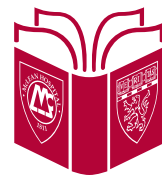




McLean Hospital
A HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE

Parent Guide to Hospitalization



**College Mental
Health Program**
McLean Hospital

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Overview of College Mental Health Challenges

College is an exciting time in the lives of young adults. With this new experience comes the promise of a bright future, new relationships, new beginnings, and new expectations.

As with any new experience, adjusting to life at college is fraught with its own unique set of challenges. To support their students, most college health centers offer mental health services. These services are geared toward helping students develop strategies for navigating the new landscape of life at college.

Still, coping with these challenges can be stressful and overwhelming. Moreover, for some young adults, the timing of college coincides with changes in the biochemistry of their own bodies, changes that can have a profound effect on their moods and ability to regulate their emotional health. These physical changes—hormonal or physiologic—can exacerbate feelings of stress and precipitate a crisis. If left undiagnosed and untreated, these changes in brain chemistry and emotional health can have serious consequences.

As parents or guardians, you want to do whatever is necessary to help your child be happy and successful. When students have mental health crises, their parents often feel overwhelmed and unsure about how to help. Worse, many parents find that they do not know how to navigate the mental health system. With so many available treatments, as well as a wide range of medications, parents and students understandably struggle to find care that truly meets their needs.

This booklet will help you to find more information about mental health care, learn how to take care of yourself while your student is going through a difficult time, and find out how other parents have made it through.

[Click here for some more facts and figures on mental health.](#)

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Facts and Figures about Mental Health

Did you know that:

- ⦿ An estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older—about one in four adults—suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder each year.
- ⦿ Major depressive disorder affects approximately 14.8 million American adults or about 6.7 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.
- ⦿ Psychiatric illnesses are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and Canada for ages 15 through 44.
- ⦿ Many people suffer from more than one mental disorder at a given time.
- ⦿ Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults ages 18 through 25; second only to accidents.
- ⦿ With proper treatment, 90 percent of individuals diagnosed with a psychiatric illness can live productive lives.
- ⦿ Treatment usually includes medication, psychotherapy or a combination of the two. For many, hospitalization is recommended.

Does My Student Need Help?

Signs of depression vary from student to student, but generally a student may need support if he or she is experiencing:

- ⦿ Persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety or emptiness
- ⦿ Hopelessness
- ⦿ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- ⦿ Loss of interest in academics, activities, hobbies
- ⦿ Inability to concentrate, focus, or study
- ⦿ Trouble sleeping, waking up too early, or sleeping too much
- ⦿ Withdrawal or isolation from family, friends, social community
- ⦿ Thoughts of death or suicide with or without suicide attempts

[How to Find Treatment](#)

[How to Talk with Your Student about Getting Help](#)

[When Your Student Needs to Take a Semester Off](#)

[In an Emergency](#)

[Contact McLean College Mental Health Program](#) for further assistance in identifying McLean Hospital programs that might be suitable for your student.

How to Find Treatment

If you believe your student is struggling and could benefit from support, you can:

- ⦿ Talk with your student and suggest that he or she contact the College Health Center or local mental health practitioner.
- ⦿ Depending on circumstances, perhaps offer to visit your student and together develop a strategy for increasing support.
- ⦿ Contact the College Health Center yourself and ask for information about the availability of campus resources and any guidance they can offer on how best to help your student.
- ⦿ Seek guidance/counseling from a mental health professional in your area. Call your insurance provider or primary care doctor for a referral.
- ⦿ In an emergency, call 911.

How to Talk With Your Student About Getting Help

Some students are afraid to ask for help. They may be worried about telling someone about the symptoms they are experiencing, for fear of being ridiculed or viewed as “crazy.” Or, they may be afraid that they will be “locked up” if someone finds out. Most students fear falling behind at school if they enter treatment.

The fact is that students who obtain treatment when it is necessary stand a much better chance of getting back to school successfully. It is nearly impossible to “tough out” a severe mental illness on one’s own.

Find a time to talk with your student, preferably one that your student has agreed upon beforehand. Think about your objectives for the conversation. Are you hoping that your student will acknowledge that there is a problem? Perhaps you are also hoping that you and your student can agree on a plan for seeking professional help.

