

Quick Guide

# Mental Health and The Move to College

Tools for Your Student and Everyone in Their Corner



**WellWithAll**  
**Foundation™**

**Grounded in clinical knowledge,  
tailored for real people.**

This resource was reviewed by Dr. Stephanie Pinder-Amaker, PhD, a licensed clinical psychologist, Harvard Medical School professor and Director of the McLean College Mental Health Program. Her feedback helped ensure this content is both accurate and empowering for real-life use.

## Why This Guide Matters

The move to college is a big shift — for students and for families. New freedoms, new pressures, and new questions about identity and belonging all come at the same time. The transition can feel like a mix of excitement, worry, and hope.

This guide is designed to walk alongside you and your student with real-world tools, honest reminders, and conversation starters to make the journey a little smoother. It's about giving them a strong foundation to thrive in this new chapter, while reminding them that they don't have to figure it all out alone.

**Disclaimer:** Your health is unique, and the information in this guide is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for personal medical advice. Consult with a healthcare provider or registered dietitian to create a plan that is right for your specific health needs and goals.



# 1. Start the Conversation Now

Replace self-judgment with self-compassion



## You Good?

Don't wait for move-in day. Casual talks now make it easier for them to open up later.

### Real Talk



Gen Z is comfortable talking about mental health, but they may not bring it up with you unless they feel safe.

### Try This:

Relieve the pressure and keep it real with ongoing conversations. These conversations don't have to be deep or perfect. They just need to be relatable and repeated.



### Keep it Chill:

"I'm here for you — not just for grades or groceries, but for how you're feeling."



### Meet Them Where They Are:

"Did you see that post / video where [celebrity] opened up about therapy? What did you think?"



### Check the Vibe:

"What's one thing you're excited about, and one thing you're nervous about?"

## 2. Spot Signs of Struggle and Avoid a Spiral



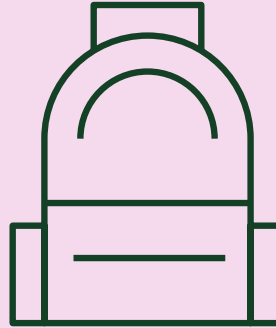
### You Good?

Every student faces stress in their first year — it's part of adjusting to college life. What matters is noticing when stress stops being temporary and starts weighing them down. You don't have to diagnose; you just need to notice patterns so you can respond with care and support, not panic.

### Real Talk



Even exciting changes (like making friends or starting new classes) can feel overwhelming. From the outside, it's not always obvious. That's why listening closely matters.



**1 in 3**  
college students

Face a mental health challenge their first year.

**Source:** World Mental Health International College Student Initiative

### Try This:

You may not see their daily routines, but you can hear when things aren't adding up. That's why it's important to listen for patterns.

### Your Check-In Checklist

If three or more of these show up in your conversations, encourage your student to connect with campus resources like counseling, peer groups, or cultural/identity centers.



They talk about sleeping all the time — or not at all



They skip meals or mention not having an appetite



They seem scattered, unfocused, or say they “can’t think straight”



They stop calling/texting or pull away from friends and family



They mention failing tests or skipping class



They sound sad, worried, or irritable more often than not

### Why This Matters

Noticing shifts in your student's mood, routines, or energy — even through a text or quick call — can help them get support before small struggles become bigger challenges. It's not about fixing everything for them; it's about showing you notice, you care, and that support is always within reach.



### 3. Know Where to Go Before Support is Needed



**You Good?**  
Everyone needs help sometimes. The key is knowing where to find it.

#### Real Talk



Students who know where to go for support are more likely to reach out sooner instead of waiting until things feel overwhelming.



#### Try This:

Having resources on deck — saved in your phone or bookmarked online — isn’t planning for failure, it’s planning for resilience. Think of it like saving your go-to playlist before a road trip. Explore these common campus resources together before your student needs them:

#### Support Resource

#### What It Offers

Counseling & Psychological Services or CAPS	Short-term therapy, crisis intervention, mental health referrals
Academic Support Centers	Tutoring, writing help, study skills, time management
Cultural & Identity Centers	Safe spaces, mentorship, and programming for multicultural, LGBTQIA+, and first-gen students
Student Health Services	Medical and mental health care in one place
Disability/Accessibility Services	Accommodations for mental health conditions (like extended time to take tests or housing adjustments)
Dean of Students / Student Affairs	Help with personal, financial, and medical challenges beyond school work
Residence Life	Housing-related support and referrals in case of conflict or concern — not direct mental health counseling

#### Why This Matters

Knowing where to turn ahead of time makes it easier for your student to ask for help — and shows them that reaching out is part of thriving, not failing.

## 4. Help Build Your Student's Support Squad



### You Good?

Independence doesn't mean going solo. You all can find comfort in building the right support team.

#### Real Talk



Having a trusted circle makes it easier for students to reach out when things get tough.



### Who's in their Corner?

Identify your support team in these three areas:

**Emotional Help** › encouragement, someone to vent to

**Academic Help** › study partners, tutors, professors

**Everyday Help** › rides, meals, navigating campus life



### Try This:

You can make it easier for your student to ask for help by encouraging them to name their go-to people (friends, mentors, relatives) — letting them choose who belongs in their circle. When students know exactly who they can turn to (and how), they're less likely to isolate during tough times.

#### Name Your Support Squad

“Who can you call for encouragement or advice?”  
“Which friend makes you laugh on hard days?” “Who would you text first if you a shoulder to lean on.”

#### Build a Routine You can Stick With

“When do you want family check-ins? How do you want to connect (daily texts, weekly FaceTime, group chat, quick memes, etc.)

#### Set Supportive Boundaries

How can you ask for space and help when you need it?

### Why This Matters

Having a plan reduces guilt, hesitation, and uncertainty in moments of overwhelm.

## 5. Crisis Planning and Resources



### In Case of Emergency

We don't expect a fire, but we still keep a fire extinguisher. Crisis planning works the same way: a tool you hope you never need, but one that saves lives when you do.

#### Real Talk



When stress spikes, knowing what to do next is everything.



### Resources to Know:

Support for students can be just a call, text, or click away. Having this list at your fingertips means you don't waste time searching, and your student sees that help is real, reachable, and built for them.

#### Support During Crisis

**Emergency:** 9-1-1

**Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:**  
Call or Text 988

### General Resources:

- + Active Minds
- + The AAKOMA Project
- + BIPOC Mental Health
- + Black Mental Health Alliance
- + Center for Native American Youth Resource Exchange
- + McLean College Mental Health Program
- + NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- + National Alliance for Hispanic Health
- + The Jed Foundation
- + The Steve Fund
- + The Trevor Project
- + Therapy for Black Men
- + Therapy for Black Girls

### Why This Matters

College isn't just about academics — it's about belonging, identity, resilience and growth. The best support you can give is to stay connected, listen without judgment and remind your student that they're never in it alone.

#### Grounded in clinical knowledge, tailored for real people.

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