



# SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH *during a pandemic*

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# Diversity Statement

The Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services (CCPPS) is dedicated to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all members of the WVU community. We are grateful for the diversity of our Mountaineer family, spanning race and ethnicity, financial means, ability, gender and sexual orientation, age, body size, religion and spirituality, nationality and citizenship status, and culture.

In particular, the Carruth Center staff wants our Black and Brown students, colleagues, and community members to know that we stand with the Black Lives Matter movement. We acknowledge that there are ways in which our profession has disenfranchised Black and Brown individuals and we also want to acknowledge and take full responsibility for ways in which our Center has not risen to the occasion to meet the needs of our Black and Brown Students. While we know that we cannot repair or fix these injustices overnight, we want our WVU community to know that we are working to do better, be better at recognizing and supporting the needs of our Black and Brown students.

Our renewed aim is to share our expertise and knowledge in the service of healing racial trauma, helping people value differences while affirming our common humanity. We will take a more focused and deliberate action to welcome and promote greater openness and compassion in all our endeavors.

# Agenda

- What are our students facing? Collective trauma trifecta—and then some
- Student mental health data
- PTSE—what is it?
- General adaptation strategies from APA
- Ways PTSE affects undergrad and graduate students
- Ways PTSE affects minoritized students and international students
- Specifics for teaching and learning
- Learning and memory under stress: Best practices
- Resources
- How the Carruth Center can help



# Trauma is Complex:

Trauma can be

- Acute, and/or
- Chronic
- Complex
- Collective

“the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual’s ability to cope, causes **feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.**”



after trauma you  
feel frozen in time  
and disconnected  
to everyone and  
everything  
including yourself  
it seems to take  
forever to  
re-connect and  
become alive  
again

[tanjawindegger.com](http://tanjawindegger.com)

# Trifecta of Collective Traumatic Stressors



COVID-19 PANDEMIC



ONGOING CHANGES DUE TO  
PANDEMIC: UNEXPECTED CHANGES IN  
SOCIAL, WORK, IDENTITY ROLES AND  
EXPERIENCES



SOCIAL UPHEAVAL: RACIAL  
OPPRESSION, BLACK LIVES MATTER,  
POLARIZED POLITICS



# Plus....

Developmental concerns, academic concerns, relationship issues, family conflicts, identity and career exploration...

And...

## Wintertime in Morgantown:

- increased isolation
- less exercise
- less light/more gray
- Seasonal Affective Disorder

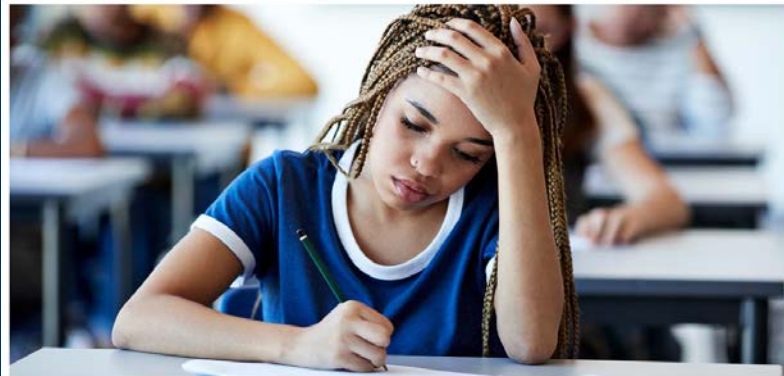


## The COVID-19 pandemic made U.S. college students' mental health even worse

Almost half of the students surveyed experienced high levels of emotional distress and worry



About 85 percent of college students experienced moderate to high levels of distress during the pandemic's early days, a new study shows. Those who reported the highest distress levels included women, Asians and students who knew someone with COVID-19.



