

# Higher Education Support Toolkit: Assisting Students with Psychiatric Disabilities

*Guidelines for Disability Service Staff to Assist in Assessing Student Difficulties,  
Connecting Students to Campus Resources, and Planning Strategies for Assistance*



The Higher Education Support Toolkit (HES) was developed by Lyn Legere, Kathleen Furlong-Norman, Christine Gayler, and Cathy St. Pierre

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# Higher Education Toolkit: Assisting Students with Psychiatric Disabilities

## Background

About 9% of all undergraduates in higher education in the United States report having a disability, a percentage that has tripled in the last two decades. This amounts to about 1.3 million students (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Students with psychiatric disabilities are well represented in this trend, with one national survey citing an 85% increase over the last five years in the numbers of students identified with psychiatric/psychological disabilities (Meyer, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Sharpe and colleagues (2004) cite the proliferation of individuals declaring a psychiatric disability as one of the more significant developments that has occurred in the field of postsecondary disability supports over the past decade. Eudaly (2003) notes that the increasing number of students with psychiatric disabilities appears as a “rising tide” on college campuses nationwide. The increase in students disclosing a psychiatric disability has required colleges and universities to develop strategies to meet the legal requirements of equal “access” of all students under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and §504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to ensure student “retention” which is a critical component to the ongoing success of any postsecondary institution.

Disability services professionals, people serving in other student affair roles, faculty, and students themselves have all faced challenges in shifting the culture of college campuses to be both accommodating and welcoming of students with psychiatric disabilities. Focus groups held at 13 schools that represented significant demographic differences queried students, faculty, student affairs staff, disability services providers, and college/university administrators about their opinion(s) on barriers impeding the success of students with psychiatric disabilities on campus (Blacklock, et al., 2003). Not surprising, all groups endorsed discrimination/stigma and stereotypes as the primary barriers. The complex nature of psychiatric disorders and the lack of knowledge about how to serve these students were also identified by staff and administration. Students highlighted lack of access to knowledge about mental illnesses and available school resources, while faculty expressed concern about classroom behaviors (Blacklock, et al., 2003).

More recently, awareness of student mental health issues has expanded greatly in response to a growing number of suicides on campus (NAMI, 2004). However, resources focusing on strategies for the equal access and retention of students with psychiatric disabilities remain few (Sharpe et al., 2004). This *Higher Education Support Toolkit: Assisting Students with Psychiatric Disabilities* attempts to address this critical gap.

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## Introduction

Over the past 15 year, the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University has provided skills teaching and practical supports to assist students with psychiatric disabilities achieve their education goals. Beginning with the creation of an on-campus program at Boston University that focused on career planning and the later development of an education program model known as “Supported Education,” the Center has been a leader in emphasizing the value and importance of education for students experiencing psychiatric disabilities. Center staff have also developed resources and tools to help students to identify and acquire needed skills, supports, and accommodations to successfully complete a course or program of academic study. (Anthony, Cohen, Farkas & Gagne, 2002; Sullivan Soydan, 2004; Sullivan Soydan & Legere, 2004).

Building on the Center’s work, the major focus of the *Higher Education Support Toolkit: Assisting Students with Psychiatric Disabilities* is two-fold:

- 1) to assist students in clarifying the issues that are hindering their academic success and satisfaction, and
- 2) to assist students in discovering the skills, supports, and strategies that will enable them to overcome the barriers to achieving their educational goals.

The Toolkit is intended for use by a broad audience within the network of campus services such as disability services, behavioral health, and student affairs. The parts of the Toolkit include:

### **Part 1: Student Self-Assessment**

Self-Assessment Checklists (two checklists) are provided to assist the student in clarifying the health, personal, interpersonal and/or academic issues that may be hindering their success and satisfaction.

### **Part 2: Getting Connected to Campus Resources**

Campus Resource Forms are provided to encourage campus service providers to compile a comprehensive and easily accessible resource list from which students can customize resources to meet their individual needs.

### **Part 3: Actions and Accommodations in the College Classroom**

A Guide to Psychiatric Disorders is provided to assist providers with a better understanding of the common difficulties and/or limitations that students experiencing a psychiatric disability may encounter in class. Possible strategies that can be implemented and/or adjustments that a student may be entitled to are highlighted in the Guide.

