

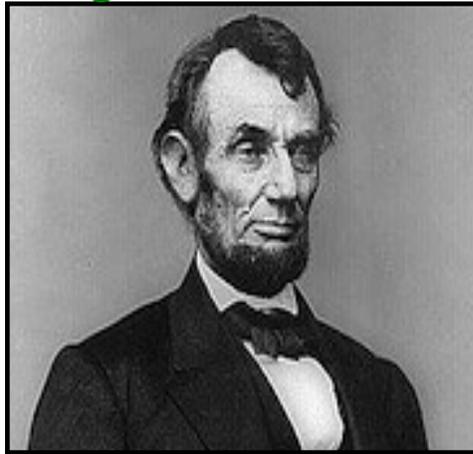
Fact Sheet

Developed by The Center for Disability Studies and Universal Access

Psychological/Emotional

QUICK FACTS

A common psychological disability among college students is depression, whether long-standing or temporary in nature. It may be a response to inordinate pressures at school, on the job, at home, or in students' social lives. Depression may manifest itself as apathy, disinterest, inattention, impaired concentration, irritability, fatigue, or other physical symptoms and result in changes in eating, sleeping, and other living patterns.



Lincoln and His Depression

"His unremitting despair and constant failure steeled his character."

Anxiety is another prevalent psychological disability among college students and may also be a reaction to stress. Students who experience severe anxiety may have reduced concentration and distorted perceptions that interfere with the learning process. Anxiety may manifest itself as withdrawal, constant talking, complaining, joking, crying, or extreme fear, sometimes to the point of panic. Bodily symptoms might include episodes of lightheadedness or hyperventilation.

Successful Classroom Strategies

- Understand the facts about the disability. Do not pre-judge or assume that a student is unmotivated or lazy. Often the symptoms of a psychological disability, or the effects of medication, can affect a student's ability to submit work on time or take exams in a traditional manner.
- Ask what support the student may need. She or he is the expert on what specific modifications will make a difference.
- Often the type and level of support needed by students with a psychological disability will fluctuate. Most manifestations are episodic and many students may have extended periods where they do not need or want any accommodation. Let each student's ability to cope with academic requirements, and not the clinical diagnosis, be your guide.
- Discuss unusual behavior with the student privately and forthrightly, delineating the limits of acceptable conduct. In your discussion, do not attempt to diagnose or treat the student, but focus on the student's conduct in the course.
- Nonverbal communication, such as tone of voice, posture, eye contact, facial expression, and physical distance between speakers, is the key to talking to students with psychological disabilities. Instruction should strive to create an inviting, comfortable setting and an environment of trust.

FYI

While many students who have a history of psychological disabilities are stable and show no symptoms, a few may have fluctuations in behavior and performance. Some may experience side effects when increasing or decreasing their medication. Note, that having a documented psychological disability does not entitle students to disrupt a class or any other part of the university experience. Their experiences are real and not a moral deficiency. However, students with psychological disabilities are expected to adhere to every rule and regulation pertaining to the behavior of all students as detailed in the school's tenets of community behavior. It is important to acknowledge, however, that most of these students are not disruptive at all. Course participation is as much a part of their goals as for students without disabilities, and with the appropriate planning, students with psychological disabilities can be expected to participate fully in the academic environment.

Classroom Strategies continued

- If the student has periods of poor concentration, suggest audio-taping lectures to supplement note-taking. This will allow the student to review lecture material at her or his own pace. Preferential seating near the front of the class may also be beneficial for staying focused.
- Exam time is stressful for everyone and for a student with a psychological disability, stress can be especially difficult to handle. Speak with the student prior to deadlines about appropriate mechanisms that will not disadvantage either the student with the disability or other students in the class.
- On rare occasions students may be admitted to a hospital or need to take time off. This does not necessarily mean that they will need to defer or end their studies. It is possible, with the appropriate support, to continue with academic progress.

Resources and Further Information



National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
3803 N. Fairfax
Arlington, VA 22203
(703) 524-7600
1-888-999-6264

ASHA National Office
220 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850-3289
301-296-5700

DOIT
University of Washington
Box 354842
Seattle, WA 98195
1-888-972-DOIT

The Center for Disability Studies
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Senior 121
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About Us...

Our Office was developed with the support of a Department of Education Grant, *Supporting Students with Disabilities through Professional Faculty Development and Student Curriculum*. We are committed to improving the educational environment for students with disabilities and believe that an effective way to reach our goals is to promote an environment of **Universal Education Access** (UEA) to all people regardless of background or characteristics.