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CHAPTER 7 FOR STUDENTS ONLY

There’s a lot of good to be said about going to college. Besides the obvious opportunities for advanced education and the boost in your career potential, college gives you a fresh start with infinite possibilities. You have a whole new world to explore and enjoy. And you finally get a major dose of long-awaited freedom.

But the truth is that sometimes the college years can be really tough. You’ve left behind your established relationships, elements of self-confidence, and high school identity. And now you’re expected to stand alone and be responsible, fun, cheerful, independent, smart, and studious.

Some college students manage these expectations just fine and get through school with a minimal amount of stress. But in recent years more and more students are finding the pressure and expectations difficult to handle, and many of those students deal with the uncertainty and stress with self-destructive coping mechanisms that compound their problems.

The most painful thing I experience as a clinician is witnessing the amount of suffering that students endure before seeking help. They often suffer alone, which compounds the problem. They don’t want to burden parents or friends, and ironically that selfless desire increases their isolation, which further worsens the problem. They haven’t learned yet that sharing stress invites others to share their own stresses, solidifies connections and provides opportunities for new perspectives and solutions.

I don’t think I can explain this state of pain and confusion better than Kara did in the following article that she wrote to her college newspaper when she was in her first year of graduate school as a business student. (With permission, I’ve changed names to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.)

Being Depressed at UBS

I almost took my life three times during my first year at University Business School. And I was just as normal as you when I started here. I was really excited to come to UBS. The first month or two were filled with new friends, and great challenges. But then one day I noticed that I wasn't feeling like myself anymore. I didn't think much of it at the time, and it was no big deal.

Then it happened again. Soon I started to feel sad all of the time. I kept asking myself if I was really enjoying school here. Was everyone happy besides me? Why wasn't I having any fun?

Maybe it was because the weather had started to turn cold and gloomy.

Perhaps I was overwhelmed by the zillions of recruiters calling me, when I was already confused about "what I wanted to do with the rest of my life." Maybe I was starting to get sick of seeing the same 80 people every single day, and that annoying guy in the corner who pointed his

finger whenever he raised his hand. Whatever it was that began it all...everything else was just piling up and making it even worse.

I began to find myself crying myself to sleep. I didn't want to go out anymore. I stopped exercising, which only made me feel worse, both physically and emotionally. I started questioning everything I would say in class. I couldn't focus on what the professor was saying. I felt like every case I read was longer than War and Peace.

I started hating myself for ever applying to UBS. And then one day I just didn't get out of bed. I stayed in bed all day and just cried and cried.

Then a strange calmness came over me. "Everything would be all right if I just killed myself," I thought. "Then it would all go away." So I made my way to the bridge and stood there for nearly an hour. But I couldn't jump off.

The next three weeks were the worst weeks of my life. I would spend class periods thinking of how to kill myself, and how that was the real answer to all of my problems. I skipped class just because I didn't want to get out of bed. I went to the bridge two more times. I wasn't scared anymore. I was ready to die and I didn't care.

A friend saved me, without even realizing it. She thought I looked sad and suggested that I go see Dr. Patricia Miller, Director of MBA Program Support Services. That was the beginning of my road back to recovery.

Dr. Miller realized that I was severely depressed and she got me some help. I went and saw Dr. Nicole Johnson, a psychiatrist at UBS. I didn't want to go at first. I was an UBS student, and I wasn't about to go see a shrink. God forbid if anyone ever found out. I was supposed to be strong-a winner. Winners don't go see psychiatrists or admit that they're depressed. I felt like a complete failure for going to see Dr. Johnson.

But he helped me realize that I wasn't. Every year the staff of the Mental Health Services department sees about 140 UBS students. That's about 1 out of every 11 people. That's 7 people in YOUR section alone. Not to mention the fact that there are many UBS students who go see outside providers without ever going through University Health Services.

