

Resource Guide: Supporting Student Mental Health at Postsecondary Institutions



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“Right at this moment, there are students of color who are failing academically, suffering emotionally and/OR in some cases are facing serious risk, because population-specific factors influencing mental health are too poorly understood and not acted upon.”¹

This resource guide is a curated compilation of information for institutions seeking to develop or refine approaches to support student mental health. The resources were compiled from publicly available sources and do not represent the work of Insight Policy Research. Inclusion in this resource guide does not constitute an endorsement by Insight Policy Research.

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Navigating the resource guide: Instructions

This resource guide is organized around four reflective questions to guide the reader through understanding mental health challenges students face during COVID-19, identifying which students need support, and selecting a strategy to support identified needs. The guide also presents examples of best practices from the field. Click the graphic on the next page to find more resources related to each of the four reflective questions. In each section, resources are organized by type using the following icons.



Article



Tool or Training



Example From the Field



Research



Partner Organization



Focus on Students of Color

Reflective Questions

1. What are common mental health challenges students are facing during COVID-19?
2. Who may need support services?
3. How do you approach selecting a strategy or finding a support partner?
4. What are best practices being used in the field to assist with mental health?

1. Define the Problem

2. Identify Whom to Serve

3. Select a Strategy

4. Use Best Practices From the Field

1. Define the problem: Potential impact of COVID on student mental health

College and university presidents were presented with a list of 19 issues and asked to select up to 5 they viewed to be most pressing as of September 2020. Mental health of students was the top concern selected (53 percent).²

There are growing indications that student mental well-being has been devastated by the pandemic's social and economic consequences and the continued uncertainty about college education and postcollege careers.

Stressors	Exacerbators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Layers of loss (graduation, jobs, time with friends)• Economic impact on family, which may limit students' ability to pay for college• Complicated family dynamics• Family or friend illness or death as a result of COVID-19• Difficulty maintaining self-care• Mental health conditions and/or a history of trauma• Social isolation and loneliness• Space or technology issues interfering with learning• Difficulty navigating the virtual learning environment• Digital overload (e.g., all-virtual classes, meetings, internships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial concerns for students and their families/first-generation low-income communities• International students dealing with issues around visas, jobs, isolation, etc.• Students who do not feel safe at home• Students of color facing issues around racism and inequality• Students with disabilities living and learning remotely• LGBTQ+ students who may not be open to their families about their identities

This section provides a selection of news articles that may help understand some of the mental health challenges college and university students face during COVID-19 disruptions to schooling.



Mental Health Needs Rise With Pandemic (from Inside Higher Ed)³

“A mountain of troubling data about rising mental health problems has health advocates and providers worried about the need for additional support for struggling students and the ability of colleges to provide it.” [\[LINK\]](#)



College and University Presidents Respond to COVID-19: 2020 Fall Term Survey (from American Council on Education)⁴

“In the September survey, presidents were presented with a list of 19 issues and again asked to select up to five they view to be most pressing for them currently. Mental health of students (53 percent) was the top concern selected by presidents.” [\[LINK\]](#)



Students Stressed Out Due to Coronavirus, New Survey Finds (from Best Colleges)⁵

“Almost 44% of students worry about their ability to enroll or stay enrolled in college. This same worry is shared disproportionately among respondents identifying as black, Hispanic, or other.” [\[LINK\]](#)



The Impact of COVID-19 on College Student Well-Being (from Healthy Minds Network)⁶

“Financial stress, a known predictor of student mental health, has been significantly affected by the pandemic: two-thirds of students report their financial situation has become more stressful. Roughly one-third of students report that their living situation changed as a result of the pandemic.” [\[LINK\]](#)



Pandemic Hurts Student Mental Health (from Inside Higher Ed)⁷

“A new survey found students had difficulty accessing mental health care and experienced higher rates of depression after the pandemic began, prompting calls for a broad response from colleges.” [\[LINK\]](#)



