

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

COUNSELOR

CONFERENCE

Opening up about mental health in the UC application

Disclaimer

We are not mental health professionals. The point of this presentation is to share mental health trends we have seen in the UC application and to share tips on how you as a counselor can help guide students to share their experiences in the UC application.



Ice breaker

How confident do you feel about helping a student disclose mental health challenges in the UC application?



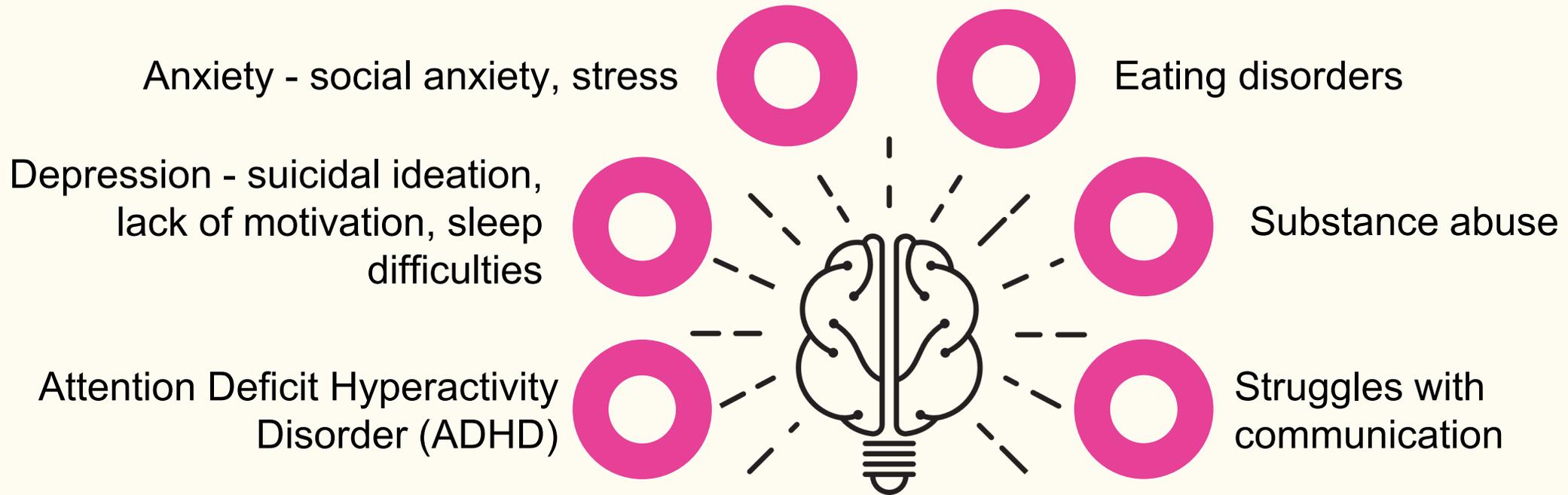
What is mental health?

“Mental health is the foundation for emotions, thinking, communication, learning, resilience, hope, and self-esteem. Mental health is also key to relationships, personal and emotional well-being, and contributing to community or society. Mental health is a component of overall well-being. It can influence and be influenced by physical health.”

- American Psychiatric Association



Mental health topics



Not an extensive list

Comprehensive review

GPA

Academic, A-G courses
- additional points for
UC-approved honors

Honors

Number of &
performance in UC-
approved honors

Opportunities

Relative to high school
opportunities available

Talents & awards

Special talents &
achievements in a
particular field

Accomplishments

In light of special
circumstances &
challenges

List of all review factors:



Conversations on mental health

According to a Pew Research Center survey:

61% of teens feel a lot of pressure to get good grades

- Academics was by far the biggest pressure point found in the survey, with about half as many teens saying they felt a lot of pressure to look good (29%) and to fit in socially (28%)



Mental health trends in the UC application

Academic
performance

Burnout

Trauma
dumping

COVID
pandemic

Mental health in the activities and awards section

Activity and awards

- Titles
- Descriptions - which need to set context to the reader

Best practice:

- A lack of opportunity to be in a structured group or activity
- Support group/counseling
- Honors or awards earned for success in overcoming or working through mental health triggers

Case study – Activities and awards

| Title | Description | Grade Level | School Year Hrs/Wk | Weeks per Year | Summer Hrs |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|
| Group Member, The SAFE Alliance | Met weekly with mentor and fellow peers to increase emotion regulation and communication skills, identify qualities of healthy relationships, challenge unhealthy gender norms, learn skills for supportive relationships, and experience a sense of belonging and connection | 12 | 2 | 8 | 0 |

Mental health in the PIQs

Personal Insight Questions

- Any response can highlight mental health struggles
- All answers need to remain in the scope of the question asked

