


# Chapter 20

## Personal Reflections and Effective Coping Mechanisms When Transitioning to Higher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter's objective is to present a framework to understand the transition to higher education. The transition is a time of uncertainty for the emerging college student. The chapter includes events and experiences from college students. The issue of mental health, identity, and group formation will be explored. Successful programs and existing infrastructures will be highlighted to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency systems. The chapter will provide the reader with a personal inside perspective about the transition to higher education.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Change is inevitable; however, a healthy level of self-esteem can help in one's ability to adjust to new challenges or situations. Emerging adulthood, as proposed by Arnett (2000), is a period of extended adolescence that occurs in industrialized countries when an individual ventures on the path of higher education. Transitioning from the home to college atmosphere can be exciting. It can also be scary and difficult. The World Health Organization (WHO) World Mental Health International College Student Initiative (2019) assessed this transitional time to highlight the issue of mental health of new college students (Auerbach, 2018). Mental health carries a certain stigma, especially in the teenage and young adult years. Mental illness in college students often includes substance abuse, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorder, eating disorder, depression, suicide, and sleeping issues. The mental health of teenagers has declined steadily due to increases in the use of social media and misinformation or lack of education on the subject (Marraccini et al., 2022). Often, students do not admit or recognize a mental health issue, which can result in missed treatments, evolving illness, and negative effects. This chapter will delineate popular programs on college campuses and provide a unique first-hand look into their effectiveness.

## **BACKGROUND**

The transition from high school to college is an element in the academic pathway of youth (Dunn 2016). Students experience major developmental changes in several life spheres, including school, social life, and family life. Academically, they must adjust to a new school, a new program and schedule, new teaching practices, and new institutional expectations and norms (Hill 2012). In terms of social networking, they must build new interpersonal relationships and cope with a change of available support in their social environment (Mattanah et al., 2010). The literature supports the claim that adjusting to college coursework demands and limited engagement in extracurricular activities is challenging for most college students. One of the challenges in transitioning to college is adjusting to a different school structure and a new course load (Gilson & Matthews, 2019). Loss of social connections and close bonds between family and friends can increase feelings of loneliness and isolation associated with mental health disorders (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health carries a certain stigma, especially in the teenage and young adult years. Mental illness in college students often includes substance abuse, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorder, eating disorder, depression, suicide, and sleeping issues. The mental health of teenagers has declined steadily due to increases in the use of social media and misinformation or lack of education on the subject (Marraccini et al., 2022). Often, students do not admit or recognize a mental health issue, which can result in missed treatments, evolving illness, and negative effects. According to Nair et al. (2021), mental health "is a state of well-being that allows individuals to enjoy and maintain relationships, as well as handle stress in a healthy manner without compromising productivity" (p.1). The following types of mental health stigmas can be observed in colleges across the United States:

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