

Working with College Students who have Psychological Disorders

Student Counseling Centers on college campuses are seeing students with emotional difficulties far more complex and more severe than those in years past. Psychological disorders refer to a wide range of conditions characterized by anxiety, mood swings, depression and other behaviors. These behaviors can persist and change over time. Psychological conditions may include such disorders as attention deficit disorders, eating disorders, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders and others. The majority of psychological disorders are treated using a combination of medication, therapy, and support. Because of the social stigma that often accompanies these conditions, students may be reluctant to disclose their needs for accommodations.

Problem areas for college students with psychological disorders:

- Sleeping problems—too much or not enough
- Class attendance
- Focus and concentration
- Impaired cognitive functioning
- Behavioral symptoms of anxiety and stress
- Difficulty working in groups
- Medication changes
- Undesirable side effects from medication: increased fatigue, sleeplessness, concentration difficulties, poor memory, slowed reaction times

Tips for working with college students with psychological disorders :

- Provide an understanding and accepting environment
- Be willing to discuss how the disability affects the student

Continued on back

- Break tasks into smaller ones
- Preferential seating in classroom (e.g., near the door or at back of the classroom)
- Have student check perception of situation or information to ensure they are on right track
- Consider extensions, incompletes, or late withdrawals in the event of prolonged illness
- Be specific about your attendance policy and late assignments on the course syllabus
- Provide option of extending deadlines for assignments to reduce stress and anxiety
- Encourage student to seek counseling if student approaches you for therapeutic assistance

Things to remember about students with psychological disorders:

- Continuing dialogue between student and professor will help minimize problems and maximize understanding of the impact of the disability.
- Students with psychological disorders may have no more control over their condition than do students with physical or sensory impairments.
- Remember that the student code of conduct applies to ALL students. Psychological disorders are not an excuse for unacceptable behavior in and out of the classroom.
- Be careful of stereotypical thinking. Behavioral manifestations of psychological disorders are unique to each individual. A diagnosis does not predict the behavior the same for every student.

For more information on the topic of teaching and working with students who have psychological disorders, please contact your campus' disability services office or the DTN.



DISABILITY TRAINING NETWORK

TAMUS IS SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION (#P333A050074). FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [HTTP://DTN.TAMU.EDU](http://DTN.TAMU.EDU).