



Student Services

A Guide to Diagnosed Disorders Mental Health

Educational Implications

Adjustment disorders: developed in response to a particular stressor and complete recovery is anticipated to occur within a 6-month period.

- ✓ Loss of initiative to attend class, complete homework assignments
- ✓ When accompanied with depression or anxiety may impact learning temporarily in ways similar to anxiety and depressive disorders do (see below)
- ✓ Inappropriate interactions with others (i.e. may be belligerent)

Anxiety disorders: disorders in which the major feature is anxiety.

- ✓ Student may be afraid/anxious of school related activities such that he/she fails to attend class, or keep scheduled appointments
- ✓ High anxiety can paralyze the ability to think and act; frequently this results in missed class and assignments, which further perpetuate the cycle of anxiety and amplifies further avoidance behaviour
- ✓ High anxiety can cause physical responses that inhibit learning – the material is not absorbed and/or the material is not recalled
- ✓ When anxiety is high, the student is more likely to respond with anger and aggressiveness or to withdraw
- ✓ The student with high anxiety is more susceptible to the consequences of fatigue than the average student

Mood disorders: can be acute, severe, and of relatively short duration, or chronic conditions.

- ✓ Lack of energy or desire to perform
- ✓ Not able to think or act quickly
- ✓ Sadness or mania makes others uncomfortable
- ✓ Many symptoms cause physical discomfort; such as lack of appetite leading to poor eating/self-care
- ✓ Lowered self-esteem, resulting in negativism
- ✓ Side effects of medication can include increased anxiety during medication start-up period, blurred vision, concentration difficulties, drowsiness and restlessness

Eating Disorders: are characterized by anxieties about weight gain. There can be long-term, irreversible consequences which can affect one's physical and emotional health.

- ✓ Absences from school for treatment of health problems because of eating habits
- ✓ Side effects of malnutrition such as lethargy, forgetfulness, poor judgment

Instructional Strategies

The following **instructional strategies** are recommended:

- ❖ Utilizing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) procedures in class would benefit all learners
- ❖ Simon Fraser – see counseling services for further information

In addition to the following general instructional strategies it is prudent for faculty to watch for any significant change in a student's work habits, behaviour, performance and attendance such as: frequent absences; low morale; disorganization in completing school work; lack of cooperation or a general inability to communicate with others; frequent complaints or evidence of fatigue; problems



Student Services

A Guide to Diagnosed Disorders Mental Health

concentrating, or making decisions, or remembering things; missed deadlines, poor exam grades; decreased interest or involvement in class topics or academics in general.

People who experience problems such as those above may simply be having a bad day or week, or may be working through a difficult time in their lives. A pattern that continues for a long period may, however, indicate an underlying mental health problem and they should be referred to AccessAbility or counseling services.

Aggressive, hostile behaviour is NOT acceptable and should be dealt with in the same manner with which faculty deal with other students (i.e. ask the person to leave or apply the rules of conduct code).

*** Note that non-threatening delusional behaviour should not be confronted by faculty. Acknowledgement is advised, using words such as, “I hear what you say, but that is not my view”.**

- ❖ Provide explicit guidelines for assignments
- ❖ Minimize distractions in the learning environment
- ❖ Pre-arrange a cue to refocus attention
- ❖ Deal immediately with any negative behaviour by peers towards the student
- ❖ Permit students to leave the classroom if anxiety becomes unmanageable
- ❖ Provide copies of your notes to cover emergency absences
- ❖ Be prepared to meet with student and disability support office for contingency planning
- ❖ Identify any changes in routine well ahead of time
- ❖ Recognize small achievements
- ❖ Refer students to counseling or disability support services if you are concerned about their mental Health

Academic Accommodations

Students with disabilities are expected to accomplish the “core competencies” of their programs. To achieve this, accommodations are provided to minimize or eliminate any disadvantage their disability presents. Accommodations are unique to each individual. AccessAbility Services makes these recommendations based on confidential documentation that the student provides to the college. Some of the most commonly provided academic accommodations to students with mental health disabilities include:

- Reduced course load
- Provision of extended time for tests and exams - the amount of extra time is determined by AccessAbility Services but is usually time and a half (1.5 times) is allotted
- Separate testing room
- Use of memory aids such as formula cards during tests
- Alternative evaluation procedures – group work/presentations (I didn’t think we could mandate this as an accommodation only a request)
- Provision of a note taker for lectures
- Allowance of break periods as needed for rest and taking medication
- Have the ability to leave the classroom without penalty
- Adjusted course grades for medical reasons (i.e. no penalty for late withdrawals)
- Priority scheduling of classes (i.e. time of day and sequence of courses in a program)
- Access to onsite emergency psychological support and referral service



Student Services

A Guide to Diagnosed Disorders Mental Health

Overview and Definitions

While a single symptom or isolated event is rarely a sign of ill health, a symptom that occurs frequently, and lasts for several weeks or becomes a general pattern of an individual's behavior may indicate the person may benefit from additional investigation and support through Student Services.

Some of the more significant indicators of a possible ill health include:

- Prolonged feelings of depression or apathy
- Heightened anxiety to the point of impairing one's ability to function.
- Low mood, fatigue, sleeping too much or too little and lack of motivation.
- Marked personality change over time
- Confused thinking, grandiose ideas
- Feelings of extreme highs or lows
- Heightened anxieties, fears of anger or suspicion; blaming others
- Social withdrawal
- Denial of obvious problems and strong resistance to offers of help
- Substance abuse
- Thinking or talking about suicide

Students who request accommodations because of a mental health disability are participating in some form of treatment intervention, either medication therapy or psychotherapy, or a combination. This should be clarified as some student's request accommodation without being registered. It is the responsibility of AccessAbility Services to work in collaboration with internal and community mental health professionals to ensure that students with mental health disabilities are capable of sustaining normal academic stress. As faculty, providing a supportive learning environment and working closely with AccessAbility Services will be key factors to the students with mental health disabilities.

Resources- Please see *AccessAbility Services* for further information

Canadian Mental Health Association

2160 Yonge St., 3rd floor,

Toronto, ON, M4S 2Z3

Tel: (416) 484-7750

Fax: (416) 484-4617

Website: www.cmha.ca