



Embracing mental
health discussions
on campus



Leaving home, social pressures, and more-demanding academics can be a big adjustment for any college student.

College students may not be aware of the connection between their feelings and mental health. Not knowing what resources are available to them, they often turn to unreliable resources like social media and Dr. Google.

To help you create a safe and supportive setting for students where mental health can be discussed on campus, we've gathered insight from Dr. Desreen Dudley, a noted clinical psychologist and the senior behavioral health consultant at Teladoc Health.

While more students are seeking help, many continue to struggle in silence.



PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE:

In the last 10 years, college students seeking mental health services has risen from **19% to 34%.**



THERE'S MORE TO BE DONE:

Many students continue to consider their symptoms of depression and anxiety as “normal” feelings associated with college life—feelings that don’t warrant mental health support.

Setting the stage for a safe conversation— when a student approaches you

Successful mental health conversations leave students feeling heard, understood, and hopeful that if they need it, there is help. If a student approaches you, here are some recommendations:

Provide your full, undivided attention.

Through body language, removing distractions (i.e., closing laptops, silencing phone, etc.), mentally preparing for a discussion, and getting in the frame of mind.

Find a quiet location.

Find somewhere private, or consider going for a walk outside. Engaging in physical activity can help reduce some of the discomfort surrounding the dialogue.

Set clear boundaries.

Be careful to remind students that while you are someone they can come to with their thoughts and feelings, you are not a therapist.

Point them in the right direction.

Know what mental health resources the campus offers and encourage students to take advantage of the available options.



| Conversation tips

Listen.

Show compassion and appreciation that the student confided in you. A simple “Thank you for trusting me” or “I’m here to listen” are good places to start.

Respond with empathy.

- “What you’re going through sounds difficult.”
- “It sounds like you have a lot on your plate right now.”

Remain non-judgmental.

Do not minimize or maximize how a person is feeling.

Language to avoid:

- “Don’t worry. This is just a small problem.”
- “Stop focusing on the bad stuff. Look at all the good things you have going for you.”

Refer to their experience as a continuum.

Recognize that we all have ups and downs in life, and there are times when mental health, like physical health, will be better and times when it will be challenging.

Let them know if you “get” it.

Have you had a similar experience? Share it so the person doesn’t feel so alone. If relevant, indicate that you or a friend or family member found therapy helpful.

Be prepared for emotional reactions.

Everyone expresses themselves in a different manner. Prepare yourself for different reactions. Allow them to express their emotions fully. Stay calm and be a good listener.

Stay up to date on your school’s mental health resources.

Helping someone discuss resources available on campus without discussing details can also make a difference.

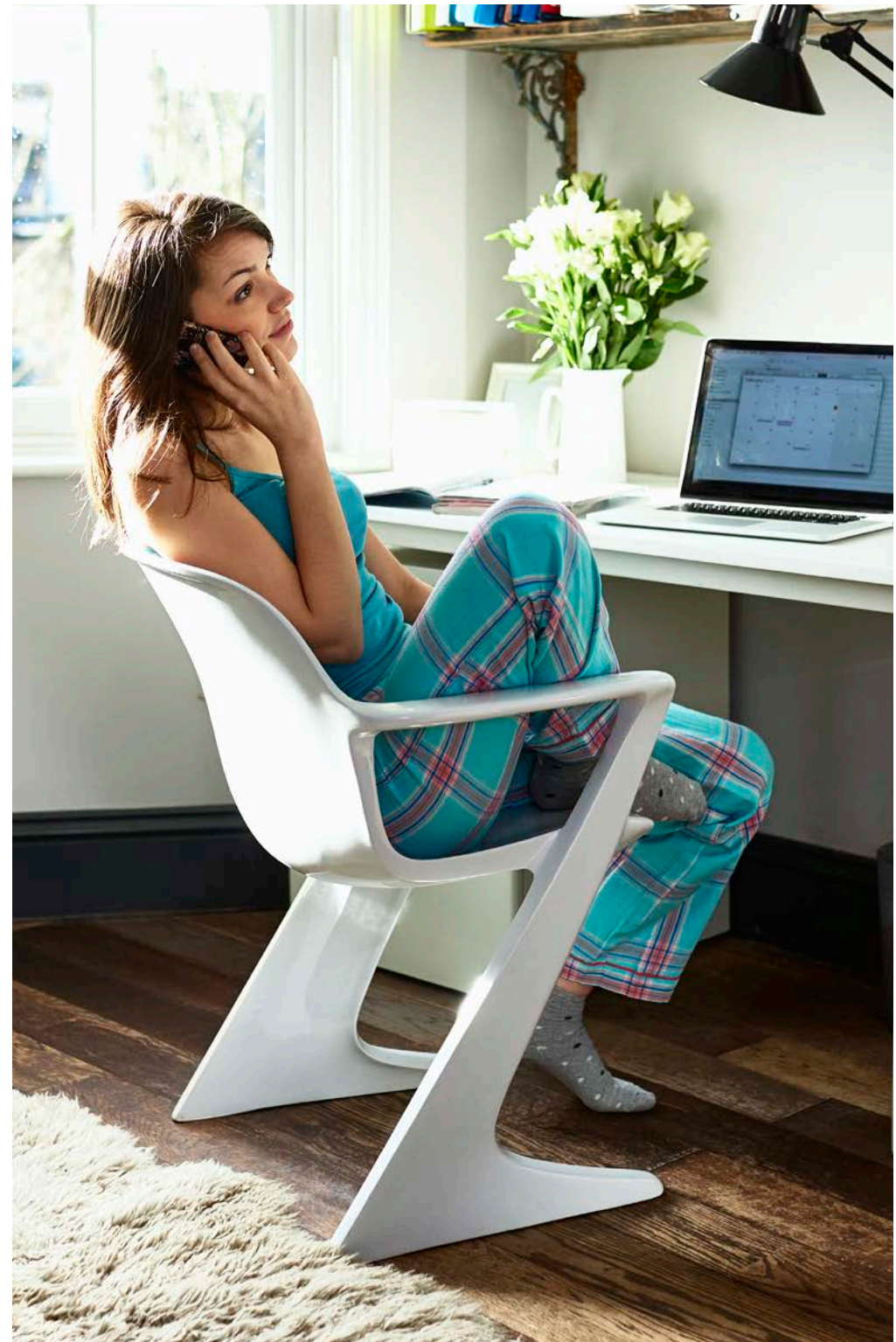
Stay alert.