Here is a script that might help you think about how to talk with your student:

Parent: I have noticed some differences in you lately, and I am wondering if you are feeling depressed. You seem to be sleeping more, and I don’t see you hanging out with your friends as much. I also notice that you are having a hard time keeping up with the things you need to do for school. Those are all signs that you may be experiencing depression. I know that you may not want to talk about it, but I am worried about you and I can’t ignore what I am seeing. These kinds of problems can get worse without treatment.

Depression is a very treatable problem and you deserve to be able to enjoy your life. Can we work together to find you some help?

When Your Student Needs to Take a Semester Off

No student welcomes the disruption caused by a psychiatric, or any other, hospitalization. The thought of not graduating “on time” can be very discouraging. Also, a college education is expensive. Tuition, work-study positions, graduate assistant jobs and scholarships can all be (or feel) threatened by an academic leave. Some students are so fearful of not being able to pursue their academic goals that they forge ahead and return to campus before they are ready. Doing so can potentially undermine their health and long-term academic goals.

This decision deserves your student’s very thoughtful attention. A guiding approach for your student should be this: “How can I attend to my mental health in a way that preserves my academic record and eases my return to campus?”

Here are some questions you might have:

- ⦿ What are the school’s policies for leaves of absence?
- ⦿ What about my student’s financial aid?
- ⦿ Is there any refund of tuition monies after a mid-semester withdrawal?
- ⦿ Will my student need to find a new roommate after returning to school?
- ⦿ Can my student negotiate “incompletes” or “withdrawals” instead of failed grades if a break from college is necessary?
- ⦿ Should my student consider a reduced course load?
- ⦿ What can be done now to support my student’s future success?

In an Emergency

In an emergency, call 911. The ambulance will bring your student to the nearest emergency room for an assessment.

The professionals at the emergency room can make a referral for a psychiatric hospitalization if needed.

Your situation is a psychiatric emergency if:

- ⦿ Someone has harmed themselves in a life-threatening way.
- ⦿ Someone has a plan and the means to harm themselves in a life-threatening way.
- ⦿ Someone has indicated that she or he intends to physically harm another person.

**Q: I am not in an emergency, but I am still concerned.
What can I do?**

A: Here are the other types of care you and your student might consider.

Levels of Care for You and Your Student to Consider in a Psychiatric Crisis

Description of level of care	Typical needs of student/patients
<i>Inpatient care</i> is used when a person is potentially harmful to themselves or others, or when his/her self-care and judgment are so impaired that he/she is at severe risk of harm.	<i>Enrolled students need</i> to make immediate contact with deans, professors, employers regarding medical crisis and missed classes, exams and deadlines; to decide whether to return to school or take a medical leave of absence; to learn new skills for co-managing mental health and college requirements
<i>Residential care</i> is used when a person needs intensive treatment and round-the-clock staffing, but is not at risk of harm to self or others if enough care is provided.	<i>Students typically are on medical leave and they need</i> to protect academic record, scholarships and financial aid; to clarify leave status and specific requirements for re-admission; to acquire new skills and supports for co-managing mental illness and college requirements; and to actively assess ability to function academically and socially in college
<i>Partial Hospitalization</i> is a form of day treatment used when a person needs intensive daily treatment but can function safely in independent living (or is living safely with family).	Same as “residential care”
<i>Outpatient care</i> is the least intensive type of treatment. Clients live independently and function reasonably well, but attend appointments for psychotherapy and medications, and may participate in some psychotherapy groups.	<i>Students typically are enrolled</i> and they need to strengthen skills and supports for co-managing mental health and college; to regularly monitor college-related stressors within context of treatment goals; to learn to make adjustments that facilitate success in both areas

[Services available to college students at McLean Hospital](#)

Internet Resources for Parents

For many parents, having a child with a mental illness means learning all about the mental health system in a short period of time. The resources on this page are all tailored to parents, guardians, and families of young adults with a mental illness.

- ⦿ The Jed Foundation's [Transition Year site](#) is a tremendous resource for both students and parents. Prefer to print and read? [Click here for a PDF containing the information on the site.](#)
- ⦿ [The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill](#) (NAMI) provides [courses](#) to help families and caregivers of individuals with mental illness. They also have a [guide to choosing a college and getting scholarship money for students with a diagnosis](#). [NAMI On Campus](#) is a resource for parents and students that includes hotlines and discussion groups.
- ⦿ [Sobercollege.com](#) has provided [this parent-friendly guide](#) to substance abuse and treatment for college students.
- ⦿ The National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder offers [in-person and Web-based courses tailored specifically to parents and families](#). They also have printable [Family Guidelines](#) that are designed to help parents in search of answers.