### **Information and Resources**

Organizations, websites, fact sheets, and articles relevant to students with psychiatric disabilities and those who are supporting them in achieving their educational goals are listed.

# Part I: Student Self-Assessment

## Overview

The *Higher Education Support Toolkit* offers simple, practical assistance designed to improve the likelihood of students with psychiatric disabilities to achieve their goals in college. The following guidelines suggest ways in which you can use this toolkit:

- Identify common difficulties experienced by students
- Assess student difficulties in adjusting and managing classroom and campus life
- Consider strategies and/or accommodations to help students
- Identify campus resources that are available to assist students at your institution

### Forms for Part I: Student Self-Assessment

- Student Self-Assessment Checklist
- Student Self-Assessment of College Classroom Difficulties

## Using the “Student Self-Assessment Checklist”

The “Student Self-Assessment Checklist” (pages 9–11) can be used to help assess generalized problems that a student may be experiencing and can assist the student in clarifying the health, personal, interpersonal and/or academic issues that may be hindering his/her academic success and satisfaction. For example, a student may experience difficulty with communication skills, relationship skills, or skills related to self-care.

When it is challenging for a student to explain the issues that they are facing within the academic setting, ask the student to complete the “Student Self-Assessment Checklist” as a helpful starting point.

Through a review of the completed “Student Self-Assessment Checklist,” areas of student concern will be revealed. Further exploration may help the student to clarify the underlying issues and to explore possible campus and community resources that could be helpful.

Use this form to:

- Assess generalized problems that a student may be experiencing
- Assist the student to clarify health, personal, interpersonal and/or academic issues
- Review and discuss the need for additional campus supports

### Using the “Student Self-Assessment of College Classroom Difficulties”

The “Student Self-Assessment of College Classroom Difficulties” (pages 12–16) can be used to help assess classroom-specific problems that a student may be experiencing. This checklist delineates actions the student can take on his or her own that may ameliorate the difficulties along with possible accommodations that can be formally requested if the student actions alone are not adequate.

Use this form to:

- Help a student to identify common disability-related limitations
- Review and discuss particular classroom difficulties
- Explore the suggested actions that the student could assume independently to address the problems that he or she reports experiencing
- Explore possible accommodations that could be formally requested if the individual efforts of the student are not sufficient



# Student Self-Assessment Checklist

The following is a list of challenges that you may be experiencing right now on campus. Often these challenges will impact your academic success. This checklist is tended to help identify your personal challenges, so that helpful resources and suggestions can be determined.

Please put a checkmark ( ✓ ) next to any of the statements that apply to you.

## 1. Psychosocial Skills

- It is difficult for me to ask for help.
- Sometimes I feel withdrawn even when I'm around people.
- I reject most people I go to school with.
- Sometimes I don't understand what people mean or why they act the way they do.
- I easily get over stimulated by all the activity around me.
- I tend to stay away from people at school.
- I am frequently rejected by others at school.
- It's easy to misinterpret what others say or do.
- Sometimes I feel suspicious of other people around me.

## 2. Communication Skills

- I talk so much sometimes that people have to interrupt me.
- Sometimes I speak so softly no one hears me.
- Others have said they don't understand what I am trying to say.
- I would rather read directions than listen to them.
- Sometimes I don't answer others or respond with only one or two words.
- I interrupt others quite a bit.
- It can be difficult to listen to and understand others.

## 3. Behavior

- I sometimes act without thinking.
- I can talk too much or too loudly.
- Sometimes strange things just happen so it's hard to meet deadlines.
- Sometimes I threaten to quit when I am angry.
- I blame others for my mistakes or find some excuse.
- Sometimes my behaviors seem strange or different to others.
- Sometimes I "lose time" and don't have any time left for studying.
- Sometimes I turn to drugs or alcohol because I feel so stressed.
- I get physically ill when there are too many demands on me.

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Adapted with permission from Lavin, D. & Everett, A. (1995). *Working on the dream: A guide to career planning and job success*. Spring Lake, MN: Rise, Inc.

# Student Self-Assessment Checklist

## 4. Perception

- It can be hard to understand others' words.
- Sometimes I hear voices or sounds others don't.
- I get suspicious of others at school.
- Sometimes I believe things others don't.
- If I explain what I see or think, people usually don't agree with me.
- Sometimes I feel like I'm not real or the world around me is not real.

