

Episode 15 Transcript

Introduction:

You are listening to the UnDeniably Well podcast hosted by the University of Delaware's Employee Health and Wellbeing team. Keep listening to discover ways to be your best self each and every day.

On this episode of UnDeniably Well, I will be talking to two of the University of Delaware students as a follow-up to the mental health episode we had a few weeks ago. I was really intrigued by the student's perspective on that conversation and just hearing the generational differences, resources that exist on campus, how social media comes into play. It's really wonderful to hear how committed these students are to improving both their own mental health and mental health of those at the University of Delaware. I hope you enjoy our conversation and here we go.

Ryan Shuler:

Welcome to this episode of UnDeniably Well. My name is Ryan Shuler. I am the Associate Director of Employee Health & Wellbeing, and today I am very excited. I have two of our students that work in our office with us to really bring some unique student perspective to this mental health conversation. And this really came about as a follow-up to the mental health episode we did with Sue from NAMI Delaware a few weeks ago. So today I have Claire Coupard with me. Claire got her undergraduate degree at UD in Health Behavior Science in 2021. Right now, she is a first-year graduate student studying Health Promotion, pursuing a career in corporate wellness. I also have Claudia Hall with me. Claudia is a second semester senior at UD, working to get her degree in Health Behavior Science. Currently she's working with our team as an undergraduate intern in hopes to eventually pursue a career in health program implementation after she graduates in May. So welcome to both of you. I just have to add both of these students are talented and bright and funny and wonderful. And I really, really am excited to have sort of this unique student perspective on the call today. Claudia, I'll throw it to you first. When we talk about mental health, a lot of it is, you know, adults talking or employees are talking, what is the student perspective right now? What is going on? How are people coping? What is happening at UD, sort of in this mental health realm?

Claudia Hall:

Yeah. So I think a lot of students unfortunately are kind of experiencing a poor mental health perspective right now, just because like everything that happened with COVID, I feel like a lot of students kind of feel like they missed out a lot of things and still like, nothing is completely normal. And I think just in general, a lot of people are burnt out and kind of tired and done. And I think there's this kind of resurgence of this, we all need to work really hard, which I agree with. But at the same time, I think there's not enough focus on students, and people in general, like taking the time to really focus on their mental health and sometimes just taking a break.

So I think a lot of students are feeling just kind of like they're at this breaking point. I mean, obviously I can't speak for everybody, but I know that's definitely how I've been feeling. A lot of people I've talked to have felt the same way.

Ryan Shuler:

And Claire, how about from your perspective? I know we've talked about this before, but really bringing up that hustle mentality, you spoke very well on that.

Claire Coupard:

Yeah, so as a grad student, I kind of have a different perspective because I only take three classes and Claudia usually takes around five, but I'm also working, but I see a lot of this trying to pick up where we left off before COVID, but by doing that, we're pushing ourselves kind of to the limit at like, I like to say we're trying to drive full speed on empty. So I see a lot of people who are my age or just in the graduate program and even employees and students too, who are just like Claudia said, are feeling burnt out and just feeling like they have to be a part of this rat race when no one's holding them to that standard. Like it's just themselves. I think people need to realize that that's not necessary, you can still live life how you did before COVID, but with a different mental health perspective.

Ryan Shuler:

I think that's so important to bring up, and I think I've sort of always been the black sheep in the career world when talking about that rat race mentality. I have no desire to always be bigger, better, more. I am very content with my job. I like where I am. I don't feel the need to get to that next best thing, but I see it everywhere. We see it on social media. I see it in my colleagues. I see it in the students that it, you always have to, you know, work harder, be better, have a side hustle, make more money, buy more stuff, do more things. And like at some point, you're going to break. I'm curious from both of your perspectives, is mental health something that, and I imagine this is a generational difference, but is mental health something that students talk about? Like, are you talking about this with your friends? Is it common to bring up mental health or a counselor, a therapist, in a conversation?

Claire Coupard:

I can start, Claudia, if you like. Definitely, I think it's almost an everyday conversation because I feel like it's a lot less stigmatized to reveal what kind of mental health issues you're dealing with. I know me personally, I deal with my own mental health journey, and I feel like it's kind of comforting to talk to other people about it, and I can definitely feel a lot more support from my peers than maybe sometimes some people in older generations. So it's really helpful to talk about it and just have that conversation.

Claudia Hall:

Yeah. I think the older generations just don't... not that they don't want to understand. I just think they don't have that capacity to grasp what is going on, because it was something that you didn't talk about. You didn't say like, "oh, I'm experiencing anxiety, I'm experiencing depression." Like you did not bring that up.