Best practice:

- Disclosure with context and/or outcome
- Disclosure with context and how they are working through it
- Going in depth about an activity or award listed prior in application

Case study – Personal insight questions (PIQ)

Example #1 – Academic subject that inspires

- Student writes about being in hospitals frequently due to mother's illness
- Mentions that they were inspired to take AP Biology and a health course at local community college
- Driven to learn about healthcare advancements and to help future patients of their own

Example #2 – Greatest talent or skill

- The applicant has been able to balance a full course load and part-time employment to supplement family expenses
- At work, they were only trained to help in preparation of food items but they took initiative to learn all aspects of business operation
- Their greatest skill is the ability to learn and master new skills

Case study – Personal insight questions (PIQ)

Example #3 – Most significant challenge

- The applicant discloses struggle with a mental health diagnosis due to strict upbringing
- Grades and activities in 10th grade felt like they were slipping due to the depressed state the student was in
- School counselor became a mentor to student, encouraging them to get the help they needed and grades improved in 11th

Example #4 – Make your community a better place

- Applicant was a recent immigrant and was afraid to talk to people until they were welcomed by a church youth group
- The group offered friendships and community that helped them make adjustments to life in America
- They are now able to invite other recent immigrants into the same environment as they adjust in their new community

Mental health in the additional comments

Additional comments (optional)

- There are 2 spots for additional comments: Within the Academic history section and the Personal Insight Questions

Best practice:

- Students can utilize these sections as a way to add any additional information to the application that they didn't get a chance to add before
- For the 'Academic history' section, sharing things like how the transition to remote learning has affected the student
- For the PIQ section, reflect on the application as a whole. What was not asked of the student, that could provide helpful context?

Case study- Additional comments in Academic history section

Academic history details

- 16 year long courses completed
 - 12 A's
 - 2 B's – All in grade 10
 - 2 C's – All in grade 10
- GPA is 4.0
- Honors level courses: 3 taken

Admissions will ask:

- What was available to the student?
- Did something happen in 10th grade?
- Why were there B's and C's earned?
 - Will look at 'Academic history' additional comments for answers

Case study- Additional comments in Academic history section

Academic history additional comments

- Student explains how their sophomore grades were negatively impacted by the loss of a loved one and their struggle with the loss over a six-month period of anxiety. They mention being able to make up most of those grades with a strong junior year, after a successful round of mental health counseling

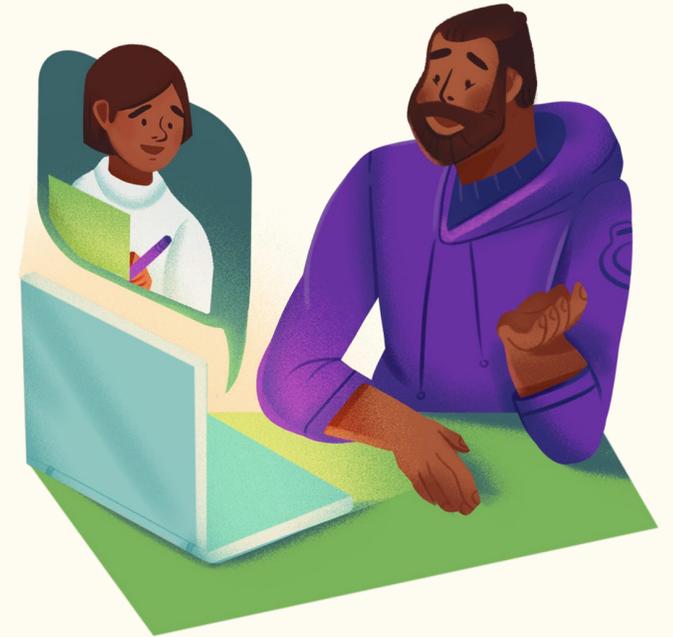
Case study – Additional comments in the PIQ section

Additional comments

- Student mentions their desire to be more involved in extracurricular activities during school but COVID-19 negatively impacted opportunities
- They shifted focus towards academics to make sure grades were not also negatively impacted by COVID-19

Tips for working with your students

- Recognizing the systems students are operating in
- Students are their biggest critics – recognize the culture and share a different way of thinking
- Make sure that the particular topic the student is talking about answers the personal insight question or explained why this is shared within the additional comment section



Tips for working with your students

- Wording matters
- As readers we cannot infer or draw conclusions. It is important that a student clearly makes the connections themselves
- Be as concise as possible



Resources at UC



Disability resource centers



Mental health services



Community based healing



Basic needs centers

“Promise me you’ll always remember: You’re braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

— Christopher Robin

————— **Thank you!** —————