



Check in with yourself and a friend

My name is Erica Riba, LCSW, LMSW and I'm Director of Higher Ed & Student Engagement at [The Jed Foundation](#), a non-profit based in New York City, that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. I found my sisterhood when I was a freshman in college, at Michigan State University (MSU). I joined Sigma Delta Tau (shout-out Beta Beta) and never looked back. After MSU, I received a degree in social work from the University of Michigan and my career has been focused on college mental health.

When in a sorority we see it all - the beginning of friendships, the stress of exams and final papers, the breakup of relationships, feeling pressed for time, figuring out how to balance social activities, more freedom, availability of alcohol and drugs, not getting enough sleep, and even feeling homesick. We even experience times when we're feeling off, down, sad, and anxious.

Did you know 1 in 4 of America's young adults (18-24) experience a mental health challenge each year?

Nearly 40% of college students report symptoms of depression that compromises their ability to function at least once within a 12-month period.

Suicide is considered to be the second leading cause of death for college students, behind accidents

Over the last decade, anxiety has overtaken depression as the most common reason college students seek counseling services. (NIMH; Kognito White Paper on Increasing Student Retention through Improved Mental Health.)

I share this because it matters. It's important to pause and acknowledge that the world we live in today is incredibly stressful. **People are dealing with A LOT** -environmental stress, proximity to school shootings, suicides on college campuses or other tragedies, Me Too stories, the political climate, and economic uncertainty. Young people appear to be spending more time on their phones than in person and students are coming to college with less developed life skills, coping skills and resilience. [Set to Go](#), a JED program is an excellent resource for students, families, and educators that offers resources on how to emotionally prepare for the transition from high school to college or adulthood.



Some of the common mental health issues that are affecting college students aged 18-24 are depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, identity (Who Am I?), and worries around transitions -in and out of college, what's my next step in life?, etc.

We've all experienced stress. Stress about a grade or deadline, about paying bills, about being late for something important. There are many ways to improve mental health and decrease stress. Some might find it helpful to engage in an enjoyable activity, journal about feelings, perform an act of kindness, volunteer, take a social media break, eat nutritious meals, stay hydrated, catch some sleep, and breathe! Taking a few seconds to breathe can often help in a moment of panic. Sometimes positive self-talk can help when feeling uncertain or anxious.

There may be times when stress or anxiety can be too much to handle on own. Signs and symptoms vary but it's important to notice changes in sleep, appetite, and energy levels, severe mood swings, social withdrawal, feeling sad, hopeless, or agitated, having trouble performing everyday tasks, or wanting to hurt oneself or others. This is when it's important to go seek help. Some ways to get help:

- Talk to someone by making an appointment with a mental health clinician
- Talk to a trusted adult like a parent or other family member or school advisor
- Reach out to a sister and talk about it
- If seriously thinking of harming yourself or others, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room

The silver lining of what we know about today's youth is that teenagers today are talking about mental health more than anyone else and they naturally want to help their friends and they even go to their friends first when they are in distress. Research has shown that 76% of young adults will reach out to a peer first during a time of crisis. If worried about a friend, a good place to start is saying something along the lines of "I've noticed that you haven't been acting like yourself recently; are you doing ok?". It's important to remind someone that it's okay to feel the way they do. The act of sitting next to a friend and talking to them goes a long way.

Remember, you don't have to know how to fix everything and you are not a trained professional. It's important to suggest that they go see a doctor or therapist for additional support.

Check out the campaign, [Seize the Awkward](#), a result of a partnership between The Jed Foundation (JED), American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and the Ad Council, which gives young adults the tools and specific language they need to feel confident embracing critical moments like “awkward silences” in a way that could have a life-saving impact. The campaign provides young adults with a variety of resources including tutorial videos, information on suicide warning signs, conversation starters and tips on how to sustain a conversation around mental health. Please also check out the [campus toolkit](#)!

If you have specific questions, JED's [Mental Health Resource Center](#), provides information and resources to help teens and young adults navigate life's challenges.

Importantly, I also encourage people to keep these numbers close by:

If you or someone you know needs help immediately, please don't hesitate to reach out for support:

- Call 911
- Crisis Text Line: Text “Hello” to 741741
- The Lifeline: Call 800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline: Call 800-656-4673
- [Get help now](#)

My hope for anyone who is reading this is to always feel empowered to get help or talk to someone when things feel too overwhelming. If you sense something is off with a friend, co-worker, family member...**JUST trust your gut!** You don't have to be a therapist to know what's going on. All you have to do is check in and be there for them. Be a sister. Be a friend. Be kind.

To become one of our Lifestyle Blog Writers or have an opportunity to write a one-time feature, please email **Jasmin Santos** at jasmin.santos1014@gmail.com.