## 5. Relationships

- General conversations like "small talk" are difficult.
- I usually don't have anything to discuss with others at school before and after class.
- I don't know how to act when people make statements I don't like.
- It really bothers me to hear negative comments about people with mental illnesses.
- Sometimes certain people make me feel like it's not going to work.
- It's difficult to agree with someone.

## 6. Thinking/Learning

- Sometimes it's difficult for me to concentrate for very long.
- It can be hard to learn new information at times.
- I am easily distracted.
- It can be difficult to shift my focus from one task to another.
- Sometimes it is hard to think things through.
- I can only do one thing at a time.
- If I have a task I don't usually do, I get confused.
- I have problems making decisions.
- I often reach the wrong conclusion.
- I am disorganized.
- I don't have enough energy to do my work.
- Sometimes ideas come to me too fast.
- I get too restless.
- I start to panic when I have deadlines or exams.
- I have difficulty remembering verbal commands.
- I get overwhelmed easily.
- Sometimes my mind goes blank when I'm called on in class or during exams.
- I have difficulty dealing with unexpected changes.
- I experience a lot of memory problems.

## 7. Medication

- I get drowsy at school or when doing my homework from my medication(s).
- I am thirsty a lot.
- My vision gets blurred.

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Adapted with permission from Lavin, D. & Everett, A. (1995). *Working on the dream: A guide to career planning and job success*. Spring Lake, MN: Rise, Inc.

# Student Self-Assessment Checklist

- I am embarrassed to take medication when I'm with my classmates.
- Sometimes my hands shake.
- My medication slows my thinking too much.

## 8. Self-Care

- At times, I don't eat very well.
- I don't sleep as much as I would like or need.
- I need to sleep a great deal.
- At times, it is easy to skip some of my daily hygiene tasks.
- I don't take my medication as my doctor prescribes.
- I don't exercise or do any physical fitness activities.
- I can't always predict when I'm going to have an increase in my symptoms.
- Sometimes I work long hours and don't take any breaks.
- I don't go to church (synagogue/other) as often as I should or would like to.
- I don't utilize my spiritual practices as much as I would like to.

## 9. Emotions

- Sometimes I worry so much, it's hard to be in school.
- I get afraid of people, places or activities.
- Sometimes I over react.
- It's hard to hear others express strong feelings.
- Sometimes it seems my reactions don't match with the others I'm around.
- I get too afraid to approach my professor(s) or advisor(s).
- Even when I get good grades, I'm terrified that I'm going to fail.
- Sometimes I feel so good that I take on more than I can handle.

## 10. Treatment Needs

- I need to see my doctor, therapist, case manager, etc. during regular work hours.
- I may need to be hospitalized for my illness in the future.
- I need to get to my 12-Step meeting(s) at least \_\_\_\_ times per week.
- I need to keep in contact with my support system.
- I need to stay in touch with my spiritual advisor/priest/rabbi/other.

## 11. Resource Needs

- I don't have enough money for books and supplies.
- I can't get a meeting with an academic advisor.
- I don't have a place to study.

*If any one of these challenges is consistently difficult for you, please feel free to add information on the back in more detail. Also, feel free to add challenges that you experience that are not listed.*

The following is a list of difficulties that you may be experiencing while attending class. Often these challenges impact your academic success. This checklist is intended to help identify your personal challenges. It also offers strategies that you can try on your own and/or possible accommodations that you can request to help you manage any difficulties that you are experiencing.

Please check any difficulty below that you are experiencing:	Possible actions that you can try on your own:	Possible accommodations that you may be able to request:
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sitting still, restlessness	Go to classroom before classes start to determine the best place to sit	Request prearranged breaks during class
<input type="checkbox"/> Inability to filter out distractions (internal or external)	Arrive at class early to be able to sit where you want/need to	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating; decreased attention span and difficulty with doing homework and test taking	<p>Arrange to photocopy a classmate's notes</p> <p>Organize time to do homework in shorter sittings, even if more frequent</p> <p>Write things down; keep a list and a schedule; keep a journal</p>	<p>Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker</p> <p>Request pre-arranged breaks to get fresh air and to move around</p> <p>Request to take tests in a separate room to decrease distractions</p> <p>Request to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Mind going blank	Relaxation exercises/deep breathing	Request to take home exam
<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension	Small hand/foot exercises that can be done discreetly at desk in class	Request to prepare a paper instead of an exam

