



MIND THE GAP

A Compassionate Approach to Online Learners' Mental Health from Mindfulness to Crisis Support

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**EXCELSIOR
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Setting the Stage: Student Mental Health in the Post-COVID Era

Faculty survey:

- 65% say student mental health has significantly worsened since the beginning of their career
- 87% say it has worsened since COVID
- 51% have a good sense of how to recognize a student in emotional or mental distress (Mary Christie Foundation, 2021)

Student surveys:

- 73% experience a mental health disturbance in college (The Mental Health Coalition 2024)
- 13% of college students have thoughts about suicide (Healthy Minds Study, 2021)
- Only 25% of those with a mental health concern seek help (The Mental Health Coalition, 2024)



Mind the Gap: The Impact on Online, Nontraditional (Post-Traditional) Learners

- Balancing work, family life, military service and schoolwork
- Misconceptions about “having it together”
- Difficulties in asking for help
- More difficult to connect online students to traditional F2F campus resources like a counseling center
- OLC partnership with Uwill (2024)



Think-Pair-Share Activity

- Think about a time when you encountered a student experiencing emotional or mental health challenges.
- Did you connect them to help, resources, and support?
- Where did your institution excel?
- Where did you see **gaps**?



Strategies for Faculty Intervention and Support

Not MORE Work, Not Counseling, But a DIFFERENT APPROACH:
A COMPASSIONATE Approach

- Provide resources on day 1: announcements, emails, or live discussion
- Be approachable: invite students to communicate with you about their mental health needs
- Pay attention and be prepared to **take action**:



Identify



Empathize



Accommodate



Refer

1. IDENTIFY:

Signs of Stress, Dysregulation, Burnout, and Distress

Irritability, "rude" remarks

Poorly submitted or incomplete work, declining performance

Infrequent attendance

Procrastination, missing or late assignments

Lack of participation in discussion forums or other public-facing areas of the course

Delayed response to outreach

Dependency – excessive emails, requests for assistance

Mention of substance abuse

Using words and phrases indicative of distress such as "overwhelmed," "hopeless," "so tired"

2. EMPATHIZE

Ask

- *I've noticed you missed a few assignments. I wanted to check in with you. Are you doing okay?*

Listen

- *What are they REALLY upset about?*

Acknowledge and Normalize

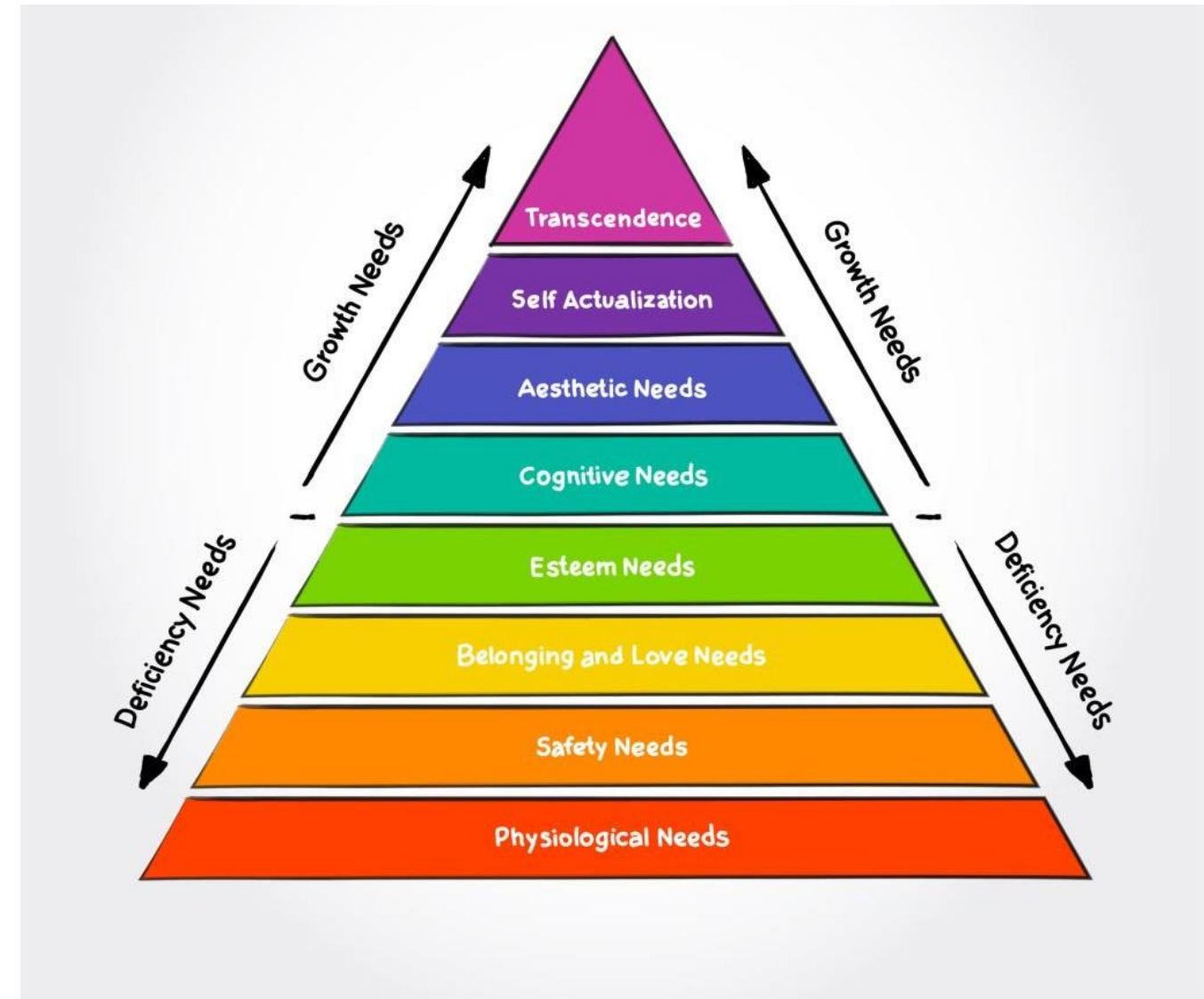
- *Thank you for sharing this with me! I'm so glad you told me about this. Wow, that sounds so hard! I would be struggling too. I have some great resources for you. I will help you connect with some support services.*

