

14 WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



SPEAKS 
2 INSPIRE



HELLO AND WELCOME,

Every semester, Speaks 2 Inspire connects with higher education and school professionals like you, who want to learn about the mental health needs of students. Our research and collaborations continue to solidify the need for mental health and wellness education and resources on campus, especially for first-generation, BIPOC, and Hispanic/Latinx students.

During a recent conversation, one of our partners shared her concerns with our team and how she'd like for us to support her.



Students struggle to connect. They are not engaging in campus activities as they did before, and they spend a lot of time in isolation. We want to create safe spaces for them to have open conversations and learn how to cope with the challenges of college.

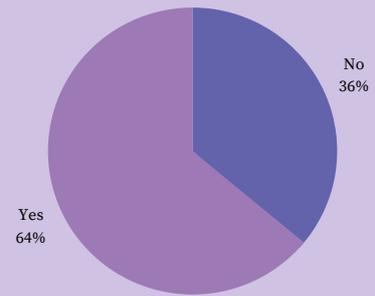
If you see similar issues with your students on your campus, then this guide was created with you in mind to help you overcome some common challenges.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are struggling with their mental health, and in turn, struggling to succeed in college. A survey by the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) showed that 73% of students surveyed reported having a mental health crisis while in college. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers continue to rise as students face technology fatigue, racial and political tensions, health safety concerns, trauma, and transition anxiety.

One survey participant stated, “A depressive episode made it impossible for me to go to classes and I did not get help until it was too late and I was withdrawn and I could never afford the cost to go back because I lost my scholarship for being withdrawn.”

This survey found that the primary diagnoses of participants included: depression, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Are you no longer attending college because of a mental health related reason?



Participants identified what could have helped them during their most difficult periods, helping them to stay in school - namely, campus-based accommodations and mental health services. However, the participants indicated that they were not aware of support or did not access them as students.

45% of those students who stopped attending college because of mental health related reasons did not receive accommodations.

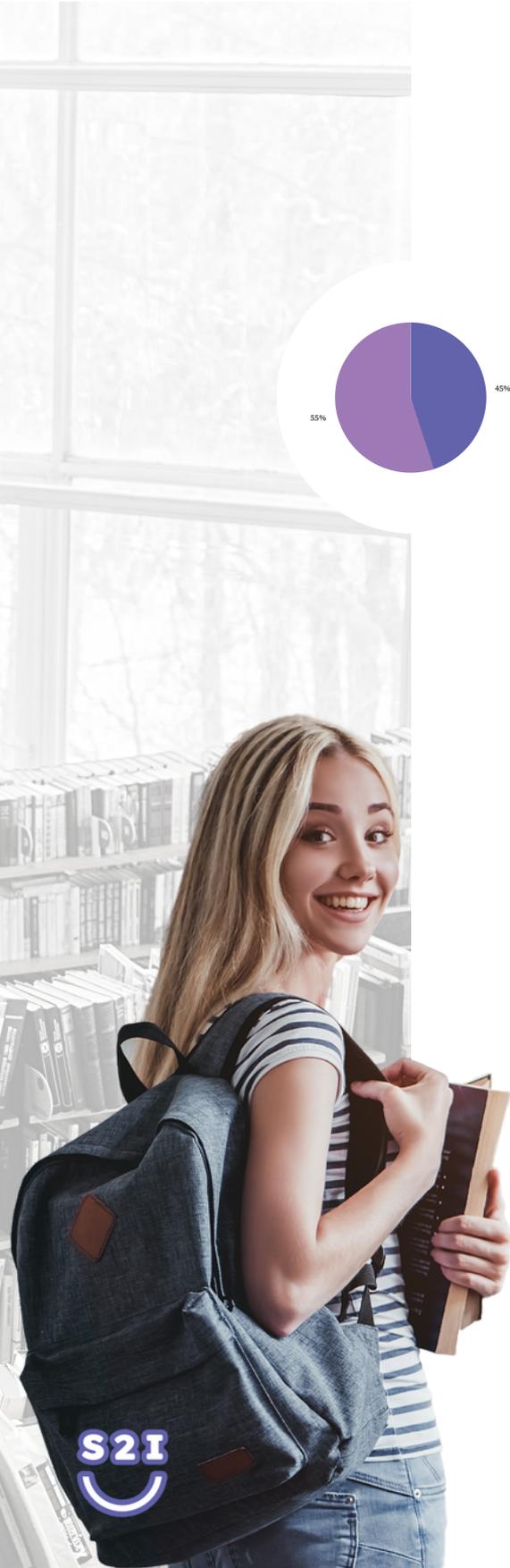
50% did not access mental health services and supports.