Please check any difficulty below that you are experiencing:	Possible actions that you can try on your own:	Possible accommodations that you may be able to request:
<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased stamina <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue	Schedule courses during your best time of day and/or schedule courses on different days Ensure rest time between courses Exercise before class	Request a decreased course load without losing full-time status for financial aid and health insurance
<input type="checkbox"/> Dry mouth from medication	Bring beverage to class	
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty remembering verbal commands and problems with memory	Write things down to help accuracy Ask a classmate to verify that you understood the assignment correctly Write things down, keep a journal and keep a schedule	Request assignments in writing from professor
<input type="checkbox"/> Easily overwhelmed	Set small, attainable goals Break tasks into small, manageable pieces	
<input type="checkbox"/> Absent from class due to hospitalization	Contact classmates to stay connected	Arrange to contact and inform professor of situation Request to complete homework assignments from hospital Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course

Please check any difficulty below that you are experiencing:	Possible actions that you can try on your own:	Possible accommodations that you may be able to request:
<input type="checkbox"/> Racing thoughts, over-stimulation	Schedule classes with breaks between or on different days Use relaxation and meditation practices	Request prearranged breaks during class
<input type="checkbox"/> Escalating symptoms	Use monitoring log of symptoms so you can intervene early enough	
<input type="checkbox"/> Caught up in perfectionism	Use positive self-talk to counterbalance negative thinking	Request to work with tutor on time-management and organizing skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Spend an inordinate amount of time organizing tasks, but unable to successfully complete tasks		
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty dealing with unexpected changes, assignments, tests, etc		Request to get advanced notice of exams, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> Experiencing panic attacks	Go to class ahead of time to get feel of classroom and pick a location to sit Sit near the door so you can easily leave the room Use cold water on face or hands Arrive at class early to be able to sit where you want and/or need to sit Let professor know why you're not coming—don't just let it go	Request to have prearranged breaks during class

Please check any difficulty below that you are experiencing:	Possible actions that you can try on your own:	Possible accommodations that you may be able to request:
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating in class due to anxiety	Deep breathing exercises; Touch something (books, desk)-note temperature, texture, etc.—really focusing on object (Grounding techniques)	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Miss final exam due to panic attack or hospitalization	Inform professor via e-mail or voice mail rather than just letting it go;	Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course
<input type="checkbox"/> Flashbacks, intrusive memories or feeling generally “out of touch” with reality	Concentrate on note taking, feel something and concentrate on texture, etc. (grounding skills)	Request prearranged breaks during class Request to tape record class Request a note taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Hyper vigilante and/or increased startle response.	Use self-talk, “I am in a classroom. I am safe” Go to classroom early to get seat that feels safest	
<input type="checkbox"/> Absent from class due to hospitalization	Inform professor rather than just letting it go; and Arrange to do homework assignments from hospital	

<b>Please check any difficulty below that you are experiencing:</b>	<b>Possible actions that you can try on your own:</b>	<b>Possible accommodations that you may be able to request:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Distracted by internal/external stimuli	Arrive at class early enough to be able to sit where you want/need to	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Pressured by voices or other stimuli	Learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises Schedule courses during your best time of day	Request to take breaks to get a breath of fresh air and refocus Request to decrease course load without losing full time status for financial aid and health insurance
<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling self-conscious and paranoid	Try to learn to use positive self-talk Try to learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises	
<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling agitated, restless or unable to sit still	Put cold water on face or hands	Request breaks during classes and exams



## Part 2: Getting Connected to Campus Resources

### Overview

The *Higher Education Support Toolkit* offers simple, practical assistance designed to improve the likelihood of students with psychiatric disabilities to achieve their goals in college. The following guidelines suggest ways in which you can use this toolkit:

- Identify common difficulties experienced by students
- Assess student difficulties in adjusting and managing classroom and campus life
- Consider strategies and/or accommodations to help students
- Identify campus resources that are available to assist students at your institution

### Forms for Part 2: Getting Connected to Campus Resources

- Campus Resources Assessment Example (Boston University)
- Campus Resources Assessment Form (blank)

### Completing a “Campus Resources Assessment Form”

Compiling a campus resources list will enable campus providers to have at hand, a comprehensive list of current resources and services. A blank “Campus Resources Assessment Form” (pages 22–24) and an example of a completed form (pages 19–21) are included in this section.

