

Transitioning to CTY Summer Programs for Students with Depression, Anxiety, or other Mental Health Concerns

Email: cty-disabilities@jhu.edu

Call: 410-735-6215

The combination of a rigorous academic course and new social environment, in addition to a residential experience for some students, requires preparation for most CTY students and their families. This preparation may be even more helpful for students with depression, anxiety, OCD, eating disorders, or other mental health concerns. This document seeks to provide some tips for facilitating your child's transition into the program and having a successful experience once there.

The environment of CTY Summer Programs is very different than that of a typical school or home. Three key aspects make the CTY environment unique:

- **Students are separated from their home environments and support systems.** At home, and even in their home schools, students are often surrounded by people that have known them for an extended period of time and know what supports they need to be successful. At CTY, staff members take great efforts to get to know each student quickly; however, students also need to take responsibility for knowing who to go to with questions or concerns and asking for this assistance when needed. Staff members are always available to assist students, but students need to take initiative to seek out that assistance and prepare themselves for being in this new environment.
- **Students spend extensive time with peers and staff.** Nearly all students and staff at residential sites live there. Thus, meal time, class time, and residential activity time is spent together. At day sites, the entire day is spent in the company of peers and staff. If a student is used to having time alone to recoup, relax, etc., this generally doesn't happen unless specifically requested.
- **CTY courses include the presentation of a lot of skills and information over a short period of time.** Unlike a typical school course, a CTY course covers a lot of ground in three short weeks. Students who are used to working a slower pace over a longer period of time may need to adapt a strategy of focusing on key parts of a task to gain as much as possible from each assignment and keep anxieties, frustrations, and any feelings of being overwhelmed at bay.

Before the program begins:

First and foremost, ensure your child is ready for not only the academic challenge of the CTY program, but also the social/emotional challenges that come with being in a new environment with brand new people, schedules, expectations, foods, etc. for three weeks. Call CTY Disability Services at 410-735-6206 or email cty-disabilities@jhu.edu as you and your child discuss registering for the program to have questions answered and to learn more about the program.

After your child has registered and been assigned to a course for the summer, contact CTY Disability Services at 410-735-6215 or cty-disabilities@jhu.edu once again to discuss your child's specific needs and potentially needed accommodations. In addition, this is another great opportunity to learn more about the program to help highlight for your child the parts of the program s/he may find most exciting and to potentially reduce anxieties by knowing more of what to expect.

By providing CTY Disability Services with as much information as you can, you will help the summer staff best serve your child and allow for a positive experience. The more information you can provide, the more likely it is your child has a more successful experience. Documentation to support any requested accommodations needs to be sent to CTY Disability Services following the documentation guidelines explained during your conversation with a CTY Disability Services staff member.

To help determine which accommodations or supports may be helpful in the CTY setting, here is a list of commonly requested accommodations and supports for students with anxiety, depression, or other mental health needs. These actions have helped students transition into the program smoothly and find success:

- Ability to schedule times to check-in via phone/Skype with a counselor at home (in a private location)
- Posted agendas in the classroom and the residence hall
- A syllabus providing the basic class schedule for the session
- A quiet place/time when the student can be alone (e.g., having a time and place to sit and listen to an iPod each day)
- A single room (this may not be possible at all sites) or preference for having a roommate (if possible) as a roommate is not always guaranteed
- Modified assignments (broken into smaller parts) or extended time
- Opportunity to visit the site ahead of time to “get the lay of the land” (not possible at all sites and must be planned in advance)
- Point person to check in with regularly throughout the program
- Safe place to go to in classroom/dorm where the student can go to “cool down”
- Structuring unstructured times (such as providing notice of activity choices ahead of time and avoiding students choosing groups by instead using a counting off or other similar technique)
- Advance notice or cue before being called upon in class
- Opportunity to check and report weight to parent/therapist (for eating disorder)

We have had students in the past with depression, anxiety, and/or other mental health concerns who attended our programs and chose not to request formal accommodations. These students usually have a wonderful time by taking their medication and/or using coping strategies. They may not require any supports or accommodations. If you believe this is the case for your child, we still appreciate getting as much information as possible in order to best inform our staff on site about working with your child. If you are not sure about requesting formal accommodations, please think through the information provided about CTY's unique environment as well as the examples of common accommodations or supports for students with mental health concerns at CTY. It may be better to set up a plan for your child in order to be proactive about providing him or her with optimal access to the program. Even if not setting up a plan, it still may help to provide information to staff about how to recognize symptoms/triggers to better support your child through any periods of anxiety, frustration, or being overwhelmed.