By Sara Frueh

Rising Rates of Mental Health Problems in U.S. College Students Require a New Response, Report Says

## College Students Have Been Stressed Out During the Pandemic. Here's How It's Affected Their Mental Health.

By Audrey Williams June | JULY 18, 2020

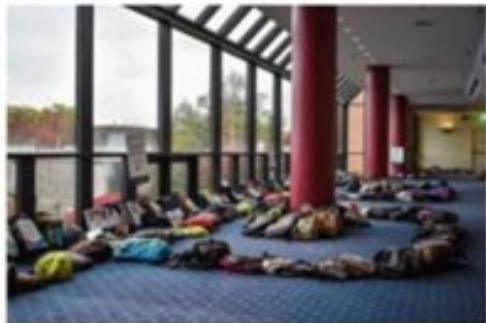


## International students face mental health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

Facing amplified social isolation and xenophobia, international students suffer mental health challenges amidst the COVID-19 ...

Science Line · 10d

## As Students Struggle With Stress and Depression, Colleges Act as Counselors



## 'What's the Point?' Young People's Despair Deepens as Covid-19 Crisis Drags On

Experts paint a grim picture of the struggle with lockdown isolation — a “mental health pandemic” that should be treated as seriously as containing the coronavirus.

## Under Pressure: The Growing Demand for Student Mental Health Services

By Lee Burdette Williams · Volume 25, Number 3 · May/June 2017



# College Mental Health Data



- 27% Anxiety | 19% Depression | 33% Stress significantly impact academic performance (NCHA, 2018).
- National increase in enrollment ~ 5-6%. Increase in CC ~30-40%.
- Anxiety and depression drive the increase in CC utilization.
- Lifetime prevalence of “threat-to-self” increase for seven years in a row.
- Ten percent of clients utilize ~ 40% sessions (CCMH, 2019).



# Carruth Center Data

## Pre-pandemic:

- 120% increase in crisis intervention appointments (2008-2018)
- 107% increase in drop-in appointments (2013-2018)

## Post-pandemic changes:

- Significant increases in diagnoses anxiety disorders: previous 3-year average 58%; current 67.7% (Fall 2020)
- Highest increase in Generalized Anxiety Disorder: previous 3-year average: 21%; current 25.57% (Fall 2020)
- Increase in counseling appointments and decrease in crisis intervention (?)



# PTSE

Pandemic Trauma  
Stress Experience

*-and how to adapt*

## What is PTSE?

A constellation of individual, family, and community reactions to the enduring global Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these reactions include:



### Emotional

Increased frustration, despair,  
weariness, worry  
Feelings of powerlessness,  
not-good-enough



### Cognitive/Behavioral

Loss of focus, fuzzy thinking  
Increased mental mistakes  
Disruptions of normal patterns  
of behavior



### Somatic

Increased hypervigilance,  
feeling "on-edge"  
Headaches, gastrointestinal  
issues, fatigue



### Social

Increased withdrawal,  
isolation, and fear of others as  
a source of infection  
Loneliness

## Adapt by naming and attending to your needs:



### Go easy, rest!

Changes in routines, news, social protocols, health statuses of friends and family, future plans: adapting to so much change is taxing on our systems! Add in the normal changes of seasons, and boom, we're headed for a crash. Gift yourself rest whenever you can.



### Feel your feelings

Emotions are hard and we're used to stuffing them down. Instead, name what you're feeling. It's ok to feel scared, sad, confused, angry, etc. Find someone to talk to, cry if you need to, journal, exercise. Our feelings need to be "completed."



### Be curious and find delight--make it a practice

We tend to find what we seek. Our brains need novelty, interest, joy, and while we have lost much in this pandemic, there are moments of delight all around us in the ordinary. Take a walk, read a poem, notice what you haven't noticed before.



### Seek physical sensation and movement

We've lost a lot of touch and movement patterns. Finding ways for your body to experience sensation and movement is important for physical, cognitive, and emotional health. Some ideas: self-massage, hot/icy cold showers (hydrotherapy), taking walks, rebounding, ASMR, yoga, running, primal movement.



### Love your unique powers

There's been an uptick in focusing on insecurities and feeling not-good-enough. Some attribute this to too much time alone, constant comparison to others that comes with social media, and not enough touch. One BIG contributor: uncertainty about the present can make us feel less-than and powerless. Reconnect with your power--it is still inside you.