“Information is power” is an old adage. A knowledgeable understanding of what resources are available both on campus will assist students in discovering the possible resources that can support them in overcoming the identified barriers to achieving their educational goals.

Your school’s website may be a helpful starting point in identifying what resources are available on your campus. A Microsoft Word® document that you can use as a template for developing your own institution’s campus and community resources can be downloaded at:

<http://www.bu.edu/cpr/resources/supportstudents/index.html>.

You can make copies of the “Campus Resources Assessment Form” to use when you meet with individual students. Once the student and campus service provider have a clear understanding of the issues, the “Campus Resources Assessment Form” can be helpful in considering what specific resources can

## Part 2: Getting Connected to Campus Resources

address the issues. If a resource is currently needed by the student, note “Yes” and discuss his or her needs and preferences and then set up a time table to address the student’s needs.

If a resource need is identified, but not currently available on your campus, note needed resource in the column labels “Other” and research options with the student to develop and/or access a suitable alternative resource. Make copies of the completed plan for both student and office use. Use the “Campus Resources Assessment Example” as a guide to assist you in creating your own form.

Use these forms to:

- Create a comprehensive list of campus resources and services
- Assist students to discover resources that can support them in overcoming barriers to achieve their educational goals
- Create links with campus resources to support student goals
- Use “Campus Resources Assessment Example” as a guide

Student Name: *Jane Doe*

Date: *8/26/08*

**Campus Resource/Service**

**Assistance Needed?**

**Notes and Preferences**

**Accommodations**

*Office of Disability Services  
http://www.bu.edu/disability/*

Yes    No

*Checked website and scheduled initial appt.  
for 09/03/08*

*Disability Services provides services and support to ensure that students are able to access and participate in the opportunities available at Boston University.*

*Follow-up on 09/10/08*

**Financial Aid**

*Office of Financial Assistance  
http://www.bu.edu/finaid/*

Yes    No

*Need to review financial status for academic year*

*This office offers comprehensive financial aid services to undergraduate students and their families. This office administers grants, scholarships, loans, and part-time employment funding. We also provide information to help students and their families make thoughtful decisions about options for financing a Boston University undergraduate education.*

**Housing**

*The Office of Housing Resources  
http://www.bu.edu/housing/*

Yes    No

*This office provides information on a range of housing options, F1Q5, summer housing, etc.*

**Residence Life**

*Office of Residence Life http://www.bu.edu/reslife/*

Yes    No

*This office is designed to support student life in and out of the classroom.*

# Campus Resources Assessment Example

Student Name: *Jane Doe*

Date: *8/26/08*

## Campus Resource/Service

## Assistance Needed? Notes and Preferences

### Academic Services and Support

*Educational Resource Center*

Yes  No

*The ERC provides academic support programs to the Boston University community*

*<http://www.bu.edu/erc/index.html>*

*Peer Tutoring to complement classroom experience*

Yes  No

*Writing Center to assist with all aspects of the writing process*

Yes  No

*Set up initial appt. for 09/17/08*

*Language Link to provide small groups to practice foreign language skills*

Yes  No

*Workshops to provide opportunity to learn how to become more successful academically*

Yes  No

*Scheduled to attend first workshop 09/24/08*

*Contingent Aid Program to design and implement educational goals*

Yes  No

*Freshman and Transfer Resource Advisor*

Yes  No

*Office of the Dean of Students*

Yes  No

*Not at this time, but revisit in October/November*

*This office provides orientation, mentoring and counseling programs to effectively engage students in academic and intellectual work, community service, and other activities that will enrich their time at the university*

*<http://www.bu.edu/dos/>*

Student Name: *Jane Doe*

Date: *8/26/08*

**Campus Resource/Service**

**Assistance Needed?**

**Notes and Preferences**

**Student Health Services**

*http://www.bu.edu/shs/*

*Student Health Services includes a medical service, behavioral medicine service by appointment or on an emergency basis, a crisis intervention counselor and chiropractic care.*

Yes    No

*Would like to have a contact person for counseling services*

*Set up initial appt. for week of 09/22/08*

**University Service Center**

*http://www.bu.edu/usca/*

*This office assists with concerns which are of a more complex or unique nature, or which may require the cooperation of several administrative offices to resolve; including the Registrar's Office, Student Accounting Services, Financial Assistance, and other administrative and academic offices. This office handles leaves of absence and withdrawals for undergraduate degree students.*

