



Resilience Through Challenges

*A Mental Health Guide for
Leading Classroom Practice*

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During the year of COVID-19, the university community and the global community experienced heightened stress and a broad range of impacts to their well-being, the long-term mental health effects of which are difficult to predict.

As we prepare for a return to in-person learning at USC, we do know—from the 2020 Student Well-being Index Survey—that the experiences during pandemic varied greatly among students. Overall, alcohol and other drugs decreased, as did sexual assault. Some students thrived in supportive environments at home, and some students experienced multiple layers of hardship, impacted by factors including:

- Illness and loss of family members
- Job loss and increased financial stress
- Racism, homophobia and transphobia and other forms of bias
- Isolation from support network of peers
- Duress from living in a stressful or non-supportive home environment

This guide is intended to help faculty and staff navigate this context as we return to in person interactions with students.

Best Practice:

Naming the Hardship

Providing space for students to acknowledge the impacts of the pandemic can help diffuse anxiety and manage stressors. A brief 10-minute “check-in” at the beginning of class may be a helpful way of addressing the topic, creating connection between classmates, understanding the collective experiences that are a reaction to hardship and loss, all while validating and normalizing mental health.

- One way to approach this could be to start a class with a simple exercise at the beginning of a class: Pick a word that describes how you’re feeling right now. Allow students to discuss their state of mind with each other.
- Before the close of the class, spend another few minutes to encourage self-care in a “check out” segment: Name one thing that you will do this week to de-stress or enjoy yourself.

If the course is on Zoom, you can use the chat feature or polling to check in and check out.

Proactively allowing students to name their difficulties, and encouraging them to see the university as a place where they can get support early in the academic year, can be a valuable upstream tool to prevent student distress downstream later on.

The Warm Handoff:

Connecting to Campus Resources

If a student is in distress, respond with empathy, and know which resources to connect them with. They may or may not be willing to speak about their situation; and you may not be the person to “fix” the problem. What you can do is connect them to the next person who can help:

Counseling and Mental Health Services (CMH) in USC Student Health:

The 213-740-9355 (WELL) phone line is 24/7. During operational hours, a **counselor on triage** is available for help.

- Students can be **walked over to talk to a counselor on triage** if they are with you in person and experiencing a crisis. (Calling first can ensure a triage counselor will be prepared to assist.) Email contact is studenthealth@usc.edu.)
- Faculty and staff can also call this number and **speak with the counselor on triage to consult about how to support and assist a distressed student.**

Trojans Care for Trojans (TC4T) in Campus Support and Intervention:

If you are concerned about a student who has exhibited signs of distress, you may submit a message to **TC4T** (<https://bit.ly/tc4t>) and a member of that team will follow up with the student. Email contact is uscsupport@usc.edu.

Basic Needs Office:

This **basic needs office** in the Student Equity and Inclusivity Programs office assists students with needs related to food insecurity, housing, and financial insecurity. Email basicneeds@usc.edu to connect students with services.

Additional Resources

- **“You Can Help: Recognizing and Responding to Distress in Students”** gatekeeper training is available for university staff and faculty upon request. Arrangements with a facilitator can be requested by completing this online [request form](#).
- **Presentations on student mental health** are available to faculty and staff, and can also be requested by completing the online [request form](#).
- The **“Gold Folder”** provides guidance for USC faculty and staff in identifying and responding to students in distress, and additional support offices.
- If you need assistance accessing these services or have any additional questions and inquiries, please contact studenthealth@usc.edu.

Faculty can provide profound and impactful modeling to students as we return to a new normal, imparting lessons on resiliency and community support in our return to campus life.

Prioritizing Your Own Mental Health

Prioritizing our own self care, and modeling flexibility, curiosity, and connecting can help students thrive.

[The Center for Work and Family Life](#) is a resource for faculty and staff for information and services related to mental health and support.

The [Care for the Caregivers](#) program provides services and support to employees of Keck Medicine of USC.