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# Mental Health Matters

If you're struggling with stress or the big sad, you're not alone

➡ Page 5

## ➡ INSIDE

- Self-care tips / 8
- Q&A with a college therapist / 10
- Journaling / 14

# LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH.

In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a public health advisory on what he called an "urgent and emerging youth mental health crisis."

In his advisory report, he cited a 2019 study that found one in three students — and half of females — reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an increase of 40% in the last decade.

This public health issue has been intensified by the pandemic.

Negative mental health symptoms can be anything from anxiety during test-taking to undiagnosed disorders to

every occasional bad day in between.

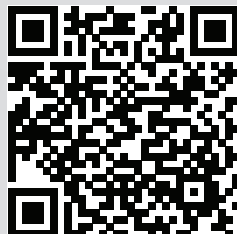
If you are like us and have felt any of these things at any time, don't worry. We got you.

The conversation around mental health is opening up more but we are here because there are individuals who are still struggling. There is no shame in needing support. We are all human. We want students to know that they have resources they are able to utilize and that it's okay to ask for help. Remember to do things that make you happy and it's okay to take a break.

—el Don *staff*



Scan here to listen to our Mental Health episode of The Distraction podcast on Spotify!



10%

OF ADULTS SURVEYED  
IN JUNE 2020 HAD  
SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED  
SUICIDE WITHIN THE  
PAST MONTH

48%

OF COLLEGE STUDENTS  
REPORTED MODERATE OR  
SEVERE PSYCHOLOGICAL  
STRESS IN 2021

1 IN 5

AMERICANS WILL  
EXPERIENCE A MENTAL  
ILLNESS IN A GIVEN YEAR

SOURCES CDC, JOURNAL OF AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

### VIBE CHECK

Answers to the question: "How are ya feeling today?"

5

### EVERYBODY HURTS

It's hard being a student. Here's how to notice the signs and when to seek help.

By Miranda Navarro

8

### SELF CARE TIPS

Ideas from across campus to get you through your next bad day.

10

### Q&A WITH COLLEGE PSYCHOLOGIST

Dr. Jill Kapil talks warning signs, stigmas and Health and Wellness Center services.

By Miranda Navarro

12

### Q&A WITH A PSYCH PROFESSOR

Professor Jeff Pedroza talks triggers, statistics and how to cope.

By Miranda Navarro

14

### HOW TO JOURNAL

If you don't know where to begin, students say start by writing it out.

By Lucero Garcia

15

### LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Last month, reporter Miranda Navarro asked students and faculty walking through the SAC campus how they're feeling.

how

"I'm feeling okay,  
kind of indifferent."  
—Leonardo

"Right now I'm feeling good, but that's just for today, talk to me tomorrow and that would be a different story."  
—Professor Marty Romero

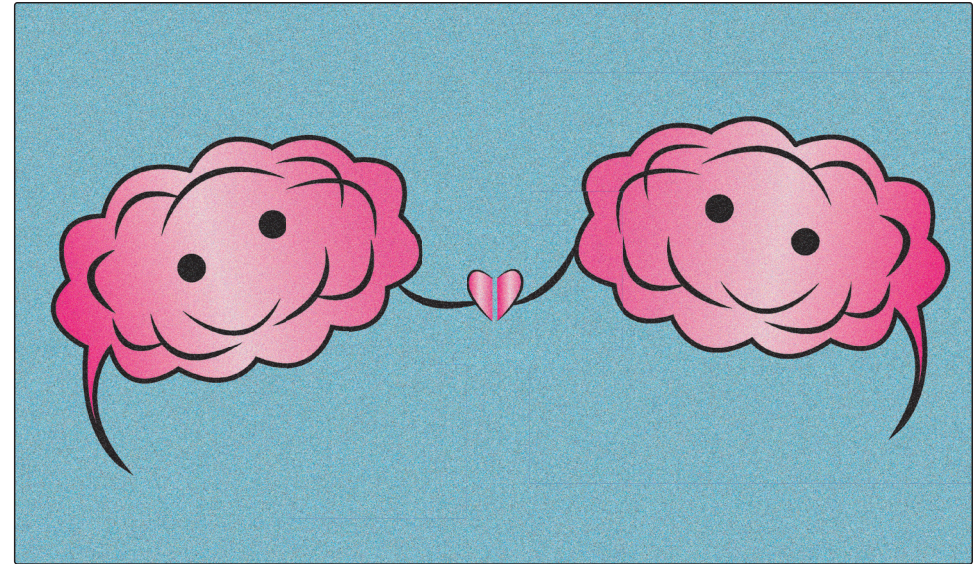
ya

"I am feeling blessed, I really can't complain. "  
—Jackson Cecil

feeling?

