

Mental Health & Wellbeing Support During the College Application Process

"Behind every application form lies a young person's dream, but also their anxiety, self-doubt, and hope for belonging."

Presented by : ICS SCHOOL COUNSELLORS (KUMASI AND ACCRA)





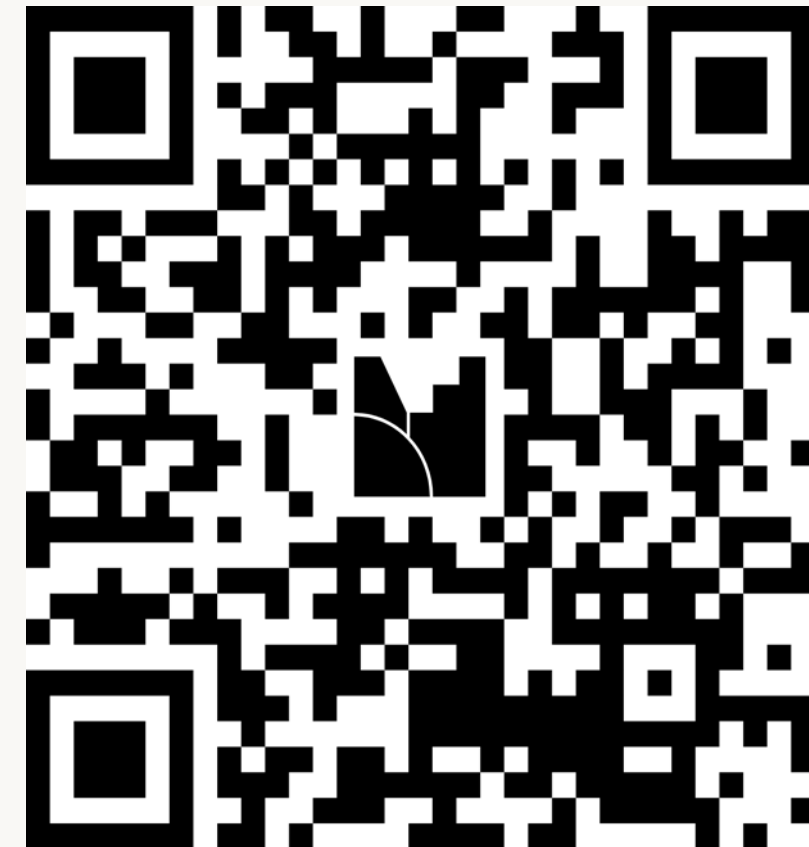
Activity 1: The Hidden Side of Applications

Before we dive into processes and procedures, let's pause to connect emotionally with the mental health challenges students face during the college application journey — not just the documents, but the people behind them.

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OR

<https://www.menti.com/al2f18j5sr31>



A Moment of Reflection

For Counsellors

Think of one student you've supported recently. Close your eyes for 10 seconds and recall that student's emotional state during their application journey.

If you could describe that experience in one word, what would it be?

Examples: overwhelmed, hopeful, anxious, determined

For Admissions Officers

Think of one applicant's file or interaction that stayed with you. What emotion did you sense from that student — or feel while reviewing their application?

What word captures that feeling?

Examples: pressured, uncertain, inspired, underprepared

 **Sharing Time:** We'll take 2 minutes for volunteers to share their one word. These reflections remind us of our shared humanity.

Students are not just applicants

Every form, transcript, and essay carries emotional weight.

Students are young people managing stress, fear, and hope all at once.

As counsellors and admissions officers, we share a responsibility to make that journey more humane.

"Students don't remember how fast we processed their forms — they remember how we made them feel heard." — Anonymous Counsellor



Understanding the Pressure Behind Applications

- The college application process marks a transformative milestone — **symbolizing independence ambition, and adulthood**. Yet beneath the excitement lies **significant emotional strain** that can shape a student's entire university experience.
- Many students **feel their entire future depends on one application, one essay, or one interview**. This intense pressure creates lasting effects that extend far beyond admission decisions.

