



MEMBER SAFETY PROGRAMMING

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Only this discussion guide is needed and is beneficial to read through ahead of the program.

TIMEFRAME

- This program should run around 45 minutes.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Define 'health' and 'mental health.'
- Explore the concept of mental health as a component of our overall health.
- Better understand the coping strategies we use to deal with stress.
- Be able to identify ineffective coping mechanisms.
- Discuss ways to adjust or change ineffective coping mechanisms to be more effective.
- Better understand how to provide support for a brother or friend who may be struggling with their mental health.

FACILITATOR NOTES

This session is designed to help members look at mental health just as they do physical health. This session is not designed to provide members any kind of mental healthcare training, and members should be reminded that beyond providing basic support, trying to “treat” someone’s mental health issues could end up making the situation worst. If the chapter is interested in going deeper into this topic, they should explore completing a Mental Health First Aid course or other peer educator trainings that may be available through their campus counseling center. Even psychology majors are not licensed counselors and shouldn’t act as such to fellow brothers or friends.

This discussion guide offers a couple different ways to end the session. Be sure to review the “Wrap Up” section at the end and decide the best way to finish the conversation with the chapter before diving into the discussion.

Remind members that in any case where they are worried about a member or a friend harming themselves or are contemplating suicide, they should:

- Call for additional help (another brother, suicide prevention hotline, campus safety, 911, etc.).
- Stay with that person and not leave them alone.
- Remove any potential methods of harm (especially if they mentioned a specific method like cutting themselves, taking pills, etc.).

Facilitation tips:

- If you have a large group, try using small groups, pair sharing, collecting responses on notecards, and tools like Poll Everywhere or Zoom polling to encourage participation.
- If doing this session virtually:
 - Try using break out rooms and polls to help keep members engaged and thinking.
 - Use a virtual white board, message board, or Google Doc that members can add their thoughts and questions during the session.
 - When posing a question, give them a little extra time to think about their answer and either come off mute or type it in the chat box.
- Look for other *facilitator tips* throughout the document, as shown in red italics.

INTRODUCTION

- *Share:*
 - In this session we will take a look at the topic of mental health, including strategies that can encourage positive mental wellness, and ways to support someone who is struggling with their mental health. This session is designed to be an introduction to the conversation around mental health.
- *Discuss:*
 - What is mental health?
 - What are the first things that come to mind when we think of mental health?
- *Share:*
 - The World Health Organization (WHO) offers the following thought around health:
 - “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”
 - When looking at mental health specifically, the WHO adds:
 - “Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes their abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community.”
- *Discuss:*
 - After hearing this definition, does it change how we think about mental health?
 - How does mental health fit into our overall wellness?

MANAGING OUR MENTAL HEALTH

- *Share:*
 - Just like our physical health, we also need to take care of our mental health. When we think of managing our physical health, we usually think of things like eating well, being active, taking medication, treating injuries, resting, and going to regular doctor appointments.
- *Discuss:*
 - If we’re trying to think of mental health the same way we think of physical health, what are things we can do to help manage and maintain our mental health?
 - *Share the following, if not shared by participants:*
 - A lot of the ways we manage our physical health also translate to mental health.
 - Think about going to the doctor’s office the same way we think about seeing a counselor. We go to the doctor for regular checkups and when

we're injured, or something isn't working like it was before. We can look at going to a counselor or therapist in the same way, by using regular checkups to help maintain a positive mental health, in addition to when there is a problem.

- *Share:*
 - Another aspect of managing our mental health is how we manage everyday stress.
 - Using different coping strategies, we are able to deal with regular day-to-day stress and less common, but more severe stressors like a big project or test coming up, a breakup or rejection, parents divorcing, or a death of someone close to us.
- *Share instructions:*
 - We're going to make a list of as many coping strategies we can think of.
 - These can be positive coping strategies like exercising to manage our stress, or negative, such as drinking when over-stressed.
- *Lead the group through making a list of coping strategies. Encourage them to share ones they use or know others use.*
- *Feel free to add any ideas that the group doesn't come up with. Record what the group comes up with on a white board, flipchart paper, or on screen for later reference.*
- ***Facilitator tip:** This is a great opportunity to mix things up and split the group into pairs or small groups. Each small group/pair should make their list of coping strategies before calling them back to the large group to combine their lists into a master list.*
- *Share:*
 - Looking at this list that we just made together, I'm sure that there are some strategies that immediately lean as either "good" or "bad", or "positive" or "negative" coping strategies.
 - Now we're going to identify those that we deem as "positive" or "negative."
- *Have the group identify a couple "positive" and "negative" strategies, and why they would categorize them that way.*
- ***Facilitator tip:** This is likely to get a conversation started as members differ on what they would mark as positive or negative, depending on how they would use the strategy or have seen others use that strategy. Lean into this conversation and allow for discussion.*
- *Share:*
 - As we've already started to see, it is not always easy to categorize these different coping strategies so neatly.
 - Instead of trying to put them in one box or another, let's think about coping strategies in a different way; let's think about coping strategies on a continuum of effectiveness.
- *Discuss:*
 - Can someone explain how one of the coping strategies from our list can be both effective and ineffective, depending on how we use them?
 - *Provide the following examples if the group struggles to come up with answers:*
 - We can look at exercise as a generally effective coping skill. It helps keep us physically healthy, releases "feel good" hormones, gives us

a sense of accomplishment, etc. But it can also be overused to avoid the source of our stress, or a symptom of an underlying mental health issue (like body image issues in this case).