### Ask for help--and help others

We already live in a very individualistic culture and many of us believe that we must "do it on our own." Humans need each other for many reasons--but most especially to validate our experiences and emotions, to make life real to us. We can't get through this pandemic totally alone. Ask for help when you need it. And feel the joy and purpose that comes with helping others too.

# General adaptation strategies for everyone...

## ...but! Students have additional considerations...

# PTSE affects undergrad and grad students differently

Undergraduates developmentally deal with issues around **identity** and **learning to become more independent**.

- Pandemic changes disrupt **social exploration needed to form identity**. Can look like: loss of interest in studies, lack of motivation, less confidence, less participation, sense of alienation.
- Pandemic changes disrupt **rhythms and routines needed to become more independent**. Can look like: inability to complete assignments, missed class, confusion about expectations, less confidence/self-efficacy, needing more hand-holding.
- **Key words: Identity, independence, purpose, social bonds**

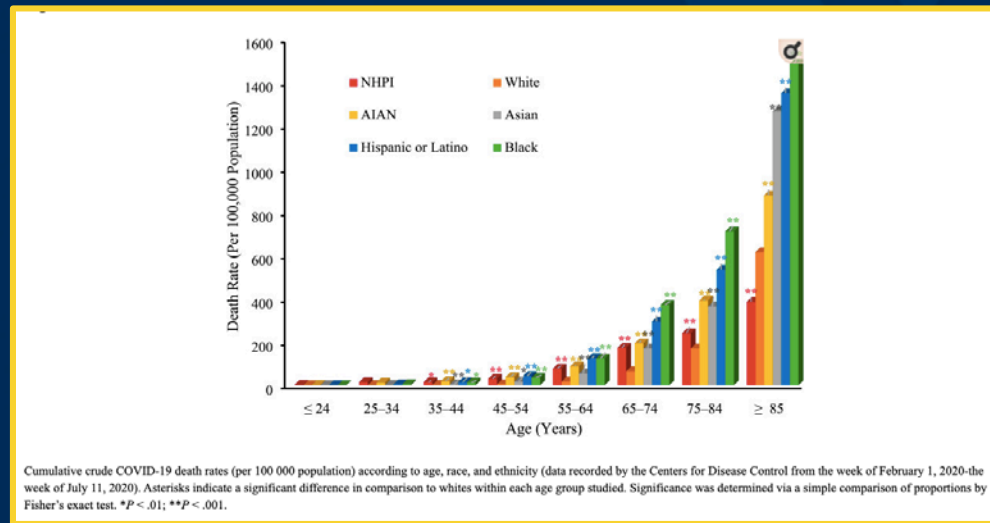


# PTSE affects undergrad and grad students differently

Graduate students developmentally deal with issues around **forming connections within their professional worlds in authentic ways.**

- Pandemic changes disrupt **future plans in professional careers.** Can look like: extreme anxiety, somatic symptoms (illness, GI issues, migraines).
- Pandemic changes disrupt **presenting authentic self in professional realms.** Can look like: hiding mental health problems, diminished performance, less emotional capacity, difficulties adjusting to change.
- **Key words: Responsibility, professionalism, performance, personal/professional balance**

# PTSE affects minoritized students differently



- Racism, sexism, ableism, and classism have effects on
  - **trusting authority**
  - **asking for help**
  - **self-efficacy**
  - **empowerment**
- Low-income students are highly affected—and may not be as visible.
- More death and loss of community, friends and family.
- Can look like: disengagement, difficulties with attention, missed class, decreased performance

