

Mental Health Resources for International Students in Poland

MS in Poland Resource Guide



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For International Students

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Taking care of your mental health is as important as your academic success. Studying abroad can present unique challenges that may affect your emotional well-being. This guide provides information on mental health resources and support available to international students in Poland.

Common Mental Health Challenges for International Students Academic Pressure

- **Adjusting to a different educational system**
- **Language barriers in learning**
- **High academic expectations**
- **Exam stress and deadline pressure**
- **Balancing studies with other responsibilities**

Cultural Adjustment

- **Culture shock and adaptation difficulties**
- **Feeling like an outsider or "foreigner"**
- **Language-based social barriers**
- **Different social norms and customs**
- **Religious or cultural identity challenges**

Social Isolation

- **Distance from family and established support networks**
- **Difficulty forming new friendships**
- **Limited social integration with local students**

- **Loneliness, especially during holidays**
- **Romantic relationship challenges across cultures**

Practical Stressors

- **Financial concerns and budgeting**
- **Housing issues**
- **Navigating bureaucracy and paperwork**
- **Weather adjustment (particularly winter)**
- **Time management across different time zones when communicating with home**

NOTE: Many of these challenges are normal parts of the international student experience. Recognizing them as common and seeking support early can prevent them from developing into more serious issues.

Signs You Might Need Support Emotional Changes

- Persistent sadness or low mood lasting more than two weeks
- Excessive worry or anxiety that interferes with daily activities
- Feeling overwhelmed or helpless
- Irritability or unusual anger
- Loss of interest in activities you previously enjoyed

Physical Symptoms

- Significant changes in sleep patterns (insomnia or oversleeping)
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Constant fatigue or low energy
- Unexplained headaches, digestive issues, or other physical complaints
- Increased alcohol or substance use

Academic Impact

- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Declining academic performance
- Missing classes or deadlines regularly
- Procrastination beyond usual habits
- Loss of motivation for studies

Social Changes

- Withdrawing from friends and social activities
- Avoiding communication with family
- Feeling disconnected from others
- Excessive homesickness that doesn't improve over time
- Difficulty trusting others or feeling paranoid

IMPORTANT: If you're experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicide, please seek immediate help by calling the emergency number (112) or going to the nearest emergency room. Your life matters, and help is available.

Mental Health Services at Polish Universities University Counseling Centers

Most major Polish universities offer psychological counseling services:

- **University of Warsaw:** Psychological Counseling Center (CPP UW)
- **Jagiellonian University:** Student Support Centre
- **Warsaw University of Technology:** Psychological Counseling Office
- **Wrocław University:** Psychological Support Center
- **Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań:** Psychological Counseling Service
- **Medical University of Gdańsk:** Psychological Support Office

Services typically include:

- Individual counseling (often available in English)
- Group therapy or support groups
- Stress management workshops
- Psychological assessment
- Referrals to external specialists when needed

TIP: Contact your university's International Student Office for information about psychological services available at your specific institution. Many universities have increased their English-language mental health support in recent years.

How to Access University Services

1. **Contact your university's psychological service center** directly or through the International Student Office

2. **Complete an intake form** (usually available online)
3. **Schedule an initial assessment** (may have a waiting period)
4. **Attend the first appointment** where your needs will be evaluated
5. **Follow the recommended treatment plan** (short-term counseling, workshops, or referral)

Private Mental Health Services Finding English-Speaking Therapists

- **Telemedicine platforms:** docplanner.com, znanylekarz.pl, psychologytoday.com
- **Expatriate forums and groups:** Facebook groups for expats often share recommendations
- **International medical centers:** Medcover, Luxmed, Enel-Med
- **University referrals:** Your university counseling service can often recommend private practitioners
- **Insurance provider directories:** If you have private health insurance

Typical Costs

- **Initial psychiatric consultation:** 200-400 PLN
- **Therapy session (45-50 minutes):** 150-300 PLN
- **Psychological assessment:** 200-500 PLN
- **Online therapy sessions:** Often 20-30% less expensive than in-person

Insurance Coverage

- **NFZ (National Health Fund):** Covers basic psychiatric care for those with state insurance, but limited English-speaking providers and potentially long waiting times
- **Private health insurance:** Many international student insurance plans include some mental health coverage
- **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC):** Provides basic coverage for EU students
- **University health plans:** Some universities offer supplemental health coverage that includes mental health services

TIP: When booking an appointment, always confirm the therapist's English proficiency level and experience working with international clients. Ask about their approach and specialization to ensure it matches your needs.