- A strategy like eating is usually seen as negative, as it doesn't seem to address the core issue, and can cause additional stress or health issues if someone overeats or develops poor eating habits. However, when used sparingly eating can be a simple solution to take someone's stress level down enough to help them get moving with the rest of their day. Eating food or cooking can also be a part of a regular habit or ritual that can provide structure, focus, and a sense of accomplishment.
- *Share:*
 - We all use a number of different coping strategies and their effectiveness can vary depending on the situation. The important thing is to think about the coping strategies that we rely on more frequently and make sure they are more effective than harmful.
 - If you identify a coping strategy that isn't working, it's important to think about how you can adjust it to be more effective or replace it with a different strategy.
 - The most effective coping strategies focus on addressing the core issue that is causing stress. Other strategies that focus on avoiding or putting off dealing with the core issue can also be effective in the short term, but are more likely to become ineffective over time.

SUPPORTING A BROTHER WHO'S STRUGGLING

- *Share:*
 - We've talked a lot about our own coping strategies and how to manage our mental health. In addition to taking care of ourselves, it is important to know how to support a friend or brother who is having a rough time or struggling to manage their mental health.
 - One of the best things about being in Phi Sigma Kappa is that we have a built-in support network to help us get through tough times, like a family away from home.
 - But we also know that it can feel awkward to talk to other people about their mental health or check in with them when we think they are having a tough time.
- *Discuss:*
 - How can we make it easier and less awkward to ask a friend or brother how they're doing?
 - *Provide these answers, if not shared by the group:*
 - Make it a normal part of how you interact with each other.
 - If you are concerned, let them know that.
 - Let them know you are available in the future, if they don't want to talk now.
 - What are potential warning signs that a friend or brother is having a tough time and could use additional support?
 - *Provide these answers if not shared by the group:*
 - The biggest thing to look for is a change in their usual behavior.
 - This could include a loss of interest in hobbies, wanting to be alone more, going out more often or drinking more heavily ,a changing

relationship with drugs or alcohol, sleeping more or less, change in eating habits or frequency of working out, inability to focus on things like classwork or fraternity responsibilities.

- Men are more likely to report the impact of negative emotions (i.e. “I’ve been so worn out lately, I have no energy, I can’t focus, etc.”) instead of reporting the actual emotions (i.e. “I’m feeling overwhelmed with all the work I have to do, I’m upset about the fight I had with my partner, etc.”). Therefore, it’s important to look out for these clues and reach out to friends who may be changing behavior.
- What are different ways that we can support a friend or brother when they are having a hard time and need additional support?
 - *Provide these answers, if not shared by the group:*
 - Spend time with them.
 - Eat a meal together.
 - Let them vent their feelings/frustrations, but don’t promise full secrecy. In the case that we’re worried someone might try to harm themselves, we need to be able to call for help from another brother, a self-harm prevention hotline, the campus counseling center, or campus safety or the police for extra support.
 - Let them know about different support resources available to them on campus and in the local community
Offer to help them sign up for an appointment or walk or drive them to an appointment at the counseling center.

WRAP UP

- *Share activity instructions:*
 - As a way to wrap up the session, it is important to think about an action step that we can take, either individually or as a chapter, to help us make our brotherhood stronger by how we support each other.
- *Consider these activity options to help the group come up with action steps. **You should try and select your method prior to leading the session.***
 - *Members can either think about an action step by themselves, talk about it with a partner, or jot their action step anonymously on a notecard that is collected and read to the group.*
 - *Some ideas could include:*
 - *Think about one thing that they can do to help them better understand their own mental health or manage it more effectively.*
 - *Identify one thing that they can do to connect with a brother.*
 - *Think about how the chapter can create a more supportive space for members’ mental health.*
- *Make sure and share additional information to offer before ending the session:*
 - Information about campus support resources, including: counseling center, health and wellness services, disability services, campus affiliation offices or student groups (LGBTQIA+ students, students of color, etc.)

- **Facilitator tip:** *In the Brotherhood in Phi Sigma Kappa resources, there's a Campus Resource Sheet. Partner with your chapter's Inductor to complete this form and share with all associate and initiated brothers.*
- Crisis hotlines:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
 - <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
 - Trevor Lifeline (LGBTIQA+ focus): 1-866-488-7386
 - Text Line: START to 678678
 - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now/>
- Additional Resources:
 - The JED Foundation: <https://www.jedfoundation.org>
 - Movember: <https://us.movember.com/mens-health/mental-health>
 - NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness): <https://www.nami.org>
- *Be sure and thank participants for engaging in the conversation.*