People of Color Face Disproportionate Pandemic Related Financial Stress (from NBC News)⁸

“Blacks and Latinos are more worried than whites about losing and keeping their jobs, paying for housing, student-loan debt and child care... For instance, 65 percent of Hispanics/Latinos and 58 percent of Blacks are worried about being able to pay their rent or mortgage, the analysis found. Of those who identify as white, 44 percent said they are concerned. Additionally, 53 percent of Blacks and 51 percent of Latinos/Hispanics are concerned about paying for child care, compared to 34 percent of whites.” [\[LINK\]](#)



2. Identify whom to serve: Identify students in need of mental health supports

To focus services on the students who are most in need of support, there are resources available that help identify and assess student needs. This section provides a selection of articles, tools, and other resources that may be useful in identifying and assessing student needs.



Showing We Care: What I Learned From Texting Students During the COVID-19 Shutdown (from The Learning Assistance Review)⁹

“While my emails to “AWOL” students often go unanswered or receive perfunctory replies, most of the students I texted responded, and all of those students were genuinely touched that I contacted them.” [\[LINK\]](#)



V-A-R 30-Minute Workshop Kit: General Audience (from Active Minds)¹⁰

Basic V-A-R is Active Minds’ everyday guide for everyday challenges. It is about showing up for one another in everyday struggles. The letters V-A-R correspond to three steps: Validate-Appreciate-Refer. The steps are easy to understand, easy to do, and easy to remember. They provide a guide to listening and responding in a helpful way. V-A-R conversations can take many forms—phone, in-person, text message, Facetime. [\[LINK\]](#)



COVID-19 National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research Tools (from National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences)¹¹

This document contains a list of data collection instruments for assessing behavioral and social science domains related to COVID-19, such as anxiety, depression, financial stress, disruptions to daily activities and social interactions, economic effects, food security, housing security, and disruption, among others.



Copilot-Ascend Professional Learning Program (from PERTS)¹²

Copilot-Ascend is a free, data-driven professional learning program that enables college instructors and administrators to learn how their students are experiencing courses and what they can do to make those experiences more equitable, more engaging, and more supportive of student success.

3. Select a strategy: Resources and partners for identifying a comprehensive strategy

Once challenges are defined and students in need are identified, there are organizations and other resources available to help select and design a strategy for implementation to address needs. This section provides selected resources for developing a strategy, including potential partners to reach out to for support.



“Just about every survey conducted since the beginning of March indicates that student distress is only going to get worse this fall. Those mental-health concerns will be exacerbated for Black and Hispanic students, whose populations are [disproportionately harmed](#) by Covid-19 and by the police violence gripping the nation’s consciousness. Asian American students, meanwhile, are dealing with [racial slurs and jokes](#) stemming from the pandemic’s origins in China.

“What’s more, students of color often don’t get the help they need. About 45 percent of white students with mental-health challenges seek treatment, according to [a 2018 study](#), but only a third of Latinx students do so. For Black and Asian students, the proportion is even lower — about 25 and 22 percent, respectively.”

—Sarah Brown, *Chronicle of Higher Education*¹³

Active Minds (nonprofit organization)

Active Minds is a nonprofit that provides resources to campuses to support student advocacy in mental health.

Postsecondary institutions can work with Active Minds to provide mental health programming or participate in training programs such as the Validate-Appreciate-Refer workshop. [\[LINK\]](#)

The logo for Active Minds, featuring the words "active" in green and "minds" in blue, with a small blue circle between them.

EVERFI (educational technology company)

EVERFI is an international education technology company driving social change through digital education to address the most challenging issues affecting society, ranging from financial wellness and mental well-being to prescription drug safety and workplace conduct, among other critical topics. Founded in 2008, EVERFI is fueled by its Software-as-a-Service community engagement platform and has reached more than 40 million learners globally across K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and adult consumers. In 2020, the company was recognized as one of the World’s Most Innovative Companies by *Fast Company* and was featured on *Fortune Magazine’s* Impact 20 list. [\[LINK\]](#)

The logo for EVERFI, with the letters "EVERFI" in a bold, sans-serif font. The "I" has a red arch above it.

