

Fall Lunch & Learn Series 2023

Autism Spectrum Disorder: What it is and how to accommodate/support students with the condition

Thursday September 21st | 12pm to 1pm

Accommodating and Supporting Students with Specific Mental Health Disorders

Thursday October 19th | 12pm to 1pm

Tricky Accommodation Issues

Thursday November 23rd | 12pm to 1pm



Accommodating and Supporting Students with Specific Mental Health Disorders

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Fall Lunch & Learn Series
October 19, 2023



Outline



Caveats & Considerations

High-incidence mental health conditions- symptoms and functional impacts

- Anxiety Disorders
- Depressive Disorders
- Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders
- Personality Disorders

Reasonable accommodations and supports



Mental Health on PSE Campuses

The number of students with mental health challenges enrolled in postsecondary institutions has grown markedly, with diagnoses of depression and anxiety being the problems most frequently endorsed.

Mental health disorders in general are now the disability category most commonly accommodated in colleges and universities in both Canada and the United States.

In a national survey of Canadian post-secondary students using campus mental health services: 95% reported being overwhelmed and exhausted, 83.7% reported anxiety, 86% were depressed, and 81% experienced loneliness (Ogrodniczuk, Kealy, & Laverdière, 2023).



Why are PSE students so “at risk”?

- Young adults tend to present with their first symptoms of mental illnesses between ages 18–25 (Pedrelli, Nyer, Yeung, Zulauf, Wilens, 2015; World Health Organization, 2018).
- In addition to biological factors driving age of onset for mental illnesses, there is a range of psychological factors and social stressors—i.e., increased academic pressure, separation from family, and demands of those balancing school, employment, and familial obligations that can present significant challenges for individuals attending PSE (Pedrelli, Nyer, Yeung, Zulaug, & Wilens, 2015).



Identification of Functional Impairment

- Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, students are not required to disclose their mental health diagnosis to register and access accommodations.
- Medical professionals should confirm that the student has a disability OR is being monitored or assessed to determine a diagnosis.
- Focus on requesting information about functional limitations due to their health condition that impairs the student's academic functioning while pursuing post-secondary studies.
- You can also ask about the effects of medication on academic functioning.
- Ask for updated medical information where a disability is identified as temporary or when accommodations need to be re-visited over time to ensure that they continue to meet the student's needs appropriately.



Linking Functional Impairment to Reasonable Accommodations

- The challenge for postsecondary Accessibility Services in supporting students with disabilities is determining which accommodations or supports will reasonably compensate for the identified functional impairment(s) without violating the essential requirements of a program or conferring an academic advantage relative to other non-disabled students (Lovett, 2020; Lovett & Bizub, 2019; Pardy, 2016).
- Accommodations recommended for mental health problems are often based solely on self-reported symptoms or clinical judgment, in contrast to the requirements from objective evidence from a psychoeducational assessment to document functional impairment that would require accommodations for LD.
- Yet, reliance on self-evaluation of functional impairment is particularly problematic, as self-report may be prone to inaccurately reflect the actual functioning of those with mental health conditions.



Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences at times. Many people feel anxious, or nervous, when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test, or making an important decision. Anxiety disorders, however, are different. They can cause such distress that it interferes with a person's ability to lead a normal life.



Anxiety Disorders

Individuals can have more than one type of anxiety disorder at the same time. Some types of anxiety disorders are:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** excessive anxiety and worry, occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities
- **Social Anxiety Disorder:** marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others
- **Panic Disorder:** recurrent unexpected panic attacks (abrupt surge of intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes)