I began to re-focus my life. Although I didn't feel comfortable telling any of my friends that I was struggling, I did tell my parents. They, along with Dr. Miller, would call or email me everyday to cheer me up and encourage me. I began forcing myself to exercise no matter how bad I felt. I sought out tutoring from some second years. And I began taking anti-depressants. That was a very difficult hurdle to overcome. I thought that surely I must be a loser if I was so depressed that I had to use medication to get better. I was scared of the side effects and of the possibility that people might find out. But once again Dr. Johnson calmed my fears.

Although I don't know the exact numbers, I do know that , you walk by someone everyday that's using Zoloft or Prozac. You don't even know it. And do you know why? Because the medicines work; and no one can tell the difference. Not everyone has to take medicine, but if you do, it's nothing to be ashamed of or scared of. It simply means that you need a boost to get your positive brain waves going again.

Combining the medicine with daily exercise made all of the difference in the world. Within a month, I felt happy again from time to time. Within 2 months, I felt happy most of the time. Within 3 months, I was me again.

Why did I write this article you ask? Because I want you to know that it's okay to be depressed but it's not okay to stay depressed. That may sound stupid or simple to you if you feel fine. But it was exactly what I needed to hear when I wanted to end my life. I also want to remind you that it's okay to ask for help.

And I pray that you do. You ask questions in class all the time. Why should you feel any embarrassment about asking for help when the answers provided are a million times more important than any ones you'll ever hear in class?

I chose not to submit my name because this is a very private experience. However, it's not an unusual experience. It's all around you. Please take the time to look out for your friends and notice when they seem down.

But most of all, take care of yourself. UBS is an amazing place full of phenomenal people and fantastic experiences. The staff and faculty here want to help you make sure that you can benefit from every aspect of the UBS experience. You can only do this if you are healthy and happy.

Remember that I started out feeling fine too. Get help before you sink as low as I did. Your life and UBS are too precious to miss out on.

It took courage for Kara to write this article, but the results have been worth it. Every year the student newspaper runs this piece during National Depression Screening Week, and after it is printed, a number of students always come into the counseling center saying, "I have all the same symptoms that were in that letter but didn't put it all together."

I'd like this chapter to help you "put it all together." Earlier in this book, I addressed my comments to parents and college counselors and administrators. But the key message is for *you* because only you know what the pressure feels like. And in the end, only you can really make a difference in the way you experience your college years.

I'm offering the following advice and tips to help you do three things: prevent, recognize, and deal with mental health problems so that they interfere as little as possible with these years and help you develop the tools you'll need to have a more fulfilling adult life.

A Good Book

For more information on college life, I recommend a wonderful book by Richard Light called *Making the Most of College* (Harvard University Press 2001). In this book, Dr. Light surveys students about their most important experiences in college and expands in great detail on several of the areas I briefly mention in this chapter.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

I'm going to sound like your mother here, but it really is important to take care of yourself by exercising, eating, and sleeping reasonable amounts on a daily basis. I would estimate that 50 percent of the students who come to the Harvard counseling center are struggling because they have neglected one or all of these basics.

Exercise Often

Some students are very active physically. These are the ones who belong to collegiate or intramural athletic teams, or the ones who just like to workout to keep themselves in shape. But others (in fact most) find that they spend the majority of the day sitting in classes, and then sitting in front of their computers, and then sitting in the cafeteria, and then sitting in front of their TVs.

If this describes your day, take a look at this list of just some of the things exercise could be doing for you if you changed a few daily habits.

Exercise can alleviate tension and elevate mood. Sustained movement at target heart rate causes your body to produce greater amounts of the beta-endorphins, which counter stress and depression and helps you to sleep

Exercise can improve alertness. A 30-minute round of aerobic exercise has been shown to improve short-term memory and increase mental performance.

Exercise can give you increased energy. Energy levels increase as the muscles become better able to utilize oxygen, the heart's pumping capacity improves, and the resting pulse slows. This allows the heart to pump the same amount of blood with fewer beats.

Exercise can stimulate the immune system. This will help you ward off the bacterial and viral germs that congregate in the cramped quarters of college classes and dormitories.

Exercise keeps off excess weight. Just eight to twelve minutes of aerobic activity can decrease appetite, boost the metabolic rate so you continue to burn calories at a higher rate for up to two days, and build lean tissue which occupies less space than the replaced fat.

