

# 14 WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH



**SPEAKS**   
**2 INSPIRE**



## ABOUT SPEAKS 2 INSPIRE

Speaks 2 Inspire creates customized high-impact programs that help colleges, universities, and schools increase engagement and retention. Initially founded in 2020, Speaks 2 Inspire is a Florida-based programming and consulting agency reducing mental health stigma and prioritizing student well-being on campuses nationwide.



*The mental health solution for young adults suffering in silence.*

For additional questions contact:  
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## HELLO FRIEND,

Every semester, Speaks 2 Inspire connects with education 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, Hispanic/Latinx students, and other minority 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 students on your campus, then this guide was created with you in mind to help you support your students.

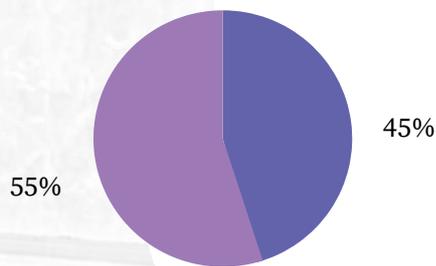
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are struggling with their mental health, and in turn, struggling to succeed in college. Prior to the pandemic, a survey by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) showed that 73% of students surveyed reported having a mental health crisis while in college. Since COVID-19, these numbers continue to rise as students face technology fatigue, racial and political tension, 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“A depressive episode made it impossible for me to go to classes and I did not get help until it was too late and I was withdrawn and I could never afford the cost to go back because I lost my scholarship for being withdrawn.”

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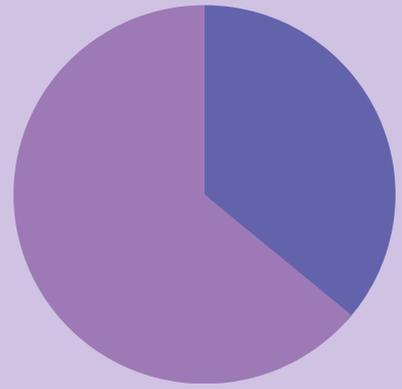


This survey found that the primary diagnoses of participants included: depression, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder.



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

Yes  
64%



No  
36%

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, "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?

**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

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# 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 cope with those challenges will make a difference. Your willingness to take the initiative and be vulnerable empowers your students to be open, 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.**



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### **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.

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### **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?**

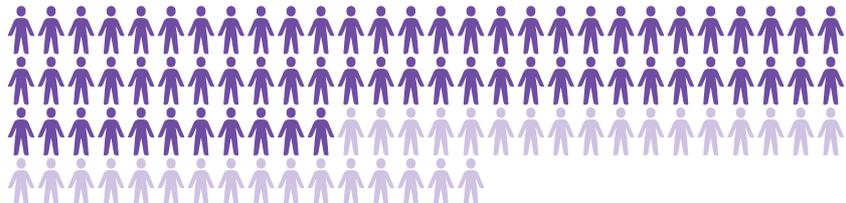
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### **Encourage peer-led discussions, and peer support initiatives.**

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 health challenges, it can increase help-seeking behaviors, student connectedness, and belonging.



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# 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 other minority students.

**Remember, representation matters.**

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

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## Promote student wellness and positive coping tools.

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.

Search "deep-breathing exercises" on YouTube and give it a try!

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## 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 jobs, it can be helpful just to breathe.

Interested in integrating some brain break activities into the space?