The survey concluded that since graduation rates are a critical factor in ranking colleges, providing adequate college mental health services is considered a good investment of resources.

Mental health issues are devastating for students' progress. But, as Albert Einstein once said, **"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."**

As an educator, you have a unique opportunity to connect, have meaningful conversations about mental health and step up to lead the charge in supporting your students so they navigate through college successfully.

As U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona put it, "Amid the pandemic, we know that our students have experienced so much. We can't unlock students' potential unless we also address the needs they bring with them to the classroom each day. As educators, it's our responsibility to ensure that we are helping to provide students with a strong social and emotional foundation so that they also can excel academically."



Even during these uncertain times, with your help, your students are able to not only survive but thrive!

By downloading this guide, you've taken the first step to success.

Congratulations! We're glad you're here.

Positive mental health promotes success in life. Our role and progress begin on campuses. However, the impact of these efforts will impact students long after they graduate from our programs.

At Speaks 2 Inspire, supporting the whole student is our focus. We understand that the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of students influences their academic performance and overall success.

Students who prioritize their mental health are more likely to attend class regularly, stay in school longer, and have higher grades and test scores.

So, what can you do to support students' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Let's dive in; here are 14 ideas that you can implement.



**Anything that's human is mentionable,
and anything that is mentionable can
be more manageable.**

**When we can talk about our feelings,
they become less overwhelming, less
upsetting, and less scary.**

Fred Rogers

1

Modeling healthy behavior is a powerful teaching tool.

Supporting your students' mental health has everything to do with what they see you do and how you show up. Be honest with your students and share your challenges. We have all been affected by COVID-19 somehow, and sharing what you've done and are doing to overcome those challenges will make a difference. Your willingness to take the initiative and be vulnerable empowers your students to be open, be engaged, and seek help when they need it.

When your students see you show up in a meaningful way and connect on a human level, it permits them to do the same.



2

Model empathy, practice active listening and create a safe space to talk about mental health.

Most times, students just need to feel heard and seen.

Telling them not to worry can be dismissive.

It takes a lot of courage for students to open up when they're struggling. Take what they share seriously, and thank them for being open with you. Try using the powerful V-A-R (Validate-Appreciate-Refer) tool created by [Active Minds](#), the nation's leading nonprofit organization supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults.

Check out their resources [here](#)

3

Build a strong community and empower students to support and advocate for themselves.

Self-advocacy leads to help-seeking behaviors. Increasing student mental health awareness is a significant first step in encouraging self-advocacy. When students can articulate their challenges, they are more likely to voice their needs.

From here, it is our responsibility to validate their experience and help them identify the resources available to support their emotional and social needs.

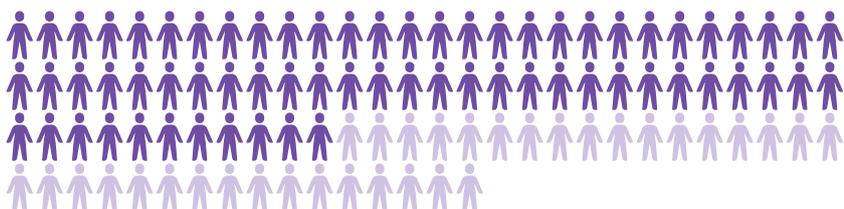
**Need help?
Work With Us!**



4

Encourage peer-led discussions, and peer support initiatives.

67% of young adults are more likely to open up about their struggles to other peers before reaching out to a mental health professional.



When you foster safe spaces and equip students to identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness, it can increase help-seeking behaviors, student connectedness, and belonging.

5

Explore new and creative platforms to increase mental health literacy.