I know you're busy, but you don't have to spend an hour in the fitness center or the gym every day to keep yourself healthy. Just make a conscious effort to find ways to keep moving:

- Take a longer route to walk to your classes.
- Always use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park your car, if you have one, far from the building
- Find small, easy ways to get your heart pumping a couple times a week, even if it's simply to run in place for 10 minutes while you're watching a TV show in your room.

If you do these things, it won't take long at all to feel the difference in your overall physical and mental health.

Eat Well to Stay Strong

Everybody knows about the "freshman 15." But to keep yourself healthy, you need to understand where that extra weight comes from and why poor eating habits can interfere with a good college experience. (I told you I was going to sound like your mother here.)

Think about it. What did you eat today that actually had nutrients in it that will give your body strength, stamina, and good health? The students I see who complain of being overweight, rundown, sluggish, and/or exhausted usually admit that their meals consist mostly of high-calorie junk. Pizza, hamburgers, French fries, and ice cream are the main diet for many students.

Whether you live on campus or are running in and out of your home as you commute to school, Mom and Dad aren't organizing well-balanced, nutritious meals for you anymore. You're in charge of what you eat, so be sure (at least occasionally) to choose wisely:

- ✓ Drink lots of water.
- ✓ Add a salad to every dinner meal.
- ✓ Substitute a piece of fruit for a high-calorie dessert at least once a day.
- ✓ Substitute whole-wheat bread for white bread.
- ✓ Have a bowl of fortified cereal instead of the usual bagel or donut.
- ✓ Put a vegetable to your plate as you walk through the cafeteria line.
- ✓ Don't bring high-calorie junk snacks like potato chips and nachos into your dorm room.

It's small changes like these that add up to big benefits by the end of the week.

Eating Disorders: While many college students suffer nutritional deficiencies due to lack of time and effort, another segment of the college community struggles with eating problems with much more severe and complex roots. Here is a quick summary of information about eating disorders – a very common, but very treatable, issue that many young women face.

The three most common types of eating disorders found on college campuses are: 1) anorexia nervosa, 2) bulimia nervosa, and 3) binge eating. Those suffering these disorders need to be especially aware of their physical and mental health and reach out for help.

Here are some of the reasons why these three eating disorders should not be ignored:

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder, affecting seven million women and one million men, [National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders] in which people use self-imposed starvation to lose weight. Sadly, anorexia has a mortality rate between 7 and 15 percent, which is higher than the mortality rate of many cancers.

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder, affecting two to five percent of college-age people, in which a person has recurrent and uncontrollable episodes of binge eating followed by the urgent need to eliminate (purge) the food through some self-induced method such as vomiting, enemas, starvation, laxatives, diuretics and/or excessive exercise. Bulimia can lead to an array of medical problems including: dehydration and dry skin, constipation from lack of body fluids, muscle spasm, kidney problems, inflammation and possible rupture of the esophagus from frequent vomiting, peptic ulcers and pancreatitis, and electrolyte imbalances (which can lead to irregular heartbeats and possibly heart failure and death). There is also extensive and expensive damage to the teeth and it takes the average person over a year to seek treatment from the onset of symptoms, don't wait! The longer you have the disorder, the harder it is to treat and undo the harm.

Binge eating is a common phenomenon in college and has a more balanced gender ratio, although it is still predominantly a disorder of women. In some cases, the weight gain brought on by bingeing makes the person feel unattractive allowing him or her to avoid forming intimate relationships. Like anorexia and bulimia, binge eating also has severe negative consequences. These include: high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, heart

disease as a result of elevated triglyceride levels, secondary diabetes, gallbladder disease, and the health risks associated with obesity

These eating disorders commonly peak at the age of 18 – just the time when young women enter their adult lives and start college.

Quick Tip: Prevent Binge Eating

Did you know that the strongest predictor of binge eating at night is undereating in the morning? Be sure to start out your day with breakfast that contains some protein and isn't loaded with sugar.