That was something that you kept to yourself, and a lot of times people didn't even know like what that was. They just were like, "oh, I'm feeling nervous" or whatever. But like Claire said, I think it's definitely a major conversation now. And I think a lot of people are very open to talking about it. I know like between me and my friends and really, as long as I trust someone, like I have no problem sharing what like mental health issues I've been dealing with or have dealt with in the past, so I think it's very helpful that people, our age are willing to talk about it because it makes you feel less crazy. Like you feel like,

oh, someone else gets what I'm saying, and you can kind of go through that together and not feel like there's something wrong with me.

Ryan Shuler:

Yeah. You feel seen. And I think I feel in a unique spot right now, just in where I am in life because I have, you know, parents who are in an older generation; I'm working with students on a regular basis, in a younger generation; and then also sort of my middle generation and to see the differences. You know, I think of like my parents or their siblings, mental health never would have been talked about. I think about my grandfather who lived through the Great Depression, World War II. I'm sure all of that generation had major mental health issues that they were trying to deal with. The mental health was not like an elaborated field yet.

So to your point, no one knew what was going on. So they just coped in the best way they could, which was not always healthy. And then those behaviors are learned by the next generation. And it's like, at what point do you have to, you have to sort of have some wherewithal and self-awareness as an individual to say, we do know about mental health now. We have resources to help with mental health now. And if you're not seeking treatment, like really you're doing that to yourself. You have to sort of take that first step and say, this is something I'm struggling with. I need to seek support, and I think one thing that we kind of talked about on our prep call for this was that it can be really scary at first, especially if you are someone in an older generation where it's not the norm to have to say, I might be depressed, or I think I have an anxiety issue and I need to go see someone for it. That can feel really scary for a lot of people.

Claudia Hall:

Yeah, I know for me, I for a long time... like I've had anxiety for a really long time, and I never wanted to see a therapist because I was like, that means it's very serious and that I can't handle this myself. And then eventually it got to a point where I was like, why am I torturing myself with this? Like, it's not helpful for me. It's not, I'm not being useful. I'm not working like to my best ability. And eventually I found a therapist. I just recently started and I already feel like it just has helped me so much just because it gives you the tools and helps you work towards where you need to be at. But it's not like this is something that is wrong with you and you need help. It's like support. I wouldn't say it's like, "oh, you need to be treated." It's more like, these are people here who know how to help you and are giving you those tools so you can be your best self.

Ryan Shuler:

I love that. And even that, even the way you just phrase that is to me shows how far we've come in this mental health conversation. Cause even when I was a student, it was treatment, and I'm not that much older than you all, but like it was treatment. Like if you had a mental health issue, you went and sought treatment and some of them, yes, some of these major mental health issues do need treatment, but to your point, a lot of the issues and daily stressors and things that we face, we don't need treatment. We just need support to kind of get through them in a positive way. And I mean, the way that mental health and these, you know, depressions, anxieties, these types of, of conditions, they limit your brain's capacity to think rationally. So when you're not in an episode, yes, you may be able to address the situation in a healthy way. But when you are in an episode, you literally cannot function in a proper way.

So you can't handle it appropriately because your brain is not letting you. I'm curious, Claire, I know we talked a lot about sort of from the health promotion perspective, the tie between the mental health and the physical health. Do you want to elaborate on that at all?

Claire Coupard:

Yeah, I'm sure a lot of people are aware of this, but there's a huge connection between physical health and mental health. Honestly, if your mental health isn't being supported or, you know, at a great state, your physical health is going to reflect that as well. I know me personally, when I'm going through finals or something really stressful in my life, it's definitely translated into my physical health, whether that be getting sick or just losing my appetite or inability to leave my bed, which I'm sure we all relate to. Yeah, there's a huge connection there and it's really important to honor both of those aspects of health, but really tying in that mental health support is really important to make the rest of your life, honestly, just better. Like it will make every aspect of your life become better.

Claudia Hall:

I know there are like a lot of connections between that, especially, this is kind of like a niche topic, but I know that there's a huge connection between mental health and digestion. Like it doesn't just affect you not being able to like get up or want to exercise or feeling sick, but it like, it impacts like the way your body physically operates and like functions. So it's not just, Oh, my mental health issues are giving me a headache or whatever, but it's like so much deeper than people realize that like you could be having a stomach ache and not even be realizing like, oh, maybe my mental health, isn't where it should be at right now.