Connect and Follow Up

- *I remember having a similar experience like this too in college. I know it is really hard when your children are sick.*
- *I wanted to follow-up to see if you were feeling better? I hope you are recovering well.*

3. ACCOMMODATE

- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
 - Cognitive Needs
- Flexibility:
 - Waiving late penalties
 - Assignment and/or course extensions with specific due dates
- Follow up!



4. REFER

Keep a list of phone numbers and emails handy for support resources:

Academic advisor or success coach

Dean of Students office

Accessibility (ADA) services

Student assistance program or counseling center



Excelsior University's Student Assistance Program



BE STRONG

Resilience in Stressful Times

Stress does not typically go away on its own; Learn how to best help yourself in hard times.

[Article >>](#)



BE RESILIENT

Living with Change

Whether it occurs at work or at home, change can be stressful. This training discusses the best ways for you to move through the 3 stages of change.

[On-Demand Training >>](#)



GuidanceResources®

Self-care for Stress Relief

Live Session Client Gender	2023 Users
Female	69%
Male	19%
Not Specified	9%
Other	3%

Live Session Age Group	2023 Users
13-19	6%
20-29	28%
30-39	16%
40-49	19%
50-59	6%
60+	3%
Unknown	19%
Decline	3%

4. REFER: Immediate/Emergency Help

Despair

- "Sometimes it feels like I'd be better off dead."

Hopelessness

- "Nothing gets better, no matter what I do. Sometimes I wonder if it's even worth being here at all."

Leaving family/friends

- "I am such a burden to my family. They would be better off without me."

Self-harm

- "Sometimes I cut myself to feel better."

"I can tell that you are upset, and I am worried about you. I want you to connect with someone now who can help you stay safe. Please let me know when you have connected with one of these contacts." Then follow back up.

Do you know who to go to for emergency assistance at your institution?

Immediate Help

Crisis Text Line

- This is a FREE service: Text **HOME** to **741741** from anywhere in the United States, anytime. Crisis Text Line is here for any crisis. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. The volunteer Crisis Counselor will help you move from a hot moment to a cool moment.

988 Lifeline Chat and Text

- This is a FREE service which connects you with caring crisis counselors for emotional support 24/7/365. Veterans and Service Members, Spanish Speaking, and Deaf/Hard of hearing services are available as well.
- Chat on this website: <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>
- Text to 988 on your phone

Excelsior University Cornerstone Course



Managing stress

Time management

Mindfulness, meditation

Habits of mind: stop making comparisons, gratitude, staying in the present

Reminders and links to seek help

Sharing Student Stories

We can just continue to share our stories and then somebody will say, 'Hey, that person looks like me. They went through what I went through. I can do it too.'

*– Josayne Anderson-Tejera,
BS Liberal Arts '16, MS Criminal Justice '20*



I learned that [asking for help] is an example of strength and the most unselfish act that I can make, because it not only helps me, but it also helps those who care for me and interact with me on a daily basis.

– Curnes Williams Jr., BS Liberal Arts '19



Mental health is important. There's a lot of resources. I talked to my neighbors, I talked to my family, my husband. Family support. I can't stress it enough. It's very important. Because there are times that I tell my husband I'm sorry there wasn't dinner today because everything is due today.

- Michelle Tochiki, BS Liberal Arts '15, MBA '21



Faculty Self-Care

- 21% of faculty feel that supporting students in emotional distress has taken a toll on their own mental health (Mary Christie Foundation, 2021).
- Establish boundaries
- Free yourself from personal responsibility:
 - Identify
 - Empathize
 - Accommodate
 - Refer



Resource Toolkit





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Thank you!

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