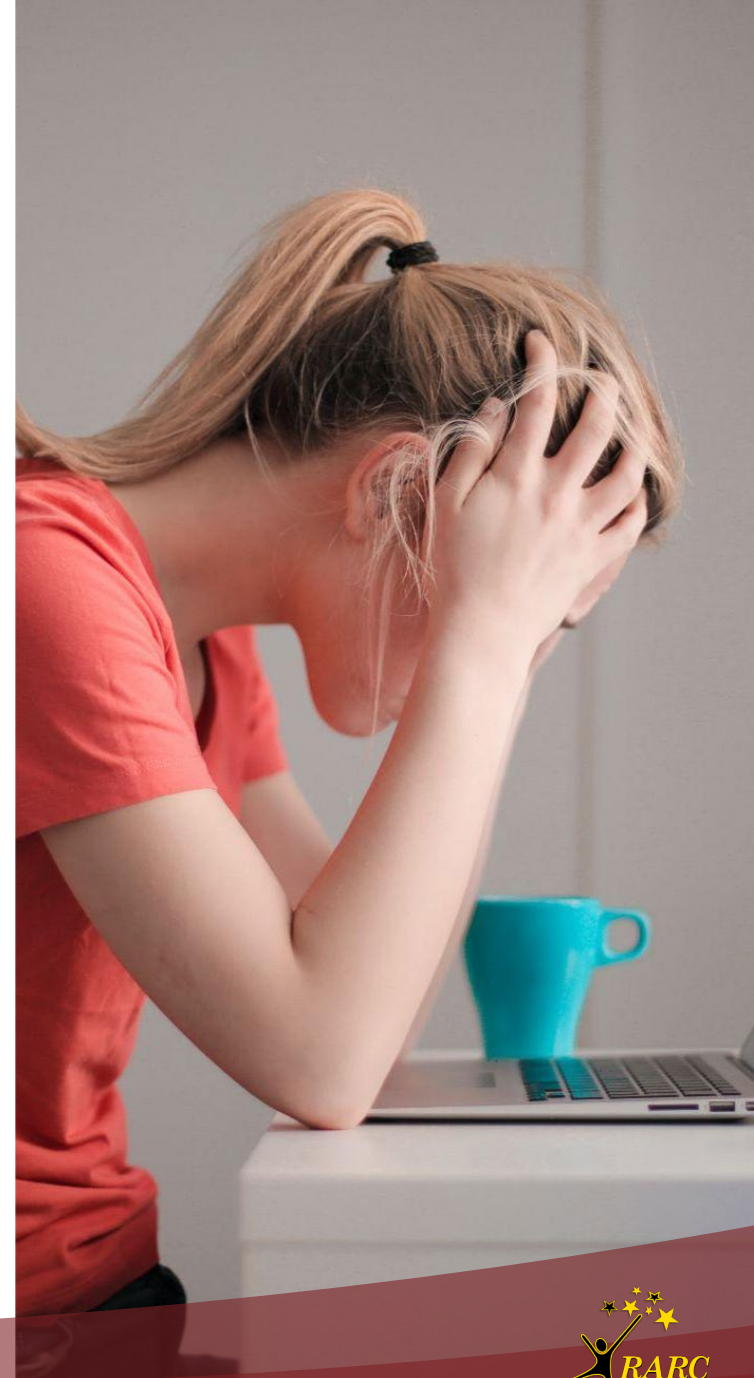
What Makes PSE Students Especially Vulnerable to Anxiety?

- Living away from home/parents for the first time +
- Managing difficult course work and schedules +
- Increased social pressures +
- Independent self-care routines +
- The pressure to succeed on your own +
- Financial responsibilities +

= feeling stressed, scared, and overwhelmed

Signs of Anxiety Disorders in Students

- Reporting excessive anxieties/worries
- Displaying catastrophic thinking
- Difficulty speaking in front of the class
- Declining focus/concentration
- Sleep disturbance
- Trembling/shaking
- Tendency to “freeze” in tests
- Attendance concerns
- Recurring physical ailments (without a medical cause)



Anticipated Functional Impairments and Reasonable Accommodations

Functional Impairment	Reasonable Accommodation
Tendency to “freeze” or “panic” in assessment situations	“Stop-the-clock” breaks during exams
Brain distracted by intrusive thoughts during lectures	The option to record lecture materials
Easily overwhelmed by academic demands	Working with a Learning Strategist to improve ability to spread out academic tasks
Brain distracted when engaged in passive academic tasks, such as reading	Trial using text-to-speech applications
Difficulty getting started on academic tasks	Trial using speech-to-text applications. Meet with staff at the campus Writing Centre to help build a template for the writing task.
Challenges with anxiety related to speaking in front of the class (e.g., presentations)	Encourage to discuss alternative presentation options (such as recording beforehand and playing in class).
Tendency to panic when sees others complete tests and exams before them	Use of Test Centre