Yes    No

**Career Services**

*Office of Career Services  
http://www.bu.edu/careers/*

*This office assists in all aspects of your career search from the time you enter the University and choose a major to the time you leave the University and accept your first position.*

Yes    No

*Career workshops  
Employer Information Sessions  
On-campus interviewing*

# Campus Resource Assessment Form

Student Name:

Date:

**Campus Resource/Service**

**Assistance Needed? Notes and Preferences**

**Accommodations**

Yes  No

**Financial Aid**

Yes  No

**Housing**

Yes  No

**Residence Life**

Yes  No

# Campus Resource Assessment Form

Student Name:

Date:

**Campus Resource/Service**

**Assistance Needed? Notes and Preferences**

**Academic Services and Support**

Yes  No

Yes  No

Yes  No

Yes  No

# Campus Resource Assessment Form

Student Name:

Date:

**Campus Resource/Service**

**Assistance Needed? Notes and Preferences**

**Residence Life**

Yes  No

**Student Health Services**

Yes  No

**Career Services**

Yes  No

**Other**

Yes  No



## Part 3: Actions and Accommodations in the Classroom

### Overview

The *Higher Education Support Toolkit* offers simple, practical assistance designed to improve the likelihood of students with psychiatric disabilities to achieve their goals in college. The following guidelines suggest ways in which you can use this toolkit:

- Identify common difficulties experienced by students
- Assess student difficulties in adjusting and managing classroom and campus life
- Consider strategies and/or accommodations to help students
- Identify campus resources that are available to assist students at your institution

#### **Form for Part 3: Actions and Accommodations in the Classroom**

Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions

### Using the “Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions”

Review and familiarize yourself with the “Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions” (pages 26–33). The guide lists prevalent psychiatric disorders and the common difficulties that are often associated with particular disorders. The guide also includes possible actions a student can take on his or her own that may help to improve a difficult situation in class. If reasonable accommodations are needed, a list of potential accommodations that the student could request is provided.

Use this guide to:

- Help staff understand the range of common difficulties for an individual living with one or more particular mental illnesses
- Help staff and student to determine appropriate strategies to help student in the classroom
- Explore options to request and use accommodations

**Psychiatric Disorder: Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Difficulty sitting still, restlessness	Go to classroom before classes start to determine the best place to sit	Request prearranged breaks during class
Inability to filter out distractions (internal or external)	Arrive at class early to be able to choose a comfortable place to sit	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker
Fatigue	Schedule courses at preferred time of day and/or schedule courses on different days with rest time between courses	Request a decreased course load without losing full-time status for financial aid and health insurance
Decreased Stamina	Ensure rest time between courses Exercise before class	
Difficulty concentrating; decreased attention span and difficulty with doing homework and test taking	Arrange to photocopy a classmate's notes Organize time to do homework in shorter sittings, even if more frequent Write things down; keep a list and a schedule; keep a journal	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker Request pre-arranged breaks to get fresh air and to move around Request to take tests in a separate room to decrease distractions Request to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment
Mind going blank	Relaxation exercises/deep breathing	
Muscle tension	Small hand/foot exercises that can be done discreetly at desk in class	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

## Psychiatric Disorder: Major Depression (page 1 of 2)

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Fatigue	Schedule courses at preferred time of day and/or schedule courses on different days with rest time between courses	Request a decreased course load without losing full-time status for financial aid and health insurance
Decreased Stamina	Ensure rest time between courses Exercise before class	
Difficulty concentrating; decreased attention span and difficulty with doing homework and test taking	Arrange to photocopy a classmate's notes Organize time to do homework in shorter sittings, even if more frequently Write things down; keep a list and a schedule; keep a journal	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker Request pre-arranged breaks to get fresh air and to move around Request to take tests in a separate room to decrease distractions Request to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment
Dry mouth from medication	Bring beverage to class	
Difficulty remembering verbal commands and problems with memory	Write things down to help accuracy Ask a classmate to verify that you understood the assignment correctly Write things down, keep a journal and keep a schedule	Request assignments in writing from professor

