

Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

1. Are mental health conditions in college students a common occurrence?

Yes! [According to the study conducted by NAMI and JED](#), 1 in 5 youth and young adults experience a mental health condition. 75% of all lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 24, and 30% of college students reported feeling so down at some point during the previous year that they found it difficult to function.

2. What are the common signs of a mental health condition?

There are 10 common warning signs of a mental health condition that should be taken seriously:

- Feel very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Severe, out-of-control risk-taking behaviors
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason
- Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight
- Seeing, hearing or believing things that are not real
- Repeatedly and excessively using drugs or alcohol
- Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality, or sleeping habits
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Trying to harm oneself or planning to do so

3. What to avoid if you are experiencing the warning signs of a mental health condition?

Avoid alcohol and drug use if you are experiencing the warning signs of a mental health condition. Alcohol and drug use can actually worsen an underlying mental health condition. Drug use, especially the use of marijuana and hallucinogens, may increase the chances of psychosis in people who are at risk of developing a serious mental illness.

4. Who should you talk to regarding your mental health?

The first people recommended to speak to about your mental health are your parents. If your support network is made up of trusted adults who are not family members, that is alright. The main purpose is to have this discussion with trusted adults who will provide support if you need it!

5. Are there campus resources that you can seek out for help regarding mental health? Yes!

- Call your campus counseling or health center
- Request a confidential conversation with your resident advisor, if you are living on campus
- Speak with the dean of student affairs, peer support specialist or campus chaplain
- Request a confidential conversation with a trusted academic advisor or faculty member
- Contact the leader of a campus mental health organization, such as NAMI on Campus or Active Minds

6. Will your health information be protected?

Health privacy and confidentiality laws protect your health records, including mental health records, if you are over the age of 18. These laws safeguard your information, but they can also prevent colleges from contacting your parents if you are facing significant challenges or a serious mental health condition. Two different federal laws regulate when and how information included in your student education records and health information may be shared with your family or others. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects information in your student education records. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects your health information.

7. How is FERPA applied? What protections does FERPA provide?

FERPA applies to student education records, including records kept in college counseling and health clinics. FERPA prohibits a college from sharing information included in a student record with parents, with a few exceptions with written authorization from the student, such as:

- In a health or safety emergency
- If parents claim the student as tax dependent

8. How is HIPAA applied? What protections does HIPAA provide?

HIPAA applies to health information kept by health care providers outside of the campus community, such as community psychiatrists, therapists and counselors, and campus-based university hospitals. HIPAA prohibits the sharing of your health information with your parents, with a few exceptions with written authorization from the student, such as:

- In a health or safety emergency
- When an individual presents a threat of harm to self or others

9. How do you know that your information is secure within your school?

Your school must have verbal or written authorization before disclosing health information to your parents or others unless there is a serious or imminent threat of harm to self or others and under other narrow exceptions.

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