Promoting Resilience in College Students

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Negative Reality

• Suicide is the second leading cause of death for students aged 16-24.
What Causes Distress??
The Evidence

• Three types of self-reported distress have demonstrated slow but consistent growth over the past five years including: Depression, Anxiety, and Social Anxiety. *(Center for College Mental Health Annual Report, 2015)*
Top 5 reasons for distress?
What does student distress look like?
Another Response to Distress

- College students turn to one another-67% of the time they seek each other in times of need.
- They do not willingly seek adult or professional help.
Students

• “Soaring expectations and crushing realities”: Optimistic, Scheduled, Perfectionistic...Miserable.
• Entitled, self centered, competitive, accomplished...lacking empathy; always connected.
• Living in an age of “uncertainty”-->culture of anxiety.
• Snowplow parents.
• Growing Cultures: first generation, identity, race, international, etc.
Lack of Stress Hardiness

• The Instagram/snapchat Generation-24/7 e-connected to “happy posts”.
• Pseudo-communication and connection→loneliness
• Students have little experience with real life skills. Many have had snowplow parents who do all the managing, negotiating, fixing.
• Less coping capacity, low stress tolerance, less empathy for self and others, more mental health issues.
Resilience

• Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

• This field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of work, love and play.

• Resilience: is the emotional aspect of positive psychology and is defined as adapting well in the face of challenges, adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or whatever one experiences as significant sources of stress.

• It is a person’s capacity to bounce back from adversity and despite adversity.
Resilience

• “At our most resilient, we can surf the waves of disappointment, distress, and change, rather than being swamped or drowned by them”.

• The power of resilience and the ”profound emptiness” of resilience.

• Reframing Resilience-”not just the strength to stay the course, but to question it, and propose others, not to just survive, but to thrive”

• FLOURISH as our goal for our students..not just academically, but as people, citizens.

“I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.”

— Gaël Gutierrez Jorg
Resilience goes to College

7 factors
• Emotional Regulation
• Impulse control
• Causal Analysis
• Self-Efficacy
• Realistic optimism
• Empathy
• Social Connectedness

What we see in students
• Increased Non-suicidal Injury in students-cutting
• Increases in binge drinking
• Lack of personal academic accountability-seeking grade changes, feel like they “deserve an A”
• Tremendous reliance on parents while in college, to “fix”, to “do” for them..bank accounts, grades, roommates, etc.
• Sense of entitlement that they should get and achieve what they WANT.
• Research has demonstrated that this generation is 40% less empathetic than those before.
• Highly connected online, but high rates of loneliness.
Principles of Resilience

• Everyone has the capacity for resilience. It is not just for students from high risk populations.
• It is a process, not a trait.
• Resilience is ordinary—not extraordinary.
• Resilience isn’t a program or a curriculum. It requires that we shift from a “problem based deficit model to a strengths-based model”. It is part of our mission. It is a culture. It is an outcome.
• Challenges of all kinds are opportunities for growth and change: institutions, departments, services, faculty, staff and students.
• (Truebridge & Benard, 2013)
Emotional Agility

- Emotional agility is a skill set that builds a person’s ability to face their emotions, label them, understand them and then choose to move forward deliberately.

- It is the ability to recognize when you are feeling stressed, be able to step out of your stress, and then decide how to act in a way that is congruent with your personal values and aligned with your goals.

  when nothing goes right ...
  go left.
Our Role in Promoting Resiliency & Emotional Agility

• The mission of our institutions is to not just prepare people for their careers, but to provide education that fosters the development of the whole person/citizen.

• Research evidence clearly documents that academic success & retention of students is connected to their mental health and wellbeing.

• We all share the responsibility.
Strategies to promote resiliency

• First Year Programs: Many focus on academic skills-time management, etc, but research shows they are not related to academic success (Robbins, et.al,2009)

• INSTEAD...Focus on helping students build social connections promotes feelings of belonging that strengthen resiliency and academic success (Walton & Cohen, 2011)

• Teach students to revise their cognitive appraisals of difficult events in college and coach them to experience that they have personal control over the events in their life.

• Correcting Student’s appraisal of any difficulty as a sign of imperfection, weakness or character fault. “The humanity of struggle”.
Individual Skills to teach that build resilience factors

- Responding to self with empathy and to others.
- Defining personal values.
- Mindfulness: using apps and in person tools.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Tolerating and respecting differences.
- Merging Perspectives.
- Resolving interpersonal conflicts.
- Identifying Personal daily rhythms.
- Connecting Skills.
- Resisting Shame.
- Distress tolerance skills.
- Refusal Skills.
Empathy Skills as a Class/Group

• Teach students to respond to their feelings and thoughts-”I am feeling______because______”

• Teach students to listen and respond to other students feelings and thoughts.

• Teach students the importance of resisting the natural tendency to minimize, dismiss, silverline their feelings or others.

Piglet: “how do you spell love?”
Pooh: “you don’t spell it, you feel it.”
Emotional Agility

• Teaching Students to “show up” to their emotions or face their emotions. Helping them see that they don’t need to be dominated by one emotion.

• Teach that they are big enough to contain all their emotions and they can drop the struggle about whether their feelings are right or wrong or if they should or should not feel a certain way.

• Teach students about “stepping out”...creating space between themselves and their emotions—emotional mindfulness.

• It is the part of themselves that is wise enough to know that when they have a thought or feeling, it doesn’t mean it is right and it doesn’t mean they have to act on it.

• It is just what they are feeling.
Emotional Agility

• Walking their “Why”: Before students make their choices, they need to know their “why” or know their values.

• Teach students to identify their beliefs and behaviors that are important to them and then choosing to act in accordance with their values.

• Moving on: Assisting and coaching students to cultivate habits that are congruent with their values.

• Teach students to create “want to goals”..these are goals that are deeply connected to what is important to them-not goals that are externally imposed by programs, parents etc.
CREATE RESILIENCY SEMINAR FOR CREDIT

• Consider offering a resiliency course for a wellness credit through the wellness/fitness center.

• Combine emotional agility strategies, self-care, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring and empathy skills into a practice-based Class.

• LEADBU: an IN PERSON experience!
Assist Faculty to promote resiliency

• Encourage Faculty to Promote a “growth mindset” in their courses:
  • Set high expectations that students can meet the high expectations of the class/program. The message is that Faculty BELIEVE students can learn, they can struggle and they can persist successfully.

• Create a culture of resiliency in your classrooms.
  • Use the language of Productive struggle + productive persistence.
  • They are there to learn skills, knowledge and habits that will lead to success as a professional and person BUT it will be challenging and that is okay.
Promoting Resiliency

• Create a Culture of Caring:
  • LISTEN...OBSERVE
  • Letting students know that you are worried about them can change his or her life forever. “you seem distressed and I am worried about you.”
  • ACKNOWLEDGE their negative realities and your belief that they can meet these challenges.

• STAY CONNECTED as staff and faculty to Students: Connectedness to just one adult on campus, can increase a sense of connectedness to the course, to the team, the program, and to the school.

• Connectedness is a protective factor and promotes resiliency.
Discussion

• What would you start, stop or continue to build resilience in your college community?
THANK YOU! BE WELL!

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