Ryan Shuler:

Such a great point that you bring up because I think a lot of times people don't realize, like you just said that the mental health is the trigger for their physical symptoms. So they think they got, you know, they caught a cold from someone else or they got sick, but it's really, that's really like your body's way of saying something is wrong. Something is not right. Mental health is not right. Something is off. We need to address it. So we're sending you all of these warning signs. We're giving you headaches, stomach aches, making you feel shaky, weak, whatever it may be is your brain's way of telling you, you need to reevaluate right now. Something is not sitting well with. Something is not being addressed. Your to do list is too long. You're caught up in this comparison game, whatever it may be. But that's sort of your body's way of signaling to you that you need to kind of take stock of what's happening. I'm curious, Claudia, I want to kind of loop back to something you said earlier about, you know, that you just started, seeing a counselor, were you sort of picky in your thought process here? Did you just kind of take the first that one was available? Because I think this question comes up a lot. Like somebody may try it and they don't love the person on that first time. So then they just never go back. So what does that look like from an individual perspective, when you're trying to find a counselor that fits?

Claudia Hall:

Yeah. I was definitely very, very picky, almost to the point where my mom was like, you need to let it go and just find somebody, and I'm happy that I didn't do that because I love the person that I see now. But going through the process. I'm only 22. I didn't want to see somebody who was like an 80-year-old man. Like that was just not there's no, relatability there. And like, while they might be very credible and have

really great resources and whatever, I just felt like I knew the type of person that I wanted to see. And it took me a while, which is unfortunate, but because a lot of practices weren't accepting people like new clients, just because there is such an influx of people wanting to seek out therapy. But eventually I did find someone who is on the younger side and a woman. And I'm so happy that I did that because I know for a fact that if I was sitting in an office with someone who I felt like I didn't either relate to, or just felt a little bit like, Hmm. Maybe not. They're not my like type of person. I definitely would not be open to like having a conversation, and it wouldn't be beneficial for me at all. It would pretty much be a waste of time. So for all the people listening, if you're trying to seek out a therapist, it's okay to be picky with what you want because you know yourself and you know what you need from somebody. So like, if you really feel strongly about the type of person you want to see, you should see that type of person.

Ryan Shuler:

I feel that's such an important fact to or point to just continue to drive in with people. Your first therapist does not have to be your forever counselor. That you could click with someone right off the bat and that's amazing. Or you could say, you know what? I don't know if I can like fully open up and trust this person. Let me try again. And I do think it's unfortunate that. Well, I will say it's sort of been a blessing and a curse since COVID. Is COVID brought a lot of this mental health stuff to light, and I think that's been a wonderful thing that now it's something that we openly talk about. Work sites are looking at. Universities are looking at. Students are talking openly about. So I think that there's been a lot of good with COVID sort of bringing this all to light, but the flip side of that is because it's been talked about so much to your point, now finding a counselor can be challenging because people are seeking the support that they need.

I will say, for all of the University of Delaware people listening, if you feel more comfortable, sort of coming to our office first as a resource, we're happy to connect you. We do have an employee assistance program, and I think this, for employees listening, it's such a wonderful resource because you can be picky. You call in, you say, look, I'm trying to find a counselor. I would prefer them to be on the younger side. I would prefer them to be female, or let's say, you know, I'm a little bit older and I'm going through a divorce. And I say, I would prefer somebody who specializes in divorce and I would prefer it to be a man, whatever you feel that, you know, be most comfortable with, you can be as picky as you want. And then the employee assistance provider will sort of do the leg work research for you and present you with your options. So there are resources. For students, I know a lot of times with the Center for Counseling and Student Development, it can be challenging because they have to triage basically. So for those who are looking for more regular support, they may refer you to an outside counselor so they can see those students are in high crisis, you know, when they, when they really need it in that moment, so it's hard because you're trying to take that big first step, that big, scary first step and do the right thing, but it may take some patience and time to sort of settle into a groove and find the right person for you.

Claire Coupard:

For any students looking for any mental health support or counselor or something like that, our Center for Counseling and Student Development has a great database to look for off campus counselors. You can put in very strict criteria, if you want them in walking distance, or maybe you're willing to drive a little bit if you have a car on campus, male, female age, what they specialize in. You can put all that in and so many great results come back, and I found that helpful. Unfortunately, I didn't really take the

next step, but I thought that it was really great for anyone looking for that who might not really know where to start because it really gives you all their information, what they specialize in, if they're accepting new clients, which is always something to look for when you're looking online for a therapist.