What Every Parent/Guardian Should Know

You're not just managing a crisis—you're learning to navigate the mental health system while advocating for your child at school. Here are a few important pieces of advice for you to remember.

- ⦿ By law, your student can prevent you from getting information about his/her treatment. [Learn the rules about confidentiality.](#)
- ⦿ Understand what your insurance will and will not cover. [Here are some pointers on working with your insurance company.](#)
- ⦿ Caregiver fatigue is a real concern. A few preventive measures can keep you from burning out. [Click here for more information on self-care.](#)

Confidentiality Rights and Authorization

Your college student is viewed as a legal adult with privacy rights. All health providers have to maintain compliance with [The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 \(or HIPAA\)](#), which means that they must obtain formal permission to share information about your student with you, or anyone else. If your student has not signed a release for the providers to talk with you, they cannot. Thus, it is important to address confidentiality concerns ahead of time if you want to be “in the loop” on your student’s care.

When your student enters treatment, the treatment providers will typically ask for permission to speak to you, as a parent, and obtain your student’s signature so that you can be contacted. Some families work with their attorneys to document this permission in advance, so that there can be no doubt that parents will be informed of the student’s hospitalization. If you, as a parent, are concerned that your student may not give hospital staff permission to speak with you, we encourage you to talk with your student first, and discuss the possibility of seeking such legal documentation.

All about Insurance Coverage

Mental health services are not always covered by your insurance company. Also, most insurers have different kinds of coverage available, which means that even if your student's providers take your type of insurance, your policy might not cover the treatment your student is receiving.

Find out what your insurance covers by asking these questions:

- ⦿ Is there a separate deductible for mental health care, and if so, how much?
- ⦿ My child was referred to a hospital (or program, or psychotherapist). Is that service covered? For how long?
- ⦿ Is there a different level of coverage for a biologically-based condition? What do you consider a biologically-based condition?
- ⦿ Does my student have to be enrolled in school for my insurance to cover him/her?

Self-Care Resources for Parents and Caregivers

Being a parent or guardian of a student with a mental illness can tax your emotional, financial, and physical resources. Although you are focused on your student, you should find ways to take care of yourself so that you can be well enough to provide for others. This page contains links to some useful skills and strategies for self-care.

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill has some [useful resources for parent self-care](#).

[Tips on how to get support](#) when you are the caregiver

[Friends and Family groups](#) with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

[Diagnosis-specific resources](#) from DBSA

[Self-care for caregivers](#)

Parent FAQ's About Student Hospitalization

Should my college student be hospitalized?

What does this hospitalization mean for my college student and his/her future?

What does the hospitalization mean for my student's academic future?

How do I explain the interruption in my student's life?

How often can I see my child if he or she is hospitalized?

What can I expect if my child is going to an "inpatient unit"?

What do I say to my student?

How do I help myself?

What do I say to others?

Parent FAQ's About Student Hospitalization

Should my college student be hospitalized?

Many students struggle in college. In some instances, professional counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy can help the student work through these struggles. In some instances, hospitalization may be required. The determination to obtain treatment in an inpatient setting is made when the student no longer is able to navigate life at college in a safe way; when the pressures of being at school become so overwhelming that the student's ability to manage independently is compromised and functioning impaired.

What does this hospitalization mean for my college student and his/her future?

There is life after inpatient treatment—productive, happy, fulfilling life. McLean Hospital's College Mental Health Program is designed specifically to help the student return to his/her college environment with coping skills necessary to manage successfully within the college community. In fact, there is evidence to support that if students do not receive treatment, symptoms left untreated can explode later in life with far more serious consequences.

We believe that by treating the student now—when he/she is young, flexible and has the time to learn and grow—we are offering this student a chance for a better, more productive and healthy life, not only in terms of academic achievement professional accomplishment, but more importantly in terms of personal happiness and fulfillment.

What does the hospitalization mean for my student's academic future?