"I am struggling today...I have so much on my plate as a student and additional responsibilities...I had to drop one of my classes because I can't keep going with everything else going on and still succeed. So yeah, I'm struggling but I'm here and I'm here to work."  
—Anonymous

"Today I actually feel good for the first time in awhile, and I'm pretty happy about that."  
—Anonymous



## Everybody Hurts

STORY  
MIRANDA NAVARRO  
ILLUSTRATION  
EMILY HERNANDEZ

Nearly every study shows that college students' mental health has declined in the pandemic. Here's what you can do about it.

It's a foggy Tuesday morning and Veronica overslept for her 8 a.m. accounting class. She is anxiously rushing to class once again after oversleeping due to working late hours and staying up until 3 a.m. to do homework. This has become a pattern for her this fall, her first semester back on campus after the pandemic. Being a full time student with a full time job can be difficult and can quickly lead to burn out for some.

"This morning was really hard for me, I had a crying breakdown before class because it's really hard trying to work full time and go to school full time. I had to drop most of my classes because I couldn't do it anymore. It was too stressful and overwhelming."

said Veronica Frausto, a business major at Santa Ana College.

Veronica is just one of a growing number of community college students who are struggling to balance school, work, social life and their mental health. Surveys conducted in the last year and a half show that anxiety and depression have increased among college students, impacting between 40% and 60% of all respondents.

According to one survey done by BestColleges.com 95% of college students have experienced negative mental health symptoms since the beginning of the pandemic.

The term "Mental Health" includes any aspect of our emotional,



psychological and social well-being. Experts say the five most common mental diagnoses amongst the general public include: Depression, anxiety, Bipolar affective disorder, Schizophrenia and dementia.

"As a clinician and now professor, the most prevalent mental health issues I see today are anxiety and depression amongst our students," said Santa Ana College Psychology Professor Jeff Pedroza.

Pedroza said most students don't notice the symptoms of these issues right away because they are so busy with family, friends, work, partner or academic obligations. Most of the time, he said, our instinct is to tend to others first rather than ourselves.

One way to tend to yourself is to identify your triggers.

In mental health, a trigger is something that affects your

significantly alters your emotional well-being.

Environmental triggers factor into everyday life but can vary depending on the individual. Some examples include academic workload, finances, home life, homelessness and even seasonal changes.

But a trigger does not mean a diagnosis

"For one example a transition to remote learning and that adjustment period can trigger some of these symptoms and just because these symptoms are present doesn't mean you meet criteria for a diagnosis," said Dr. Jill Kapil SAC's lead psychologist. "It just means that your body and your mind is reacting to what's happening in your environment and that's what is triggering these specific symptoms."

So how do you know when "the big sad" needs a diagnosis?

Kapil says it may just be a low period which is normal, although it's important to pay attention to your emotional and mental state. Take note if you lose interest in activities you used to love, experience low mood, a change in sleep

and appetite or maybe thoughts of suicide. Kapil says if your symptoms last more than two weeks, it would meet the criteria for a depressive episode and may meet the criteria for a diagnosis.

**"Healing can come from so many different sources, it doesn't have to come from a mental health professional. The main goal is to find something that can start the process because everyone heals differently."**

—Cheron Zekavat, LMFT

emotional state, often causing overwhelm or distress. Major triggers can include loss of family members or friends, loss of employment, loss of a relationship, uncertainty or anything that



A diagnosis can help you identify what is going on and can help open up doors to seek help if necessary.

"Yeah a lot of times we just ignore those signs because we just have to work through them. I heard a definition of depression described to me years ago by a professor. 'Depression is anger turned inwards' and I thought what an interesting way of looking at the world. Those are some typical things people should look for." - said Pedroza

After identifying some of these symptoms and trying to find ways to take care of yourself, here are some examples: being mindful of your headspace, going for walks, listening to music, exercise, journaling, practicing breathing or relaxation techniques or reaching out for support from others.

Kapil says seeking help whether it be with a professional or not, is a very scary and vulnerable

thing. It takes a lot of strength to acknowledge that you may need help and recognizing that is the first step in the direction of growth. Also recognize that seeking help or support doesn't mean that something is wrong or that something is bad. It just means that you want that extra support when it comes to finding what may help you heal in the long run.

"Never give up, keep on going, although there is always gonna be ups and downs, just keep on pushing with life," said Veronica who was helped through a "big sad" by two therapy sessions at SAC's Health and Wellness Center.

"I know for me I didn't seek out help for a while because I thought people would look at me differently but we are all equal. We are all human, don't feel embarrassed or ashamed to seek out help because I'm sure a lot of people need it," Veronica said.

# self care tips

Don't seek validation from others, seek it within yourself, because at the end of the day, what you think about yourself is what matters.

