

# Programs for college students suffering from depression, anxiety and stress

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Is it possible to prevent mental health problems in higher education students? The answer is "yes" according to a team of psychologists from Loyola University Chicago who conducted a careful, systematic review of 103 universal interventions involving over 10,000 students enrolled in 2- and 4-year colleges and universities and graduate programs. The findings appear in the May 2015 issue of *Prevention Science*.

Researchers indicated that universal prevention interventions - that is, programs targeting general students, not just students who are at risk for or who have already developed problems - were effective in significantly reducing outcomes related to stress, anxiety and depression. The programs also helped in enhancing not only students' social-emotional skills, self-perceptions, and interpersonal relationships, but also their academic adjustment. However, programs differ in their effectiveness. Notably, programs that included supervised practice of targeted skills significantly outperformed didactically oriented or psychoeducational programs, as well as skills-based programs without supervised practice.

These findings have important implications because stress, anxiety and depression are among the most common adjustment problems experienced by higher education students, and these problems have been rising on college campus. Furthermore, these problems can interfere with students' academic performance and retention. In contrast, developing psychosocial assets - including adaptive social and emotional skills, positive self-perceptions, and supportive [interpersonal relationships](#) - demonstrate adaptive links to [mental health](#) and academic

performance and retention.

The authors discuss the value of skill-training programs with a preventive mental health focus and their application within higher educational settings. They conclude that effective programs to prevent emotional distress and promote psychosocial assets warrant more widespread use.

**More information:** "A meta-analysis of universal mental health prevention programs for higher education students." *Prevention Science*. DOI: [10.1007/s11121-015-0543-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0543-1)

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