An inpatient hospitalization should have little impact on the student's academic future. Depending on the timing of the hospitalization, courses may need to be repeated, or additional credits earned. But in general, inpatient hospitalization has zero impact on a student's academic future. The Dean of Students will help students manage schedules and courses upon re-entry into the college community. Concern about a student's academic future can be left at the door.

Whatever the academic implications, they can be managed post-hospitalization. The primary concern now is the student's health, welfare and safety.

How do I explain the interruption in my student's life?

Friends of the students may be aware of the student's struggle and may be relieved that the student is seeking help and treatment. In fact, very often it is the student's friends who recommend that treatment be sought and escort the student to the College Student Health Center.

How often can I see my child if he or she is hospitalized?

The protocol for contact with family and friends of a patient at an inpatient psychiatric facility is different from that in the more familiar acute care hospital setting where visiting is permitted during specified hours. Once admitted to McLean Hospital, it is the student, together with staff, who will determine the nature and frequency of calls and visits.

To ensure contact, McLean Hospital assigns a liaison to the family of each patient. It is through this liaison that family questions can be addressed and contact with student maintained. The primary goal of hospital staff is the treatment of the student. If your student is 18 years of age or older, HIPAA regulations preclude the staff from sharing treatment information without the student's consent.

What can I expect if my child is going to an “inpatient unit”?

Once your student is referred to McLean for inpatient treatment, you may be asked to contact an intake counselor to discuss the situation and guidelines for admission. This intake counselor is your first opportunity to ask questions about the admission process and hospital stay.

Average Length of Stay: patients stay anywhere from 3-21 days.

Evaluation: comprehensive psychiatric evaluation of student will be conducted by McLean staff prior to placement on a specific unit and development of treatment plan.

Contact: telephone number for the unit will be given to parents. While helpful, this patient phone may or may not be answered by patients.

Packing list: students may bring whatever they like to the unit, including school work. Here is a basic packing list:

Cell Phone: Students may bring a track phone—a cell phone that does not have a camera (no cameras are allowed)

Prepaid calling card: it may be helpful to provide your student with a calling card to use on the pay telephone.

Electric razor: no scissors, razor blades, knives, or other sharp edged items allowed

Clothing: change of clothing for 7 days, gym/workout clothes, sneakers (laundry available)

Personal items: shampoo, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, brush/comb, photos, books, etc.

Visiting: All visitors to McLean Hospital check in first at the Administration Building to obtain a pass before heading to the patient’s room. The number and frequency of visits is determined by the student and staff.

What do I say to my student?

Watching a loved one struggle is upsetting under any circumstances. Watching your student struggle, often while far away from home, can be even more so. As painful and difficult as this situation may be for you the parent/guardian, it is your student who is suffering. It is your student who is at risk.

The best response to your student is one of support. Words such as: “We are here for you.” “Take it one step at a time.” “Good for you for taking steps to get the help you need.” “Take the time you need to work this through.”

Words of reassurance: “You will get through this.” “We’ll figure this out.” “You will feel better again.”

Remember, your student has been hospitalized because he/she is not safe within his/her current environment. Your student is ill. Your student can’t help him/herself out of this situation without professional treatment. This situation is not voluntary; often a chemical imbalance of the brain precipitates a depression.

How do I help myself?

Since many illnesses do not manifest themselves until the late teens or early twenties, it is not uncommon for parents/guardians to be shocked to learn that their student suffers from depression/mental illness. Many times, parents/guardians feel “blindsided;” stunned that their high achiever is struggling and in need of inpatient psychiatric treatment.

Whirling from this news, parents/guardians then must navigate the strange new world of health insurance for inpatient psychiatric care and the inpatient care system itself. No easy feat.

Several parents have commented that seeking professional counseling during this crisis period has been very helpful. Sometimes, speaking with someone who knows the system and who can allay fears and worries can be both reassuring and informative. Families may benefit from learning more about depression, anxiety, mental illness and the struggle involved in working through underlying issues.

What do I say to others?

Every family handles this question in its own unique way. There is no right or wrong way, other than to be sure to respect the decision of your student. If asked how your student is doing, you can say, “working through the bumps of college life,” “negotiating the slippery slope of life at college,” or words to that effect. Your student’s life is personal—nobody else’s business. You are under no obligation to share details with anyone. Quite the contrary: Your responsibility is to respect your student’s wishes with regard to dissemination of personal information.



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