

# Transition to University: Supporting Students with Mental Health Disabilities

Mental Health Disability Services  
York University

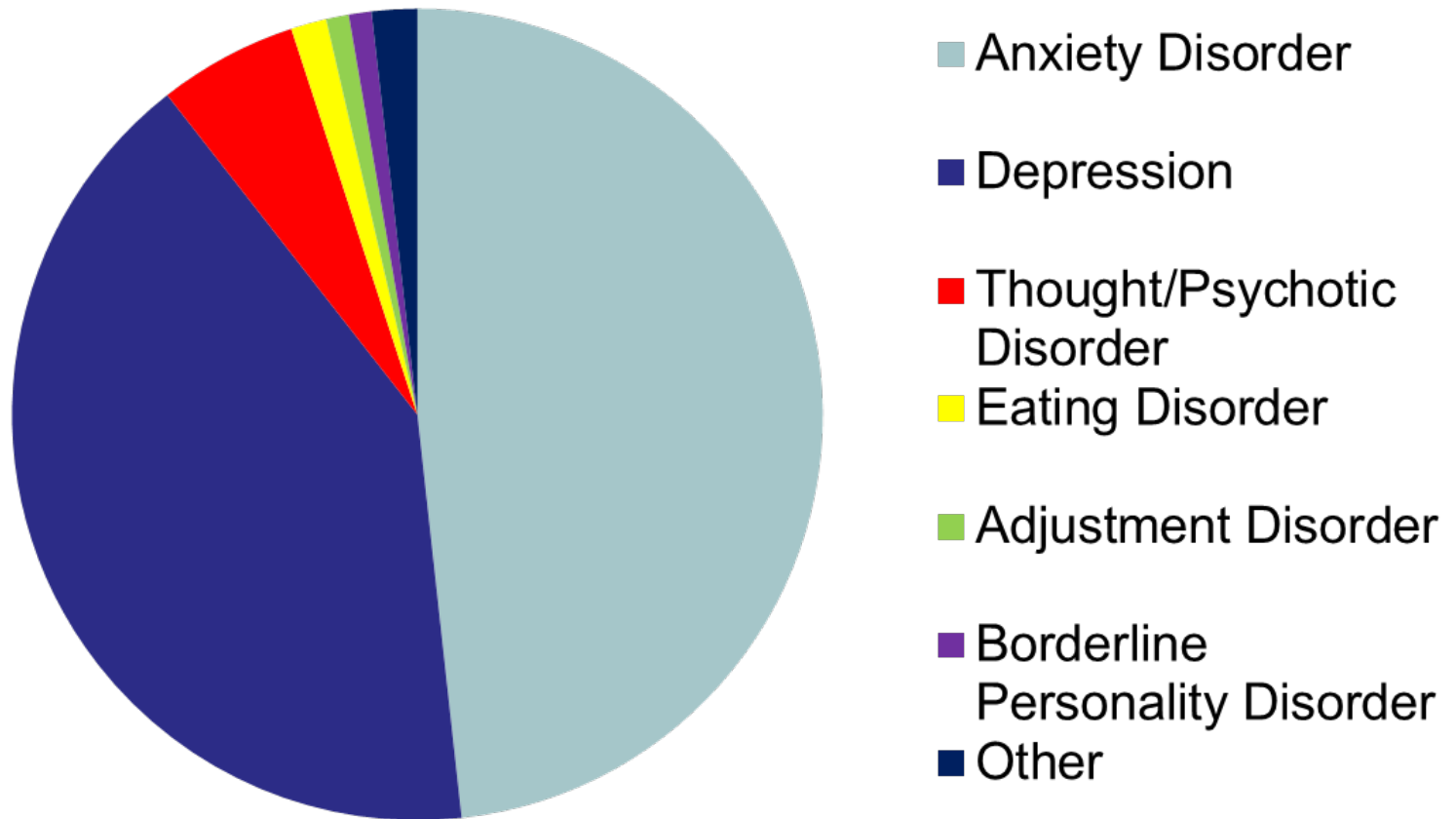
# Mental Health Disability Services

- Housed within York Counselling and Disability Services, we provide academic accommodations for students with documented Mental Health disabilities. Students with medical evidence of a long-standing or temporary disability can access services
- Accommodations are provided in accordance with Ontario Human Rights Code and York Senate Policy on accommodating Students with Disabilities
- We provide academic support, which does not include treatment. We do provide students with appropriate referrals
- Our program is not meant to replace mental health support available in the community



# Our Statistics

## Primary Diagnosis



# Diagnosis and Disability

## **Not all diagnoses are disabilities**

But access to disability-services requires a DSM-IV diagnosis

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)  
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)  
Social Anxiety Disorder  
Panic Disorder  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)  
Major Depressive Disorder  
Bipolar Disorder  
Schizophrenia/Thought Disorders  
Eating Disorders  
Personality Disorders

## **“Test anxiety” is not accommodated**

A student who experiences panic during tests must have a DSM-IV diagnosis to access disability-services

