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What to Do When Your Student is Struggling

St. Norbert College

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While college is an exciting time in one's life, it can also be stressful.

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What to Do When Your Student Is Struggling

College is often touted as the best time in your life – that time when you're finally living on your own, but still protected by mom and dad financially and otherwise. Yet for many students, college can bring struggles, both academically and psychologically. While these struggles are often temporary, they're still important to identify and treat.

Psychological struggles

Anxiety has replaced depression as the No. 1 mental health issue facing college students, says Bruce Robertson, senior director of counseling and career programs. Roughly 16 to 18 percent of students on campus are dealing with anxiety and stress, he says, a figure consistent with other higher-education institutions across the nation.

What's behind the spike in anxiety? No one knows for sure. But Robertson says many experts believe it comes down to expectations and social media. Today's students were told as kids that they could be anything they wanted to be. But when they get to college, some realize they're actually not going to be able to attain their dream career. Or, if they can attain it, "it's going to take a lot more than they thought, and require a lot of energy, effort and time management," Robertson says, which is stressful.

The overwhelming presence of social media in students' lives can also feed anxiety. Students are used to handling relationships and conflict online or through social media, not face-to-face or in real time. But on campus, that's exactly what they have to do. And this lack of anonymity can be intimidating.

Then there are the regular challenges facing students: adjusting to college life as a freshman, fretting over internships as sophomores and juniors, and worrying about landing that first job as juniors and seniors.

As parents, you play an important role in helping your student. Make a practice of regularly checking in, Robertson says, and asking how things are going. Many students won't proactively call a parent when something is wrong. But if a parent happens to call when they're stressed out, they'll often spill the beans.

Be direct, too. If something seems off when you call your student, come right out and say, "You seem sad/quieter/moody. Is something wrong?"

Robertson also recommends having a plan. Talk to your student about potential stressors, then discuss how to address them if they become problematic. And if your child has had mental health issues in the past – say, a brush with anxiety during high school – head to St. Norbert's Counseling & Psychological Services, or CAPS. Don't wait and see if everything will be O.K. Your student can meet with a counselor to proactively address the situation and try to prevent it from emerging again. One or two meetings may be all that's needed. But if something begins to go awry down the line, having that initial connection can be critical.

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Things You Need to Know

Check for Holds

Students should review holds in KnightLine before advisement to prevent registration delays.

Commencement

Seniors should check with the [bursar office](#) to ensure all bills are paid.

StoryCorps

StoryCorps app hits SNC.



Academic struggles

College is a big adjustment. Students suddenly have enormous independence, more rigorous coursework and new social dynamics, factors that can combine to trip up the most seasoned learner. It's not surprising, then, that St. Norbert's [Academic Support Services](#) tends to see more first-year students every year.

Corey Ciesielczyk, director, says some students aren't used to managing their time, while others have reading deficits or aren't skilled note-takers. Many struggle with communication, especially when it comes to having meaningful face-to-face conversations with their professors. "It takes an adjustment period, but they usually settle in and get their footing underneath them," he says.

As with mental health issues, monitor your student's progress by openly asking about classes and grades. Be alert for warning signs something is amiss. "If your son or daughter doesn't seem their normal self, or if they give you short answers when you ask how things are going, that's typically a sign something is wrong," he says.

Another warning sign can be found on social media. If you notice your student using Snapchat or Instagram at 2 a.m. on a weeknight, he's probably not getting enough sleep, which can hamper studies.

Be aware, too, that mental health issues are often intertwined with academic issues. One can cause the other and vice versa.

If you're worried something may be amiss with your student, give [Robertson](#) or [Ciesielczyk](#) a call. While they may be limited in what they can disclose to you due to confidentiality regulations, the two say they can definitely reach out to your student.

"Expect some stress. Expect some transitional difficulties. That's absolutely normal," says Robertson, especially during your student's first year. "At the same time, keep an open dialogue with your student about how things are going. Tell them that if either one of us feels things are starting to slip, let's talk about it."

St. Norbert College

100 Grant Street
De Pere, WI 54115
920-337-3181

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