It is also important to note that all students on prescription medication should continue to take their medication during the program as prescribed. If at all possible, we have also found that medication dosage/type changes should be avoided just prior to and during the program. If your child's doctor feels a change may be needed specifically for the structure of the program (e.g., to manage symptoms through the evening session at older students sites that runs from 7-9pm), this should be discussed with the doctor well in advance so the student can adjust to any changes well before arriving at the program.

If your child starts experiencing severe symptoms within the 6 months leading up to the program, contact CTY Disability Services again to discuss options.

Tips For Helping To Ensure A Successful CTY Summer Experience:

Contact CTY Disability Services as soon as possible. If you complete a *Request for Accommodations* form, think about the program holistically (not just in the classroom.) Talk with your child about how he or she can best be supported. Have your child talk to CTY Disability Services staff about his or her needs.

Ensure that adults working with your child are aware of specific difficulties your child faces and the strategies implemented to help with these to date as well as your child's strengths. This needs to be communicated to CTY Disability Services ahead of the session. The more information you can provide to help us be helpful to your child, the better. By informing CTY of known strengths and weaknesses and potential triggers for symptoms to develop, staff can better play to strengths while working to minimize challenges as well as better recognize when your child may need some extra support.

Consult with appropriate school personnel and professionals knowledgeable about your child. Talk with them about your child's upcoming CTY experience and ask for their recommendations as they pertain to the program. These individuals have often seen your child in academic and social situations when you are not around and may have valuable insights to

offer about your child's attendance at CTY. If possible and appropriate, help to arrange for these individuals to speak directly with CTY Disability Services.

Read through the Site Information Packet and any other CTY-related materials with your child. Discuss the Honor Code, student expectations for behavior, and the CTY culture (bright students from all over the country/world, dorm life, etc.). Talk about how the rules, expectations, and environment may be different from those in school or at home and how they may relate to his or her daily routine, behaviors, and potential triggers for inducing symptoms. Have your child start practicing meeting the expectations and schedule (that may be different than what he or she is used at home) so he or she can get used to the environment.

Review the campus map and other concrete details about the program and site provided in the Site Information you receive with your student's course assignment. Read this to determine the key locations of buildings such as dormitories, classrooms, the dining hall, and the main offices. If you would like even more details, discuss that with CTY Disability Services or the site program manager/assistant program manager listed on the front of the packet. Your child will not have to navigate the campus on his or her own, but it may be helpful for him or her to get a mental map of the lay of the campus, know the basic set-up of the dorm and dining hall, and the schedule for weekdays and weekends to feel more at ease upon arriving.

Think about the social, academic, and organizational skills that are required in the CTY setting that may not be needed in the home or school environment. For example, if your child typically spends a lot of time organizing materials outside of class time, this may not be possible at CTY due to the full schedule of the program. Discuss how your child might be able to keep up with organization within class time with support from the instructor or teaching assistant, if needed. In addition, if your child is participating at a residential site, discuss how he or she will share living spaces with others, will have to be responsible for getting ready in the morning and at night, will need to do laundry, etc. You may want to consider providing your child with some basic housekeeping pointers, such as how to do laundry, how to make healthy food choices (dining halls are often buffet style with varied choices), how to keep possessions clean and organized, and how to share personal space with a roommate. Your child's Resident Assistant is on-hand to provide guidance and supervision in these areas, but the more prepared a child feels, the more likely s/he is at ease in the new environment.

Think about new situations that may cause your child anxiety. Discuss these with CTY Disability Services and your child in advance to prepare as much as possible. For example, if using a shared restroom may cause anxiety, discuss with your child strategies for dealing with this and how making the site staff aware of this may help to lessen the anxiety once on site. Going into the program knowing what to expect may help ease anxieties tremendously. Don't hesitate to ask questions of CTY full time staff as the summer approaches.

Discuss strategies for dealing with anxiety in the CTY setting with your child and share this with CTY Disability Services and the academic counselor on site. What does your child normally do to cope in stressful situations? Will this be possible at CTY? (If you're not sure, discuss this with CTY Disability Services). Talk with your child and CTY Disability Services about what else your child can do to handle any stress and anxiety on site.

Talk to your child about where he or she can go for assistance while on site. Make sure he or she knows who to talk to if he or she is feeling stressed or anxious.