Sleep Well

Sleep is a general measure of how things are going. If you have sleep problems such as difficulty falling asleep, early morning waking, waking up during the night, or exceptional trouble getting out of bed in the morning, but then sleep just fine when you return home (or on weekends if you're a commuting student), this may be an early signal of emotional upset or even the cause.

Poor sleep quality is known to lead to many mental health problems. These include depression, anxiety, reduced physical health, poor problem solving and attention difficulties, and increased use of drugs and alcohol.

Partial sleep deprivation (less than six hours of sleep per night) can lead to deficits in attention, concentration, memory, and critical thinking, along with increased depression, irritability and anxiety.

Even students who regularly obtain eight hours of sleep per night, but shift their sleep schedule by more than two hours (by sleeping late on the weekends for example) may experience attention, concentration, reasoning, and psychomotor difficulties, as well as increased irritability, anxiety, and depression

There's no doubt that sleep is vital to good mental health – and can directly affect your academic GPA. It's a myth that the best students stay up all night studying. It has been scientifically proven that it's the student who gets a good night's sleep, not the student who studies through the night, who does better academically.

One of these studies was done right here at Harvard. Dr. Stickgold taught a group of undergraduates to look for a particular visual target on a computer screen and then to push a button as soon as they saw it. At first the students were slow to recognize and react to the image, but after an hour of training they were quick and accurate.

Then Stickgold divided the group into two. One half of the students were allowed less than six hours of sleep, while the other group got more than six hours of sleep. The results were remarkable. The sleep-deprived students showed no improvement in the task the following day. But the students who got a good night's sleep were far quicker and more accurate than they had been the day before. After several nights of good sleep, they got even better!

The study concluded that sleep allows information that has been gathered during the day to flow from a short-term memory bank into a long-term one. The process preserves information for future reference. In the later stages of sleep, the brain runs through the data it has stored in the previous hours. This reinforces and strengthens connections that make up memory. Without more than at least four hours of sleep, the process can't happen.

Although occasionally you may have to pull an all-nighter to get required work done, when it comes to studying for a big test, you'll do far better if you study and then get to sleep. Here are some tips to help you:

- ✓ Stay away from caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol in the late afternoon and evening. That cigarette or can of coca-cola will make it difficult to drift off to sleep. And although alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep, it will interrupt your sleep and awaken you later in the night.
- ✓ Don't nap during the day if you're having trouble falling asleep at night. A nap can confuse your biological clock.
- ✓ Exercise regularly, but not right before bedtime. Give yourself at least three hours between a workout and sleep time.
- ✓ Give your brain the signal to sleep, by establishing a nighttime ritual. Leave time to relax and unwind with the lights turned low. Stay back from the TV and computer screen because their light can confuse the day/night rhythms of the body.
- ✓ If you can't fall asleep after 30 minutes, don't toss and turn worrying about not sleeping. This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, get up and do some kind of relaxing activity like listening to music or reading. Try to clear your mind and not worry about not sleeping. When you start to feel tired, get back to bed.

Quick Tip: Speak Up to Save Your GPA

If you miss classes while you're struggling with emotional issues, the problem gets compounded by the fear of lowering your grade point average. In this case, the mental health counselors on your campus can help you. I often write notes for students to give to their professors asking for appropriate considerations, such as extending the deadline on a paper or offering a test at a later date. This letter does not give specific reasons and will not break the bond of confidentiality by saying something like: "Kristen is suffering from depression and therefore needs additional time to hand in her term paper." The letter simply shares information the professor needs to know: "Kristen has a medical problem that has been interfering with her ability to do her class assignments. Please make appropriate accommodations and allow Kristen to make up any missed work." Speak up and let the health care counselors know what you need.

STAY CONNECTED

You're on your own. Your parents won't be contacting your professors to check on your grades. If you live at school, they won't be calling the dean of housing to make sure you're in bed at a certain hour. And you don't need their permission to stay out late. This is a life passage when you separate yourself from your parents. Feels good, huh?

