

The Sophie Fund



Brief Guide to Student Mental Health Advocacy



Mental disorders, from anxiety and depression to dependency on alcohol and opioids, are an increasing challenge for American society. Today's college students face a mental health epidemic as they leave home for the first time at an age of life common for the onset of mental illness. Due to concerns about reputation, liability, cost, and other factors, college administrations have broadly failed to meet the growing crisis with a scaled response. Student advocates play a critical role in improving mental health policies and practices.

Key Advocacy Goals

- Comprehensive review of campus policies and practices to identify gaps and make recommendations for improvement
- Full alignment of Counseling and Psychological Services staffing levels with student need for services
- Current best practices for mental health treatment and suicide prevention
- Campus-wide culture promoting help-seeking behavior and providing support for student mental health
- Health Leave of Absence policy prioritizing student interests, needs, and well-being

For a comprehensive hyperlinked listing of resources for student mental health advocacy, go to:
www.thesophiefund.org

Facts About Student Mental Health

- 43.8 million American adults—18.5 percent of the population—are experiencing mental illness in a given year, and 75 percent of mental illness cases begin by age 24, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24 years, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- 46.8 percent of college students surveyed reported that academics have been “traumatic or very difficult to handle,” and 39.3 percent “felt so depressed that it was difficult to function,” according to the 2017 National College Health Assessment; 12.1 percent seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months, and 1.9 percent had attempted suicide.
- 35.8 percent of surveyed college students seeking counseling in the 2017-18 academic year had “seriously considered attempting suicide” (up from 24 percent in the 2010-11 academic year), according to Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2018 Annual Report; 10.3 percent of the students seeking counseling had actually made a suicide attempt.
- 52 percent of students seeking counseling presented with “severe” psychological problems, up from 16 percent in 2000 and 44 percent in 2010, according to the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers.
- In a campus-specific study, Cornell University’s 2017 Perceptions of Undergraduate Life and Student Experiences (PULSE) Survey of 5,001 undergraduates reported that 71.6 percent of respondents often or very often felt “overwhelmed,” and 42.9 percent said that they had been unable to function academically for at least a week on one or more occasions due to depression, stress, or anxiety. Nearly 10 percent of respondents reported being unable to function during a week-long period on five or more occasions.
- 13.5 percent of female seniors participating in the Association of American Universities 2015 Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct reported being raped (“experiencing nonconsensual penetration involving physical force or incapacitation”) since enrolling in college; only 37.4 percent of undergraduate female students felt it was very likely or extremely likely that campus officials would take action against perpetrators of sexual assault or sexual misconduct.

Mental Health and Student Rights

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Organization providing valuable resources in support of student mental health, including:

Campus Mental Health

Policy documents; materials concerning legal action on mental health.

<http://www.bazelon.org/our-work/education/campus-mental-health/>

Campus Mental Health: Know Your Rights

A guide for students who want to seek help for mental illness or emotional distress

<http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/YourMind-YourRights.pdf>

The Law Office of Karen Bower

Legal firm operated by a former senior staff attorney at the Bazelon Center, focused on assisting students with a mental illness who have been charged with disciplinary action, have been placed on suspension or involuntary leave of absence, or have been denied reasonable accommodations.

<https://thelawofficeofkarenbower.wordpress.com/>

“Legal and Ethical Issues in College Mental Health,” by Karen Bower

<https://thelawofficeofkarenbower.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/bower-chapter-6-final-clean.pdf>

Active Minds

Active Minds campus chapters raise mental health awareness, educate faculty and students, support peers, and advocate for better services and policies.

<https://www.activeminds.org/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness on Campus

NAMI campus clubs raise mental health awareness, educate faculty and students, support peers, and advocate for better services and policies.

<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-on-Campus>

Suicide Prevention and Resource Center

Colleges and Universities

<http://www.sprc.org/settings/colleges-universities>

Task Force Reports and Other Resources

Task Force on Student Mental Health and Well-being, Office of the Provost,
February 2018, Johns Hopkins University

<https://provost.jhu.edu/about/mental-health-task-force/>

Joint Task Force on Student Mental Health Recommendations. September 2017,
University of Minnesota

http://usenate.umn.edu/sites/g/files/pua3451/f/media/jtfsmh_report_2017.pdf

Mental Health Committee Report 2016, Ryerson University

<https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/mentalhealth/RMHC-Report2017-Web.pdf>

White Paper on Postsecondary Student Mental Health 2015,
Coordinating Committee of Vice Presidents Students of Colleges Ontario

<https://occcco.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/ccvps-white-paper-on-postsecondary-student-mental-health-april-2015.pdf>

Student Psychological Wellbeing at McGill University: A report of findings from
the 2012 and 2014 Counselling and Mental Health Benchmark Study,
McGill University

https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/student_psychological_well-being_at_mcgill_october_2013.pdf

Supporting Students: A Model Policy for Colleges and Universities

<http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SupportingStudentsCampusMHPolicy.pdf>

The JED Campus Program Framework, The Jed Foundation

<https://www.jedcampus.org/our-approach/>

A Guide to Campus Mental Health Action Planning, The Jed Foundation
and EDC, Inc.

<http://www.jedfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/campus-mental-health-action-planning-jed-guide.pdf>

Standards for University and College Counseling Services, International
Association of Counseling Services, Inc.

https://0201.nccdn.net/1_2/000/000/195/93c/STANDARDS-Sec.-IV.-Amended-10-22-2016--edited-12-2016--edited-10-13-2018.pdf

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