

# GOING TO COLLEGE WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION:

Your Plan for  
Getting Good Care



The Jed Foundation





## If you're heading to college with a diagnosed mental health condition, you're not alone.

About 3 in 5 college students have a mental health diagnosis, and it's likely many more are living with a condition but don't have an official diagnosis.

Planning ahead to make sure your mental health and academic support needs are met will make your transition to college easier and empower you to have the college experience you've dreamed of and worked toward. And it can begin well before you step onto campus.

**This guide will walk you through what you need to know and do to take care of yourself:**

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# IN HIGH SCHOOL

If you haven't already, here are some important things to do before you leave for college or move away from home. Your parents, caregivers, school counselors, teachers, or mental health providers can support you in this process.



- **Learn about your diagnosis.** Ask your provider how the diagnosis was made, and about good resources for doing your own research on living with your condition.

- **Be able to describe your symptoms.**
- **Be able to describe your reactions and responses to your treatment** (what's been helpful and what hasn't).



- **Know your medications**, including what they're for, possible side effects, when to take them, what to do if you miss a dose, and how to get a refill. If you don't already have one, develop a reliable routine for taking your meds and know how to store them safely.

**i** [Learn more about handling mental health challenges in college](#)

- **Begin scheduling your own appointments** with your providers.
- **Save your providers' contact info** in your phone.
- **Think about what parts of your mental health story you want to share**, or whether you want to share it at all.
- **Be a part of discussions about your IEP and accommodations** if you have them.
- **Recognize early signs of changes in your mental health.** You, your loved ones, and your provider have probably identified patterns and signs that mean you're struggling and could use more support. Pay attention to these signs and practice taking action early and reaching out to your support network when they appear.
- **Have an emergency plan.** Talk with your providers and other trusted adults about what will happen if you experience a [mental health crisis](#). Know whom you'll reach out to if you notice your symptoms worsening or feel that things have become unmanageable.



This is also a good time to:

- **Determine whether you need to update your psychological or educational testing.** Your college may require results from within the past three years if you need accommodations such as more time on tests or the ability to take breaks during class.
- **Apply for testing accommodations or support for the SAT, ACT, TOEFL, or AP tests.**

[Learn more about getting accommodations in college](#)

## WHEN YOU'RE CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Just like looking for classes that fit your major and the extracurricular activities you want, it's important to find a college that has the right services—or access to them—to meet your mental health needs.

Most schools have counseling centers, but not all, especially two-year programs like technical schools and community colleges. If you're considering these schools, ask whether they provide any counseling services or have partnerships with community providers that offer discounted rates to students.

### To find out what's offered on campus, you can:

- Visit the school's website
- Call the counseling center or admissions office
- Reach out to specific departments by email
- Visit the counseling center or disabilities office if you take a tour



To find our full set of resources to support your transition out of high school, check out [Set to Go](#). For more information and tools to help you prioritize your emotional well-being, visit JED's [Mental Health Resource Center](#).



## Mental Health Gap Year

For some people living with mental health conditions, it makes sense to delay the start of college, even if they want to pursue a degree. People ages 18 to 25—the age most students are during the college years—are at the highest risk for mental illness, and many first experience symptoms during this time. That can make the transition to college difficult.

A mental health gap year might be the right decision for you if:

- You have a new diagnosis or your mental health isn't currently well managed.
- You're recovering from a crisis.
- Your mental health symptoms are severe enough that they'll interfere with your ability to keep up in class or connect with your peers.
- You have a plan for improving your mental health before getting into the classroom.

A gap year can give you time to get healthy, learn about managing your mental health condition, and set yourself up for success on campus. Your care team, parents, teachers, and other trusted adults can help you decide whether a delay is right for you.

[Learn more about mental health gap years](#)

## Questions to ask:



- Is there a counseling center?
- What types of counseling do they provide, and what types of mental health challenges and conditions do they treat?
- Are there medication management services?
- How many counseling visits are allowed per year?
- Is counseling free? If not, how much does it cost? Is financial assistance available?
- If there's no campus counseling center, does the school have connections with mental health providers in the community for referrals?
- Does the school offer health insurance that provides comprehensive mental health coverage?
- Does the school provide tuition reimbursement insurance, which refunds all or part of your tuition if you need to withdraw to take care of your mental health?
- Are the school's mental health providers able to coordinate care and treatment with your home providers?
- Are there counselors on campus who share or have expertise in working with your race, identity, or lived experience?
- If you visit, does the center feel like a place where you would feel safe and supported?

# BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR COLLEGE

## Make a Plan for Your Care

If you're comfortable with your current providers, you might want to keep seeing them if possible. Other options include transferring to the school's counseling center, working with off-campus clinicians, or a combination of all three. Talk with your family—if they're helpful partners in your treatment—and work with your current providers to decide what might be best.