This separation is good, natural, and normal, but don't cut off all contact with home. Having the connection with your family while you make new connections in the college community is very important to your sense of comfort and security. How you feel about taking risks, accepting challenges, and trying new things is tightly bound to how secure you feel at your base. For many students, the family is the base, and it's good to know that they're there when you need to go back for a dose of security.

However, when you lose that connection (because perhaps you haven't contacted them in over a month) it can be very hard to then pick up the phone and admit that you're struggling with a problem. When you lose that intimate connection and the thrill of taking that independent step in college begins to wear off, it can be a very lonely feeling.

At least until you have strong connections among your college peers and professors, keep the connection with your family alive. Send them e-mail, pick up the phone when they call. It's a little dose of insurance in case the day comes when you're out there alone and you need to hear a kind, familiar voice.

If that day does come, your first impulse may be to hide your troubles from your parents – it's a kind of protective reaction. You don't want to worry or disappoint them. That sounds admirable, but it's really not. Keep in mind when you're struggling with a problem that your parents are usually much more aware of what's going on than you might think. There's probably no one on the planet who cares more about you, and that's why when they sense that you're unhappy or scared, they'll bug you with questions like, "What's the matter? Are you okay? Is there anything wrong?"

You have to make your own decisions about when to talk to your parents and how much to tell them about your life. But when making that decision remember that being an independent adult doesn't mean going it alone. Part of being mature is learning when to share problems and concerns and when to ask for help. Even if your parents can't understand exactly what you're going through, their love goes a long way – what they don't get, they'll usually try to understand and work with you to get through it.

At the same time, take stock of your relationships with peers. We all need connections with others to feel wanted and secure. These connections are so important that feeling engaged with other students and professors is a key for academic and emotional well being.

If you find yourself feeling left out or alone, do something about it. The college community has programs and activities for everybody from activists to artists, from computer techs to feminists, from atheists to fundamentalists. Find a group that shares your interests and passions. Reach out, talk to people, go to meetings, take a risk. You spend only 12 to 18 hours a week in the classroom; that leaves a vast amount of time for non-academic experiences with peers and friends. Take advantage of the college environment to make those connections that will make you feel important and valued. We all need that.

Not True!

Each of the following quotes is a myth that too many kids actually believe. When you're talking to yourself, stop short and evaluate what's really going on if you hear yourself saying any of these. They are sure signs that you're headed for trouble.

- "I don't need to sleep."

- “Alcohol isn’t dangerous- it helps relax me in social situations and unwind after a hard week of work.”
- “ I can’t believe I screwed up that test. I’ll never amount to anything. This is going to ruin my life.”
- “This person is the love of my life. I couldn’t live without him/her. He/she would never hurt me or let me down.”
- “My parents have no idea what I’m going through. They would be so disappointed if I told them.”
- “They must have picked up the wrong folder when they admitted me. I don’t belong here.”

ORGANIZE AND EVALUATE YOUR TIME

You have so many people pulling on you from all directions that sometimes it just feels like you can’t get everything done, meet everybody’s expectations, and keep yourself sane. When the going gets really tough, you might figure that you have only two choices: you can either go nuts or give up. Fortunately, time management skills give you another option.

Good time management requires that you block out time periods during the day to get things done. Use a daily planner or Palm Pilot to set up a doable schedule in specific blocks of time. Each day, block out your class time, then schedule in time for things like studying, laundry, homework, and so on. Schedule in the stuff that has to get done and give it a particular time of day. This way you won’t be trying to squeeze all the things on your “must do” list into the last hours before bedtime.

When you’re blocking out time periods in your day, don’t forget to give yourself time for exercising, eating, socializing, and sleeping. If your day zips by and as you fall into bed you realize that you didn’t sit down to eat a meal or talk to a friend, you’ve got to plan better for the next day. If you start cheating yourself out of time for *you*, you’ll soon find yourself worn out and open to loneliness and depression.

Look at your day and create a balanced time schedule. “Balance” is a key word here. To do your best at college, you need to find a way to balance the need to do your academic work, create and nurture relationships, and take care of your own physical and mental health needs. Not too much play or too much work. There is a time and place for everything if you think ahead and map it out.