If there’s serious concern someone may end his or her own life, get help immediately. **The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)** is available 24/7 for free and confidential support.

| What you can do next

Following a conversation, even if you discussed it, make sure students are aware of what mental health support is available through the campus health center or counseling office.

- Many campus health centers offer a private and non-judgmental setting to help students connect with the care and resources they need.
- Remind students that there are many ways to receive confidential support. Virtual care, such as Teladoc Health, provides access to mental health professionals by phone or video while BetterHelp offers text-based therapy, and both are available seven days a week.
- Let students know you're there for ongoing support by checking in on how they're feeling.

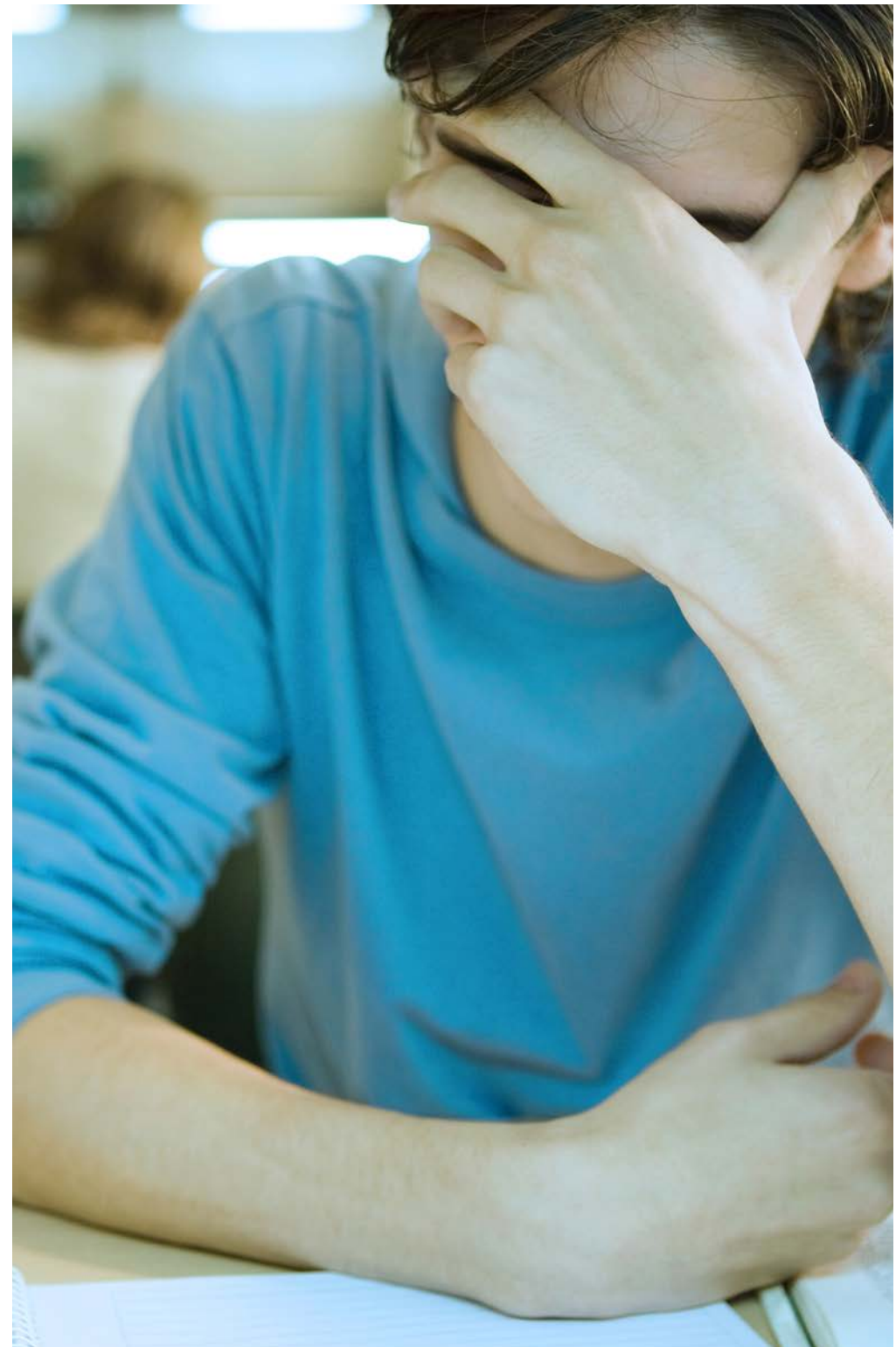


| Warning signs for parents

Observing change is key to recognizing whether your son or daughter might need mental health support during their college years.

What to keep a watchful eye on:

- Excessive or persistent feelings of sadness, irritability, or anger.
- Sleeping considerably more or less, not as a result of a looming deadline for a paper or studying for a test.
- Lack of energy, motivation, and interest in activities that once brought joy.
- Changes in eating habits, such as increased hunger or lack of appetite.
- Avoiding friends, family, and on-campus or off-campus social events.
- Trouble concentrating on assignments, or difficulty learning new concepts in the classroom.
- Changes in school performance, as indicated by declining GPAs.
- Using substances like alcohol or drugs (illegal or prescription) to cope with stress.
- Engaging in self-harming behaviors, such as cutting or burning.



Offering mental health support as a parent

Students with a strong support system tend to have better outcomes. Parents are encouraged to talk openly with their students or encourage them to speak with a professional counselor if they prefer.

Here's how you can offer your support, as a parent, no matter how many miles away you are:

1. Call your students to reinforce that they can get through particularly stressful periods.
2. Avoid judgment and criticism, but stress the importance of not ignoring negative emotions or symptoms.
3. Send care packages during finals exams. Self-care items such as yoga mats, essential oils, healthy snacks, or tea are great options.
4. Remind your students that carving out time to alleviate stress in a fun manner is important.
5. Encourage your students to connect with a mental health professional if they need someone to talk to.



General tips for well-being to ensure good mental wellness:

- Pay attention to how you are thinking and feeling. Don't ignore what is uncomfortable.
- Get enough sleep! Aim to sleep 7-9 hours per night.
