

SSD FACULTY INFO

MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

OVERVIEW and DEFINITION

While a single symptom or isolated event is rarely a sign of mental illness, a symptom that occurs frequently, and lasts for several weeks or becomes a general pattern of an individual's behavior may indicate the onset of a more serious mental health problem that requires treatment. Some of the more significant indicators of a possible mental illness include:

- marked personality change over time
- confused thinking, grandiose ideas
- prolonged feelings of depression or apathy
- feelings of extreme highs or lows
- heightened anxieties, fears of anger or suspicion, blaming others
- social withdrawal, increased self-centeredness
- 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 may be participating in some form of treatment intervention, either medication therapy or psychotherapy, or a combination. It is the responsibility of the disability support office to ensure that students with mental health disabilities are capable of sustaining normal academic stress. ***Faculty can contribute significantly to the success of the students with a mental health disability by providing a supportive learning environment.***

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Disorder	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 and complete homework assignments; when accompanied by depression or anxiety may impact learning temporarily in ways similar to anxiety and depression disorders (see below); inappropriate interactions with others (i.e. may be belligerent).
Anxiety Disorders: can be acute, severe and of relatively short duration, or chronic conditions. Types include major depressive disorder, dysphonic disorder, bipolar disorder, cyclothymic disorder, and substance induced mood disorder.	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 blurred vision, concentration difficulties, drowsiness and relentlessness.
Personality Disorders: are characterized by a pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, starts in adolescence or early childhood, is stable over time and leads to distress and impairment. Types include paranoid, schizoid, antisocial, narcissistic, and avoidant, dependent and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders.	Difficulties with relationships; others become frustrated with them; often "punished" without knowing why; difficulty in trusting others so they may be manipulative, blame others, seem to be trying to retreat; a crisis is often occurring in the life of an individual with a personality disorder. <i>(All this makes it difficult to accept help that is available to them through modifications/accommodations).</i>
Eating Disorders: characterized by anxieties about weight gain. There can be long term, irreversible consequences which can affect one's physical and emotional health. Types include anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.	Absences from school for treatment of health problems because of eating habits; side effects of malnutrition such as lethargy, forgetfulness, poor judgment.

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

In addition to the following general instructional strategies it is prudent for faculty to watch for any significant change in the student's work habits, behaviors, performance and attendance such as: frequent absences, low morale, disorganization in completing school work, lack of cooperation or general inability to communicate with others, frequent complaints or evidence of fatigue, problems concentrating, 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 of time, however, indicate an underlying mental health problem and they should be referred to the Office of Student Services for assessment or the Women's Center for counseling.

- provide explicit guidelines for assignments
- minimize distractions in the learning environment
- pre-arrange a cue to re-focus attention
- deal immediately with any negative behavior by peers towards the student
- permit students to leave the classroom if anxiety becomes unmanageable
- provide copies of your notes to cover emergency absences
- identify any changes in routine well ahead of time
- recognize small achievements

SUGGESTED ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

- adjusted course grades for medical reasons (i.e. no penalty for late withdrawals)
- separate testing room or test proctoring by the Office of Student Services
- provision for extended time for tests and exams
- use of memory aids such as formula cards during tests
- priority scheduling of classes (i.e. time of day and sequence of courses)
- provision of peer note taker for lectures
- reduced course load
- allowance of break periods as needed for rest and