At the end of the week, look back and take inventory. How did you do? Did you meet your academic goals? Did you make time for fun extracurriculars? Did you leave time to relax and recuperate? Did you spend time with friends? If you had a magic wand and could change the last week, what would you do differently? With this information in mind, decide what you can try to do next week that might improve your experience.

Don’t let life just happen to you. The people who have the most successful college years, both academically and socially, are the ones who consciously take control of their lives. They plan, evaluate, take inventory, and make the effort to create an experience that meets all their needs and keeps things in balance.

Quick Tip: Think Locally

When you're making up your daily schedule, think locally, not globally. Instead of thinking that you have to write your 15-page history paper this week, think, "I have to write five paragraphs today between 2 and 3 o'clock." Breaking down your work into manageable sections will keep you from feeling overwhelmed.

REACH OUT

Many graduates look back on their college years and say that their most valuable experiences involved getting to know people of different cultures and backgrounds. Keep an open mind while you're in school and don't get stuck in your own small world. You may never again find yourself in such a diverse environment so take advantage of the situation and find out what makes other people tick.

A diverse environment gives you the opportunity to take your family beliefs and values and hold them up against those of others. How do your classmates feel about religion? Sexual mores? Politics? Gathering information and mixing it up with your own does not betray the connection with your family. It is part of growing and maturing.

Accepting and enjoying people who look and act differently from you is also a great stress reducer. It helps you feel more connected to your college community, and it will raise your comfort level when you find yourself in a class or circumstance with a bunch of "strange" people around you. Reach out and enjoy the situation.

Breaking Free

Naturally, different students respond differently to mental health problems. However, I've noticed that students from diverse minority backgrounds often don't get the health care services they need before reaching college. In fact, a new report from the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. David Satcher, has found that minorities in the U.S. suffer a disproportionate burden of mental illness for several reasons. He says that they often have less access to services than other Americans; they receive lower quality care; and they are less likely to seek help when they are in distress. The report noted that while serious mental disorders like depression, schizophrenia, panic disorder, manic-depression and substance abuse occur in all races, ethnicities and socioeconomic classes, minorities tend to be over-represented among those most vulnerable and in need of mental health treatment [Department of Health and Human Services 2001].

If you come from a family that sees mental health problems as a personal weakness or from a family that doesn't believe in seeking treatment for emotional pain, or cannot afford to, now is the time to break free of these things that have kept you from taking care of your mental health. The services offered in your college community are there to help you. There is no shame or family disgrace in taking this step. It is an intelligent and mature person who can recognize a problem and ask for appropriate help to find a solution – regardless of race, nationality, or ethnicity.

BE INFORMED

Ignorance is a major factor in the increase in mental health problems on college campuses. Too many students don't recognize the signs and symptoms of trouble, and those that do feel ashamed or embarrassed and so they keep the problem to themselves. If we are to make even the slightest reduction in the numbers of students struggling with emotional and psychological problems, each one of you need to start paying attention to yourself, your needs and your feelings.

What? Me Worry?

You can start to get to know yourself by keeping track of the way you worry. Dr. Ned Hallowell talks about anxiety and stress in a very readable and useful book called "Worry." He notes that we all worry about things to one degree or another, and the key is to focus on "productive" versus "toxic" worry.

Let's say you're worried about an upcoming exam. If you handle that worry by scheduling time to study, reviewing your notes and preparing for the exam, you are practicing productive worry. But if you spend the time before the exam obsessing about how hopeless your life will be when you fail the exam, you are stuck in a state of "toxic" worry.

You can use productive more often than toxic worry if you follow these steps when you have a problem:

- ✓ Be aware of the circumstance that is causing you to worry.
- ✓ Recognize the patterns you fall into when you're worried (obsess? eat more? sleep less? give up?).
- ✓ Challenge the negative patterns and actively do something to take you a step closer to resolving the problem.
- ✓ Reach out. Support from friends and teachers can get you through bad situations.