Ryan Shuler:

That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that resource. And we'll link that in the show notes. both the EAP and the Student Counseling Center website for that. I am curious. So now that I have, you know, children of my own, I'm sort of looking at this through the parenting lens too. And I think when talking about students, a lot of what gets brought up is that, you know, oh, students are so much more anxious these days. Students don't, are not able to handle things as well. And, I'm thinking, is it really because you can't handle things or is it really because you've been given the language to finally voice what's happening? Like when listening to you to talk, these are the same things that happened to me when I was in college. And I just didn't know that I could do all that. Like to me, therapy was, you know, you're bipolar or schizophrenic, or you have this massive health condition. It wasn't like, oh, if you want to go talk to someone for more support, that's an option. So I'm just curious from your perspectives, do you think things have changed where students are more anxious or do you think that it's just more commonplace?

Claudia Hall:

I think that it definitely has a lot to do with the language. When I was younger, like I had anxiety when I was younger and for a really long time, I just didn't know what that meant. Cause like, when you're that young, you don't know what anxiety is. So I definitely think it has a lot to do with just being like learning the language and because it is so much more at the forefront of our society right now, like having the tools to be able to explain like what you're feeling. But I also think that there is a slight part of it where just in general, everybody is a little more anxious, or just a little more in distress, I would say, because there's a lot happening in the world right now, between COVID and things that are happening in Ukraine. And honestly, everything it's just like, it becomes a lot to process.

And especially when you have. All this information at your fingertips with social media and the internet in general, you have more to worry about. So I think definitely having that language to be able to finally explain how you feel, but also there is that aspect of having more information that you need to process and then becoming overwhelmed from it. So I think it's a combination of both.

Ryan Shuler:

That's such a valid point with social media, and I know Claire, when we talked previously, we kind of talked about this comparison game. Do you want to sort of to elaborate on that?

Claire Coupard

Yeah, just through social media. All you see is the good in other people's lives. You never see the bad. So you're so prone to compare yourself to what just seems like someone always having a good day, always doing the best they can. When in reality, everyone has bad days and everyone is not excelling at every portion of their life. But I definitely have found myself coming to grad school and seeing these other people on social media, whether they're in law school or just, you know, in graduate programs and their life seems great. And it seems like they're getting great grades, and they're working out and they're

doing all these things all day. They're filled up being productive. And at first I felt, oh my gosh, I need to be productive like 24/7, like I'm dropping the ball here. And I really tried to do that. And then I took a step back and thought, this isn't me. Like I can get things done in three hours. I don't have to be doing work for nine hours of the day.

So a lot of the comparison can just be so detrimental, but taking a step back and realizing, and I kind of mentioned this before, earlier in the podcast doing what's best for you. And what works for you is most important because you're yourself and that's at the end of the day, you'll always just be yourself. You're not someone else.

Ryan Shuler:

That's such a valid point to bring up because it happens regardless of the population, regardless of what you're looking at on social media. If you're a mom, there's all the mom games. If you're a student, there's all of this hustle and bustle mentality. It's everywhere. And it really does make you feel like all of these people have it better than me. Like you can very easily slip into that state and feel less than all the time. And it's really hard to constantly tell yourself, like this was 10 seconds of their day today. The other 23 hours and 50 minutes could have been awful, but they chose to post this ten second highlight of one tiny thing that went well.

So it's really like constantly reminding yourself that, it's okay to have a bad day. Everybody's going to have a bad day. Everybody's going to cry. Everybody's going to get told no, at some point. Everybody's not going to feel their best one day. That's just normal. That's normal life. And it's really hard to continually put that in the forefront of your mind when you're being so inundated with filtered perfect images all the time. And I think about like, you know, I have a 12-year-old at home. Like that's, what she's growing up with, is this filtered image of everyone and what bodies should look like and what people are doing. And it's no wonder that, you know, Claudia, to your point, people are feeling that greater level of distress because you're constantly being told all day, every day, you're less than unless you're actively shutting it down. Like you need to either actively tell yourself I am good enough, or you need to actively turn off social media. Or if you are on social media, carefully curating your feed, so it's real life people. And not just this, you know, people who do this for a living all the time.

Claudia Hall:

Yeah, I think it's important. I know for me, like I'll just unfollow people. I have no problem. Like if you're not putting anything positive into my life, I don't need to follow you on social media if I have never met you or met you one time in person five years ago, or like, if you're a random influencer who is making me feel bad about myself, not because they're doing it on purpose, but they're working out every day, eating so healthy. I feel like, oh, I should be doing that. I'll just be like, Hmm, no, I don't, I can't see this anymore. It's not helping me. I feel bad about myself and I'd rather not feel that way. So I have no problem doing that. And I think a lot of people need to be again with that whole being picky thing, be picky about who you follow. If you don't want to see something, just remove it because you're only helping yourself feel better in the end. So I'm a supporter of the unfollow.

