

New Semester, New Stress: ANK Behavioral Health on the Mental Health Toll of Starting – and Returning to – College

New Jersey psychiatric practice points to research on anxiety, financial stress, and homesickness among college students.

MOUNT LAUREL, NJ, UNITED STATES, August 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As colleges and universities across the country welcome new and returning students this month, ANK Behavioral Health is drawing attention to a growing body of research showing that the transition into, and back into, college life carries measurable mental health risk, one the practice says deserves the same attention families give to dorm shopping and class schedules.



Sometimes, having the right people around can make a stressful transition feel a little easier.

A 2024 study published in JAACAP Open followed 556 incoming first-year students at a northeastern U.S. university through weekly surveys across their first semester and found that anxiety symptoms fluctuated significantly week to week, rising in step with academic stressors such as exams and papers.

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*Alyssa Killion, MSN, APN,
PMHNP-BC*

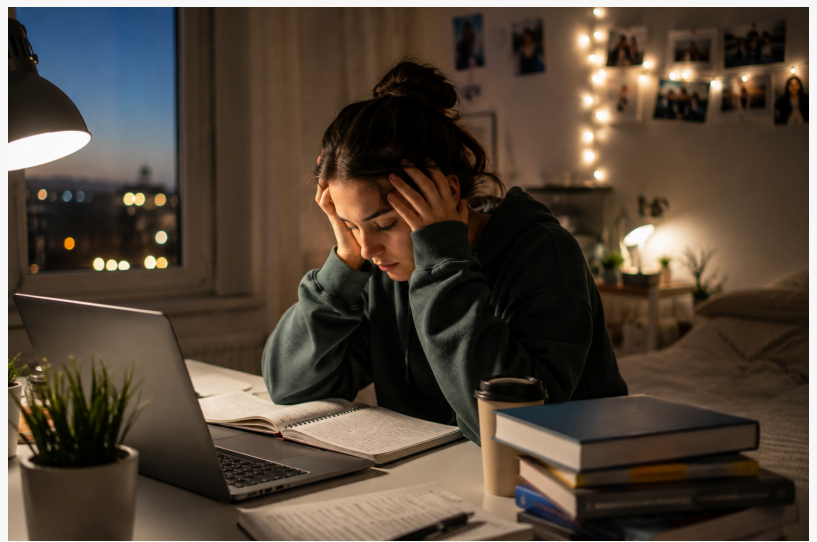
Researchers led by Laura Bloomfield and colleagues at the University of Vermont found that students with a prior mental health diagnosis, a history of trauma, or higher levels of neuroticism were significantly more likely to experience elevated anxiety, and that anxiety symptoms were significantly higher among non-male students than

male students.

A separate 2025 study in Psychosomatic Medicine, led by researchers at UCLA, followed 198 first-

year students and found that financial stress over college costs and first-generation college status were both associated with increases in depressive symptoms and inflammation markers across the first year of school; evidence, the researchers say, that the transition's toll is not only psychological but shows up in the body as well.

National survey data offer a wider view. The 2024-2025 Healthy Minds Study, one of the largest annual surveys of U.S. college student mental health with more than 84,000 respondents across all class years, found that 32 percent of students reported moderate to severe anxiety and 52 percent reported high levels of loneliness, even as both figures continued a three-year decline. Because the survey spans every year of school, the data make clear that the start-of-semester anxiety spike is not limited to incoming freshmen: sophomores, juniors, and seniors report comparable levels of stress as they head back into coursework, jobs, and relationships that paused over the summer.



When stress starts affecting sleep, focus, or daily life, it may be time to pause and check in with yourself.



A little self-awareness can go a long way when navigating the pressures of college life.

"Every year we hear from families who think their student is just being dramatic about missing home, or struggling to make friends, or falling behind in a class," said Alyssa Killion, MSN, APN, PMHNP-BC, founder of ANK Behavioral Health. "The research backs up what we see clinically: the first few months of a semester are a genuinely high-risk window, especially for students who are first-generation, dealing with financial stress, or already managing anxiety or depression."

"Back-to-school anxiety isn't just a kindergarten thing," Killion said. "It shows up in eighteen-year-olds moving into a dorm for the first time, and it shows up just as much in juniors and seniors heading back into a heavier course load, a job, or relationships that got complicated over the summer. The advice is the same either way — don't wait for it to resolve on its own if it's affecting sleep, eating, or the ability to function week after week."

ANK Behavioral Health emphasizes that most students adjust to college life without lasting effects, and that persistent transition stress is treatable. The practice encourages students and families who notice ongoing changes in mood, sleep, appetite, or academic functioning beyond the first few weeks of the semester to seek an evaluation, and encourages parents to stay engaged with first-year and returning students alike during move-in season and the weeks that follow.

ANK Behavioral Health offers [comprehensive psychiatric evaluation](#) and ongoing care by telehealth across New Jersey, with first appointments running 60 to 90 minutes to allow time for a full conversation about what a patient is experiencing. More information is available at ankbh.com.

About ANK Behavioral Health

ANK Behavioral Health is a psychiatric care practice based in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, offering comprehensive psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and integrated psychotherapy through telehealth. Founded by Alyssa Killion, MSN, APN, PMHNP-BC, the practice has served New Jersey patients since 2012 with a focus on thorough evaluation, clear communication, and individualized care. ANK Behavioral Health accepts major insurance plans and offers telepsychiatry services statewide. More information is available at ankbh.com.

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