When it comes to early intervention and prevention, mental health education is key. Education builds a solid and lasting foundation for suicide prevention, student wellness, and resilience.

Create opportunities for students to learn about mental health in engaging ways through seminars, workshops, group discussions, or online courses. Try some new and creative approaches like hosting a mental health speaker on your campus, welcoming all to attend!

6

Decrease stigma around mental illness.

One of the greatest barriers to seeking help is stigma. Remind your students that it's okay to struggle at times. This is especially true for BIPOC, Hispanic/Latinx, and API students.

Remember, representation matters.

It is important for students to feel validated, supported, and connected to the person they seek help from.



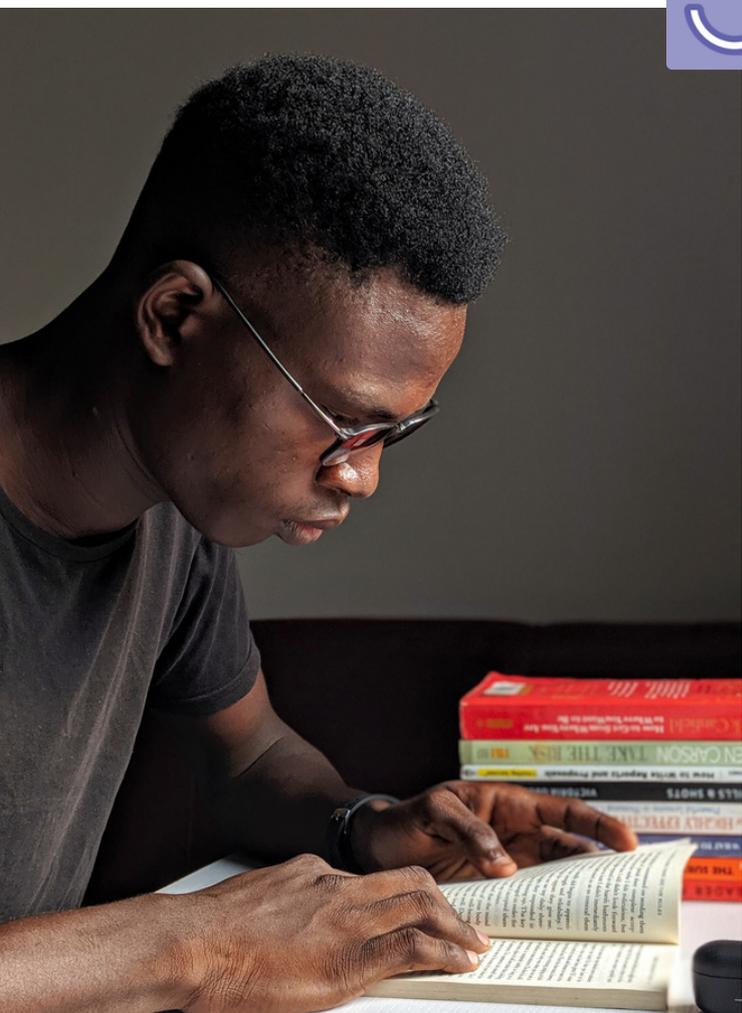
7

Promote student wellness and well-being practices.

Encourage students to prioritize their mental health by engaging in wellness practices such as regular self-care, exercise, adequate sleep habits, stress reduction techniques, meditation, good nutrition, breathing techniques, and expressive art groups.

Try out this [deep-breathing exercise](#) that you can do together!

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8

Designate a space physically/virtually for Brain Breaks.

Designating a space to recharge and reset is essential.

Design a room or a corner for students to relax. Students benefit significantly from sitting quietly for a few minutes, closing their eyes, doing yoga, or meditating. With all the stress that comes from school, home, and their jobs, it can be helpful just to breathe.

Interested in integrating some brain break activities into the space?

Check out this article with [23 different ideas for Brain Breaks](#).

9

Do a routine (weekly or daily) mental health check-in.

Normalize and have open conversations about mental health. Instead of asking your student, "how are you doing" or "how are your classes going?"

Instead, ask open questions like, "How are you doing mentally?"