Talk to the academic counselor the week prior to the start of the program (**Please note that the counselor will call you. If you do not hear from counselor within a day or two of the start of your child's program, please feel free to contact the site office and ask to speak with the counselor). The academic counselor is the point person for you on-site to discuss any accommodations or information that will help your child have a successful experience. Take this opportunity to share further information and ensure you both understand the Accommodations and/or Support Plan developed through CTY Disability Services (if applicable). Have questions prepared that came up in any discussions with your child in preparing him or her for the program.

During the program:

On Opening Day be sure to meet with the academic counselor on site. The academic counselor is most likely to be stationed at the medical table. If not, ask the health or other staff where to locate the counselor.

Check-in with your child and the academic counselor regularly. You may want to let the academic counselor know on Opening Day that you would like to speak with him or her at some point during the first week so that you know how your child is progressing in the program. It is easier to address any issue that may arise as it is developing rather than after it has surfaced. You know your child best, so site staff members appreciate any information you can update them with during the summer.

After the program:

On Closing Day, you'll have the opportunity to discuss your child's academic progress in a conference with his or her instructor. You may also want to check in with the academic counselor. Use any challenges faced as a learning experience, and celebrate your child's successes in the program.

After the summer, you may be asked to participate in a survey about you and your child's experiences for the summer. Any feedback is appreciated to help improve future CTY summer experiences for students (and parents).

Further Resources:

Your child's CTY experience can help to prepare him or her for a residential college experience. The resources below may help prepare your child for CTY Summer Programs, transitioning into middle or high school, and making the transition to college. Please note that links and resources are listed for informational purposes and convenience. No direct or implied endorsement by the Center for Talented Youth should be construed.

2E NEWSLETTER AND BLOG (<http://2enewsletter.blogspot.com/>) and (<http://www.2enewsletter.com>):

Both the blog and the newsletter provide current articles and information related to all things "twice exceptional." The bi-monthly newsletter has a subscription fee, but the blog and news briefings (a collection of links to twice exceptional articles sent monthly) are free. Past newsletter themes have included ADHD, dysgraphia, transitioning to college and more. You can see a complete listing of past newsletter topics on the 2eNewsletter website.

CHILD MIND INSTITUTE (<http://www.childmind.org>)

The Child Mind Institute website offers a host of resources and support on a number of mental health, learning, and social issues. Whether you are looking for more information, advice, support, or where to find treatment, this website may be a good place to start.

HELPING ANXIOUS KIDS ENJOY SUMMER CAMP (article on childmind.org)
(<http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2011-6-8-12-ways-help-anxious-kids-enjoy-summer-camp>)

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S PUZZLING BEHAVIORS by Steven E. Curtis, Ph.D.
(<http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Your-Childs-Puzzling-Behavior/dp/0979498201?ie=UTF8>)

From Amazon: "When should you seek professional help for your child's behavioral, social, or learning challenges? Understanding Your Child's Puzzling Behavior is the ultimate resource for assessing your child's behavior, learning when to intervene, and knowing how to seek further help for a struggling child. Whether a child is dealing with performance issues, anxiety, noncompliance, angry outbursts, or a host of other difficulties, this book offers a step-by-step method that walks parents through the often-complex process of treating a child's problems. You'll learn

- Not to accept any 'quick-fix' solutions
- How to holistically assess the condition and determine the nature and cause of the behavior
- What professionals can offer, and when to consult them

Understanding Your Child's Puzzling Behavior can help parents make informed and confident decisions about their child's well-being."

LEAVING THE NEST: 10 TIPS FOR PARENTS from Dr. Sarah Ravin
(<http://www.blog.drSarahRavin.com/depression/leaving-the-nest-10-tips-for-parents/>)

This article discusses 10 tips for parents as they consider having their child with a psychiatric diagnosis leave for college.

WORRY WISE KIDS (<http://www.worrywisekids.org>)

This site provides tools, tips, and resources for parents and professionals to help students with anxiety and related struggles.

HELPING YOUR EATING-DISORDERED CHILD NEGOTIATE SUMMER CAMP by Nancy Matsumoto (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/eating-disorders-news/201105/helping-your-eating-disordered-child-negotiate-summer-camp-1>)

This short article provides some good tips on preparing a child with an eating disorder for camp.

SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR KIDS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS by Michelle Davis, Vincent Culotta, Ph.D. Eric Levine Ed. D., Elizabeth Hess Rice, Ed.D. (<http://www.amazon.com/School-Success-Emotional-Behavioral-Disorders/dp/1593634315>)

This book provides an overview of why it is important to set up supports for students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders and provides concrete strategies for parents and teachers to use to set these students up for success.