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**Accommodating Students with Mental Health Impairments**

**Adapted from http://askjan.org/media/HiEdStudentsPsych.html**

Students with mental health impairments may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all students with mental health impairments will need accommodations in Job Corps and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of accommodation possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations does the student experience?
2. How do these limitations affect the student's ability to perform in the classroom, in residential setting or participate in Job Corps activities?
3. What accommodations are already available to help reduce or eliminate the problems caused by the student's limitations?
4. Are all possible resources being used to determine accommodations?
5. Can the student provide information on possible accommodation solutions?

Special note about housing: Students with mental health impairments may need housing accommodations, such as a private room, permission to use a service animal, or special room location (nearest to a bathroom, nearest/farthest from entrance, near residential advisor’s office).

**Accommodation Ideas:**

**Managing Stress and Emotions:**

Students with mental health impairments may experience difficulty managing stress and emotions which can impact academic and social functioning.

* Allow breaks as needed to practive stress reduction techniques
* Identify support person student can reach out to when feeling overwhelmed
* Provide peer mentor
* Excuse student from student assemblies and group activities

**Time Management:**

Students with mental health impairments may experience difficulty managing time, which can affect their ability to mark time as it passes incrementally by minutes and hours. It can also affect their ability to gauge the proper amount of time to set aside for certain tasks. It may be difficult to prepare for, or to remember, activities that occur later in the week, month, or year.

* Divide large assignments into several small tasks
* Give ample time to complete in-class and out-of-class assignments
* Provide a checklist of assignments in and out of the classroom
* Assist students with their own techniques for time management:
  + Develop a color-coded system (each color represents a task, or event, or level of importance)
  + Help students add entries on their calendar or on their cellphone calendars with reminders. Double-check entries to ensure dates and times were entered correctly

**Memory:**

Students with mental health impairments may experience memory deficits, which can affect their ability to complete tasks, remember personal responsibilities, or recall daily actions or activities.

* Provide written instructions
* Allow additional time for new tasks
* Audio recording the class
* Cellphone alerts or reminders for tasks

**Maintaining Concentration:**

Students with mental health impairments may experience decreased concentration, which can be attributed to auditory distractions (that can be heard) and/or visual distractions (that can be seen).

* To reduce auditory distractions:
  + Purchase a noise canceling headset
  + Provide a white noise machine in the dorm
  + Relocate student's workspace or room away from audible distractions
  + Redesign student's workspace or room to minimize audible distractions
* To reduce visual distractions:
  + Reduce clutter in the student's classroom or dorm environment
  + Redesign student's workspace or room to minimize visual distractions
  + Relocate student's workspace or room away from visual distractions

**Organization and Prioritization:**

Students with mental health impairments may have difficulty getting or staying organized, or have difficulty prioritizing tasks and activities.

* Develop color-code system for files, projects, or activities
* Use chart to identify class activities and assignments
* Use a peer to reinforce organization skills

**Social Skills:**

Students with mental health impairments may have limitations in adaptive skills, such as communicating with others, or exhibiting appropriate social skills. This might manifest itself as interrupting others, demonstrating poor listening skills, not making eye contact when communicating, or inability to correctly read body language or understand innuendo.

* Demonstrate appropriate behavior in the classroom
* Develop a simple, but appropriate, code of conduct for your classroom:
  + Rules for tardiness or leaving early
  + Rules for engaging in debate or discussion
  + Rules for good classroom citizenship
* Encourage students to minimize personal conversation, or move personal conversation away from class or dorm room.
* Promote sensitivity training (disability awareness) in the classroom and dorm.
* Encourage all students to model appropriate social skills
* Adjust method of communication to best suit the student's needs
  + - Slow the rate of speech
    - Simplify or minimize verbal communication
    - Allow ample time for response to verbal communication / questions
    - Encourage student to question / repeat back information received
    - Be patient

**Taking Tests:**

Students with mental health impairments may need accommodations when taking tests.

**Lack of Concentration or Organization:**

Test-takers may be distracted or disorganized when taking a test.  Possible accommodations include:

* Testing in a private room
* Providing extended time
* Providing a reader
* Providing the test on tape
* Reducing/eliminating distractions
* Allowing breaks
* Seating test-taker away from doors or windows, and other distractions

**Reading Print Material:**

Test-takers may be unable to read test materials. Possible accommodations include:

* Providing a reader for the test-taker
* Providing test on tape/cd-rom
* Providing extended time
* Administering test in private room
* Giving instructions in bold print
* Allowing the use of a line guide or ruler to keep place in test book or answer sheet
* Testing on computer with voice output
* Using symbols or pictures where appropriate
* Color-coding test by sections or subjects
* Putting multiple choice in bold

**Panic Attacks:**

Test-takers may experience panic attacks during test administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with ADD and psychological impairments.  Possible accommodations include:

* Allowing frequent breaks
* Extending time
* Providing a private room
* Providing a regular room – sit in back of room so test taker can leave if necessary
* Allowing test-taker to become familiar with test environment
* Allowing test-taker to choose own seat
* Having a plan of action for test administrators to deal with emergencies such as passing out, having seizure, or conduct problems

**Other Resources**

https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/disability/Pages/PsyDAccommodations.aspx

[http://AskJAN.org/media/testingaccomm.html](http://askjan.org/media/testingaccomm.html)