The key is to be aware of how you are feeling and what you're doing to cope. Face your fears; it's the only way to defeat them. Denial is the enemy of growth.

Know the Symptoms

Everybody feels unhappy and down sometimes. It's part of life. But a willingness to accept these feelings as "normal" even when they persist for weeks at a time may keep you from recognizing the symptoms of excessive stress, anxiety or depression.

Over and over again, I see students who have trouble concentrating, aren't sleeping well, are losing motivation and confidence, and withdrawing socially, who say they just need to focus and apply themselves more. They just don't see the danger signs or they choose to ignore them fearing that depression or an anxiety disorder is a personal weakness or character flaw. Rather than face the issues and seek help, they end up in denial, trying to convince themselves how they ought to feel, rather than accepting what they actually feel. They become victimized by depression, sleep disorders, substance abuse, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, various self-destructive "coping styles" such as chronic procrastination; preoccupation or obsession around relationships or sexuality; cutting/ self-mutilating behaviors and in the most extreme cases overt suicide attempts.

Don't let this happen to you. Know the signs of mental health problems and be willing to seek help when you need it. These are the primary symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression to watch out for:

- Sleep changes (early morning wakening, waking through the night, or trouble getting out of bed in the morning can all be early warning signs of depression)
- Increase or decrease in appetite.
- Loss of motivation
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of concentration
- Feelings of hopelessness, loss of self esteem
- Loss of interest in activities that are usually pleasurable
- Intense worry without foundation for concern
- Small problems feel overwhelming
- Physical symptoms of anxiety: rapid heart rate, upset stomach, feelings of panic, headaches, sweaty palms

Any of these symptoms by themselves may be passing signs of stress, but if they cluster and become more persistent, they should be cause for concern.

Be Proactive

To keep yourself out of the dark, be proactive about getting information on mental health:

- ✓ When your school offers workshops or seminars on topics such as substance abuse, sexual assault, depression, and eating disorders, go to them. Not necessarily because you are directly affected right now, but because it's smart to have this information – just in case.
- ✓ Read the mental health materials that are handed out all over campus. Contrary to popular belief, these flyers are not really wastebasket liners. They have been put together to inform, encourage, and support all students so you can have the best possible college experience, both academically and socially.
- ✓ Know where the counseling services are offered on your campus. Get familiar with the building and the setup. Take a look around and gather some of the printed material they offer. If you should need the help of a counselor in the future, you will feel more comfortable asking for it, if you have previously been in the center.

If you don't feel comfortable attending workshops or visiting the counseling center, you can also get lots of information online at sites created specifically for college students who like the anonymity of the computer. There are many top-quality sites listed in Appendix D you should check out. Here are an additional few that are for students only:

Ulifeline.com: The Jed Foundation is the nation's first nonprofit group dedicated solely to reducing suicide on college campuses. Founded by Phillip and Donna Satow, whose son Jed killed himself when he was a sophomore at the University of Arizona, the group seeks to expand the mental health safety net by offering online services for students.

They have created this free, anonymous website customized to link students to their college counseling centers and a library of mental-health information.

Campusblues.com: This site is sponsored by a for-profit company; it is designed specifically to help students find appropriate mental health services on or near their campuses.

Outsidetheclassroom.com: This subscription site offers prevention-based health education with particular focus on high-risk drinking on college campuses.

The National Mental Health Association: At www.nmha.org, this site offers information specifically for college students with fact sheets on:

- Adjustment to Life's Changes
- Anxiety Disorders and Depression
- Eating Disorders and Depression
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Depression
- Suicide and Depression

MyStudentBody (MSB): This site at www.mystudentbody.com offers you personalized and confidential health information through interactive tools, flash animation peer stories and informational pieces.

Active Minds on Campus: This site at www.activemindsoncampus.org is a student-run mental health awareness, education, and advocacy organization designed for the college campus. The group aims to remove the stigma that surrounds mental illness and create a comfortable environment for open discussion of mental health issues.

Facts on Tap: This site at www.factsontap.org has interesting links to subjects such as drugs, alcohol and your body, alcohol and sex, commuter students, children of alcoholics, and dealing with a friend's drinking.