## Your Options

### Option A: Keeping Your Current Care Team

#### Things to consider and talk about:

- Do you want in-person visits, and will you be close enough to attend them?
- Is telehealth an option with your providers, and are you OK with it?
- If you take medication, how will you get it?
- Are your symptoms well controlled, or are you in the middle of treatment changes? There can be advantages to sticking with a provider who knows you.

#### Things to know and do:

- You can always connect with the campus counseling center if there is one. They can help with the transition to college and support you if you have an urgent need.
- If you need academic accommodations, you'll need to apply through the disabilities office. There should be an arrangement to share information, as needed, between your home clinician and campus-based providers.





## Option B: Campus Counseling Center

### Things to consider and talk about:

- Do you prefer face-to-face visits?
- Can the counseling center clinicians provide the regular appointments you need?
- Are there limits to the number of visits you can have during one school year?
- Can the center meet all your needs, including medication refills if you need them?

[!\[\]\(666e09182d4cd268646ea700ea60dcdf\_img.jpg\) Learn more about \*\*establishing your college treatment team\*\*](#)

### Things to know and do:

- This option may make it easier to coordinate accommodations with the disabilities office.
- Make sure that your treatment team from home has shared necessary information and records with the campus counseling service. You—or your caregivers—will need to sign a consent form for them to do so.



**This option might be best for you if:** The counseling center is able to provide ongoing care, it has the full range of services you need, and you and your home treatment team agree that you need only intermittent visits.

## Option C: Off-Campus Clinician Near the School



### Things to consider and talk about:

- Does your school have any relationships with off-campus clinics or providers?
- Can your current provider help you find someone in your new location?
- Will your insurance cover an off-campus provider, and is it possible to find one in your insurance network?
- Does the school insurance plan cover local providers?
- If not, can you find a provider with a sliding scale, which means they adjust fees based on what you can afford?

**This option might be best for you if:** You need long-term and regular face-to-face visits and your campus service has care limits.

[!\[\]\(95b425611cbd2b8716a140cf67c81822\_img.jpg\) Learn more about \*\*finding affordable mental health care\*\*](#)

### Things to know and do:

- Your current clinician will need to share your medical information with the new provider and, ideally, talk with them about what kind of support you need.
- If you plan to keep in touch with your home clinician for advice, talk with both providers about how information will be shared. You'll likely need to sign a form that enables your home and your school provider to talk with each other if they need to.
- You should still establish relationships with the campus counseling center (if your school has one) in case of emergency.
- You'll still need to apply for any needed accommodations through the disabilities office.
- If possible, you and your family can try to meet the off-campus clinician before going to school and have a plan set up in advance.

[!\[\]\(3342c215b2a8b663596a81468d5dc314\_img.jpg\) Learn more about \*\*getting off-campus care\*\*](#)

## How to Prepare for All Options



- Create open and transparent communication among the people who care for and support you.
- Make sure everyone involved is clear on all the details for your follow-up care.
- Have a medication refill plan in place so it's clear which provider will be responsible for timely refills.
- Agree on a communications plan with your caregivers and providers that includes:
  - Signing releases that enable current and past providers to share information about your care.
  - Signing forms that lay out what you want your caregivers to know about your care and when you would want your provider to contact them. (Know that if any provider is worried a student could be an immediate threat to themselves or someone else, they can contact caregivers without student permission.)
- Make sure everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency.
  - There should be a written plan for managing crises that covers who will make clinical decisions, who the primary family contact is, and when they should be contacted.
- Make sure you know how to describe your prior care, current needs, and medications, and that your records are sent to the school and to any new clinicians.
- [Apply for accommodations through the disabilities office](#) if you need them.
- Know what insurance you have and how to use it.
- Save in your phone:
  - On-campus emergency service numbers
  - Your providers' contact info
  - The counseling center number
  - 741741 (Crisis Text Line)
  - 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)

[Learn more about your rights to privacy](#)

## Know the Signs That You Need to Activate Your Team

- Frequently or constantly feeling sad, empty, hopeless, frustrated, irritable, or pessimistic
- Having big changes in your appetite, such as eating too little or too much
- Having trouble sleeping or finding yourself sleeping much more than usual
- Feeling tired or low on energy all the time
- Being less interested in activities you usually enjoy
- Having trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or like you're not enough
- Having panic attacks
- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to tackle new challenges or seek help
- Neglecting personal hygiene, like skipping showers or not brushing your teeth
- Using alcohol or drugs to deal with difficult feelings or situations
- Preferring not to socialize with family and friends
- [Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide](#)

### If you or someone you know needs help right now:

**Text HOME to 741741** for a free, confidential conversation with a trained counselor any time of day.

**Text or call 988** or use the chat function at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

If there is a medical emergency or immediate danger of harm, **call 911 and explain that you need support for a mental health crisis.**

The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults, giving them the skills and support they need to thrive today and tomorrow.

Visit us at [jedfoundation.org](https://jedfoundation.org)



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