

## Mental Health Disabilities

### **Definition**

Mental Health disabilities involve psychological disturbances in thinking, emotions and behavior. These disorders result from complex interactions between hereditary, physical and social influences. Disorders become disabilities when they seriously interfere with a person's ability to work, socialize or learn.

### **Documentation**

Documentation of mental health disabilities must include assessment and diagnosis by a Physician, Psychiatrist or a Psychologist. This documentation should also include current evidence that symptoms are interfering with coping and learning abilities. Accessibility Service Coordinator will need a copy of the psychiatric or medical assessment in order to provide services, accommodations or technological assistance.

### **Most Common Types of Diagnoses**

Depression	Phobias
Bipolar Disorder Disorders	Anxiety Disorders/ Panic
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	Schizophrenia
Personality Disorders	Addictions
Eating Disorders	Sleep Disorder

### **Medications**

Many negative mental health symptoms are stabilized by the use of medications. Sometimes, students go off their medication regimes when they start to feel better or when they start to feel balanced. However, they often find that the stresses of college life reactivate symptoms and they need to start and continue taking medications. Some medications take several weeks to reach their maximum effectiveness so students may need extra monitoring and support during this time.

Some students experience significant side-effects from medications. Difficulties with concentration, sleep, tremors, memory and blurred vision may be issues facing students using prescribed medication. It is best if students with mental health issues get regular monitoring from their Physician, Psychiatrist or Mental Health Counselor.

## ***Student Strategies And Accommodations***

- Meet with Accessibility Service Coordinator at least a few months before starting your course. They can help you plan, provide support and possibly assist in accessing adaptive technology. It is your responsibility to provide appropriate documentation.
- Reduce your course load. Symptoms are exacerbated by stress.
- Develop healthy sleeping, eating and exercise routines. Make time for fun and relaxation!
- Take medication as prescribed. (Erratic use plays havoc with your mind and body!)
- An appropriate accommodation may be to tape record lectures. This is particularly useful when there are swings in mood, memory or concentration due to the illness or medication.
- Work with a tutor and/or study groups for additional academic support.
- An appropriate accommodation may be extra time for exams so you are not overwhelmed by time constraints.
- Educate yourself thoroughly about your disorder so that you can advocate for yourself. It is also important to recognize when symptoms are becoming problematic so you can be pro-active in requesting help before things are at a crisis point.
- Seek emotional and practical support from staff and students. Develop positive working relationships with counselors, accessibility coordinator and instructors so that they can support you when it is needed.
- Find the unique survival and study strategies that work for you and use them!

\*These are suggestions only -- you are the best judge of what will work for you.

## ***Instructors Strategies And Accommodations***

College can be overwhelming for students struggling with mental health issues. Instructors, who are approachable and strive to create learning environments that welcome individual differences, can be instrumental in students having positive college experiences. Needs will depend greatly on what the diagnosis is and how severely it affects the student, but the following guidelines are helpful for many students with mental health disabilities:

- Be supportive, but not intrusive. Some students are very comfortable talking about their disability and others are extremely private. If a student chooses to share their diagnosis with you, respect confidentiality.
- If a student approaches you about the struggles they are having, assist them in developing a plan for being successful in your course. (This can be done in conjunction with the Accessibility Service Coordinator).

# ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

for Students with Disabilities

Selkirk  College

- Students with accommodations may require tape recording lectures and photocopying lecture notes.
- Encourage students to write exams in a separate, quiet setting with extra time so that they are not overwhelmed.
- Encourage students to seek support and develop strategies in self-advocacy, study skills and time management strategies through the Learning Centre, tutors, the Counselling centre and Accessibility Services.
- Most students with disabilities function best when classes are structured and expectations are clear. Unannounced changes can be stressful. Sometimes facilitating study partners or helping a student to join a team during group work will alleviate stress.
- If a student is disconnected from reality, visibly agitated or severely depressed accompany them to the Counselling Centre or Accessibility Service Coordinator's Office.