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

**Psychiatric Disorder: Major Depression (page 2 of 2)**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Easily overwhelmed	Set small, attainable goals Break tasks into small, manageable pieces	Request to tape record class
Absent from class due to hospitalization	Arrange to contact and inform professor of situation Request to complete homework assignments from hospital Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course	
Racing thoughts, over-stimulation	Schedule classes with breaks between or on different days Use relaxation and meditation practices	Request prearranged breaks during class
Escalating symptoms	Use monitoring log of symptoms so you can intervene early enough	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

**Psychiatric Disorder: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Caught up in perfectionism	Use positive self-talk to counterbalance negative thinking	Request to work with tutor on time-management and organizing skills
Spends an inordinate amount of time organizing tasks, but unable to successfully complete tasks		
Difficulty dealing with unexpected changes, assignments, tests, etc		Request to get advanced notice of exams, etc.

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

**Psychiatric Disorder: Panic Disorder**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Experiencing panic attacks	Go to class ahead of time to get feel of classroom and pick a location to sit Sit near the door Use cold water on face or hands Arrive at class early to be able to sit where you want and/or need to sit	Request to have prearranged breaks during class
Unable to get to classes/exams due to panic attacks	Let professor know why you're not coming—don't just let it go Request to arrange an "incomplete" rather than fail a course	Request to arrange an "incomplete" rather than fail a course
Difficulty concentrating in class due to anxiety	Deep breathing exercises; Touch something (books, desk)-note temperature, texture, etc.—really focusing on object (Grounding techniques)	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Miss final exam due to panic attack	Request to arrange an "incomplete" rather than fail a course	Request to arrange an "incomplete" rather than fail a course

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

**Psychiatric Disorder: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Flashbacks, intrusive memories or feeling generally “out of touch” with reality	Concentrate on note taking, feel something and concentrate on texture, etc. (grounding skills)	Request prearranged breaks during class Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Hyper vigilante and/or increased startle response.	Use self-talk, “I am in a classroom. I am safe” Go to classroom early to get seat that feels safest	
Anxiety/panic attacks	Sit near the door so you can easily leave the room	Request prearranged breaks during class
Absent from class due to hospitalization	Inform professor rather than just letting it go; and	
Miss final exams	Arrange to do homework assignments from hospital Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

**Psychiatric Disorder: Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Distracted by internal/external stimuli	Arrive at class early enough to be able to sit where you want/need to	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Pressured by voices or other stimuli	Learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises Schedule courses during your best time of day	Request to take breaks to get a breath of fresh air and refocus Request to decrease course load without losing full time status for financial aid and health insurance
Feeling self-conscious and paranoid	Learn to use positive self-talk Learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises	
Feeling agitated, restless or unable to sit still	Put cold water on face or hands	Request breaks during classes and exams

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.



**Psychiatric Disorder: Manic/Hypomanic Episodes**

<b>Common Difficulties/Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Strategies for Student</b>	<b>Possible Accommodations</b>
Inability to pace self		Work with tutor on time-management skills
Problems with memory	Write things down; keep journal; keep schedule	
Racing thoughts, over-stimulation	Schedule classes with breaks between or on different days Relaxation/meditation practices	Prearranged breaks during class
Escalating symptoms	Use monitoring log of symptoms so you can intervene early enough	
Expansive good mood	Intervene if possible	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

## Information and Resources

The Toolkit includes websites, fact sheets and relevant publication references. This information can be used and shared by students, campus providers and the community-at-large to learn more about psychiatric disability.

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### Organizations and Websites

#### **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**

<http://www.ahead.org/index.htm>

AHEAD is a professional association committed to full participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education. AHEAD addresses current and emerging issues with respect to disability, education and accessibility to achieve universal access.

#### **AHEAD Special Interest Group on Psychiatric Disability**

<http://www.ahead.org/about/SIGs/psych/psychology.htm>

The Psychiatric Disabilities Special Interest Group strives to improve services and the campus climate for students with psychiatric disabilities. Working with a network of disability service providers, this group explores issues and shares useful resources to develop and promote the use of best practices for students with psychiatric disabilities.

#### **Revolution Online Mental Health Fair**

<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthfair>

The Revolution Online Mental Health Fair provides the latest in mental health information and support via “Information Booths” that are actual web links to organizational websites. The websites included in the Online Mental Health Fair focus on enhancing student mental health.