Quick Tip: Do Something About It

Feeling distracted? Unable to focus? Studying hard but getting nowhere? Don't wait for these problems to fix themselves. Your school has tutoring and counseling services that are there to help you if you ask. I think that most students are aware of less than half of the resources they could be using in all areas including academic, social, and physical and mental health services.

Check with the dean of your college, go online to your college site, or ask your resident adviser. Do something to help yourself!

DON'T SUFFER LONG – DON'T SUFFER ALONE

I've been helping college students deal with the pressures of young adulthood for 25 years. And yet, I confess that when I was in college, I did not take the advice that I now

give to you – and I still regret it. I clearly remember some of the mistakes I made along the way and wish I had the wisdom in my youth to seek help that would have avoided a lot more mistakes, pain, and lost opportunities.

I remember thinking that I was comfortable, confident, and autonomous when I left for college. I had been a strong high school student, a three-sport athlete, and socially very engaged and confident. When I arrived at college, amongst a group of very bright, accomplished, other students, I felt very insecure, but never admitted this to myself or anyone else. I felt the best way to prove that I could manage was to be sure I didn't need anyone. I drank a lot on many weekends like many college students, to bolster my confidence in social situations, but it didn't really work and probably interfered with forming deeper relationships with peers. I threw myself into literature and reading and isolated myself, trying to prove that I was autonomous and didn't need anything from other people.

If you had asked me at the time, I would never have described myself as depressed nor would I have seen my drinking and isolation as “coping mechanisms.” I frequently pulled “all-nighters” to study for exams and finish papers, having no idea of the negative effects of sleep deprivation. And I admit that the thought of seeking counseling never entered my mind.

It took me years to learn that the patterns and behaviors practiced in college don't “disappear” when you graduate. You must address them to develop as a person. I now know that there is no need to suffer long or suffer alone.

Keep that thought in mind. When you start to feel unhappy or anxious, it is a normal reaction to withdraw from friends. You probably figure that they don't want to be around someone who's unhappy or struggling, and you don't want them to worry about you. But once you're isolated, you might find out that you feel worse. Then you might think that the feeling will pass – it's just a mood. But it doesn't.

Now you've created a vicious cycle. You've withdrawn from your friends, but then you feel worse, and feeling worse makes you less willing to socialize, which makes you feel even lonelier and the bad feelings just go round and round. Still, you think that eventually you'll get these awful feelings under control. But another day goes by, and then another, and another, and still you can't shake it.

If you suffer any of the symptoms of depression and anxiety listed earlier for more than two weeks, it's going to be very hard, if not impossible, to get over this tough spot without the help of others. We all need each other to feel connected, engaged, and mentally healthy.

The result of reaching out to others when times get tough opens the way to a secure and happy future beyond college. You don't have to take my word for this. Take a look at this e-mail that I received from Kara when I wrote to ask for permission to publish the personal letter about depression she wrote four years ago that opened this chapter:

I wish you the best of luck with the book. And I am delighted to hear that my article has helped so many over the years. I am so grateful for the time that you spent helping me, as well as the countless others. I have learned how to recognize “bad” days, and they never get past “so-so” days anymore. It's wonderful! My spouse and I have been very open about the topic and we have discovered similarities in our pasts - likely due to both being so driven and ambitious. This

has helped us grow and also achieve a new focus in life - energy with underlying strength and assuredness. I have enjoyed every moment of it, including the stressful days.

I can never thank you enough for encouraging me to follow the full path of treatment and for giving it time. It has made the world of difference.

If you should ever feel alone and hopeless, remember Kara. There is treatment, there is a life of joy beyond college, and there is hope.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Above all else, I'd like you to remember these five things:

- Self care is not the same as being selfish.
- Be honest with yourself about what you're feeling.
- Eat, sleep, and exercise.
- Stay connected to others.
- Think of proactive ways to address problems.

Good grades and impressive jobs don't mean anything if you feel miserable all the time. There are people – family, friends, peers, and counselors – who can help you, so reach out when you need to.