

# Mental Healthcare: Now in Session

At the **Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University**, a program supporting students' mental health expands its reach through nationwide collaborations.

**T**he college experience can be many things—fun and empowering, but also stressful and lonely. Then there's the fixation in Western culture on attending higher education to land a job and make a lot of money. All this imparts enormous pressure on young adults, especially those with mental health diagnoses. Unable to cope, many take leaves of absence or drop out of school altogether.

It's a trend that concerned rehabilitation providers and researchers at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University Sargent College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences. So, in 2014, the Center launched a program to bridge the gap in youth services, called NITEO—Latin for “thrive.” NITEO is a three-day-a-week program offering courses that intersect academics and wellness. The program has unbundled these curricula so other colleges and universities or programs can customize them to their unique audience.

“The beautiful thing about these curricula is they are adaptable and diverse, and they can be customized to whomever we are delivering to,” says Chelsea Cobb, assistant director of college mental health education initiatives.

## Self-Care 101

Many students take a leave of absence when their mental health distress intersects with their academic, social, and athletic lives on campus. They return home, perhaps engage in some sort of treatment, and are isolated from their friends and activities that help them thrive. Come September, school resumes. How does that student—now a year behind their cohort and navigating a mental health condition—transition back?

For students in this situation, NITEO is a landing pad where critical

skills are taught to and practiced by a cohort of 19 young adults all moving through similar experiences. Guided by practitioners and peer mentor interns—themselves NITEO alumni—students look critically at wellness and self-care. They identify their individual learning styles and learn to advocate for themselves in various situations. This could mean practicing appropriate communication with professors and employers, or simply learning how to do laundry.

“Helping them find tangible things they can work on, while learning to follow up with accountability, is critical for building resilience and wellness,” Cobb says. To date, 300 students have completed the NITEO program; 74% of those returned to school in some capacity.

The NITEO program serves all students who are transitioning from a leave, not just Boston University students. Other services that are offered for all students, not just those transitioning after a leave of absence, are one-on-one coaching sessions and classes. One example is Healthy Relationships, an evidence-based course that teaches students how to build and maintain healthy young adult relationships, which has been used as a restorative tool in some Title IX cases. Beyond Boston University, NITEO curricula, which are an intersection of academic, wellness, and resiliency skills, are being adapted and implemented at other universities and colleges, according to each institution's needs.

The Center has even developed a program for parents of young adults called “Flourishing Families” that imparts skills and supports to parents



so they can thrive while parenting a young adult who is struggling with their mental health.

The adapted curricula has been implemented in 10 institutions nationally and internationally, one high school, one therapeutic program, and one criminal justice program. The possibilities for these curricula to reach an even greater number of communities is immense.

“Our mission is inherently collaborative,” Cobb says. “We’re always looking for ways to support people’s goals around holistic well-being, academic stamina, and resilience.”



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