The JED Foundation (foundation)

The JED Foundation is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for the nation's teens and young adults. The Foundation offers recommendations, resources, and considerations for college and university campuses as they continue to prepare and work through supporting the mental health and well-being of their communities—in whatever format they will take for each campus. [\[LINK\]](#)



The Steve Fund (foundation)

The Steve Fund is the nation's only organization focused on supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color. The Steve Fund works with colleges and universities, nonprofits, researchers, mental health experts, families, and young people to promote programs and strategies that build understanding and assistance for the mental and emotional health of the nation's young people of color. The Fund holds an annual conference series, Young, Gifted & @Risk, and offers a Knowledge Center with curated expert information. With multicultural mental health experts, it delivers on-campus and on-site programs and services for colleges and nonprofits, and through tech partnerships, it provides direct services to young people of color. [\[LINK\]](#)



TimelyMD (telehealth organization)

Focused on improving the health of students, TimelyMD offers colleges and universities a comprehensive, customized telehealth program. TimelyMD's solution provides students anytime, anywhere access to quality care for medical or mental health concerns, with a diverse network of board-certified physicians and licensed counselors. TimelyMD's telehealth program optimizes clinic resources and supports clinic staff in delivering quality care to students when and where they need it. [\[LINK\]](#)



InsideTrack (nonprofit)

InsideTrack partners with institutions and organizations to improve enrollment, persistence, completion, and career readiness. Its student support methodology uncovers firsthand feedback about student goals and challenges. Through strategic guidance, staff training, and student coaching, InsideTrack helps institutions turn this feedback into actionable insights that drive better student outcomes. It offers partners access to a comprehensive range of [resources](#) and the latest research and insights on student success. [\[LINK\]](#)



An Evidence-Informed Curriculum to Support Student Mental Health and Wellness (from EVERFI)¹⁴



“Within today’s higher education environment, mental health is an issue that has quickly risen to the forefront. Recent research from the World Health Organization¹ found that 35% of incoming college students worldwide have a diagnosed mental health condition...When it comes to help-seeking, EVERFI data indicates that students are most likely to reach out to a friend (45%) or parent (24%) when experiencing stress or emotional challenges. Only 3% indicated that they would reach out to a counselor, while 5% would not reach out to anyone at all. As institutions of higher education seek to educate the whole student, they must also explore ways in which they can provide skills training to students to foster mental wellbeing and encourage seeking support.” [\[LINK\]](#)

Supporting the Mental Health of Students of Color (from TimelyMD)¹⁵



“Americans are struggling with [historic levels](#) of [mental health problems](#), but according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, rates of anxiety and depression among Black Americans have risen higher recently than any other racial or ethnic group, with [41%](#) screening positive for at least one of these conditions...As college and university leaders manage reopening in the middle of a global pandemic, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and growing racial tensions across the country have administrators asking, ‘How can higher education best support the mental health of students of color?’ ” [\[LINK\]](#)

7 Steps to Creating a Caring Campus Culture (from TimelyMD)¹⁶



“How do colleges create a campus culture that supports mental health? First, support for emotional well-being must be considered a campus-wide responsibility and prioritized similarly to physical health. Second, senior leadership must acknowledge the importance of student mental health and well-being and nurture a shared value across the campus community. With these two principles in place, members of the campus community are positioned to develop a culture of caring and compassion in which students feel supported.” [\[LINK\]](#)