Depressive Disorders

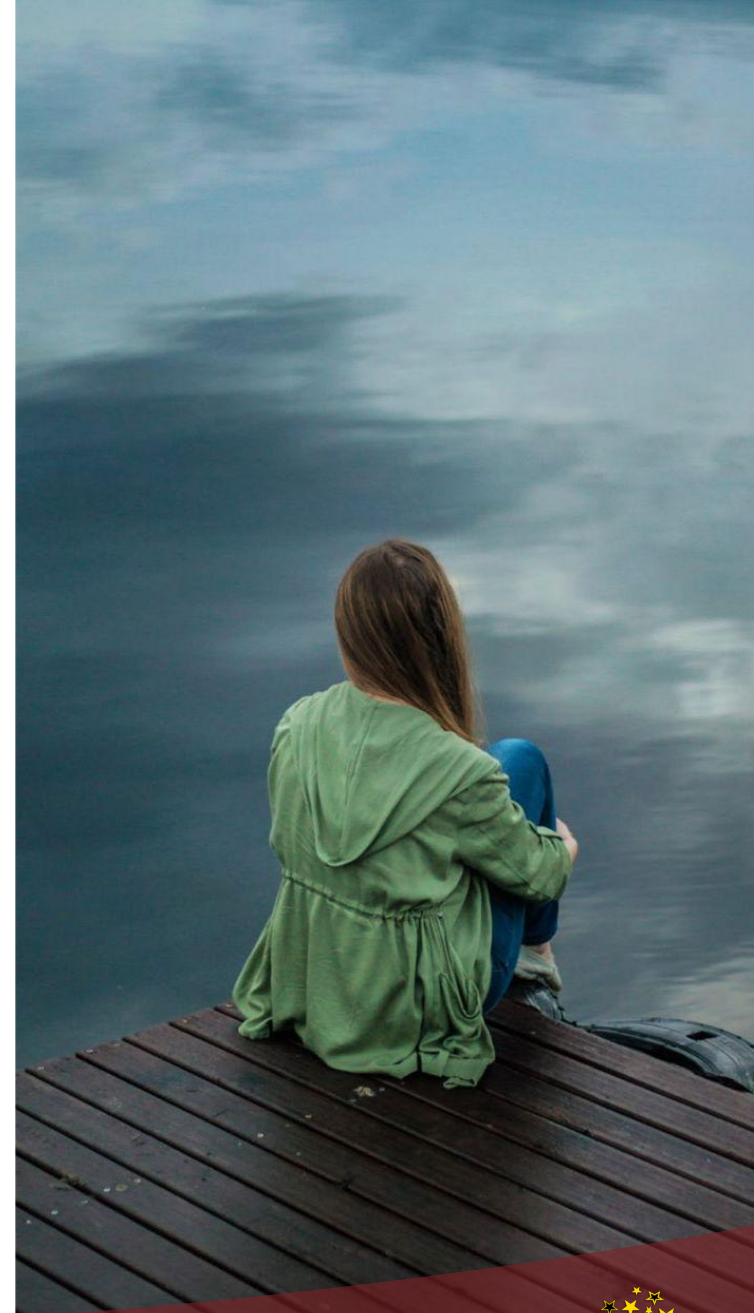
- **Depressive disorders** are not a passing blue mood but rather persistent feelings of sadness and worthlessness and a lack of desire to engage in formerly pleasurable activities.
- Depressive disorders include:
 - **Major Depressive Disorder:** Affective, cognitive, and physical symptoms of depression present during the same two week period
 - **Persistent Depressive Disorder:** Depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, for at least two years

What makes PSE students vulnerable to depression?

- First time away from home
- Loss of typical support system
- Sexual identity adjustment difficulties
- Difficulty adapting to their new situation
- Challenges navigating relationships
- Loss of previous activities that brought them joy
- Facing stress/failure

Signs that a student may be depressed

- Reduced motivation
- Loss of interest in activities, such as clubs, sports or other social commitments
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Emotional outbursts, such as tearfulness or anger
- Increased irritability
- Increased or new use of substances/alcohol
- Lack of energy
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm



Anticipated Functional Impairments and Reasonable Accommodations

Functional Impairment	Reasonable Accommodation
Low motivation to complete academic tasks	Discuss a possible reduced course load. Refer to a Learning Strategist to help with time management.
Fatigue during classes affects focus	The option to record lecture materials
Easily overwhelmed by academic demands	Working with a Learning Strategist to improve ability to spread out academic tasks
Brain fatigued when engaged in passive academic tasks, such as reading	Trial using text-to-speech applications
Difficulty getting started on academic tasks	Trial using speech-to-text applications. Meet with staff at the campus Writing Centre to help build a template for the writing task.



Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders

- Most psychiatric diagnoses are clustered by core symptomatology. Trauma- and stressor-related disorders are unusual because they are grouped by apparent etiology: all of these disorders develop after exposure to a traumatic or stressful event.
- They are often discussed in the context of anxiety disorders, but the trauma- and stressor-related disorders may present with dysphoria, irritability, dissociation, substance use, or insomnia in addition to (or instead of) anxiety.
- Include:
 - **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**- Can develop after exposure to a traumatic event. It is characterized by intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks; avoidance of reminders of the trauma; negative cognitions and mood; hypervigilance and sleep disturbance. Lasts for at least one month.
 - **Acute Stress Disorder**- begins immediately after the trauma and lasts from 3 days to 1 month
 - **Adjustment Disorder**- development of emotional or behavioural symptoms in response to an identifiable stressor(s) occurring within 3 months of the onset of the stressor(s).



Anticipated Functional Impairments and Reasonable Accommodations

Functional Impairment	Reasonable Accommodation
Intrusive thoughts causing panic during assessments	“Stop-the-clock” breaks to implement stress management strategies.
Fatigue/attentional lapses during classes	The option to record lecture materials
Easily overwhelmed by academic demands	Working with a Learning Strategist to improve ability to spread out academic tasks
Periodic need to retreat from environment during lectures	Preferential seating near the door
Challenges with fatigue due to disruptions to quality of sleep	Reduced course load. Discussion of timing of classes.



Personality Disorders

- A personality disorder is a mental health condition that involves long-lasting, all-encompassing, disruptive patterns of thinking, behaviour, mood, and relating to others.
 - **Cluster A** personality disorders involve unusual and eccentric thinking or behaviours (Paranoid, Schizoid, and Schizotypal Personality Disorders).
 - **Cluster B** personality disorders involve intense, unstable emotions and impulsive behaviours (Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, and Narcissistic Personality Disorders).
 - **Cluster C** personality disorders involve severe anxiety and fear (Avoidant, Dependent, and Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorders).



Anticipated Functional Impairments and Reasonable Accommodations

Functional Impairment	Reasonable Accommodation
Cognitive distortions due to paranoid or delusional thinking (Cluster A)	Reduced load. Check-ins with an Academic Coach/Learning Strategist to monitor progress and aid with any misconceptions of academic task requirements.
Emotional dysregulation and impulsivity (Cluster B)	“Stop-the-clock” breaks during exams.
Issues with productivity due to perfectionism and anxiety (Cluster C)	Working with an Academic Coach/Learning Strategist to improve time management skills and temper perfectionism.
Significant challenges with anxiety during lectures (Cluster C)	Preferential seating near the door. Possible use of a recording device if impacts focus (thereby affecting note-taking)
Easily overwhelmed by academic demands (Cluster A, B, and C)	Working with a Learning Strategist to improve ability to spread out academic tasks

Treatment?

- Treatment-seeking is reported to be as low as 10% (Auerbach et al., 2018; Marsh & Wilcoxon, 2015).
- Factors such as cost, stigma, privacy concerns, heavy academic course loads, inability to distinguish between mental illness and stress or other common emotions, work priorities, and long wait times can deter students from seeking help (Dunley & Papadopoulos, 2019; Marsh & Wilcoxon, 2015).
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy is highly recommended for most mental health conditions. Dialectical-Behaviour Therapy is warranted for Borderline Personality Disorder.



Other considerations

- Student may also wish to connect with their prescribing physician to ensure adequate medical monitoring of their condition and any medications being taken.
- Self-care strategies can also be encouraged as part of accessibility and transition services offered.
- Also helpful for students to know their options in terms of taking a leave if they experience an exacerbation of their condition.



Questions?



HIDC 2024- SAVE THE DATE!

- 3rd High Incidence Disabilities Conference will be held **May 2 & 3, 2024 in Toronto, Ontario.**
- This year's theme: **Navigating Assessment, Academic Accommodations, and Post-Secondary Supports in a Changing World.**
- Currently accepting proposals for speakers.
- <https://www.queensu.ca/rarc/training/workshops-and-conferences> for more information.



Thank You!

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