#### **Active Minds on Campus**

<http://www.activemindsoncampus.org/>

Active Minds is the only national organization dedicated to utilizing the student voice to raise mental health awareness on the college campus. Student and staff members’ work to promote a better understanding of mental health issues and promote a dialogue that is supportive and stigma-free.

### **Healthy Minds.org**

<http://www.healthyminds.org/collegementalhealth.cfm>

Healthy Minds is a web-based resource produced by the American Psychiatric Association as a resource for students and parents. A wide range of topics are included on this site with links to facts, statistics and personal accounts of students managing college life while coping with a mental illness.

### **Bazon Center for Mental Health Law**

<http://www.bazon.org>

The Bazon Center for Mental Health Law produced “Campus Mental Health: Know Your Rights,” a 27-page guide for college and university students who want to seek help for mental illness or emotional distress. The guide explains legal rights and treatment options and is available as a free download at the Bazon Center’s website.

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## **Fact Sheets**

### **Recovery from Serious Mental Illness Fact Sheet**

<http://www.bu.edu/cpr/resources/factsheets/index.html>

As a way to spread awareness of the reality of recovery from mental illnesses, the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation has produced a one-page fact sheet designed for distribution to the general public. The fact sheet "Recovery from Serious Mental Illnesses" is a free download. Reproduction and distribution is highly encouraged.

### **What a Difference a Friend Makes – SAMHSA Fact Sheet**

<http://whatadifference.samhsa.gov/>

This site and related fact sheet are designed for people living with mental illnesses—and their friends. Information and tools are available to help in the recovery process, and you can also learn about the different kinds of mental illnesses, read real-life stories about support and recovery, and interact with the video to see how friends can make all the difference.

### **National Mental Health Anti Stigma Campaign Fact Sheet**

<http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/adCouncil/25953/>

This fact sheet highlights a national awareness public service advertising (PSA) campaign launched by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in partnership with the Ad Council. This fact sheet is

designed to decrease the negative attitudes that surround mental illnesses and encourage young adults to support their friends who are living with mental health problems.

### **Issue Brief—The Emergence of Psychiatric Disabilities in Postsecondary Education**

[http://www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief\\_3.1.pdf](http://www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief_3.1.pdf)

An unprecedented and growing number of postsecondary students report psychiatric disabilities. This Issue Brief describes key issues faced by students and explores how postsecondary personnel can support the success of these students.

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### Articles

**Collins M.E., & Mowbray, C.T. (2005). Higher education and psychiatric disabilities: National Survey of Campus Disability Services. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75, 304–315.**

Students with psychiatric disabilities are an increasing presence on college and university campuses. However, there is little factual information about the services available to these students in campus disability services offices or the extent to which they use these services. This article reports the results of a survey of disability services offices at colleges and universities in 10 states. Data from 275 schools revealed the number of students with psychiatric disabilities seeking assistance from disability services offices, characteristics of these offices, and the types of services they provide. Survey data also identified barriers to full participation of these students in academic settings. Implications of the study are discussed to inform policy and postsecondary institutional practices with the goal of better serving psychiatrically disabled students to maximize their talents and potential.

**Blacklock, B., Benson, B., & Johnson, D. (2003). *Needs Assessment Project: Exploring Barriers and Opportunities for College Students with Psychiatric Disabilities: Executive Summary*. Retrieved from**

<http://ds.umn.edu/Outreach/executivesummary.html>

The Needs Assessment Project: Exploring Barriers and Opportunities for College Students with Psychiatric Disabilities was sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education/U.S. Department of Education in October 2001 for a period of 18 months. The purpose of the project was to gather comprehensive data on the needs of college students with psychiatric disabilities, to identify the real and perceived barriers facing these students on college campuses, and to identify strategies for removing these barriers.

## Information and Resources

**Knis-Matthews, L., Bokara, J., DeMeo, L., Lepore, N., & Mavus, L. (2007) The Meaning of Higher Education for People Diagnosed with a Mental Illness: Four Students Share Their Experiences. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 31, 107–114.**

In this qualitative study, four participants diagnosed with a mental illness were interviewed to explore their experiences while attending a post-secondary school. Each participant described how education helped them to find a sense of purpose in their lives. Education is also described as a means of transition from the patient role to other roles such as student or worker. However, the symptoms and stigma associated with their mental illness has created additional challenges for them while in a school setting. Supportive professors and counselors were viewed as helpful in overcoming these barriers.