

# Supporting students with disabilities related to Mental Health



Canadians aged 15 to 24 experience the highest incidence of mental health or psychological disorders. Emotional, psychological or psychiatric conditions can limit the activities that students with mental health issues can perform. As well, students' abilities may change over time with fluctuations in the severity of their conditions.

Mental health issues can include but are not limited to

- Heightened anxieties, fears and suspicions
- Changes in personality
- Confused or disorganized thinking, and ideas that may seem unusual or grandiose
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Extreme highs and/or lows in mood
- Difficulty with social interaction and communication

## Best Practices

Encourage open communication and comfortable exchange of information among everyone. Respond to students' needs. Be patient and calm. If conversation becomes lengthy and disorganized, ask them what you can do for them. Ask questions that require "yes" or "no" answers.

## In the Classroom

- Adopt Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies. UDL benefits all students and promotes a respectful classroom climate with: clear expectations and feedback; a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge; natural learning supports; multimodal teaching methods; and technology to enhance learning

### Adaptive Technologies

Some students use computers equipped with text-reading software to read textbooks and other documents. They report that this technology facilitates their concentration. Some students use voice-recognition software if they have difficulty writing or typing (e.g., tremors from medication).

- If the student is being abrupt, acknowledge the request without commenting.
- Permit the student to leave class periodically.
- Reserve seating near the door to allow leaving class for prearranged breaks.
- Incorporate a variety of learning styles: auditory, visual, kinesthetic, experiential.
- Provide copies of overheads and class notes.
- Provide feedback in private.
- Avoid stressful situations such as abrupt sounds, flashing lights, confrontational interactions
- Avoid interactions that require sharing of intimate or traumatic personal experiences in group work
- Permit the student a beverage if medication causes thirst.

### Assignments

- Make readings and assignments available in advance.
- Extend deadlines to complete assignments when students' conditions compromise their ability to do course work or attend classes.
- Consider substituting assignments in specific circumstances if doing so would not compromise academic integrity.
- Allow assignments to be handwritten rather than typed if a student has difficulty using a computer.

### Avoid

- Taking responses personally
- Assuming a therapeutic role. If you are concerned about a student's mental health or emotional wellbeing, refer the student to the appropriate service (.....). If a student is in crisis and you are concerned about his/her safety, call ..... for immediate medical or other assistance.

Links to Health site