

The MySSP app.

Moment of Zen

Curtis offers crucial mental health resources to students.

BY MEREDITH TARDITI

Colleges and universities across the United States are seeing dramatic changes in student mental health. In addition to longstanding challenges involving homesickness, relationships, and academic responsibilities, students in 2023 are confronting unforeseen obstacles unique to the current moment: political unrest, mass violence, racial injustice, career uncertainty, social media pressures, and overwhelming losses from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Healthy Minds Study of 350,000 American students showed that during the 2020–21 school year, more than 60

percent of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health problem. The study was published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* in June 2022. Another study, published in 2021 by the American College Health Association, revealed that almost 75 percent of students reported moderate or severe psychological distress.

Administrators and student affairs staff at schools across the country are thinking creatively about how to expand upon existing mental health support systems and implement holistic wellness interventions on campus. Curtis has worked to incorporate a culture of wellness, paying special attention to student mental health.

From Workshops to a CARE Team


For several years, Curtis, working with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, has trained frontline student-facing staff in Mental Health First Aid, so they can respond quickly to a student in distress. In resident coordinator and peer ambassador training, Curtis student leaders receive additional guidance on how to care for a friend in need and recognize signs that someone may need help. Student orientation includes two workshops on mindfulness, breathing, and healthy movement, along with a workshop on breaking mental health stigmas and a 90-minute group session with a member of the Curtis Mental Health Team.

To ensure widespread access to mental health care, in 2021, Curtis partnered with LifeWorks to provide an app, MySSP, through which students can access a counselor, 24/7, from anywhere in the world, in five different languages, via text, chat, or phone. This ensures that students face no barriers to care in a moment of crisis, even while touring outside of the country.

In 2021, Curtis also formalized a behavioral intervention group called the CARE (Concern, Assessment, Response, and Evaluation) Team. The Curtis CARE Team is a group of administrators trained in mental health first aid and crisis response, who are poised to respond to situations that could disrupt a student's academic participation or psychosocial well-being. The CARE Team will intervene and coordinate an action plan to support a student through a difficulty. Faculty and fellow students can contact that CARE Team if they notice a student who may need additional support or a possible mental health intervention.

Curtis distributes information about national hotlines and other free mental health support services to all students and keeps an updated list of free resources on the student portal. Any student who seeks mental health care can contact a member of the Student Life staff for individual assistance.

Meredith Tarditi is Curtis's former associate dean of student life and international student affairs.



KEY RESOURCES:

- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** 988
- National Sexual Assault Hotline:** (800) 656-4673
- The Trevor Project:** (866) 488-7386
- Curtis Therapy Fund Hotline (for former students and alumni) with RAINN:** (844) 986-4426