

988 LIFELINE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following discussion guide is adapted from the Active Minds Validate, Appreciate, Refer (V-A-R) mental health support tool **facilitator guide**. Note, it is recommended you show the VAR video as part of the discussion, so a projector and screen are needed.

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in 10- to 24-year-old individuals¹. In the United States, more people die by suicide than by homicide or car accidents. For every person who dies by suicide, 316 people seriously consider suicide but do not kill themselves².

Overall, 67% of young adults first inform a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else, and 39% of college students experience a significant mental health issue³.

Large Group Discussion Question: What stands out to you when you hear this data?

Solicit a few participant responses.

It is important to understand most, if not all, of us, will experience times of significant mental distress and challenge at some point. And, often, help from a friend, like a fraternity/sorority brother or sister, can play a huge role in helping us successfully navigate those challenging times in a healthy way. Our time today will focus on providing a helpful framework to use when helping a friend through a challenging time.

For the next activity, ask participants to pair up to discuss the following discussion question. Allow 7-10 minutes for the small group discussion.

Small Group Discussion Question: Describe a time in which you helped a friend or relative through a difficult situation. What did you find was effective in helping that person? What was ineffective?

Active Minds, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults, partnered with Alpha Chi Omega, Pi Kappa Phi, Sigma Nu and Zeta Tau Alpha to develop resources for teaching fraternity and sorority members how to support a friend or loved one who may be struggling. The outcome of that partnership is the Validate, Appreciate, Refer, or V-A-R, mental health support tool.

Show the V-A-R video at activeminds.org/GreekLifeVAR. The password is **GreekLifeVAR**.

V-A-R conversations can take many forms: phone, in-person, text message, Facetime and many others. The medium does not matter. What does matter is that the other individual knows you care.

Large Group Discussion Question: If a friend told you, “I didn’t go to class this week – I just couldn’t do it,” how could you respond using the V-A-R framework?

The last letter – “R” – is of critical importance. We must recognize the limitation of the help we can offer. And in some cases, the biggest help we can provide is getting the friend connected to a counselor or other mental health professional.

One of the easiest ways to make that connection is by encouraging your friend to call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The Lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress. The Lifeline is a national network of crisis centers. Calling or texting 988 will put the person in direct contact with a trained professional that can provide immediate help and connect the person to additional local resources for ongoing support.

Discussion Question: What can our chapter do to increase awareness of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline?

Possible answers include:

- Hang the poster within our chapter house and at various locations on campus.
- Research if your campus has an Active Minds chapter, and if so, partner with them on an awareness campaign.
- Facilitate a workshop using this discussion guide for the chapter and/or a wider campus audience each year as part of **National Suicide Prevention Month**.

Remember, the data is clear. Without question, you will have a friend in your life at some point who will be navigating a challenging situation that is potentially causing significant mental distress. Be the friend they need you to be and use the V-A-R mental health support tool to provide them help, including, when needed, connecting them with additional resources such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

References

¹*Disparities in Suicide | CDC*

²*By the Numbers: Lifeline (988lifeline.org)*

³*Statistics - Young Adult Mental Health Stats and Figures (activeminds.org)*