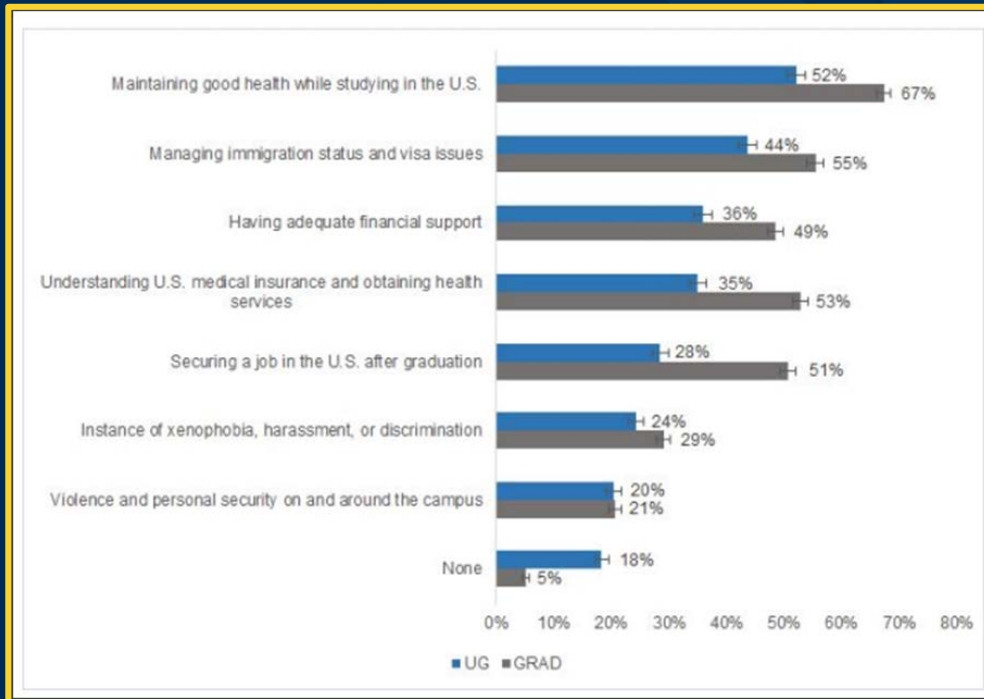
# PTSE affects international students differently

International students **worry most about maintaining good health and managing immigration and visa issues.**

Other important issues for international students:

- Financial support
- Health care navigation and access
- Job opportunities
- Travel restrictions
- Xenophobia and harassment

Can look like: disengagement/increased avoidance, decreased performance, anxiety, overworking

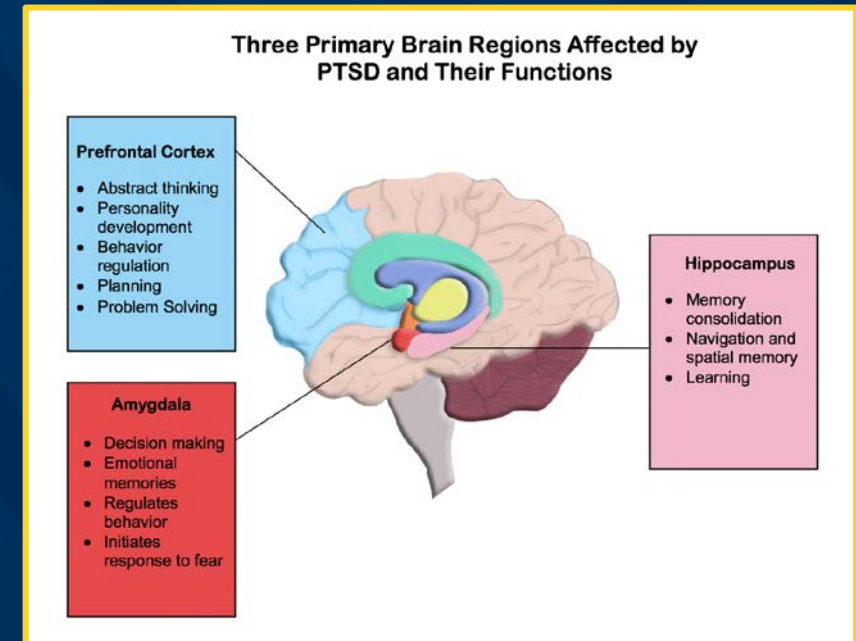


*from the 2020 SERU survey*

# Adapting to PTSE: Learning under traumatic stress

*Science!* how chronic (even low-grade) trauma affects memory:

