Dear Johns Hopkins Families,

December 2015

It is our pleasure to send you this edition of our Parent and Family eNewsletter. We hope you are enjoying the end of fall and looking forward to the winter holidays. You may notice some changes to this issue. We have decided to make these newsletters more tightly focused by asking the experts at JHU to share their knowledge and perspectives with you on topics of interest to students and their families. For this edition, focused on mental health, we turn to Dr. Matthew Torres, Executive Director of the Counseling Center.

Thank you for your involvement and support!

Sincerely,
Kevin G. Shollenberger, Vice Provost for Student Affairs

Dear Johns Hopkins Families,

As Director of the JHU Counseling Center, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to share my thoughts about ways in which you can support your student to have the best possible experience at JHU. My goals are to offer possible suggestions for ways you might support your child through their college experience, to help you recognize signs that might suggest that professional emotional/psychological assistance is needed, and to highlight helpful campus resources.

Attending college creates opportunities for tremendous growth and development, and these rarely occur without struggle and stress. College can challenge students’ coping resources in a wide variety of ways – challenging academic classes and course load, increased independence and responsibilities, having to make decisions on important matters such as money, academic majors, adjusting to college and later adjusting to leaving college, and building and maintaining social relationships, to name a few. In addition, college life lacks the structure that home and school provided. Combined, these are unavoidably stressful, and for some people, they can feel overwhelming.

You can support your student in one or more of the following ways:

- Trust your parenting skills and the bond between you and your student.
- Listen supportively.
- Ask them how you can help, and help them to make the best decisions for them (for example, by asking them questions to help them sort through the pros and cons of their perceived options), while communicating that you want to help them because you care and not because you believe they are incapable of making their own decisions.
- Explicitly encourage resilience - the continued determined effort toward a valued goal despite challenges or setbacks.
Emphasize that struggle and failure are almost certainly a part of even the most successful careers/lives and can make us stronger people.

Send good old-fashioned care packages (maybe with a mix of healthy snacks and goodies).

Model and encourage patience.

Offer praise and reassurance.

Try to encourage the use of the same coping strategies that have helped your student through previous challenges, such as exercise, time outdoors in nature, humor, gratitude, etc.

Help them stay in touch with their goals and sense of purpose - the things that can make their struggle worthwhile to them.

I expect that all of our students will face challenging and stressful situations during their time in college. My sincere hope is that they all, with your help and sometimes with the help of the caring JHU professionals in the offices outlined in this newsletter, will not only successfully navigate but also learn and grow from these challenges. The resources and tips outlined below are intended to provide families with the information they may need to recognize issues when they arise and offer effective guidance and support. I wish you and your families the very best.

Sincerely,

Matthew Torres, PhD
Executive Director
Counseling Center

Resources on Campus

To promote connectedness and combat loneliness, isolation, homesickness, encourage your student to get involved:

- The Office of Student Leadership and Involvement supports more than 300 clubs and organizations
- The Center for Social Concern houses over 60 student-led community service groups through which students can volunteer.

To address stress related to academics and future career, encourage them to take advantage of the following:

- The Office of Academic Support provides small group tutoring, PILOT (peer-led team learning) groups, and one-on-one coaching in academic skills such as time management and note taking.
- The Career Center provides help ranging from selecting a major, to writing a resume, networking, job searching, and interviewing techniques.
- The Writing Center offers undergraduate and graduate students free, individual conferences with experienced tutors, all of whom are trained to consult on written work in the humanities and social sciences.
- Students should utilize the office hours made available by professors and teaching assistants.
Ways to recognize when your student may need emotional/psychological assistance:

It is important to observe changes from your son or daughter’s previous behavior. These signs may include a drop in class attendance, a drop in quality of class work, a more generally tense or sad appearance, and the development of inappropriate or bizarre responses such as talking off-the-subject and rambling or laughing inappropriately.

Just about everyone experiences sadness from time to time, but persons suffering from significant levels of depression may exhibit an array of symptoms, such as:

- insomnia or change in sleep patterns
- inability to concentrate
- change in appetite
- loss of ability to experience happiness or pleasure
- apathy
- crying
- poor personal hygiene
- anti-social behavior
- loss of self esteem

Although many students experience high stress at college, some develop emotional problems related to anxiety. Students suffering from anxiety problems can experience panic attacks or extreme fearfulness of specific situations. Exposure to a traumatic experience can also cause a student to develop anxiety problems, symptoms of which include flashbacks, avoiding things associated with the traumatic event, and being easily startled. When symptoms such as these interfere with a student’s life, they may be experiencing an anxiety disorder.

Potential signs of suicidality may include:

- Talking about harming oneself
- Speaking about “wanting out” or “ending it all,” even in passing
- Taking unnecessary or life-threatening risks
- Giving away personal possessions
- A sudden apparent improvement in mood or outlook in someone who is depressed

If you recognize that your son or daughter is feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of college, or is potentially struggling with some form of mental illness, please encourage them to seek support at:

**Counseling Center (410-516-8278)**

We provide initial assessments, individual and group counseling, psychiatric consultation and medication management, and referral assistance for Homewood and Peabody undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in full-time programs.

**Important Dates**
Wednesday, December 9th - Friday, December 18th: Final Exam Period
Saturday, December 19th - Sunday, January 3rd, 2016: Mid-Year Vacation
December 19th: Residence Halls Close at Noon
Sunday, January 3rd: Residence Halls Re-Open at Noon
Monday, January 4th - Friday, January 22nd: Intersession
Monday, January 18th: Observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday; no intersession classes
Monday, January 25th: First day of classes

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