



Mental Health

Today's Collegiate
Mental Health Landscape



Learning Design Team

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Today's Collegiate Mental Health Landscape

The landscape of college student mental health has evolved greatly over the last decade. Prior to the pandemic, the [EAB](#) reported that from 2009 to 2015, college and university counseling center utilization grew five times faster than enrollment. A [JED Foundation](#) survey of college students in Spring 2020 found that 63% of respondents felt that their mental health was worse after the onset of the pandemic, citing anxiety, depression and social concerns as top contributing factors. This [brief video](#) also provides an overview of how some students were affected by the pandemic and learning online over the last two years. Further [research](#) has also indicated that mental health concerns are particularly acute for students who identify as being part of a racial and/or ethnic marginalized group.

The reasons for these increases vary. Some reasons are positive, as stigma in accessing mental health resources continues to decline, and today's students access mental health support prior to college at rates higher than previous generations ([Abrams, APA, 2022](#)). However, there are other, less positive reasons that account for these increases.

The [Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds](#) at Mass General Hospital

Cites two reasons:

1. "...pre-existing or new-onset of a psychiatric disorder or recognition of a previously undiagnosed learning disability. About 50% of psychiatric disorders begin by age 14 and over 75% arise by age 25. Many students have issues with inability to manage stress and feelings of exhaustion. Others struggle with overwhelming feelings of anxiety, depression, homesickness and loneliness. Most college students have intense experiences in relationships and just cannot navigate those waters."
2. We need to keep in mind that the brain does not fully mature until the age of 26! This means that the adolescent brain is driven mainly by emotions, impulsivity and pleasure-seeking, rather than by the "higher cortical regions which consider alternative solutions, consequences of actions and utilize logic and reasoning to offset emotional pressures."

While these statistics and factors call for increased awareness and action, it is not cause for despair. We can all work together to create a culture of caring here at Bentley. The other sections of this webpage provide more direct resources and strategies for faculty, but in this section, you can find more information on the mental health picture for Bentley University students.



Creating a Culture of Caring on Campus

Creating a culture of caring on campus does not require you as a faculty member to engage in more work. It may require some re-thinking of your work, but it will serve you and your students well. Here are some strategies that each of us can employ to foster a culture of caring inside our classrooms:

- Let students know that you care about their success. You can (and should) have high expectations for your students, but you can let them know in class, in your syllabus, and on your Blackboard site that you want to see them succeed in your course and as Bentley students.
- Promote messages that counteract stigma. Utilizing inclusive language and examples help students see themselves as scholars and learners who belong at Bentley.
- Listen with empathy. If a student is sharing with you a temporary or long-term concern or struggle, please do not ask them to “give you the short version.” Give them space to share this experience at their own pace. When they are done sharing, let them know you care and want to connect them with expert support services. Then you can review the resources on this page to make those referrals.
- Educate yourself. You are already doing so by visiting this page. You are not expected to be a mental health counselor or expert but understanding the challenges facing our students today supports a feeling.

- Related to the bullet above, you should not replicate or replace counseling or other support services. In the next two sections, you will find information on the Counseling Center and Care Team here at Bentley. Please refer students, when appropriate, to a resource such as these for expert support and care. Doing so with empathy can encourage your student to receive the help they need to succeed.



The Counseling Center



The Counseling Center is available for all students who are struggling and seeking mental health support. Their staff of licensed mental health providers are available to meet with students to get a better understanding of the problem and determine the best course of action to help them with whatever they are going through. If appropriate, staff can schedule students for short-term mental health care. Should it be determined that more long-term, intensive, specialized, or local support is necessary, they will assist with connecting students with those resources.

While support from a professional mental health provider is sometimes necessary, it's important to recognize that not all students who are struggling are in need of this level of care. Starting in 2019 - 2020, the Counseling Center developed a tool to assess every student who uses their services on four variables: functioning, intensity of symptoms, severity of symptoms, and risk to self or others. What they found was that more than half were functioning well and did not have considerable mental health problems (55% are low to no severity, 94% low to no risk for harm to self or others). This would suggest that students do not always need professional mental health treatment and would benefit from more basic interventions such as empathy, encouragement, help with problem-solving or even just a sympathetic listener. Faculty are encouraged to listen to students with empathy and refer them to the resources available. If you don't know whether a student is in need of more support or support from multiple resources, Bentley has another resource, the Care team, to support students, especially those dealing with temporary disruptions or concerns to their daily lives.



The Bentley Care Team

The Care Team, a small group of staff members from Student Affairs and Academic Services, works collaboratively with partners across campus to follow up with students who may benefit from support to connect them with the resources or services they need. Faculty have a unique opportunity to assist when a student is experiencing challenges. You may notice a significant decline in a student's academic performance, a change in a student's behavior or appearance, or be one of the people a student feels comfortable talking to about their personal struggles.

During the 2021-2022 academic year, the Care Team received 331 Care referrals submitted by Bentley staff, faculty, students, and families or friends of students. Almost half (47.7%) of all Care referrals received were due to mental health-related concerns for a student. This was the most common reason a student was referred to the Care Team, followed by an academic-related concern (22.1% of Care referrals received) and death or illness of a friend/family member (12.4% of all Care referrals received).

If you have a non-urgent concern for a Bentley student and have not yet talked to the student directly, we encourage you to invite the student to speak privately and check

in with them in a kind, compassionate way. If it seems like sharing the concern with the Care Team would be helpful, you can let the student know about the Care Team and that you plan on submitting a Care referral to get them connected to support. Speaking openly with the student about your concern and your decision to submit a Care referral lets them know you care about their well-being and that resources are available.

For more information and details on how to submit a non-urgent concern, please visit www.bentley.edu/bentleycares. If you are concerned about someone's immediate safety or well-being, please contact University Police at 781.891.3131

Community Wellbeing & Health Promotion

The Office of Community Health & Wellbeing in Student Affairs offers programs, confidential services and skill building on common health topics and experiences that can get in the way of student success. To support ongoing mental health needs for students, one member on the team specializes in mental health promotion.

All services are free and the team utilizes equitable, non-judgmental, evidence-backed approaches to equip students (and the people on campus who support them), with skills and resources to bolster wellbeing inside and outside of the classroom. They support students of all abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, racial and ethnic identities and religious and cultural practices in ways that honor who they are and their lived experiences.

This resource is particularly well-suited to students who may be struggling with sleep and implementing healthy habits while in college.

To connect with the Community Health & Wellbeing Team:

Phone: 781.891.2600

Email: thrive@bentley.edu



References

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Sarraf, K. (2021). How professors can support students' mental health (opinion) | Inside Higher Ed. [Www.insidehighered.com](https://www.insidehighered.com). <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/10/25/how-professors-can-support-students-mental-health-opinion>