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Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health: A Vital Role for Advisors and Mentors

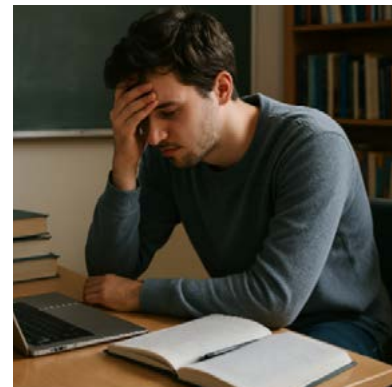
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Graduate students often face significant mental health challenges during their academic careers. [A 2018 study of over 2,000 graduate students published in Nature Biotechnology](#) revealed that they are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety compared to the general population. On the respective scales utilized to test anxiety and depression, 41% percent of graduate students scored as having moderate to severe anxiety while 39% percent scored in the moderate to severe depression range. This compared with 6% percent of the general population previously with those same scales.

Faculty advisors play a crucial role in supporting the mental health and well-being of their graduate students. Effective mentoring relationships are built on reciprocal respect, trust, openness, and flexibility. Mentors should acknowledge their mentees as whole individuals with lives both on and off campus and recognizing that personal and familial issues can impact their academic performance and overall well-being. By empowering mentees to express their needs and guiding them toward appropriate resources, advisors can help address issues related to mental health, work-life balance, and micro-aggression.



Strategies for Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health

1. **Recognize the Signs:** Familiarize yourself with common indicators of mental health struggles, such as changes in behavior, mood, or academic performance. Early recognition allows for timely intervention.
2. **Open Communication:** Create an environment where students feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns. Regular check-ins can provide opportunities for students to share challenges they may be facing.
3. **Provide Resources:** Be knowledgeable about campus support systems such as [UCF Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#). Encourage students to seek professional help when needed.
4. **Set Realistic Expectations:** Help students set achievable goals and maintain a manageable workload to prevent burnout. Encourage a healthy work-life balance and model this behavior yourself.
5. **Promote Inclusivity:** Foster an environment that respects diverse backgrounds and experiences of your students. A sense of belonging can significantly reduce stress.

References

Evans, Teresa M., et al. *Evidence for a Mental Health Crisis in Graduate Education*. *Nature Biotechnology*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2018, pp. 282–284. <https://www.nature.com/articles/nbt.4089>

UCF Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). <https://caps.sswb.ucf.edu/>