

BELONGING STARTS WITH YOU: A CONVERSATION STARTER*

Sisterhood can be defined by these five areas: Shared Social Experiences, Support & Encouragement, Belonging, Accountability and Common Purpose.

The most important area is Belonging, which is interconnected with and directly impacts the other four Areas of Sisterhood.

Social Connection

Social connection is deeply rooted in the fraternity and sorority experience. At our core, we create communities of friendship and belonging. Research has found that social connection is vital to our mental health and emotional well-being.

As we collectively work to make positive contributions to our emotional well-being, we can't ignore the importance of social connection. Feeling connected to our sisters, friends and campus community is an essential part of the collegiate experience.

This month's Harm Reduction Alliance poster focuses on the importance of connection during the COVID-19 pandemic and finding ways to create a sense of belonging for all our members.

Show Harm Reduction Alliance poster.

Having these connections with one another can have a positive impact on our health and emotional well-being.

Ask:

How has the pandemic impacted your mental health?

Allow members to share their responses. Thank participants for sharing.

Active Minds surveyed college students between April 10-18, 2020, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health. Here are some of the takeaways from the survey:

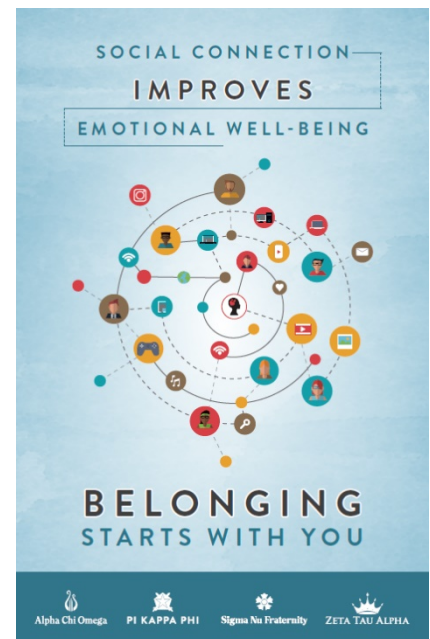
- 80% of college students reported that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health.
- 91% of college students have experienced stress or anxiety due to COVID-19.
- 76% of college students faced challenges in maintaining a routine due to COVID-19.
- 56% of college students do not know where to go for help for their mental health.

I hope these statistics remind us we are not alone and that we all experience hardships or obstacles from the pandemic. It's important that we focus on supporting our emotional well-being.

Ask:

What are some strategies you have used to support your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Allow members to share their responses. Thank participants for sharing.



In the Active Minds survey, college students shared several coping strategies they have used during the pandemic. The most commonly used strategies were virtual interaction with friends (69%), in-person interaction with friends (58%), being around pets (56%) and receiving support from their families by living at home (42%).

Belonging Starts with You

Knowing that one of the top coping strategies used by college students is virtual interactions among friends, we must do our part to help create these connections. Zoom breakout rooms and FaceTime calls with sisters are becoming our “new normal.” What we know now is that we have to be intentional with creating connections. Relationships among sisters are not going to create or sustain themselves. We all must do our part to create a sense of belonging.

Belonging is about establishing those close relationships with each other, which ultimately leads to a stronger sisterhood.

Share instructions:

Let’s break up into smaller groups and talk a little more about how you have created lasting relationships with a fellow sister or friend. You will have five minutes to share an experience with a small group of sisters. We will come back as a large group to discuss some of the stories shared.

Ask:

How have you created lasting relationships with fellow sisters or friends?

If facilitating the conversation virtually, put members into breakout rooms of no fewer than four members. Be sure to provide members a one-minute warning after four minutes have passed.

After five minutes, allow members to share some of the things discussed in their small group. Thank participants for sharing.

Ask:

Now that we have talked about some of those lasting relationship we created, how can we create or sustain those relationships virtually?

Allow members to share their responses. Thank participants for sharing.

Examples could include:

- *Virtual trivia nights*
- *Breakout room activities during chapter meetings*
- *Group Netflix screenings*
- *Photo or social media graphics challenges*
- *Video game challenges or competitions*
- *Virtual fitness classes*
- *DIY home projects*
- *Virtual paint night*
- *Virtual coffee, lunch or dinner “meet-ups”*
- *Group check-ins or meditations*

Feeling socially connected is more important during the pandemic than ever. We must find ways to continue to create a sense of belonging that reminds members of our core principle, sisterhood. It starts with you. One decision to create a connection can have a lasting impact.

If you have new and creative ways to allow us to connect as sisters, please share them with the Executive Committee so we can explore innovative ways to engage with one another. It is vital that we create these positive connections to help our emotional well-being.

When it's More than a Bad Day

As we navigate the pandemic, it is also important to acknowledge that sometimes it's more than a just a bad day. While it's important to be there for each other over phone, in person, via text or over FaceTime, we know that members may also need help from a professional mental health counselor. In times of uncertainty, showing up for a sister and getting her the help she needs is extremely important.

Let's review some helpful resources to make sure we are all aware of where to get help or refer a sister or friend in need of mental health resources.

Share information or resources available on your campus or local community. Unaware of resources? Visit [ULifeline.org](https://www.ulifeline.org) to search your college/university mental health resources.

- To connect with a crisis counselor from the [Crisis Text Line](https://www.crisistextline.com), text "HOME" to 741-741.
- To access a culturally trained counselor, text "[STEVE](https://www.crisistextline.com)" to 741-741.
- Call 800-273-TALK (8255) to speak with someone from the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.nationalsuicidepreventionlifeline.org) for immediate, 24/7 emotional support.
- In emergency situations, it is appropriate to call 911 to get connected to emergency personnel who can provide immediate medical attention.

I hope today's conversation brought to light some of our shared struggles during the pandemic and reminded us that collectively, we must create a sense of belonging that leads to lifelong sisterhood. While it may not always be easy, it is necessary. Remember, belonging starts with you.

Should your chapter need additional educational experiences to further discuss emotional well-being, be sure to review the following suggestions and plan a future conversation or program around mental health.

Continued Conversations around Mental Health

Looking to continue conversations in your chapter around mental health? Here are some additional resources:

- Review Active Minds' everyday guide for everyday challenges: Validate, Appreciate, Refer (V-A-R). [V-A-R](https://www.activeminds.org) is an easy way to show up for a friend, helping them cope when they may be having more than a bad day.
 - [Click here](https://www.activeminds.org) to watch the video. Password: GreekLifeVAR
 - [Click here](https://www.activeminds.org) to see the conversation guide.
- Visit [ULifeline.org/stay_well](https://www.ulifeline.org/stay_well) to access wellness resources on sleep, exercise, nutrition, stress management, relaxation and connectedness. Facilitate a five- to 10-minute conversation during a chapter meeting about resources on a specific wellness topic.

**Prior to facilitating this conversation, please be aware of how to access mental health resources and/or counseling on your campus. If you are unaware of those resources or where to refer a member in need, please visit the Jed Foundation's [ULifeline.org](https://www.ulifeline.org) to find your campus mental health resources.*

References

April 2020. Active Minds Survey Data. <https://www.activeminds.org/studentsurvey/>