



College Mental Health Guide for Parents

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Parent Guide Contents

A Note for Parents ... 3

Signs and Symptoms...4

Encouraging Healthy
Habits... 5 & 6

Practical Resources...7

Emergency Contact...8

Encouragement for
Parents...9

Prayers &
Scriptures...10&11



A Note for Parents:

I see you.

Holding on to hope through the whisper of your desperate prayers!

Let me start by saying, I don't claim to be a perfect parent by any means; and I surely don't have all the answers when it comes to parenting a child with a mental illness. I wish I did. But what I can say is that

I understand the harsh realities, and hope, that come with mental challenges.

The last two years have been emotionally draining, mentally and physically exhausting, and have targeted my momma heart in unusually brutal ways. Sadly, the consequences of untreated mental health have also wreaked havoc on our entire family.

What I've come to learn is that **the weight of mental illness has a ripple wave effect** that pulls loved ones in with all its bittersweet and heavy-hearted burdens. But, I promise, there are glimmers of light!

As a mom that struggles with anxiety and depression and now has a young adult daughter who is diagnosed with a rare mental illness; and another teen daughter that battles with bouts of anxiety, this road has been hard and filled with endless twists and turns! So, while this subject matter isn't easy to talk about, it's necessary.

The reality is, that **I understand how truly heartbreakingly it is to watch your teen struggling**, especially as they embark on this new college journey. Maybe you find yourself trying to delicately balance the art of loving them and letting go, at the same time thinking, they'll soon be on their own, so...

"How do I parent in this season?"

The all consuming thoughts of witnessing your kid struggling with mental illness in college, can leave any parent concerned, and rendered **helpless**.

I get it. I have held those same thoughts. And honestly, it can lead you to feel isolated, alone, and utterly hopeless on this journey. I have felt ill-equipped and torn by the brutal waves that come with parenting a daughter with a severe depressed disorder. In full transparency, I have even wanted to give up!

This is why as parents, **we must acknowledge our need for guidance and direction** when it comes to mental illness, so we can help our kids in these crucial years. With the constant and ever-evolving pressures college students face in today's society, it's so important to notice the signs and symptoms, so that we can offer support and sound advice about their health, while also **seeking help when we need it!**

That is why this guide was developed. It was **created with you (the parent) in mind**. In this guide, you will find **helpful resources, signs and symptoms of concern, ways to encourage healthy habits, practical tips, pocket prayers**, and more. My prayer is that while this guide won't be a cure all, it will **help you lovingly support your college kiddo**, while also giving you a little comfort and peace of mind.

Please know that I am walking this journey with you, and we can do this - together.
You aren't alone. Gods got your college kid, and He's got you!

Keep fighting, keep parenting, keep going...and **keep praying!**

Much love,
Alicia Searl

Signs & Symptoms

We must be in tune and attentive to the signs and symptoms of mental health so we can support our children, especially when they are away at college. Below are some commonly seen signs so you can be vigilant and begin a conversation, offer support, and extend encouragement as needed.

- Negative or Irregular Behaviors
- Inconsistent Sleep or Eat Patterns
- Disinterest in Hobbies or Passions
- Isolation or Withdrawal
- Carrying Guilt or Shame
- Headaches, Body Aches, or Pains
- Inability to Difficulty Concentrating
- Restless or Idle

Monitor your child's demeanor and tone as you speak via phone or have a visitation together and touch base.





Encourage Healthy Habits

It can be difficult to decipher how to help your child when they are away at college, but thankfully there are ways you can “check in” and ensure they are caring of their mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

While you may initially want to ask how (or what) your kiddo is eating, if they are getting enough rest, or managing their time wisely, more than likely, they will not respond too well to these types of questions.

Due to high amounts of stress and a heavy courseload, it may be better to casually ask how they feel when they “do” eat well, get enough rest, and make time for a sweet friend.

For example:

How's your study schedule?

What are you most worried about right now?

Is your dorm room quiet while you sleep?

How is that friend that you met at church group last week?

How can I pray for you right now?

Framing questions in this way come across as less offensive and allow them to open up and share their concerns.

As hard as this is to hear we must also remember that our college kiddos want to be treated like adults, so our words can either encourage them to become the best versions of themselves or make them slowly pull away.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is give them a little space to figure things out, while we live on a prayer!

Healthy Habits

These habits are not only great for your college kiddo, but for you as well.

Don't discount your own physical, emotional, and mental state.

Physical Self-Care

- 6-8 Hours of Sleep
- Drink Plenty of Water
- Exercise Daily
- Get Outdoors and Soak in the Sunshine
- Eat Healthy

Emotional Self-Care

- Cultivate Healthy Friendships
- Seek a Faith-Based Community
- Practice Slow Breathing
- Speak Kindly to Yourself

Mental Self-Care

- Limit Screen Time
- Set Manageable and Realistic Goals
- Avoid Alcohol and Drugs
- Start a Gratitude Journal



Practical Resources

On Campus

If your child is on campus, I HIGHLY recommend first checking for an on-site Doctor, Counselor, or Psychiatrist. Not every campus has these things, but most do. These people are here to help your child. Take a trip to the school and visit these resources together to become familiar with the services offered.