—Leonardo

Music always helps me get through tough times. Depending on how I am feeling that day, I have certain playlists I listen to based off my mood.

—Anonymous

When I'm feeling low, or not feeling very good, I allow myself to feel those emotions, so I know I'm not blocking that out. When I'm finally able to go through those emotions, I like to go outside, go for a walk, I like to go to the beach, and that's really good therapy for me, and I like to talk to my friends. I think it's important to take care of yourself.

—Stephanie

I realize at my age now that I am much older I need to count on other people and that the most important thing to do is count on other people. Trying to find time to do things that I enjoy. Whether it's sitting with my wife, exercising or being with my daughter.

—Professor Marty Romero

Instead of worrying about others just take some time to think about yourself and what makes you feel empowered and what you are grateful for. I think it's important to take these steps to have a longer life. I feel like if you take those steps you will have a greater successful life and a long one at that.

—Jackson Cecil

I am a big fan of aromatherapy, and candles that just smell relaxing, and bath salts, not smoking them, but sitting in a bath. This is all the self care I have time for in my life, it may not be much, but it is what I like.

—Anonymous

# Interview with Dr. Jill Kapil

SAC's lead psychologist talks pandemic stress, environmental triggers and how the Health and Wellness Center can help you.

Interview by Miranda Navarro

## How are students' mental health being affected during this time?

I think it's been a combination of managing the pandemic, managing remote learning, managing varying schedules and then also for students who maybe had campus be more of a safe space to be able to come on and be away from their environments at home and just have a change of pace and environment and not having that at least in the beginning of the pandemic when we were all in quarantine was pretty impactful for students. Now that the vaccine is out and students are being vaccinated, mandates for masking have loosened and we are returning to more in person classes. I think that has helped students improve their mental health overall, just kind of having that space. However, I would say just the pandemic as a whole, just the transition to remote learning has increased stress, anxiety, low mood and depression for students because of the difficulty with the transition.

## What are some signs of depression or anxiety that may not be as common as the stereotypical ones?

So there is such a thing of having a period of sadness and not being diagnosed with depression. Depression itself is a diagnosis and so you have to meet a pretty strict criteria for having depressive episodes which are kind of ongoing low mood, loss of interest, loss in activities you once enjoyed, maybe some partial suicidal ideation, change in sleep and appetite. Typically that episode lasts almost 2 weeks or longer and that is then what would meet the criteria for a depressive episode which would then meet criteria for a diagnosis. However, our students and the general population often experience different events or different triggering experiences or environments that contribute to low mood or changes in sleep & appetite. Or for example a transition to remote learning and that adjustment period can trigger some of these symptoms and just because these symptoms are present doesn't mean you meet criteria for a diagnosis it just means that your body and your mind is reacting to what's

happening in your environment and that's what is triggering these specific symptoms. So I think it's important to distinguish the difference between having that diagnosis where it's ongoing and it's impacting your day to day functioning versus experiencing symptoms that you may just notice that may come and go based on what's happening in your environment.

## What are some common coping mechanisms someone may use?

Some of the most common ones tended to be spending time with their support system family and friends, listening to music, exercise, walking, going to the gym, swimming, practicing a lot of breathing, meditation or relaxation exercise. Allowing their body and mind to kind of slow down and be in the present moment. Practice letting go of those worry thoughts and focusing on the areas they have control of versus focusing on the past that they no longer can change or focusing on a future that hasn't arrived. Oftentimes both the past and the future are areas we don't have control of, bringing that sense of control back to the present moment so they can feel empowered in their day to day functioning.

## Why is it important to take care of yourself?

There is a saying that goes around about how we can't pour from an empty cup so often times we are so busy taking care of others we forget to take care of ourselves. There is so much going on with our day to day lives, with balancing academics, family, relationships, work, finances, careers and navigating our health. It is extremely important to manage our well being and practice that self care so you have that foundation.

## Health and Wellness Center

Your \$19 health fee gives you access to services for the following mental health issues:

Anger management	Life transitions
Anxiety or stress management	LGBTQ related support
Depression/lack of motivation	Self-esteem/self-worth
Domestic violence	Sexual assault
Eating disorders	Sleep disturbances
Family and social relationships	Substance use and abuse

### LOCATION

Johnson Center Room 110  
(714) 564-6216  
Sachealth\_Center@sac.edu

**FREE THERAPY:** Your health fee includes up to 10 free in-person or telehealth sessions per semester, depending on need and availability.

*For psychological services (either face to face or telehealth) you can call (714) 564-6216 or email SACHealth\_Center@sac.edu*

# Interview with Prof. Pedroza

Psychology professor Jeff Pedroza knows what happens in the brain when we're depressed. So we asked him about it.