Online Mental Health Resources Teletherapy Options

- **BetterHelp:** International online counseling platform (English)
- **Terapia przez Internet:** Polish online therapy service (some English providers)
- **Mindgram:** Employee and student wellbeing platform with therapist access
- **7Cups:** Free emotional support and paid online therapy
- **Jeno Medical:** Telemedicine platform with English-speaking psychiatrists

Mental Health Apps

- **Calm:** Meditation and sleep assistance
- **Headspace:** Guided meditation and mindfulness
- **What's Up:** CBT-based tools and tracking
- **MoodKit:** Mood improvement activities
- **Woebot:** AI-based cognitive behavioral therapy chatbot
- **Youper:** AI-based emotional health assistant

International Student-Specific Resources

- **International Student Insurance Mental Health Resources**
- **ISEP Student Mental Health Handbook**
- **Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Support Services**
- **International Therapist Directory**
- **Study Abroad Mental Health Resources (NAFSA)**

NOTE: While apps and online resources can be helpful tools, they are not substitutes for professional help if you're experiencing severe symptoms. Use them as supplements to professional care or as initial support while seeking more comprehensive treatment.

Crisis Services in Poland Emergency Contacts

- **General Emergency Number:** 112
- **Emergency Psychiatric Help:** 800 70 2222
- **Crisis Intervention Center (Centrum Interwencji Kryzysowej):** Available in major cities
- **Polish Suicide Prevention Helpline (Centrum Wsparcia):** +48 800 70 2222 (24/7)

English-Speaking Crisis Support

- **International Association for Suicide Prevention:**
iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/
- **7 Cups:** 7cups.com (free online emotional support)
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 (international service)
- **International Student Helpline:** Available through many universities

What to Expect in a Mental Health Emergency

1. **Call 112** if there is an immediate safety concern
2. **State that it's a psychiatric emergency** and if you need an English speaker
3. **Provide your location** as precisely as possible
4. **Emergency services** may take you to a psychiatric emergency room
5. **Bring identification** and insurance information if possible
6. **Consider asking a friend** to accompany you for support and translation

WARNING: In a psychiatric emergency (suicidal thoughts with a plan, psychosis, or other crisis requiring immediate attention), do not hesitate to use emergency services. Your university's emergency contact can also help coordinate appropriate care.

Building Your Support Network Within the University

- **International student organizations**
- **Buddy programs** pairing new international students with local mentors
- **Student interest clubs** related to your hobbies or background
- **Academic study groups**
- **Faculty advisors and mentors**

In the Broader Community

- **Religious communities** (if applicable to you)
- **Expatriate groups** from your home country
- **Language exchange meetups**
- **Volunteer opportunities**
- **Sports clubs and fitness communities**

Virtual Connections

- **Regular video calls** with family and friends from home

- **Online communities** for international students
- **Social media groups** for your university's international students
- **Alumni networks** from your home institution

TIP: Creating a balanced support network that includes both local connections in Poland and maintaining ties with your home country can provide stability during challenging times. Aim to develop at least 2-3 close connections you can rely on for emotional support.