At Home

It's humbling, but we (ourselves) must admit when we are not okay, not enough, and even failing. It's okay to step out in faith and say we need help. Reach out to a trusted friend so that they can pray over you and your college kid. Also, consider seeking a counselor who will walk beside you and offer you sage advice while loving, supporting, and encouraging you on this hard journey.



Emergency Contacts

If you, your child, or someone you know are in a Mental Health crisis, don't wait to reach out.
These hotlines are here for you and them.



**If you or someone you know is in CRISIS
(Suicide, medical emergency, etc.), contact any of
these hotlines:**

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (USA) -
Call 988 (24 /7 support) or
Text “HELLO” to 741741
- National Eating Disorders Association Helpline
- Call 1- 800- 931-2237
(M-F 9 AM-9 PM ET) or Text “NEDA” 741741
- SAMHSA National Hotline for Substance Abuse
and Mental Health -
Call 1-800-662- HELP (4357)

**While this is a Christian Guide, it's important to help
everyone struggling with mental health. Here are some
additional hotlines:**

- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ Support)-
Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678
- Mental Health America (MHA)-
Call- 1-800-969-6642
- Young Adult Crisis Hotline
(For Ages 16-24)- Call- 1-800-273-TALK
(1-800-273-8255)
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) HelpLine-
Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)



Encouragement for Parents

Practice Self-Care

Contrary to popular belief, self-care is NOT selfish. God wants us to care for our “temples” well, and that includes tending to our bodies, minds, and souls.



Let Go of Guilt

You will make mistakes on this journey and maybe even say or do things you later regret. Come clean before God and seek His wisdom and help, letting Him guide you, all while receiving His mercy and grace.

Don't Lose Hope

It can be easy to feel isolated and alone on this journey. So, lift your college kid up in prayer and invite God into your heart. Seek His discernment in these times. Start a journal and jot down your hopes and dreams for your child, then check back and see how God showed up!



Get Support

In all transparency, if we don't seek wise counsel, this can cause devastating consequences and put a strain on not just the relationship with our child, but with our spouse, family members, friends, and even God. Find a support network or community to lean on.

Have a Plan

Be prepared for challenging days by having a plan beforehand. Consistently check in and look for signs or red flags. If something feels “off” have a crisis plan to activate that will ensure your college kid do is safe.



Accept Help

It's okay to ask and enlist help from trusted family and friends. Let them bring you a coffee on a rough day or lift you and your child up in prayer. If you have a specific need, let them know so they can help carry this burden with you.

The Power of Our Prayers

In pursuit of our child's mental health, we will do just about anything. We will lead them to get help on their campuses, remind them of self-care, encourage and offer our support, all while leaning into our friends to help us carry this emotional burden, but oftentimes, we fail to pray. Or at least forget the power of our prayers.

Yet, this is the biggest weapon we have as parents!

God may not promise us (or our child) to be free from mental illness, but He does promise to always be with us. Prayer and Scripture remind us that we have a God that draws near to us and offers peace and comfort when we draw near to Him.

Below are a few whisper prayers (or prayer prompts) you can easily lift up and add to throughout your day, along with some Scriptures to proclaim aloud. When we speak these prayers and verses into existence, not only do we hear them and allow absolute truths to soak into our mind and heart, but we also prevent the enemy from trying to use our pain in these times to stroke lies.

This is a battle we are fighting with and for our children, and with God in our corner, we will find a place of comfort, peace, and rest.



Prayer Prompts & Scriptures

Father, please be with my son today and comfort his restless heart. Tend to his mental state and lead Him into Your loving arms for strength...(Specifically pray for the academic challenges he faces and to persevere and endure). Amen.

I (My child) can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

God, thank you for Your provision. I humbly ask that You remind my child of Your amazing love and faithfulness...(Pray that your child will feel the warm embrace of our God and cling to their foundation of faith). Amen.

Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Psalm 136:2

Lord, please help my daughter realize when she is struggling and find the courage to ask for help. May she find the support she needs and a strong community to hold her accountable...(Ask God to provide opportunities to grow in their faith with faithful friends and a church body of believers) . Amen.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

Gracious God, with a heavy heart, I seek your help. Draw near to me as well as my son. We both desperately need to know You are near and can provide us rest, especially for our weary souls. Amen.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28



Be sure to join us Thursday, May 15 at 12 p.m. as we discuss this topic via a live IG webinar. We will share our own personal experiences, ways to cope with mental health, and pray for our college students to rest this summer before returning to their campuses in the fall. We will also be giving out Starbucks gift cards to the first four that join our event with our "Savor the Summer" gift card giveaway!

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