Interview by Miranda Navarro

## What are the most common mental health illnesses?

The most common as a former clinician and now professor that I used to see as very prevalent today are anxiety and depression. Those two issues kind of go hand in hand with most of our students.

## What are some things that may cause depression or anxiety?

Just a sense of feeling overwhelmed. As a student here, most students have courses, they are employed, they have financial constraints, they have family obligations, there is a variety of stressors that they are facing and if you add into that mix the pandemic. That has just been a complicating variable where people are lacking energy and many people are feeling pretty helpless and hopeless. I think that compounds the fact that normally we have anxiety and depression as we are getting through life and now it just seems to be exacerbated.

## Would you say genetics play a part in mental health?

Oh yea absolutely, very much like we see in other forms of physical illness as an example of hypertension or diabetes. We also see patterns of genetics playing a role in carrying on anxiety disorders and especially with depression so it's not unheard of to have grandma deal with some issues of depression, mom dealing with some issues and then daughter. It's not a guarantee that if we have it in our genetic history that we will get that. It just means that we have a predisposition to have some of these issues. Very much like we have with high blood pressure or diabetes.

## Do you think there are ever any signs that indicate that your mental health is declining?

Yea a lot of times we just ignore those signs because we just have to work through them. Things to look for are inability to sleep more so than usual, inability to concentrate, missing important meetings or appointments. Finding your mood fluctuating drastically or finding yourself constantly feeling angry and not being certain to what's causing that. I heard a definition of depression described to me years ago by a professor. 'Depression is anger turned inwards' and I thought what an interesting way of looking at the world. Those are some typical things people should look for.

## Why isn't exercise enough?

If you are suffering from depression the last thing you want to do is get up and do some cardio. It is beneficial, it will change your bio chemistry and you will feel better but you need help and sometimes it's our friends or family who are going to be giving us support. Taking us to our appointments, getting us to go for that brisk walk. But it's more than just the exercise, we have to watch our diet. It's too easy to turn to fast foods, carbohydrates, alcohol or other substances as a way of masking how we are feeling or just trying to put a bandaid over it. We kind of have to focus on our attitudes, quality sleep, good diet, exercise, support networks and also taking advantage of the services provided to us on campus. Students have already prepaid for those services through the student health fee.

## Are environmental triggers a big deal?

It's an everyday thing. I mean we have this thing in psychology called our daily hassles. We have traffic, inability to order things online, having stress at work. Certainly those people in the health profession are feeling extreme stress because they are overloaded with a number of patients and not even able to service those patients who are not suffering with covid. We have so little sense of control in our world. So many things that can go wrong but we have to try to focus on the things that can go right too. We should implement daily practices of gratitude. If you are able to find one thing to be thankful for it really changes your outlook on life.





# How to start your own journal

Not good at talking it out? Some students prefer writing it down. Here are their tips for fast-acting therapeutic relief.

by Lucero Garcia

## Step 1: BUY A JOURNAL    Step 2: FIND YOUR STYLE

Journals can be bought at your local 99 Cents Only store. If you are looking for a journal that already has words, you can find some at Target, and Walmart. There are dozens of different types of journals, and with that, many styles of journaling.

There are many ways you can journal to relieve your emotions and stress. For example, journaling can be writing down your thoughts and feelings to drawing, to writing poetry or going full arts and crafts to decorate a part of the notebook.

## Step 3: WRITE UNTIL YOU FEEL BETTER

One good thing about journaling is that you do not have to edit yourself. You can write down anything and everything you feel without judgement. Write to your future self, your goals and affirmation for the semester, or just write down what you did that day. It can be depressing when stress becomes overwhelming and you have no one to talk to. Journaling isn't going to solve all your problems, but it is a great outlet that still releases all these feelings you hold in. By writing your thoughts on paper, you can gain understanding of the challenges you face both internally and externally.

*"I feel free. I no longer have those thoughts roaming around and upsetting me as I'm going about my day."*

—Daisy Madero, human services major at CSUDH

## Step 4: FEEL BETTER!

When you finish writing everything you feel, you may feel a sense of relief. And one other good thing about journaling is, you can either say goodbye to the journal and that memory or go back and reflect on it later.

## LOCAL RESOURCES



### Need to talk to someone?

Call the National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline at 800-950-NAMI

In a crisis, text "NAMI" to 741741.

### More info:

[nami.org](http://nami.org)



### Having suicidal thoughts?

Call the National Suicide Prevention line at 800-273-8255

### More info:

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)



### Experiencing a mental health crisis?

Call the Crisis Assessment Team (CAT) at 866-830-6011 **OR** call 714-517-6353

### Mental health referrals or connections:

Call OC Links Behavioral Health line at 855-625-4657

### More info:

[ochealthinfo.com](http://ochealthinfo.com)



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