Need a prompt? Check out this [Awesome Mental Health Check-In Poster Print](#) it out and place it in your office somewhere that can be seen.

10

Promote your campus resources.

Students cannot get help if they do not know it's available. Ensure there is enough information and awareness around campus about the services and activities available to students. Send out wellness emails or try to reach students face-to-face to educate them about their options.

Look for student organizations centered around mental health awareness or education (i.e., Active Minds) to help with the promotion. Locate and consolidate any counseling or wellness resources available to students on-campus and off-campus (TAO, etc.), ensure that they are easy to find and simple to contact for the students who might be struggling the most.

11

Partner with your school's counseling, wellness, or health center and host a campus-wide mental health screening event.

Even as we work to reduce the stigma around mental health, some students will have a barrier to seeking help.

Encourage your students to take a free, confidential mental health test provided by Mental Health America, the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and promoting the overall mental health of all.

These screenings can help students identify what they are feeling to seek help for their mental health.





12

Train gatekeepers.

Find staff, faculty, and student leaders that you could train to support students who may be struggling with their mental health. Remember, students are the first line of defense for students who are in a mental health crisis.

The more training they have to help deal and assist in these situations, the better chance the students have of sourcing the help they need to continue their studies and manage their struggles.

At Speak2Inspire, we offer QPR Gatekeeper trainings to support your campus. [Find out more by clicking here.](#)

13

Create a culture on campus that promotes mental health.

Encourage students to practice self-care, take breaks from study, and focus on their overall wellbeing. This encouragement should be outside of their studies and educate them about their holistic wellbeing, not just their academic progress.



14

Host an event.

Hosting events can help to promote all of the above options.

Mental health, wellness, or suicide prevention workshops are a great place to start when establishing a solid foundation for your students' mental health promotion, awareness, and education. There are designated days to bring awareness to mental health.

- National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (February),
- National Counseling Awareness Month (April),
- Mental Health Month (May),
- National Suicide Prevention Month (September),
- World Mental Health Day/National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month/Domestic Violence Awareness Month/Mental Illness Awareness Week (all fall in October).

Get creative with your event ideas. They don't necessarily need to mention mental health wellbeing.

We have seen success with hosting a book club, a movie screening, and a 5k walk/run, to name a few.

**Need help?
Work With Us!**



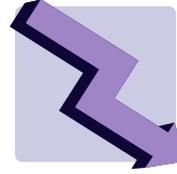
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many unique challenges for students, including:



Lack of student
connectedness



Increased
isolation



Low academic
performance



Lack of
motivation



Decreased help-
seeking behaviors



Lack of commitment and
high absenteeism rates

If you recognize any of these signs, your students need support.

As you develop a plan, consider that every student may not be willing or able to open up and ask for support, which is why you must meet students where they are at.



Ready to put these ideas into action?

Our team is happy to provide additional assistance and help you create a comprehensive plan to support your students. We would love to collaborate with you and bring one of our programs to your institution!

Please feel free to reach out to us directly if you need additional resources, consultation, or just someone to brainstorm ideas.

**Let's Work Together!
Contact Us Today.**

At Speaks 2 Inspire, we believe that overall student well-being leads to academic success in the classroom and success after graduation.

We hope this guide provides much-needed value for you! We look forward to collaborating with you in the future.

“To create a strong foundation for students' academic success we must prioritize their social, emotional, and mental health.

The U.S. Department of
Education



RESOURCES

- <https://mhanational.org/supporting-students-facing-trauma>
- <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>
- https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-new-resource-supporting-child-and-student-social-emotional-behavioral-and-mental-health-during-covid-19-era?fbclid=IwAR0Q-s52EStIEW8DWd5rp122sXvvGBNbOMeIeQ_xxm4KkehF7vPfKaKKmrU
- https://www.nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/Publications-Reports/Survey-Reports/College-Students-Speak_A-Survey-Report-on-Mental-Health-NAMI-2012.pdf
- <https://www.activeminds.org/about-mental-health/var/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNXKjGFULMs>
- <https://www.buzzfeed.com/melissaharison/take-a-break-at-work-brain-breaks-wfh>
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Mental-Health-Check-In-Poster-4435675>
- <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/?ref=Covid>



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