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READING BOARD OF HEALTH OUTLINES HEALTH ISSUES FACING COLLEGE STUDENTS

Board Suggests Resources To Aid Students & Their Families

As we get ready to enter the New Year, many freshmen will return to college for their second semester. The [Reading Board of Health](#) would like to highlight some of the most pressing health challenges faced during this vulnerable time of life. According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), “75% of mental health issues emerge by age 24ⁱ” Many young adults face these health challenges on their own while at college.

The [American College Association](#) conducts an annual health assessment survey of 108 post-secondary institutions to identify pressing health challenges. These challenges include depression, suicide, anxiety, drug abuse, and eating disorders. While college can be an exciting time for students, both students and parents should be aware of these challenges, and other health-related issues associated with this major life transition.

In order to identify potentially troubling health matters in their children, parents need to maintain a certain level of non-judgmental communication with their son or daughter living at college. Should any of the following health issues become a concern, the Reading Board of Health recommends the student seek

immediate help by visiting student health care services or contacting their primary care provider. [Depression](#): While situational issues can cause brief episodes of sadness or feeling down, “a major depressive disorder lasts for at least two weeks and affects a person’s ability to work, carry out daily activities and engage in satisfying relationshipsⁱⁱ”. Signs of depression include extreme

National College Health Assessment Survey: 2015

	%
Within the last 12 months, diagnosed or treated by a professional for the following:	
Anorexia	1%
Anxiety	16%
Attention Deficit &Hyperactivity Disorder	6%
Bipolar Disorder	2%
Bulimia	1%
Depression	13%
Insomnia	5%
Other sleep disorder	2%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	3%
Panic attacks	8%
Phobia	1%
Other addiction	2%
Other mental health condition	3%

sadness, irritability, lack of motivation, hopelessness, fatigue, withdrawal from friends, peers, and activities you used to enjoy, substance misuse (including alcohol) to relieve symptoms of depression, and thoughts of death or suicide. The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) describes depression as “a serious mental health condition that requires understanding, treatment and a good recovery planⁱⁱⁱ”. Note that a family history of depression is a risk factor.

Suicide: The worst possible outcome of an untreated mental illness is suicide. Even for people without a serious mental health disorder, the stress of a completely new environment can affect coping^{iv}. Anyone who has seriously considered suicide, including thoughts of worthlessness or guilt, should seek professional help immediately. If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or call 911 immediately^v.

Anxiety: Most college students experience some level of stress, but when anxiety starts to interfere with daily function and quality of life, this is when anxiety becomes a health issue. Signs of an excessive level of anxiety include anxious or worrisome thoughts on a daily basis, fears that family and friends perceive as unfounded or irrational, avoidance of social activities because they cause you anxiety, and panic attacks.

Eating Disorders: According to some estimates, approximately 20 percent of women and 10 percent of men in college struggle with an eating disorder. Eating disorders are serious and could lead to devastating consequences for a young person’s health. Signs of eating disorders include a refusal to eat food or skipping meals, a fear of eating in public with others, counting calories out of a need for control, strict eating habits followed by feeling guilty and shame if you break them, a history of perfectionism, and an obsession or dissatisfaction with your weight or body shape. If you notice any of these symptoms in your child, seek immediate professional help.

Drug Abuse: For individuals of any age, the misuse of substances can lead to significant and life-threatening health issues including the development of a substance use disorder. Young people may turn to drugs to deal with general stress or an underlying mental health disorder. Binge drinking is an especially common form of risk-taking found on American campuses and increases a person’s risk for blackouts. According to the [American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment](#) released in the spring of 2015, of the 62 percent of surveyed college students that drank, 40.5 percent binge drank and 16.3 percent were heavy drinkers^{vi}. For many who struggle with substance abuse, often the hardest hurdle for them to overcome is admitting that they have a problem. Indications of drug addiction include: feeling uncomfortable when drugs are not available, heavy use of drugs when you are disappointed, distressed or get in a fight, failure to remember part of the previous evening, even though your friends say you did not pass out, concern expressed by a friend or family member about your drug use, and a history of drug abuse in your family.

If you are interested in mental health resources, the [Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse](#) and Reading Public Schools will sponsor [Mental Health First Aid](#) trainings this spring. These trainings provide a basic level of education to help those that may encounter a youth, young adult

or adult experiencing a mental health issue or crisis. Over 400 Reading Public Schools and Town Library staff have been trained in [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) and 100% of participants recommend the course.

The [Reading Board of Health](#) encourages you to visit the websites below to gain a greater understanding of the health issues mentioned in this article.

Andrew Friedmann, Ph.D., Chair, Reading Board of Health

Town Resources

[Reading Board of Health](#)

[Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse](#) and [Finding Help for Substance Abuse Disorders](#)

[Reading Public Schools Behavioral Health](#)

Online Resources:

For Young Adults to Access Help <http://ok2talk.org/about> and http://www.ulifeline.org/get_help_now

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ⁱ National Alliance on Mental Illness, retrieved at <http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Teens-and-Young-Adults>

ⁱⁱ Mental Health First Aid USA, www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Understanding Depression: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression#sthash.PwdFJ7gE.dpuf>

^{iv} Stress in America Survey, retrieved at <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/index.aspx>

^v See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Risk-of-Suicide#sthash.VishuVoY.dpuf>

^{vi} American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Undergraduate Student Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2015. Hanover, MD: American College Health Association; 2015, retrieved at <http://www.acha-ncha.org/>