(GAD, Panic Disorder)

# The Transition to Post-Secondary

- Suddenly all of the responsibility is on the student
- They must be proactive in accessing resources
- The earlier a student asks for help, the less stress they will experience
- A Disabilities Counsellor is one of the best touchstones on campus

# The Transition to Post-Secondary

## High School

- IEP follows student year to year
  - Student is not responsible for giving it to new teachers
- Primary support from classroom teacher
- Modification/accommodation
- Teachers are able to be flexible with exceptions to rules and deadlines

## University

- Student is responsible for registering with Disability Center
  - Accommodation Letter given to Professor by student
- Primary support from Disabilities Counsellor
- Accommodation
- Professors are able to be flexible, but limited by institutional rules and principles



# New Student Responsibilities

Register with Mental Health Disability Services **early** in the school year

- Bring required medical documentation form
- Set up accommodations with Counsellor

Student to provide each Professor with an accommodation letter at the beginning of the term

Student to register with Alternate Exam Centre for exam accommodations

- Students must register three weeks before the first test/exam in the course. If they do not meet this deadline, they have to reschedule the test



# Registration Process

Intake Package is available online or for pick-up from reception

Completed Package is received by administrative staff and passed to the team for weekly disposition

## Intake Appointment

- Introduction to counsellor, policies and procedures, review of documentation and assessment, accommodations, referrals to supports,

On Going Support Advocacy, systems navigation, referrals, touchstone/crisis management, coaching & support



# Registration Process

Download MHDS Registration Package from our website:

<http://mhds.info.yorku.ca/registration/>

Package includes:

- Medical Documentation Form, must be signed by a physician
- Intake Questionnaire filled out by student



# MHDS Medical Documentation

**Counselling and Disability Services  
 Medical Documentation**

**NOTE: This form must be signed and stamped by a medical doctor or a registered psychologist.**

Date Completed (mm/dd/yyyy): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

*To be completed by student (please print):*

Student's Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home/Cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Practitioner,

You have been asked by a student who wishes to register with Mental Health Disability Services (MHDS) at York University to complete the enclosed documentation. MHDS is an educational support program only. It is primarily meant for students who live with a chronic, persistent and permanent mental health disability and who are involved in university education. Significant temporary mental health disabilities can also be accommodated through our office.

As you know, the post-secondary environment involves taking examinations, doing research, assignments, and assuming responsibility for one's higher education pursuits. The purpose of the medical/psychological documentation is to enable disability counsellors to recommend 'reasonable' and appropriate academic accommodations for students with DSM diagnoses. It is imperative that this form be filled out comprehensively. We need to fully understand what specific challenges and limitations the student's disability imposes on their learning.

We are accountable under the Ontario Human Rights Code and York's Senate policy on accommodating students with disabilities. These guidelines help us provide academic accommodations that level the playing field for students with disabilities without creating an unfair advantage or undermining academic integrity. We rely on your detailed knowledge of this student's disability, how it impacts his/her education, and the provision of a clear rationale for your recommendations to help us determine the appropriate academic accommodations.

Thank you for helping to reduce barriers for students with disabilities while upholding the academic standards of the university.

*To be completed by medical practitioner or registered psychologist:*

Name/Address/Phone Number → Please use office stamp as well as signature

How long have you known this student? \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Diagnosis: There must be a DSM-IV diagnosis in order for students to qualify for academic accommodations. **Please include DSM-IV code and diagnostic criteria used to establish the diagnosis:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Date of onset: \_\_\_\_\_

Mental health disability is:

- long-term
  - The student's disability will be pervasive throughout the course of academic studies and will likely require continuing academic accommodation/support
- temporary
  - Student should only require academic accommodation/support for approximately 1 to 3 academic terms

Please list any additional disabilities:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Temporary vs Long-Standing

- Primary Diagnosis (DSM-IV code)
- Date of Onset
- How long have you known this student?

## Long-Standing

- Disability will affect the student for duration of post-secondary
- Doctor has known student long enough to make this judgment

## Temporary

- 1-3 academic terms
- Student required to get new medical form every year to continue receiving accommodations



# MHDS Medical Documentation



Counselling and  
 Disability Services

4700 KEELE ST  
 TORONTO ON  
 CANADA M3J 1P3  
 T 416 736 5297  
 F 416 736 5633  
 www.yorku.ca/ods

Duration and Frequency of Treatment:

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Possible side effects of medication(s) on student's academic performance:

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Student's strengths and challenges:

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The DSM-IV definition of a mental disorder requires that there be clinically significant impairment or distress in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning. Please indicate the potential academic impact of this student's mental illness on the following areas. An explanation of numbers 1 to 4 is given below.

