

Online Resource Warehouses Have a Valuable Role in Supporting Student Mental Health

Healthy Minds Network white paper series



The Need for Reliable Information

In recent years, there has been spikes both in interest in, and availability of, online and mobile (e.g., app-based) resources for mental health and wellbeing. Given that the majority of today's college students are digital natives, who grew up with readily accessible personal technologies, interest in online and mobile resources for mental health and wellbeing appears to be particularly high on college campuses. In the U.S., 85% of 18-29 year olds own a smartphone¹, and more than 75% of Americans are interested in free mobile apps aimed at mental health management and treatment².

However, despite high levels of interest and a plethora of options, both mental health providers and students commonly report that they don't know where to turn for reliable, trustworthy resources. Students may wish to use mental health apps in conjunction with, or in place of, regularly scheduled counseling sessions, and mental health providers may feel that app-based programs have the potential to be useful, but do not know which one(s) to recommend. Given that there are thousands of mental health apps available on common app stores^{3,4}, it makes sense that people feel lost. We can't assume that the best apps are those that are the most widely used, and we know that app store ratings are not a reliable indicator of the quality and utility of apps. The sheer number of online mental health resources is consistently growing, and it just isn't feasible to expect that each college campus will be able to independently maintain an up-to-date bank of these resources. Therefore, there is a significant need for an online resource warehouse that contains curated information on available resources and best practices for college students and for campus mental health providers.

Existing Online Resource Warehouse Efforts

Some online resource warehouses have emerged in recent years in attempts to meet the needs of students and mental health providers. Below is a brief review of some of the online resource warehouses available. This is not an exhaustive list, and is intended only to offer a sense of available resources.

Active Minds is a nonprofit that promotes advocacy by students, for students, to promote mental health and wellbeing on college campuses. Starting in 2015, they began the Healthy Campus Award, which recognize “colleges and universities that are leading the way in prioritizing student health.” Through this initiative, they are not only recognizing standout campuses but are also compiling a growing database of best practices that other campuses might learn from. The general website for Active Minds also has links to information on a variety of mental health topics relevant to students.



The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) is a federally supported resource center which offers training and various materials to professionals who serve people at risk for suicide. It is funded by the US Department of Health and Human Service’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and offers a web presence at www.sprc.org. Their web site provides visitors with information about suicide and suicide prevention, access to online training courses, and a library of downloadable resources and information about program and practices. This library includes special notation for program and practices that have an evidence base, which could be particularly useful for campus mental health providers.

The JED foundation is a nonprofit organization that partners with high schools and colleges to strengthen mental health and prevent suicide for teens and young adults. Their main website, www.jedfoundation.org and their mental health resource center online resource center www.ulifeline.org, both offer an abundance of information on mental health and wellness and resources for students.

The main JED foundation site allows users to select if they want to get help (which leads them to a Mental Health Resource Center) or to get involved (which leads them to a section of the site on mental health advocacy). The ULifeline site prominently features contact information for the CrisisTextLine and Suicide Prevention Hotline, and contains contact information for several other 24 hour hotlines. This site also offers user-friendly articles and guides for students seeking mental health assistance for themselves or for a friend, and provides a “Self Evaluator” to screen for common mental health conditions. Even further, if a college campus is a JED foundation partner, then site visitors can enter in their college information and receive additional, campus-specific resources.



jedfoundation.org



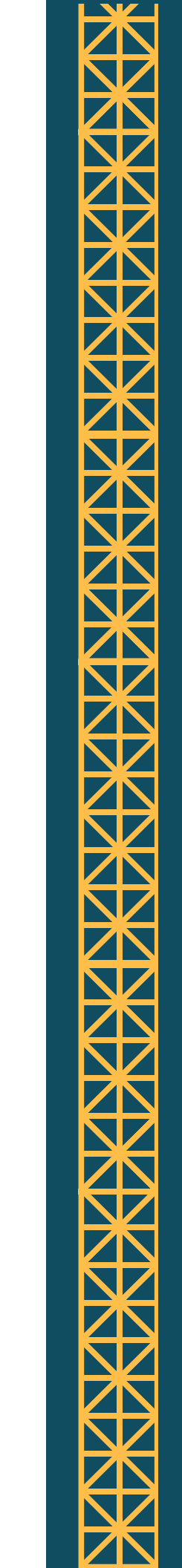
PsyberGuide
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PsyberGuide (psyberguide.org) is a non-profit site that provides information about computer and device-assisted

PsyberGuide (psyberguide.org) is a non-profit site that provides information about computer and device-assisted therapies Product Guide which offers reviews of a growing number of computer and device-assisted therapies based on metrics including research support, consumer ratings, software issues, et cetera. By using the Product Guide, a visitor to the site can easily read about and compare apps for different common mental health conditions.

Recommendations and Questions for College Students and Campus Professionals

The above-listed guides all contain information that could be valuable to the broad college mental audience. Yet there are at least two important challenges, as we see the situation. One challenge is that people may not be aware of these guides and all the useful information they contain. Another challenge is that people may be aware of the guides but find it overwhelming or confusing to figure out which guide to use for which information or situation. Given these problems, we wonder if there is a need for a “guide to the guides” that is user-friendly and engaging for



both student populations and campus professionals. We envision that this master guide would have separate sections for students and professionals, given that students are more likely to be looking for hands-on tools and professionals may also be looking for broader resources.

However, we know there are challenges to this idea and pose the following questions to our fellow students, researchers, and mental health providers:

- How feasible is the creation of a guide to the guides for online mental health resources?
- What existing guide (or guides) aren't referenced here that should be?
- What might differentiate what a student would be looking for versus what a mental health provider or other campus professional would be looking for in term of online mental health resources?
- Beyond apps and basic psychoeducational materials, what else should be included in an online mental health resource warehouse?

Authors

Emily Gardiner Lattie, Ph.D
Research Assistant Professor
Preventive Medicine
Northwestern University

Peter Ceglarek, M.P.H.
Study Coordinator
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

Daniel Eisenberg, Ph.D
Director
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

Megan Phillips, M.A.
Study Coordinator
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

Sarah K. Lipson, M.Ed., Ph.D.
Associate Director
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

Sasha Zhou, M.P.H., M.H.S.A.
Research Assistant
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

Jasmine Morigney
Research Assistant
Healthy Minds Network
University of Michigan

*Many other symposium participants contributed to the discussion that led to the development of this report

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