



KEY PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN POST-SECONDARY MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Student engagement involves the meaningful and timely involvement of postsecondary students as experts with lived experience in the processes and decisions that affect them and their community.

In collaboration with post-secondary student advisors and researchers, the Inlight engagement team co-developed key principles of student engagement in mental health research. This process was led in partnership with a Student Advisory Committee composed of current graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Toronto. The principles outlined in this resource are based on learnings from previous research and research-adjacent activities and guided by community-engaged research principles.

These key principles are intended to be used as the foundation for any research activities engaging students as lived experience experts. They should be embedded at all stages of the research process, from project conceptualization through knowledge mobilization. Researchers are encouraged to engage with student partners to adapt these principles to their current project.

ABOUT INLIGHT

This resource was produced by the Inlight Student Mental Health Research Initiative, an Institutional Strategic Initiative of the University of Toronto committed to improving student mental health and wellness outcomes by investing in high-quality, impactful research and driving scalable research innovations.

For more information about this resource or Inlight, contact studentmh.research@utoronto.ca.

CITING THIS RESOURCE

McCann E, Ewing L, Cleverley K, & the Inlight Student Advisory Committee (2024). Key Principles of Student Engagement in Post-Secondary Mental Health Research. Inlight Student Mental Health Research Initiative, University of Toronto. Retrieved from: <https://smhr.utoronto.ca/student-engagement/>

LIVED EXPERIENCE IS EXPERTISE

Students should be valued as experts in their own experiences and respected as equal contributing partners. Students are living the realities that we are researching, meaning they have firsthand, direct expertise that would not be represented if they are not actively engaged. Their perspectives, feelings, and voices should be reflected in and valued deeply throughout the research process.

CAPACITY FOR IMPACT

Ensure student feedback and perspectives are meaningfully integrated to affect the direction of the research and inform decision-making in the project.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Authentic student engagement is a responsibility of all partners at the table. This means all members of a research team should understand, value, and respect the student engagement process.

SUSTAINABILITY

Student engagement should be a continuous process embedded throughout the project to allow for ongoing opportunities for participation and mentorship of new voices. Recognize that individual student involvement might look different over time as students' commitments and availability change.

APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION

Students should be recognized for their time and intellectual contributions. Recognition may look different and could include financial stipends or co-authorship. It should be tailored to students' specific needs, interests, and contributions.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Engagement in research should not automatically come with the expectation of disclosure. Participation in engagement activities does not necessarily mean the student is open and willing to disclose their lived experience more broadly. Students should have the opportunity to choose with whom, where, and when they wish to disclose any lived experiences.

BI-DIRECTIONAL LEARNING

Engagement is a reciprocal process, where everyone has something they can learn and something they can teach. Knowledge should flow in both directions.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

It is imperative to follow-up meaningfully and report on ideas and recommendations that students provide throughout the engagement process, even if the idea is not possible to execute. Accountability is an important aspect of ensuring students know their contributions are recognized and valued.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Students' lived experiences of mental health are informed by multiple, unique, and complex identities and experiences. These considerations must be integrated thoughtfully into the research processes, including in the identification and engagement of, and ongoing support for, diverse student voices.