

Teaching Students With Psychiatric Disabilities

Definition

Psychiatric/psychological disabilities encompass a wide range of mental disorders characterized by cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dysfunction. Psychiatric disorders seen in college settings may include anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, mood disorders and schizophrenia. These disorders are generally controlled by utilizing a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

Misconception

There is a misconception that people suffering from mental illnesses are violent. This mistaken belief adds to the stigma of mental illness. The vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent, and the majority of violent acts are carried out by persons who are not mentally ill. People with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators and are more likely to hurt themselves than to hurt others.

Possible Characteristics and Educational Implications

- Heightened anxieties, fears, suspicions or blaming others
- Marked personality change over time
- Confused or disorganized thinking; strange or grandiose ideas
- Poor concentration, decision-making, or memory
- Prolonged feelings of depression or apathy
- Extreme highs or lows in mood

- Denial of obvious problems and a strong resistance to offers of help
- Difficulty interacting with others
- Social withdrawal
- Thinking or talking about suicide
- Negative side effects of medication

Suggestions and Instructional Strategies for Faculty

- Provide clear guidelines and expectations about the course, including time-lines
- Establish behavioral expectations for all students, and set clear limits for acceptable classroom conduct
- Post rules, schedules, and assignments
- Provide reminders and call attention to any changes in the schedule
- Make sure directions are given step by step.
- Give directions both verbally and in writing.
- Combine lectures with classroom demonstration, visuals and videos
- Work together with the student and the Disability Resource Center to ensure a successful experience for the student

Possible Academic Accommodations

- Preferred seating (i.e. front row, next to the door, in the back of the room)
- Reduced course load
- Extended exam time
- Access to class notes/note taker
- Use of tape recorder for lectures
- Distraction reduced test space
- Consideration for absences when disability is exacerbated

This document is a compilation of resources from the APA, BRCC, CCDI, DO-IT and the DSM-IV



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