

EH 101

Final

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What a Difference a Day Makes

Taylor Covington, a researcher for *The Zebra*, writes an alarming statistic stating that a whopping 73% of college students has experienced, on campus, a mental health crisis.

(Covington). When people hear the words ‘mental health’ they tend to shy away from such a sensitive topic. Every single person has mental health so why is it so hard to talk about? Why is mental health such a big problem that is not acknowledged like other illnesses? Mental health affects all demographics; thus, it is important for everyone to maintain their mental health.

Colleges getting more involved in their students’ care could help prevent suicides and other mental health crises. The solution I propose is allowing, by law, for students to have mental health days to better both mental and physical health in college students.

College students tend to struggle with low mental health because of the severe stress of academic success while also working a part time job and having a social life. With this being said, college students should be given opportunities to heighten their mental health. Mental health is a top factor for the cause of suicides in the United States. According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, 90% of suicide victims have experienced symptoms of a mental health condition (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI]). Mental health is taking too many lives in this country and only a few college universities are doing something to bring awareness to and try to counteract this awful statistic. Mark Stibich, PhD, from Verywell Health states that suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people aged 20-24 (Stibich).

As stated previously, 90% of suicides are from low mental health issues. This should be evidence enough that this is a major problem that needs to be addressed. Instead of being shy to talk about mental health, we should be willing and open to talk about it. Mental health isn't a secret, and everyone has it so why is it so hard to talk about? With making mental health a normal topic, more people can understand the severity of it and how serious mental health should be taken. It could also lead to people realizing that they have a mental health condition that needs to be treated. Many great and progressive things such as this could happen simply by making mental health a normal topic and not such a hushed one. But there is much more to be done than just making mental health a normal conversational topic.

In order to counteract such a prominent issue among college students, university administration should start educating students on mental health by doing conferences and offering on-campus therapy and outreach. The universities should start instilling how to take care of mental health to their students such as asking for help, taking a break, or talking about their feelings. Last but certainly not least, all college universities should implement mental health days for each of their students. One must remember that in order to take breaks without stress, there needs to be an understanding that taking a break will not result in some kind of punishment.

The first thing that should be done in order to have mental health days implemented is to educate the faculty and staff of all universities about mental health and what it is. The institutions could offer videos or speakers to come and speak to them to help them understand how to help people with low mental health and how it effects their students. There are free videos on YouTube to help spread awareness and understanding of mental health that could be

offered to the administration staff. An example of these videos is, 'Stop the Stigma: Why it's important to talk about Mental Health, Heather Sarkis' (TED Talk 9:19).

A good portion of the older generation may not be aware of mental health as much as the newer generations are. Therefore, they sometimes don't understand the need for mental health days. A hall monitor in a high school in Colorado states, "No, I don't think it is necessary for students to have mental health days; life is already stressful itself. I'm stressed and I still attend my job. Over time you need to learn how to deal with it and not use that as an excuse." (Mesfin) This quote highlights the stigma that some people hold over mental health. Most people are told to 'tough it out' or 'it's just in your head' and that is not what someone who struggles with mental health needs to hear. Universities should make sure that all of their faculty and staff understand just how serious mental health is and that in turn, will help students greatly. After being educated, the university could hold information tables with people who are well versed in mental health and can offer information about mental health such as signs and treatments. With having students understand mental health, it could lead them to seek help for their mental health. As stated previously, highlighting mental health could lead to someone realize that they may have a mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression. This could lead the student to seek treatment for their mental health and in succession, heightening their mental health.

The final part of my solution is implementing mental health days. Mental health days should be implemented in all college universities. With low mental health being such a wide array of different symptoms and causes that differ from person to person, a mental health day could be lots of things. A mental health day could be a day where the student doesn't have to worry about the stress of completing schoolwork that day or simply just a day where the student

spends time with their loved ones so that they feel loved and understood. With people who struggle with depression some days it is very hard to leave one's bed. If a person is struggling with depression and they feel they can't get out of bed, they shouldn't have to worry about missing class and how that could affect their grade. Those students should be able to take that day off and focus on themselves and their wellbeing.

Mental health also ties in with physical health. With anxiety attacks most people feel like they are having a heart attack or with depression they could feel very fatigued. With this being said, shouldn't mental health also be treated as physical health? If one were to get a stomach bug, they would stay out of school for a day or two, but what if they are going through a depressive episode? Both of those instances should be treated equally. Mental health days should also be recorded just like if one is out for a sick day. With each of these days being recorded it could help the institution see if their students are struggling and could usher them to help their students with their mental health. With taking a mental health day, one should always notify their institution just as they would a sick day. Another great thing about allowing mental health days is that it doesn't cost anything. Sure, therapy and counseling does have costs such as the cost of one not working but the student's life should be more important than the money lost from them missing a few days for mental health. What if every school had a mental health counselor? A person who has been educated in psychology and mental health could make waves in a student's life who struggles with low mental health. After taking mental health days, students should be allowed ample time to complete any missed assignments and should receive the same amount of opportunity as all other students. Mental health days should be 100% excused and

accepted in every college university in the United States and with implementing these few low-cost things we could reach that goal very quickly and it will change lives.

Hailey Hardcastle, a student activist from Oregon created a law that mandated excused mental health days for students. Hailey's story has made waves for students who struggle with mental health. Hailey was featured on Ted Talk and spoke about her mental health journey and how her parents helped her with giving her mental health days off from school. Hailey states, "This bill allows student to take mental health days off of school the same way you would a physical health day." The law that Hailey introduced has led to a spread of activism about mental health days. Now, more students are starting to use their voice about mental health days and how they need them. Hailey's solution is a great step in the right direction, and it has worked, the law was passed, and mental health days have been implemented in Oregon. The students in Oregon have a much better grasp of mental health now thanks to Hailey Hardcastle (TED Talk 7:16).

When some people hear 'mental health days' they think of a way for them to get a free day out of school. While some students may take advantage of this opportunity, for the students that need these mental health days, it will help them monumentally. When the majority of students actually need the mental health days, it is worth the chance of a few students taking advantage. Each mental health day a student takes, it will be recorded. With mental health days being recorded, it can help the universities pinpoint the students who are struggling the most and reach out to them. With low mental health being the leading cause of suicide, helping those students out that do struggle with low mental health is substantially greater than focusing on the students who may or may not take advantage of mental health days.

In conclusion, mental health should be taken seriously. Students should not have to worry about school when they are going through a mental health crisis so every college university should implement mental health days that are fully excused and should allow the students to make up any missed work. The administrations of each institution should be educated in mental health to better understand their students. Mental health must be de-stigmatized. Universities should spread mental health awareness to make it known that it is a real problem. Students should express the importance of mental health to their institutions and explain to them that they deserve mental health days. Simply by showing the alarming statistics of the suicide rates due to mental health could spark inspiration for them to better their student's well-being. After all, if the universities really care about their students, they should care about their mental state too.

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