Understanding the Pressure Behind Applications

Common Emotional Challenges

- Anxiety about academic performance and competitiveness
- Pressure from family, peers, and societal expectations
- Fear of rejection amplified by social media comparison
- Sleep deprivation and burnout from overwhelming demands
- **Our role: Balance guidance with empathy, seeing students as whole individuals with emotional, social, and psychological needs.**



Recognizing When Students Are Struggling

Counselors and admissions officers are often the first adults to notice when students are overwhelmed. Early recognition enables **timely intervention** and appropriate referrals to mental health professionals.

Behavioral Changes

Withdrawal from activities, avoidance behavior, or decline in school performance

Emotional Indicators

Frequent tearfulness, emotional outbursts, or over-fixation on outcomes ("What if I don't get in?")

Physical Symptoms

Persistent headaches, stomach upsets, fatigue, or changes in sleep patterns



The Hidden Crisis in Higher Education

Mental health challenges from the application process don't disappear at enrollment — they often **persist and intensify** during the critical first year of university life.

Chronic Stress on Arrival

Students enter campus already experiencing untreated mental health issues, creating a foundation of vulnerability rather than strength.

Rising Dropout Rates

Unaddressed psychological strain contributes significantly to attrition, with many capable students leaving due to mental health struggles rather than academic inability.

Diminished Engagement

Mental health challenges directly impact academic performance and participation, creating a cycle of declining motivation and achievement.

Creating a Supportive School Environment



A proactive school environment makes a world of difference. Strategic wellness initiatives can transform how students experience this challenging transition.

-  **Wellness Workshops**
Focused on stress management, time planning, and emotional regulation
-  **Peer Mentoring Programs**
Pairing experienced students with those beginning their application journey
-  **Mindfulness Activities**
Breathing exercises, reflection journals, or prayer breaks during counseling sessions
-  **Mental Health Awareness Days**
Inviting psychologists to discuss resilience and coping strategies

❏ **Ghanaian Context:** Students often face additional tension from financial barriers and limited scholarship access. Counselors should normalize conversations around financial concerns and direct students to reliable scholarship information and fee waiver resources.



The Counselor's Role: Guiding with Compassion

Proactive Identification and Support

During Counseling Sessions

- Encourage **realistic goal-setting** — balanced mix of reach, match, and safety schools
- Emphasize **process over perfection** — completing each task is progress
- Break down overwhelming tasks into smaller, manageable parts
- Validate emotions: "It's okay to feel anxious; it means you care"
- Provide safe spaces for emotional release

Building Bridges

- Develop strategic partnerships with universities for early counseling referrals
- Create seamless transitions between high school and university support services
- Normalize wellness discussions as an expected part of pre-enrollment
- Focus on building emotional resilience before students face campus challenges

When counselors are calm, patient, and organized, students feel anchored and less likely to spiral into stress.

The Admissions Officer's Role: Humanizing the Process

Admissions officers are uniquely positioned to integrate mental health awareness into the **earliest stages** of the student journey — transforming how institutions communicate care from first contact.



Communicate Transparently

Provide clear information about timelines, expectations, and selection criteria. Host virtual Q&A sessions for international applicants to reduce uncertainty.



Emphasize Holistic Review

Remind students that universities seek character, growth, and potential — not just grades. Share authentic stories of diverse student experiences.



Showcase Wellness Resources

Make campus counseling services, wellness centers, and peer support clubs as prominent as academic offerings in all communication materials.



Establish Pre-Enrollment Programs

Launch webinar series on stress management and peer mentor programs connecting incoming students with trained upper-year mentors before semester begins.

Encouraging Self-Care and Building Resilience

Essential Wellness Habits

☾

Sleep

Maintain 7–8 hours of rest nightly

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Nutrition

Balanced meals improve concentration and emotional stability

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Movement

Regular walks, dance, or light exercise relieve tension

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Reflection

Gratitude journaling or prayer reduces anxiety



Beyond Applications — Towards Emotional Growth

The college application process is not just a test of intellect, but a **journey of self-discovery and resilience**. When we prioritize mental health, we empower students to pursue higher education with confidence, balance, and joy.

"It's not the acceptance letter that defines you; it's the strength you found while waiting for it."

The time for reactive mental health support has passed.

The future of higher education lies in **proactive, preventive approaches** that honor the complete wellbeing of every student from their very first interaction with our institutions.

"When we care for the mind behind the application, we nurture the future beyond the admission."

THANK YOU