5 Myths About Seeking Mental Health Support Online (from TimelyMD)¹⁷



“Due in part to COVID-19 and social distancing requirements, the telehealth industry has grown exponentially this year. A recent report indicates that between May 2019 and May 2020, telehealth-related care increased by 5,680%. It goes on to say that “telehealth will represent a significant share of healthcare services in the U.S. for the foreseeable future.” The use of telehealth for mental health care also rose, with mental health comprising almost 40% of all diagnoses in May 2020. Even as telehealth usage has grown to meet healthcare needs during the pandemic, myths remain about using telehealth for mental health care. However, as the technology advances and becomes more widely adopted, these five misconceptions no longer hold true.” [\[LINK\]](#)

Proactive Steps Your Campus Can Take Toward Suicide Prevention (from TimelyMD)¹⁸



“It’s no secret that student mental health is a top concern for many in higher ed leadership. Research from TimelyMD has found that student stress and anxiety is high, and many parents are concerned about the mental health of their students. Another recent student survey discovered that 35% of undergraduate students screened positive for major depressive disorder. Additionally, suicidal ideation is on the rise for the age group (18-24) that includes college students, according to research by the CDC...Clearly, this is a critical moment for colleges and universities to pause and examine what steps are being taken and what could be added to support student mental health and suicide prevention.”[\[LINK\]](#)

Creating a Culture of Caring: Practical Approaches for College and University Faculty to Support Student Wellbeing and Mental Health (from Active Minds)¹⁹



“A 2019 survey by the American Council on Education (ACE) found that 82 percent of college presidents agreed or strongly agreed that faculty on their campus were spending more time addressing student mental health concerns than three years ago.” This report suggests strategies that faculty can implement through their daily roles and responsibilities to support student success and connect students to professional help when appropriate. [\[LINK\]](#)

V-A-R: Validate, Appreciate, Refer Workshop (from Active Minds)²⁰



Basic V-A-R is Active Minds’ everyday guide for everyday challenges. It is about showing up for one another in everyday struggles. The letters V-A-R correspond to three steps: Validate-Appreciate-Refer. The steps are easy to understand, easy to do, and easy to remember. They provide a guide to listening and responding in a helpful way. V-A-R conversations can take many forms—phone, in-person, text message, Facetime. There are several different workshops to choose from. [\[LINK\]](#)

Supporting the Whole Student: Promising Practices for College and University Staff to Integrate Mental Health Promotion in the First College Year (from Active Minds)²¹



“The first year of college is a particularly vulnerable time for students. They are often adjusting to a new way of life in a new environment, sometimes away from family and friends for the first time. Concerningly, student mental health is a growing issue on college and university campuses. National data sources, including the Healthy Minds Study, show a high and rising prevalence of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidality, and other concerns in student populations over the past decade.”

This report provides practice strategies for integrating mental health supports into the first year of college for students. [\[LINK\]](#)

4. Use best practices from the field: Mental health and other services for students

Whether you are working with an external partner or planning to provide supports through internal channels, there are a variety of approaches you can adapt to your local context. This section includes selected examples of institutions offering mental health supports to students and a selection of research and reports on this topic.



“Creating a culture of well-being is not just about what the counseling center is doing.. Colleges can stop personal crises before they happen by helping students who are experiencing “subclinical” issues — distress that’s not yet a mental-health disorder but affects their ability to function. That means investing in food pantries and emergency financial aid so that low-income students, who are disproportionately people of color, don’t have to stress as much about basic needs..”

—Sarah Brown, *Chronicle of Higher Education*²²

Examples from the field



Student Support Groups at Northeastern University

Northeastern University provides a [website](#) with supports, resources, and tips for students.



It also offers a variety of virtual [support groups](#) for current students, including yoga, depression and anxiety support, art therapy, processing racial trauma, stress management, support for being in quarantine, and others.



Online Health Services With University Staff at the University of Pennsylvania²³

U Penn’s [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) provides a limited level of in-person counseling support



and online support services for students, including resources on coping with racial trauma and managing stress related to the election. The services include virtual counseling for students called Let’s Talk. CAPS administers [I CARE](#), an interactive gatekeeper training for students, faculty, and staff that builds a caring community with the skills and resources to intervene with student stress, distress, and crisis. CAPS also developed webpages to provide mental health resources to [students](#) and their [parents and guardians](#).



