

Part 3: Actions and Accommodations in the Classroom

Overview

The *Higher Education Support Toolkit* offers simple, practical assistance designed to improve the likelihood of students with psychiatric disabilities to achieve their goals in college. The following guidelines suggest ways in which you can use this toolkit:

- Identify common difficulties experienced by students
- Assess student difficulties in adjusting and managing classroom and campus life
- Consider strategies and/or accommodations to help students
- Identify campus resources that are available to assist students at your institution

Form for Part 3: Actions and Accommodations in the Classroom

Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions

Using the “Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions”

Review and familiarize yourself with the “Guide to Psychiatric Disorders, Related Difficulties, and Possible Actions” (pages 26–33). The guide lists prevalent psychiatric disorders and the common difficulties that are often associated with particular disorders. The guide also includes possible actions a student can take on his or her own that may help to improve a difficult situation in class. If reasonable accommodations are needed, a list of potential accommodations that the student could request is provided.

Use this guide to:

- Help staff understand the range of common difficulties for an individual living with one or more particular mental illnesses
- Help staff and student to determine appropriate strategies to help student in the classroom
- Explore options to request and use accommodations

Psychiatric Disorder: Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Difficulty sitting still, restlessness	Go to classroom before classes start to determine the best place to sit	Request prearranged breaks during class
Inability to filter out distractions (internal or external)	Arrive at class early to be able to chose a comfortable place to sit	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker
Fatigue	Schedule courses at preferred time of day and/or schedule courses on different days with rest time between courses	Request a decreased course load without losing full-time status for financial aid and health insurance
Decreased Stamina	Ensure rest time between courses Exercise before class	
Difficulty concentrating; decreased attention span and difficulty with doing homework and test taking	Arrange to photocopy a classmate's notes Organize time to do homework in shorter sittings, even if more frequent Write things down; keep a list and a schedule; keep a journal	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker Request pre-arranged breaks to get fresh air and to move around Request to take tests in a separate room to decrease distractions Request to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment
Mind going blank	Relaxation exercises/deep breathing	
Muscle tension	Small hand/foot exercises that can be done discreetly at desk in class	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Major Depression (page 1 of 2)

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Fatigue	Schedule courses at preferred time of day and/or schedule courses on different days with rest time between courses	Request a decreased course load without losing full-time status for financial aid and health insurance
Decreased Stamina	Ensure rest time between courses Exercise before class	
Difficulty concentrating; decreased attention span and difficulty with doing homework and test taking	Arrange to photocopy a classmate's notes Organize time to do homework in shorter sittings, even if more frequently Write things down; keep a list and a schedule; keep a journal	Request to tape record class and/or request a note taker Request pre-arranged breaks to get fresh air and to move around Request to take tests in a separate room to decrease distractions Request to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment
Dry mouth from medication	Bring beverage to class	
Difficulty remembering verbal commands and problems with memory	Write things down to help accuracy Ask a classmate to verify that you understood the assignment correctly Write things down, keep a journal and keep a schedule	Request assignments in writing from professor

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Major Depression (page 2 of 2)

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Easily overwhelmed	Set small, attainable goals Break tasks into small, manageable pieces	Request to tape record class
Absent from class due to hospitalization	Arrange to contact and inform professor of situation Request to complete homework assignments from hospital Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course	
Racing thoughts, over-stimulation	Schedule classes with breaks between or on different days Use relaxation and meditation practices	Request prearranged breaks during class
Escalating symptoms	Use monitoring log of symptoms so you can intervene early enough	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Caught up in perfectionism Spends an inordinate amount of time organizing tasks, but unable to successfully complete tasks	Use positive self-talk to counterbalance negative thinking	Request to work with tutor on time-management and organizing skills
Difficulty dealing with unexpected changes, assignments, tests, etc		Request to get advanced notice of exams, etc.

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Panic Disorder

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Experiencing panic attacks	Go to class ahead of time to get feel of classroom and pick a location to sit Sit near the door Use cold water on face or hands Arrive at class early to be able to sit where you want and/or need to sit	Request to have prearranged breaks during class
Unable to get to classes/exams due to panic attacks	Let professor know why you're not coming—don't just let it go Request to arrange an "Incomplete" rather than fail a course	Request to arrange an "Incomplete" rather than fail a course
Difficulty concentrating in class due to anxiety	Deep breathing exercises; Touch something (books, desk)-note temperature, texture, etc.—really focusing on object (Grounding techniques)	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Miss final exam due to panic attack	Request to arrange an "Incomplete" rather than fail a course	Request to arrange an "Incomplete" rather than fail a course

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Flashbacks, intrusive memories or feeling generally “out of touch” with reality	Concentrate on note taking, feel something and concentrate on texture, etc. (grounding skills)	Request prearranged breaks during class Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Hyper vigilante and/or increased startle response.	Use self-talk, “I am in a classroom. I am safe” Go to classroom early to get seat that feels safest	
Anxiety/panic attacks	Sit near the door so you can easily leave the room	Request prearranged breaks during class
Absent from class due to hospitalization	Inform professor rather than just letting it go; and	
Miss final exams	Arrange to do homework assignments from hospital Request to arrange an “incomplete” rather than fail a course	

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Distracted by internal/external stimuli	Arrive at class early enough to be able to sit where you want/need to	Request to tape record class Request a note taker
Pressured by voices or other stimuli	Learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises Schedule courses during your best time of day	Request to take breaks to get a breath of fresh air and refocus Request to decrease course load without losing full time status for financial aid and health insurance
Feeling self-conscious and paranoid	Learn to use positive self-talk Learn to use relaxation and self-soothing exercises	
Feeling agitated, restless or unable to sit still	Put cold water on face or hands	Request breaks during classes and exams

Adapted from: Sullivan Soydan, A.P. (1997). *Frequently asked questions by educators about students with psychiatric disabilities: Tips and resources on the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, Academic Adjustments, and Support*. Boston: Boston University, Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Psychiatric Disorder: Manic/Hypomanic Episodes

Common Difficulties/Limitations	Possible Strategies for Student	Possible Accommodations
Inability to pace self		Work with tutor on time-management skills
Problems with memory	Write things down; keep journal; keep schedule	
Racing thoughts, over-stimulation	Schedule classes with breaks between or on different days Relaxation/meditation practices	Prearranged breaks during class
Escalating symptoms	Use monitoring log of symptoms so you can intervene early enough	
Expansive good mood	Intervene if possible	

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