- Keep a healthy diet. Avoid nicotine, artificial energy drinks, or other energy supplements.
- Surround yourself with positive emotional support. Avoid isolating yourself.
- Make time for regular physical activity.
- When stressed, use relaxation techniques such as yoga, deep breathing, or other forms of physical relaxation.
- Seek mental health counseling and psychiatric care, if needed.



Keep in mind, the most successful mental health conversations on campus leave students feeling heard and supported.

The tips in this guide are provided to help you effectively and appropriately support college students seeking help.* There are many other resources available to support specific situations.

For more information on mental health, visit these organizations:

Teladoc: [Teladoc.com/therapy](https://teladoc.com/therapy)

BetterHelp: [BetterHelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** [nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions](https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions)

Mental Health America:** [mhanational.org/MentalHealthInfo](https://www.mhanational.org/MentalHealthInfo)

MentalHealth.gov:** [mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health)

American Psychiatric Association:** <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>

Dr. Desreen Dudley is a clinical psychologist at Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center and senior behavioral health consultant at Teladoc Health since 2016. She holds clinical psychologist licenses in Connecticut and New York, and has provided therapy and neuropsychological evaluations to many college students and young adults at various Connecticut colleges and universities.

* Not all tips may be appropriate or applicable in all situations. If you have any questions or concerns, contact a behavioral health professional. And, as always, call 911 or go to your local emergency room in the event of emergencies.

** These resources are provided for information purposes only, and do not constitute endorsement by Teladoc Health.

¹ Lipson, Sara Ketchen, Emily G. Lattie, and Daniel Eisenberg. 2018. "Increased Rates of Mental Health Service Utilization by U.S. College Students: 10-Year Population-Level Trends (2007–2017)." *Psychiatric Services*. Nov. 5, 2018.

² Eisenberg, Daniel, Ezra Golberstein, and Sarah Gollust. 2007. "Help-Seeking and Access to Mental Health Care in a University Student Population." *Medical Care*. July 2007. DOI: 10.1097/MLR.0b013e31803bb4c1.

This conversation guidebook is produced by Teladoc Health, the leader in virtual care, providing millions with the treatment they need. Teladoc Health is committed to encouraging open dialogue and reducing stigma around mental health on college campuses.

Learn more at [Teladoc.com/therapy](https://teladoc.com/therapy)

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