Online Health Services With External Vendors at California Community Colleges



California Community Colleges gathered a [list](#) of resources to help college faculty, staff, administrators, and students support their mental health, physical health, basic needs, and wellness. The list includes links to documents, podcasts, and websites and has specific supports available for marginalized student groups.



Reach Out SUNY Program



The Chancellor of the State University of New York, the nation's largest public university system, and its Board of Trustees unveiled their comprehensive [Reach Out SUNY](#) program developed by health experts to expand mental health and wellness services for students, with a particular focus on eliminating the unseen hurdles to various tiers of intervention.

The program will establish a second telecounseling hub at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University after the highly successful initial hub at SUNY Upstate Medical University; expand the University at Albany's peer-to-peer hotline to all SUNY students who may simply need someone to talk through a problem; and connect students with a network of more than 6,000 licensed mental health service providers via the [Thriving Campus](#) app.



Hope Center at Temple University



The Hope Center at Temple University offers a [collection](#) of resources, including publications, tools, news items, policy guidance, webinars, and a newsletter to support students in navigating health and wellness challenges during COVID-19.



Appalachian State University's Racial Trauma Healing Space



Through the Department of Wellness and Prevention Services, Appalachian State University is facilitating a [space](#) dedicated to the needs of Black students during a time of racial unrest in America.

Additional resources



Beyond Stigma: Addressing Students' Mental Health Challenges During a Pandemic (from Iohud)²⁴

"Institutions must enlist health professionals in their community, maximize touchpoints and support layers, mobilize young people who want to help, aggressively raise awareness about available services, and leverage the technological platforms where young people feel comfortable. Issues vary, so we must offer a wide range of services, and work strategically to break down the barriers that stand between students and accessing those services, when and where they need them." [\[LINK\]](#)



Three Ways to Support Black Students This Fall (from Inside Higher Ed)²⁵

“Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has taken a toll on Americans’ mental health. That toll is even more severe among college students and other young adults. And, unfortunately, the negative impact on Black college students may be the most significant.”



Shaylen Hardy, national director of Black campus ministries at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, offers strategies for colleges to help those students cope with trauma and the other burgeoning mental health challenges on their campuses that focus on service, the value of faith, and opportunities to connect. Hardy draws on studies and her own experience working with college students to inform the strategies listed. [\[LINK\]](#)



Financial Aid Officials Share How They’re Advising College Students Now (from Education Dive)²⁶

“Heading into the season, three-quarters of college presidents are reporting increased expenses related to financial aid, according to an American Council on Education survey in September.”

Education Dive contacted several financial aid experts to determine how they are guiding students and families through a process made more complex by COVID-19. They asked one question: What changes in the financial aid process should colleges account for during the pandemic, and how should they communicate those changes to students, families, and the public? The article covers three responses. [\[LINK\]](#)



Financial Education Should Be Part of the Recovery From the Covid-19 Recession. This Is Why. (from Forbes)²⁷

“Images and stories of people struggling amid the turbulence of COVID-19 are no formal test of the importance of financial education. So, together with a team of co-authors, I set out to determine whether financial education is effective. The answer is important, not only because time and money are invested to provide financial education, but also because it is urgent that we figure out how to help families manage financial aspects of COVID-19, as argued in the National Strategy as well.” [\[LINK\]](#)



JED’s POV on Student Mental Health and Well-Being in Fall Campus Reopening (from JED Foundation)²⁸

JED, a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for the nation’s teens and young adults, offers some recommendations, resources, and considerations for college and university campuses as they continue to prepare and work through supporting the mental health and well-being of their communities—in whatever format they will take for each campus. [\[LINK\]](#)