- Low-road processing: amygdala and sensory memory
- Variability in memory: disruption in memory encoding
- Stress hormones: cortisol inhibits neocortex's ability to consolidate information AND mitigate fear response



**BOTTOM LINE: Some stress is good for learning!**  
**But chronic, ongoing stress that disempowers individuals prevents learning.**



# So...How do I set my students up for success?

did u take care of urself today?  
eat something? drink water? do  
something that makes u happy?  
allowed urself to feel whatever ur  
feeling?? huh?? do it



## ◦ Take care of yourself first!

*This is affecting us too.*

- Do less.
- Practice self-care and self-compassion.
- Maintain social networks.
- Get sleep!
- Seek help when you need it.

# How do I set my students up for success?

To address:

- **Developmental needs for forming identity and relationships:**
  - Create times and spaces to build relationships to relieve some isolation.
- **Developmental needs for career performance, self-efficacy, and authenticity:**
  - Validate and normalize your students' fears about the future.
  - Hold conversations about how the pandemic has affected/will affect their profession.
  - Frame the changes with them. Ask them for their opinions and perceptions.
- **Needs for minoritized and international students:**
  - Recognize and remember that they have additional stressors placed on them.
  - Remind students that you are there for them and will listen to them.
  - Reach out when you notice changes in these students: *"Hey I noticed you've been looking extra tired lately. Do you want to talk about it? I can listen."*
  - Have resources for these students on hand.

# How do I set my students up for success?

Best practices to address effects on memory and learning:

- **Mindfulness interventions** are simple, but powerful. Consider mindfulness moments to frame each class or a connecting activity relevant to your course material (will help with stress levels and kinetic learning).
  - Ideas: Carruth therapist can teach short mindfulness interventions
  - 2:1 breathing at the beginning and end of class
  - Visualization/guided imagery exercises
  - Recorded meditations (YouTube, Insight Timer)

# How do I set my students up for success?

Best practices to address effects on memory and learning:

- Post-traumatic growth (PTG) happens when people are able to make meaning from traumatic event. **Encourage storytelling** and finding language to describe their experiences.
- **Interface** their present experience with the content wherever possible. Make it relevant!
- Consider **implementing pass/fail structures** where possible.
- Consider **scaling content back in favor of more process/praxis** for essential material.
- **Be flexible.**



# Resources

- Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services  
[carruth.wvu.edu](http://carruth.wvu.edu)  
304-293-4431
- Adventure West Virginia  
[adventurewv.wvu.edu](http://adventurewv.wvu.edu)  
304-293-5221
- Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion  
[diversity.wvu.edu](http://diversity.wvu.edu)  
304-293-5600
- International Students and Scholars Services  
[isss.wvu.edu](http://isss.wvu.edu)  
304-293-3519
- Office of Accessibility  
[accessibilityservices.wvu.edu](http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu)  
304-293-6700



# CARE Team

Part of Campus and Community Life Office, the CARE team is a Behavioral Intervention Team working to reduce threats to the safety and well-being of students and the greater WVU community.

CARE Team Referral form

**CareTeam.wvu.edu** (not monitored 24/7)

For emergencies contact:

**UPD 304.293.2611 (COPS)**

**Carruth 304.293.4431**

Feel free to reach out for questions and support before or after submitting a referral.

**304.293.5611** or **careteam@mail.wvu.edu**



# Carruth Center Services Spring 2021

- Outreach
- Short-term counseling (individual and group)
- Psychiatry
- LD/ADHD Assessment
- Student Assistance Program
- Consultation with faculty
- Crisis Intervention
- Case Management
- My Student Support (MySSP)

me: im actually doing fine this week  
my therapist:  
me:  
me and my therapist:



***Please call (304) 293-4431 to speak with staff or set up an appointment***

# References

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- Lepore, S. J., and Revenson, T. A. (2006). *Resilience and posttraumatic growth: Recovery, resistance, and reconfiguration*. New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.