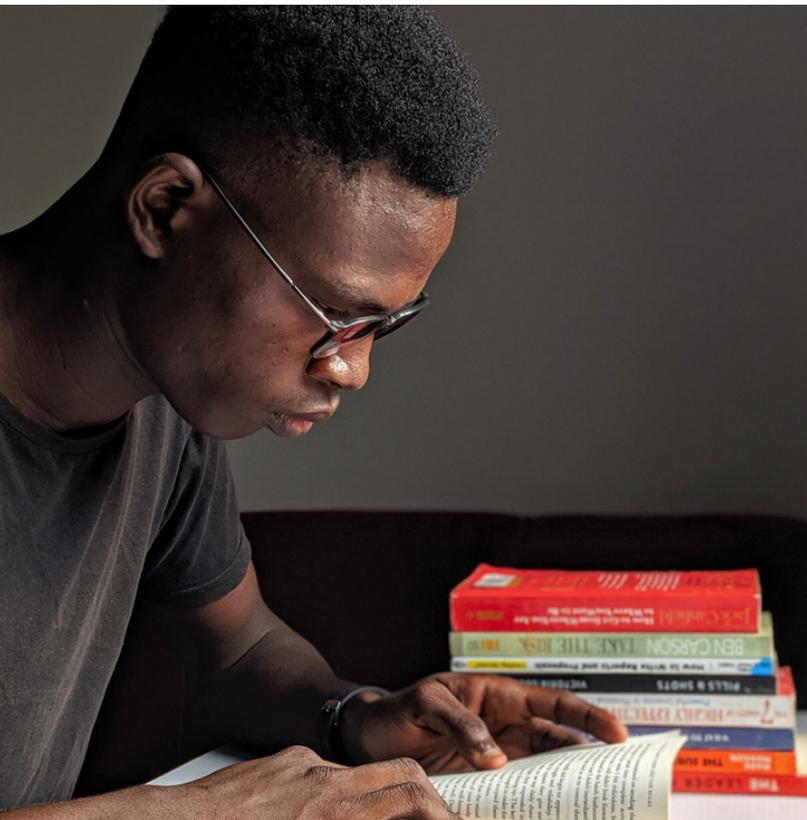
Google "Ideas for Brain Breaks" and try them out!

9

## Do a routine mental health check-in.

Normalize conversations about mental health. Instead of asking your student, "how are you doing" or "how are your classes going?" try open-ended questions like "How was your weekend? What did you do?"

Open conversations can make a big difference. (Tip: Listen to understand, and when you don't understand. Say "I don't understand. Tell me more.")



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# 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., an Active Minds chapter) to help with the promotion. Locate and consolidate any counseling or wellness resources available to students on-campus and off-campus (TAO, etc.), and ensure that they are easy to find and simple to contact for the students who might be struggling the most.

Tip: Call/Text 988 for FREE 24/7 support from crisis counselors

# 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](#).

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



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# 12

## Train gatekeepers.

Train staff, faculty, and students to identify signs and 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 with and assist in these situations, the better chance the students have of sourcing the help they need to continue their studies and manage their challenges.

At Speaks 2 Inspire, we offer mental health training to support your campus. **Complete this form** to schedule a call with us.

# 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 well-being. This encouragement should be outside of their studies and educate them about their holistic well-being, not just their academic progress.

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# 14

## Host an event.

Hosting events can help to promote all of the options shared so far.

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 also designated months and opportunities 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 (October).

Get creative with your event ideas. They don't necessarily need to mention "mental health" or "well-being".

We have seen success with hosting campus-wide events, public speakers, movie screenings, and 5k walks/runs, to name a few. Do you want to bring an S2I event to campus? **Complete this form** and we'll contact you!

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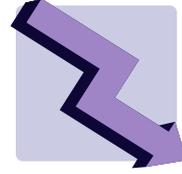
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many unique challenges for students, including:



**Lack of student connectedness**



**Increased isolation**



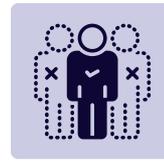
**Low academic performance**



**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.



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## 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 or speakers to your campus!

Please feel free to reach out to us directly if you need additional resources or consultation.

Need help?  
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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 a ton of 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

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# MEET THE S2I SPEAKERS

Our diverse team of experts creates culturally-competent, evidence-based programs that educate, empower, and specialize in decreasing stigma and prioritizing mental health and well-being. By marrying the art of storytelling with mental health education, S2I creates safe spaces conducive to honest conversations on campuses across the nation.



**I had a student stop by my office after Abraham's visit and say, "I thought it was just me. I didn't know someone else felt this way." His presentation has opened up a critical and ongoing conversation between staff and students at our college.**

**- TRIO SSS Advisor, Lake Land College**



**Meet our speakers:  
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## 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.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.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=aNXKjGFUIMs>
- <https://www.buzzfeed.com/melissaharrison/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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