Concentration	1	2	3	4
Processing information	1	2	3	4
Retaining information	1	2	3	4
Assignment deadlines	1	2	3	4
Group participation	1	2	3	4
Exam situations	1	2	3	4
Oral Presentations	1	2	3	4
Working Memory	1	2	3	4

1 = No Impact

2 = Mild Impact (the student should be able to cope with minimal support)

3 = Moderate Impact (the student requires some degree of academic accommodation)

4 = Significant Impact (the student has a high degree of impairment with significant academic accommodations required)

If any of the above areas were indicated as having a "Significant Impact", please elaborate:

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Academic accommodations are intended to level the playing field while maintaining academic integrity. Based on your knowledge of this student and his/her mental health disability, please list **specific disability related academic supports/accommodations** that you would recommend to assist the student (e.g., to complete assignments, to write tests/exams). Please provide a rationale for these academic accommodations:

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I give consent for Disability Services within Counselling and Disability Services to contact my medical practitioner or registered psychologist, if necessary, regarding the information provided in this document:

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Practitioner's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Practitioner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Medical Practitioner's License Number: \_\_\_\_\_

OR

Registered Psychologist's Registration Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*Please ensure that this form is completed in full. Incomplete forms will not be accepted.** Return completed form to student or fax this form to: Dr. Enid Weiner, Manager, Mental Health Disability Services, York University, 416-736-5633 (Fax Number).

**\*\*Note to student:** If you have other relevant documentation, you may include copies of them with this registration package. These additional documents are not intended to replace the MHDS registration package. Please note - additional documentation may be requested.

# Academic Accommodations: What does 'leveling the playing field' really mean?

- Reasonable Accommodations
- Accommodations must take into account nature and severity of disability, course objectives, and academic integrity.
- Accommodations are negotiated individually and are subject to change (e.g. episodic disability, course format with cumulative knowledge)
- Impact of students' disabilities (symptoms and medication) can affect their learning (e.g. slower pace of academic performance, slower processing of information, difficulties with concentration, memory, motivation, energy level)

# Test & Exam Accommodations

- Writing exams in a private room
- Extra time
- Access to computer software
- Spacing of exams
- Breaking exams down into more manageable units

# Classroom Accommodations

- Flexibility around deadlines
- Flexibility around class/tutorial/group participation
- Notetaking / Recording of lectures (LiveScribe)
- Assistive Technology (Kurzweil, Dragon, etc)
- Alternate forms of evaluation e.g. written assignment in lieu of oral presentation
- Priority enrolment in order to access course material early or take classes at times best suited to mental health related needs

# The Best Accommodation

The absolutely most effective accommodation for students with a mental health disability is:

**A reduced course load**



# Peer Mentors

MHDS peer mentors are upper year students with Mental Health Disabilities, who are registered with MHDS.

Peer support is powerful!

- Combat stigma
- Plan how to discuss accommodations with professors
- Building connections with peers
- Self disclosure
- Understanding how to navigate York's campus and web resources
- Study and time management tips from experience



# The Importance of Self Advocacy

- Self-identifying with Disability Services
- One of the goals of MHDS is to encourage students with mental health disabilities to become as independent as possible
- Meeting others with mental health disabilities to share experiences and coping strategies
- Learning how to establish a meaningful connections with faculty and supports
- Involving professors in students' academic progress by bringing matters affecting their academic performance to their attention

## Program Description

- A four day transition/skill building program for students registered with Mental Health Disabilities at York University
- August 19<sup>th</sup>- 22<sup>nd</sup>
- No fee for students
- Snacks and lunches included
- Social activities
- Skill building workshops
- Career planning activities

## Program Objectives

- To provide knowledge and access to resources that are necessary in achieving retention and academic success for students with mental health disabilities
- To promote the engagement of students with mental health disabilities in the university environment
- To deliver activities promoting problem solving, effective coping strategies and valuable skills in university life
- To promote a social network of support for students with mental health disabilities
- To encourage recovery of students with mental health disabilities

## Outcomes of Pilot Program

Participants of the 2012 Head Start Pilot Program Evaluation reported an increase in:

- knowledge of services and resources on campus
- confidence in ability to navigate campus services and resources
- use of campus services and supports needed to meet academic goals
- knowledge of information to become involved in campus activities
- confidence in ability to problem solve issues related to academic accommodations
- confidence in ability to self-advocate for academic accommodations required
- skill acquisition in coping with disability related symptoms
- feelings of connection with peers

*"I've gone to so many other programs, courses, classes and I've never made this connection. Everyone has made it so easy. This has really exceeded my expectations" – Student, Head Start, 2012.*

## Registration

- Spaces limited
- Closes July 31, 2013
- See flyer for details

# Supports & Services

- Learning Skills
- Centre for Academic Writing
- Transcription Services
- Centre for Human Rights
- Alternate Exam Centre
- Listservs
- Workshops / Groups
- Peer Mentor/Advisor Program
- Personal counselling services
- Financial Supports



# Tips

- Empower students to apply to university
- Encourage students to attend disability orientations or transition programs
- Help students understand their mental health disability and how it impacts their learning
- Work with students and families, when appropriate, to create **realistic expectations** of a new educational environment
- Encouraging students to **start slow** and (whenever possible) help parents understand why taking one's time leads to success

# Questions?

## Questions?

Main reception: 416 736-5633

Contact:

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