Ryan Shuler:

Well, and really the unfollow is boundary settings. Like we talk about so much about how important boundary settings are, and they can be really difficult. You have to set boundaries at work, you have to

set boundaries in your family, you set boundaries with your friendships. And then it's like when there is social media, they don't exist. It's just a free for all. But the unfollow button is like a very easy clickable boundary that you can say, I don't need this in my life anymore. And that's just such a great point that you bring up is you have to set boundaries even on social media when it's just, you know, for fun, you still have to set boundaries, if it is affecting your mental health. Claire, do you have anything to add to sort of the social media?

Claire Coupard:

Just like comparison will literally kill you so like Claudia said, fan of the unfollow, you know, monitor what you're doing on social media and be accountable for that.

Ryan Shuler:

And for those of us, I think who are trying to do this right. For myself, both as a parent, as a manager, I need some model those behaviors for my students, for my children, for my colleagues, for my staff, that, you know, I want them to see that I have healthy boundaries. I want them to see what a real life mom looks like. That my house is a mess all the time. I want them to see that sometimes my hair looks awful and sometimes I don't feel my best. And when the people around you can see that, that it's normal to have ups and downs and goods and bads and not everything is perfection all the time. It lessons that comparison or lessons that anxiety or feeling of needing to be perfect all the time for those around you. So it is hard. I think one thing that we've all sort of agreed on in conversations that we've had is that all of these things are challenging at all ages in all generations. But one thing that is very important and crucial that we want to get across is that it's never too late to start taking steps to get your mental health back to a good spot. And this is something that you'll have to work at.

You know, mental health does not mean illness. Like there's mental health on the preventative side. Like what are the things you're doing on a regular basis to keep you in a positive state? But really just to put it out there that there's always resources. There's always someone you can go to. Our office, the counseling center, a family member, a friend, you just sort of have to take that first step, and it's never too late to sort of take that first step to get you the resources that you need to be successful. So for sake of time, we're going to pause there. I would like to start with Claudia. We ask all of our guests this, what is one thing that helps you stay undeniably well?

Claudia Hall:

I was thinking about this. I think for me, Which I don't always do this because sometimes I am just feeling like overwhelmed and stressed out, but working out, even just going for a walk, being outside is something that you feel so much better, even if it's like for five minutes, you just feel so much better, if you step away from whatever you're worrying about, you're stressed about work. Just taking that even like hour, 30 minutes, 20 minutes to work out. It's something that really helps me. And like, sometimes we'll be like, Ugh, I really don't want to work out today. And then after, my mood is like completely different and I feel so much better. And I know like, again with that whole hustle mentality, like I don't always do that, even though I know that I should. And then the other thing is just what I've recently been doing is therapy. I've only been doing it for like a month or two now, but I feel like it is something that I will do for a very long time.

Like regardless of whether I feel like I'm struggling in that period of my life or not, I just think it's so important to be able to have somebody who is so removed from your life in that way, and just really there to be able to help you. So between working out and therapy, I think are the two main things in my life at this moment that I've been doing to be undeniably well.

Ryan Shuler:

That's wonderful. Claire, how about you? What are you doing to stay undeniably well?

Claire Coupard:

Definitely taking breaks when I need them and surrounding myself with people that are accepting of taking breaks. I feel really grateful to work at employee health and wellbeing and be a part of the team because I feel like everyone really values my health, whether it be mental or physical, and I have the chance to improve both being a part of this team, and everyone's so supportive and really just wants the best for me. So just taking breaks and surrounding yourself with those kinds of people will make your life a lot better.

Ryan Shuler:

That's wonderful. So thank you both very much. I really loved the opportunity to sort of hear all of this from your perspective. I think, you know, to a fault of mine, we get so hung up on the employee side. But really hearing that student voice in this, is so important because it dictates so much of what we do. I mean, we exist at the University of Delaware to ensure that students are having a positive experience. And even though my job is employee focused, my job is to keep the employees healthy so they can keep the students healthy and engaged and learning and connected. So I really do appreciate having you both on the team and that you both are so open and willing to talk about all of this. Thank you both very much for that. If anyone has questions, you know, if you're listening and you have questions about this, please feel free to email us wellbeing@udel.edu, check out our website. We'll also put some of these resources we spoke about in the show notes. And really remember that, you know, it is sort of never too late to get your mental health back on track, and if there's any way we can support you in that we are happy to do so. So thank you both very much for being here and have a wonderful day.

Outro:

Thank you for listening to the UnDeniably Well podcast. For all things wellbeing at UD, visit our website, udel.edu/wellbeing. There you can access our on-demand library, subscribe to our newsletter and see what's coming up to help you on your wellbeing journey. Until next time, be well.