Improving Emotional Wellness for Students (from the Harvard Gazette)²⁹



“The needs highlighted by this report — for greater connection, for wider adoption of and help with self-care, for more accessible support in dealing with everyday struggles as well as mental health conditions, and for better coordination of mental health strategies across the University — are made even more pressing by the uncertainty and isolation that everyone experiences now. At a time when mental health and well-being demand more of our attention than ever, the report points us toward steps we can take now.”
A special task force at Harvard University released eight recommendations for improving emotional wellness on campus by addressing a mix of academic, social, and institutional issues. [\[LINK\]](#)

Mental Health, Higher Education, and COVID-19 (from American Council on Education)³⁰



“Many institutions are sharing powerful messages with students regarding overall wellness. Leading institutions in student well-being, such as California State University Long Beach and Denison University, send regular video messages from their top leaders, encouraging students to communicate with faculty about how things are going and what they need. In these examples, seeing and hearing a person cuts through the considerable amount of email and helps convey compassion and understanding.”



Using new and existing data, the authors of this article identified three major categories for leaders to consider in responding to student mental health during COVID-19 and beyond: communication; the mental health and well-being of all campus stakeholders; and the need for assessment. Authors offer examples and resources to help guide decision-making, including ways leadership can adopt an equity lens to each of these mental health considerations. [\[LINK\]](#)

Adapting and Innovating to Promote Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Young People of Color: COVID-19 and Beyond (from the Steve Fund)³¹



“Even before the pandemic began, students of color were more likely to report feeling overwhelmed at college and keeping their concerns to themselves. In one study... 26% of Black students... with mental health problems sought treatment vs. 46% of white students... Mental health disparities are a poorly understood part of the student success equation: students with mental health challenges are twice as likely to drop out of college than students without them. Since the arrival of the pandemic, students of color, including Black... and multiracial students, are experiencing higher rates of depression and anxiety than white students.”



The Steve Fund, a national advocacy organization focused on the mental health of young people of color, recently published a report with recommendations for college leaders to better support students who are currently facing unprecedented mental health challenges. The recommendations were formed by the organization’s Crisis Response Task Force—a group of students; mental health experts; and college, nonprofit, and corporate executives, created to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout on the mental health of young people of color. The report also addresses the nation’s “racial reckoning” and how the death of George Floyd and wide acknowledgment of systemic racism can put additional emotional stress on those students. [\[LINK\]](#)

- ¹ The Steve Fund. (n.d.). *About the Steve Fund*. Retrieved from <https://www.stevelfund.org/welcome-to-the-steve-fund/>.
- ² Turk, J., Soler Salazar, M.C., and Ramos, A.M. (2020). *College and University Presidents Respond to COVID-19: 2020 Fall Term Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Senior-Leaders/College-and-University-Presidents-Respond-to-COVID-19-2020-Fall-Term.aspx>.
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- ⁸ Fox, M. (2020). *People of color face disproportionate pandemic-related financial stress. CNBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/people-color-face-disproportionate-pandemic-related-financial-stress-n1243717>.
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- ¹⁰ Active Minds. (n.d.) *V-A-R 30-Minute Workshop Kit General Audience*. Retrieved from <https://activemindsshop.myshopify.com/collections/v-a-r/products/v-a-r-30-minute-workshop-kit-general-audience>.
- ¹¹ National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. (2020). *COVID-19 National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research Tools*. Retrieved from https://www.nlm.nih.gov/dr2/COVID-19_BSSR_Research_Tools.pdf.
- ¹² Project for Education Research that Scales. (n.d.). *Copilot-Ascend*. Retrieved from <https://www.perts.net/orientation/ascend>.
- ¹³ Brown, S. (2020). *Students of Color Are Not OK. Here's How Colleges Can Support Them. Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/Students-of-Color-Are-Not-OK/249125?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in.
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- ¹⁵ TimelyMD. (2020). *Supporting the Mental Health of Students of Color*. Retrieved from <https://www.timely.md/supporting-the-mental-health-of-students-of-color/>.
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