

UNDERSTANDING CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

How Mental Health and Substance Use Interact in Students

What It Is

- Co-occurring disorders (also known as dual diagnosis) happens when a mental health disorder and substance use disorder happen together.
- They are common in college due to stress, transitions, and increased access to substances.

Why It's Challenging

- Hard to diagnose: Symptoms overlap.
- Complex care needs: Both conditions must be treated together.
- Academic & social impact: Absences, poor grades, isolation.
- High relapse risk: Stress can trigger both issues.

*<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24426-dual-diagnosis>

Why They Happen

- Self-medication: Using substances to cope with anxiety, depression, or trauma.
- Shared risks: Genetics, brain chemistry, stress.
- Mutual impact: Substance use worsens mental health; mental health struggles make quitting harder.

How to Support

- Integrated care: Treat mental health + substance use together.
- Early screening & referral.
- Peer recovery groups to reduce stigma.
- Person-first language (e.g., "person in recovery").

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