



STEVE FUND WHITE PAPER

WHAT PARENTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
OF COLOR NEED TO KNOW

BY DR. ANNELLE B. PRIMM, M.D., M.P.H.
MEDICAL EXPERT, THE STEVE FUND



THE
STEVE FUND

What Parents of College Students of Color Need to Know

By Dr. Annelle B. Primm, M.D., M.P.H.
Medical Expert, The Steve Fund

Often when young people of color move on to college, there are significant changes not only in their lives, but in the lives of their parents as well. While they navigate new territories, parents and other family members must navigate new ways to assist them in their journey. Having knowledge and strategies to be informed and to assist this exciting but sometimes challenging phase in young people’s lives can make a fundamental difference in this experience.

Important Information

- The time between the teenage years and early adulthood is a critical developmental period during which common mental illnesses such as depression have their initial onset.
- College students of all backgrounds typically deal with being away from home for the first time, handling the demands of academic coursework and navigating social relationships, all of which can be stressful. 50% of college students in the JED Foundation and the Steve Fund survey felt stressed “most” or “all” of the time.
- Maintaining mental health in this stressful environment can be challenged further by insufficient sleep and exposure to substance use, which is not uncommon on college campuses.
- Recent survey research has found that first year college students of color feel less academically and emotionally prepared for college, feeling more overwhelmed and less in control during their first term than their peers.
- Students of color attending college at predominantly white institutions may experience feelings of isolation and alienation. These feelings may be pronounced in university environments where highly publicized racial incidents have occurred on campus. Some colleges have developed specific resources and supports designed to help students from non-white backgrounds have a sense of belonging.



Download an infographic developed by the Steve Fund and the Jed Foundation at <http://www.settogo.org>

Practical Tips

- Regardless of the racial and ethnic make-up of the college the student attends, be sure to determine and ask questions about the counseling and mental health resources on campuses your child is considering during the application process.
- If your child has received mental health services prior to college, be sure to explore mental health care resources on campus and in that city/area and arrange care for the student in advance so that their care can be continued if needed. You can use Internet search tools to locate various doctors and MH providers. You can also contact the number on your insurance card to request information on the mental health providers that will accept your insurance in the location that your child will be residing for school.
- Based on a survey on providing emotional preparation for students of color prior to them going to college could be beneficial by helping students feel more able to take care of themselves, adapt to new environments, control negative emotions and behavior, and build positive relationships. This can include encouraging dialogue about expectations, how to anticipate issues and healthy choices for dealing with them/coping, and reinforcing the value of seeking help - whether through peers, student leaders (i.e., RA's), affinity groups, and/or campus counseling.
- It is important to talk with your child about their feelings, about mental health in general and to seek mental health services if they are exhibiting signs of mental health care need. This will help to create an environment in which your son or daughter feels comfortable talking about these issues if they arise and not feel that they have to keep it a secret and suffer in silence. Every person is unique and has a right to their feelings.
- Encourage your child to spend time on self-care, achieving a balance between academic work, social time, physical activity, recreation and relaxation, which can contribute to overall health and well-being.

About the Steve Fund

The Steve Fund is the nation's only non-profit organization focused on promoting the mental health and emotional well-being of students of color. It works with colleges and universities, students, non-profits, researchers, practitioners, and with groups serving diverse populations. Learn more at <http://www.stevelfund.org>.