Self-Care Strategies for International Students Daily Habits

- **Establish a routine** that includes regular meals and sleep schedule
- **Physical activity:** Even 20-30 minutes daily improves mood
- **Mindfulness practices:** Brief meditation, deep breathing, or gratitude journaling
- **Nature exposure:** Parks and green spaces can reduce stress
- **Healthy nutrition:** Balanced diet with foods from your culture when possible

Maintaining Cultural Connections

- **Cook familiar foods** from your home country
- **Celebrate important cultural holidays** with other international students
- **Share your traditions** with new friends
- **Stay connected** to news and events from home
- **Use music, films, and books** from your culture as comfort

Academic Balance

- **Set realistic goals** that account for adjustment challenges
- **Break large tasks** into smaller, manageable steps
- **Schedule regular breaks** during study sessions
- **Form study groups** with classmates
- **Utilize academic support services** early rather than waiting for problems

Winter Wellness

Poland's winter can be particularly challenging for students from warmer climates:

- **Light therapy** or maximizing natural light exposure
- **Vitamin D supplementation** (consult with a healthcare provider)

- **Winter-appropriate exercise** options
- **Social activities** to prevent isolation during dark months
- **Proper winter clothing** for comfortable outdoor activity

TIP: The "HALT" check-in is useful when you're feeling emotionally overwhelmed: ask yourself if you're Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. Addressing these basic needs first can sometimes significantly improve your emotional state.

Cultural Considerations in Mental Health Polish Attitudes Toward Mental Health

- Generally increasing acceptance of mental health care, especially in larger cities and academic settings
- Some lingering stigma, particularly among older generations
- Growing availability of psychological services in urban areas
- Strong tradition of resilience that sometimes discourages seeking help
- Medical model of mental health care more prevalent than in some Western countries

Cultural Differences in Therapy

- **Communication styles:** Polish therapists may be more direct than in some cultures
- **Therapeutic approaches:** CBT and psychodynamic approaches are common
- **Medication practices:** Possibly different from your home country
- **Patient-provider relationship:** May be more formal than you're accustomed to
- **Language nuances:** Expressing emotions in a non-native language can present challenges

Religious and Spiritual Support

- **Catholic Church resources:** For those who practice Catholicism
- **Other religious communities:** Most major faiths have places of worship in larger Polish cities
- **Spiritual counseling:** Available through many religious organizations
- **Meditation centers:** Secular mindfulness and spiritual traditions
- **University chaplaincy services:** Multi-faith support at many institutions

NOTE: When seeking mental health support, it's okay to ask for a provider who understands and respects your cultural background. Cultural competence is increasingly recognized as important in effective mental health care.

Reducing Mental Health Stigma Educating Yourself and Others

- **Learn the facts** about mental health conditions
- **Share accurate information** when appropriate
- **Use respectful language** when discussing mental health
- **Recognize that mental health conditions** are medical issues, not personal weaknesses
- **Understand how cultural backgrounds** influence perceptions of mental health

Supporting Peers

- **Check in regularly** with fellow international students
- **Listen without judgment** when someone shares their struggles
- **Know the resources** available so you can provide information
- **Respect confidentiality** when others confide in you
- **Encourage professional help** when appropriate

Advocating for Better Services

- **Provide feedback** to your university about mental health needs
- **Participate in mental health awareness events**
- **Support student initiatives** focused on wellbeing
- **Share your experiences** (as comfortable) to help normalize seeking help
- **Request additional resources** for international students if needed

IMPORTANT: Taking care of your mental health is a sign of strength, not weakness. Just as you would seek treatment for a physical illness, addressing mental health concerns is part of responsible self-care during your international study experience.

Additional Resources Books and Guides

- "International Student's Survival Guide" by Gareth Davey
- "Mindfulness for Students" by Stella Cottrell
- "The International Student's Guide to Studying in the United States" (contains general wellness information applicable in many countries)
- "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ" by Daniel Goleman

Websites

- studyinpoland.pl/en/index.php/news/85-mental-health-support-for-international-students
- international.studentmentalhealthsupport.com
- ulifeline.org/topics/international_students
- lesley.edu/article/mental-health-resources-for-international-students

Organizations

- World Health Organization (WHO) - Mental Health Department
- International Association of Counseling Services
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Mental Health Initiatives
- International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) Support Services

TIP: Remember that seeking help for mental health concerns is a normal part of self-care. Many successful students utilize mental health resources during their studies. You don't need to be in crisis to benefit from mental health support.