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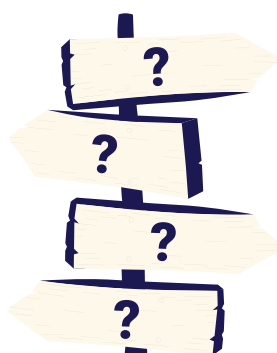
# Psychologist

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## LIFE'S TRANSITIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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# THE PROMOTION OF SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE DURING THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

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The start of college for many young adults coincides with a time of transition to adulthood. This period of adjustment is characterized by identity exploration, instability and change, self-focus, feeling “in-between,” and “hopeless” (Arnett, 2014). College students are engaging in reflection about both their past and future, which often leads to the questioning of their values and the assessment of their place in the world. Often, this process can lead to a desire to compare their experiences against those of others, which can significantly impact self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to the perception and sense of value about the self and is crucial to overall well-being. By nature, it involves making a judgment about one's relative worth. It can fluctuate due to environmental circumstances, one's own emotions and perceptions, or recent “successes” and “failures.” During the first year of college, the desire to find a sense of belonging, connection, and career direction may elicit heightened self-evaluation. People can make determinations of their worth based on their perceived performance or level of success in various areas. Among college students, self-esteem is often linked to factors associated with the transition, like interpersonal relationships or academic performance, and to beliefs

about the self developed earlier in life. Many have been taught to expect college to be the “best 4 years of their lives,” which can adversely affect those who do not have this experience.

One particular area that may be subject to increased scrutiny during a time of adjustment and identity exploration is body image. Body image may be especially salient when forming initial impressions and developing relationships. Additionally, changes in one's routine, eating habits, physical activity, financial stress, and overall structure from high school to college can positively or negatively impact body image. Students enter college with attitudes and beliefs developed from the messages they have heard throughout their lives. Those with more unrealistic expectations about the body or greater exposure to diet culture may be especially susceptible to this stress. The common notion of “the freshman fifteen,” in which it is expected that individuals could expect to gain weight during the adjustment to college, may serve as a threat to body image and self-esteem. In reality, first-year students may gain under 5 pounds on average, with only about 12% of students experiencing an increase of 15 pounds or more (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011). This myth can instill harmful effects on body image.

Transitioning to college can be a significant stressor for many young adults, which unfortunately can lead to imbalances in self-care and overall well-being. Young adults are at a time in their lives in which they can create and maintain a mental health foundation that they would be able to implement throughout their lives. Therefore, it is essential for clinicians to promote the use of effective, meaningful strategies to maintain or build self-esteem. The following are a few strategies that can be used.



### CREATING HEALTHY EXPECTATIONS

We can encourage our college students to confront negative self-talk and to promote personal and professional boundaries within relationships. The utilization of cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, such as thought logs, can be essential in the development of insight. One step further can be encouraging college students to take a few moments during the day to determine three challenges they have tackled or accomplishments they achieved on that day. Such reflection can enable more consistent recognition of positive attributes. Similarly, exploring with the client how “good” and “bad” labeling, in speech and cognitive patterns, impacts their mindset may also pose a benefit in reducing self-criticism.

### LEARNING TO APPRECIATE THE BODY

Many young adult college students are struggling to recognize aspects of their body beyond what is visible. As clinicians, we can work with our young adult clients

to build a relationship beyond the exterior by educating them about the multitude of ways their body serves them day to day. We can encourage them to be mindful of engrained norms or forms of speech that may facilitate unhealthy cognitive patterns, such as complimenting a friend on their physical appearance (“You look like you lost weight”) or making comments on others’ appetite (“You’re getting another snack?”). Additionally, we can reframe how we discuss the benefits of physical activity. At times, the term exercise can exacerbate anxiety or perpetuate a previously held unhealthy expectation. Instead, when discussing the benefits of physical activity, refer to it as movement and discuss that this movement consists of many forms beyond going to the gym or spending large amounts of time exercising. In a similar vein, we can encourage students to focus on how they feel in their body compared to the number on the scale.

### MINDFUL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Encouraging young adult clients to critically examine what they are witnessing on social media may promote healthier expectations. You can urge clients to actively examine the thoughts and emotions they experience upon seeing certain posts. Additionally, discussing the pros and cons of following particular pages or influencers on social media that may amplify misinformation or unhealthy perceptions of self may help reduce factors that trigger negative self-talk and unhealthy pressures. Through the promotion of this insight, clients may be better able to limit comparisons of worth. 📌

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## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS TO PREPARE FOR AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER IN CRISIS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33)

- numbers of individuals (faculty, staff, agreed-upon community members, interpreters, etc.) in a common location, such as the front office, to contact in case of emergencies.
- Identify community partners who can help with either translational, interpretation, or both services if needed in a crisis. Give the community partners the resources they need to become available to provide interpretive services, and provide them with training on confidentiality before they are called into a specific situation.
- Create a repository of documents or questions that are translated to other languages that can be used throughout the district or beyond to help with mental health or crisis situations. For example, develop a standardized letter to parents specific to suicidality that is readily available to send to a parent in multiple languages.
- If no person is available to speak the child’s language, have the technology (Google Translate, Care to Translate, Interpreting, Language Line, MediBabble, etc.) available to translate what the child is saying. Then use the technology as a medium of communication to attempt to implement crisis management skills.
- Schedule an annual training for your staff from a technology savvy individual trained on how to use translational applications or services that are available to help children. Key faculty and staff should not

be impeded by unfamiliarity with accessing such services.

With the seven recommendations listed above, a school can be more prepared to help EL students in critical times of need. 📌

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