

TTUHSC Expert Says Ongoing Mental Health Support Key for College Students

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According to the National Institute of Mental Health, suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 10 to 34, a concerning statistic that underscores the importance of mental health awareness and support for young adults.

Students attending college have access to various physical and mental health services through their Student Wellness Center. Texas legislation mandates that students be made aware of these resources during their orientation and campus tour.



The beginning of college life can bring significant mental health challenges for young adults.

“It’s a good first step in navigating the mental health challenges which often accompany the transition to college life,” said Nancy Treviño, Ph.D., director of the Texas Tech Mental Health Initiative at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC). “Mental health care is not just about knowing where to go — it is also crucial that students and their parents be familiar with how to access the services at their college and the resources available in the community. These can include crisis hotlines such as 9-8-8 and that of their local mental health authority.”

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Nancy Treviño, Ph.D.

Treviño noted that TTUHSC has long been committed to improving mental health through research, public policy and training in collaboration with the Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative and the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium.

“We recognize that the beginning of college life can bring significant mental health challenges for

young adults,” Treviño said. “As the academic year progresses, it is easy for both students and parents to forget about these services amidst the pressures of adjusting to campus life. However, it is crucial to keep them in mind and also to understand that this transition is significant.”

Treviño said that during this period, young adults often suddenly face new stressors such as new responsibilities related to their schedules, finances and health. Additionally, the brain is still developing during this time, especially in areas tied to long-term planning and decision-making.



Nancy Treviño, Ph.D., director of the Texas Tech Mental Health Initiative at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center

For parents, caregivers and guardians, Treviño said it’s important to shift from traditional roles of authority to those of supportive mentors, listening to and guiding young adults while also allowing them to learn and grow from their experiences. She encouraged parents to ask open-ended questions such as, “Who could you talk to about this?” or “What resources are available to help with this situation?” to foster independence in young adults. “This also serves as a model for them as they make new connections and provide support to friends in their new environment,” Treviño said.

“The role of parents and caregivers is evolving, not ending,” Treviño added. “By having ongoing conversations with their children about managing stress, checking in about their mental well-being and coping strategies, parents can play an essential role in building resilience in young adults. Parents are transitioning from being the problem-solver to being a guide who helps the young person develop their problem-solving skills.”

Treviño encouraged students to get involved in campus organizations that align with their interests and values, which can provide a sense of community and belonging. In addition to emotional support, she said social connection is critical to mental health and academic success.

Treviño also urged parents and students to reach out for help if they need support immediately. Warning signs of mental health struggles may include changes in eating or sleeping patterns, emotional outbursts, excessive fatigue, feelings of anxiety or panic, feeling overwhelmed, unrealistic guilt and difficulty keeping up with schoolwork.

“Always take it seriously when a person mentions thoughts of suicide or self-harm, and connect

them with the appropriate resources. If you do not know about crisis resources, call or text 9-8-8," she said.

"Additionally, students who are away from home or who may not have strong family support are encouraged to reach out to peer mentors, resident advisors and faculty members who can all serve as that crucial connector during challenging times on campus," Treviño said.

Treviño acknowledged that college is a time of immense growth, change and sometimes struggle.

"With open communication, the utilization of available resources and a community-wide commitment to supporting mental health, we can help ensure that these years are not only transformative but also filled with resilience, growth and flourishing mental health," she said.

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