

CAMPUS TOOLKIT

SEIZE THE
AWKWARD



American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention



nami
National Alliance on Mental Illness



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ABOUT US

An illustration of two people from behind, set against a bright blue background. The person on the left has long, wavy pink hair and is wearing a blue patterned top. The person on the right is wearing a pink shirt and a red and blue cap, and is holding a red tennis racket. Above them is a yellow speech bubble with a black border containing the text 'Feeling all right?'.

Feeling all
right?

OBJECTIVE

Young adulthood is a time in a person's life where many life changes can happen closely together and cause overwhelming feelings. Leaving high school, beginning college, moving away from home, or entering the workplace, it's a period where caring for our mental health and wellbeing is critical. Friends can play an important role in supporting one another with their mental health. Simply checking in, staying connected, and actively listening to a friend can help more than you know—and you don't have to have all the answers, just being there can be enough.

This toolkit is intended to provide ideas and thought starters on activities that can help college students, student organizations and/or faculty members launch mental health programming on campus (in-person and virtual) that provide safe and supportive content and resources to foster open conversations, creating community and overcoming stigma associated with mental health.

We hope this **Seize the Awkward (STA)** toolkit helps your campus and community feel more confident about having mental health conversations and providing support to each other.



THE CAMPAIGN

[Seize the Awkward](#) is a national, award-winning communications campaign from the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI), in collaboration with the Ad Council. The campaign aims to equip young adults ages 16-24 with resources to check in with friends about their mental health.

We foster mental health conversations among young adults by providing resources, tips, and tools, including

conversation guides and diverse public service advertisements (PSAs). This encourages them to reach out to their friends, trust their instincts, and take action, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Since launching in January 2018, “Seize the Awkward” has been a trusted source of information for young adults across the country, driving over 7.3 million visits to [SeizeTheAwkward.org](#) and more than 83 million video views.



IDEAS & ACTIVATION

In the next section you will find a few ideas and thought starters you can leverage when planning Seize the Awkward events on your campus. Whether you're working with a lot or a little, we're sure these will help spark your imagination, and even inspire new unique ideas.

IN-PERSON ACTIVATIONS

- Distribute Seize the Awkward posters/flyers
- Facilitate a community art project
- Host a "Seize the Sofa" interview series

SOCIAL ACTIVATIONS

- Story takeover
- Informational posts
- Campus interview series

EVENTS

- Facilitate a PSA screening and discussion
- Collaborate on a guided mindfulness activity
- Host a STA Social



STA TIP

If your campus has a NAMI On Campus club, see how you can collaborate on one of these ideas. Don't have one? NAMI On Campus are student-led, student-run mental health awareness clubs on high school and college campuses. Learn more [here](#).

Join AFSP in hosting an It's Real: College Students and Mental Health education program or help us lead an Out of the Darkness Campus Walk on your campus. Learn more [here](#).

Sharing any of these online too? Use the hashtag #SeizeTheAwkward and tag @SeizeTheAwkward on Instagram or TikTok!

IN-PERSON ACTIVATIONS

Distribute Seize the Awkward Posters/Flyers

Let's start simple! Posting flyers can be an effective way to spread the word about Seize The Awkward and encourage students to reach out to their friends who may be struggling. It can be as easy as posting flyers in the student center, dorm hallways, or other places around campus. You can also include this digital toolkit in campus newsletters or emails.

In the [campaign content section](#), you'll find digital files for branded materials available to download, print, and distribute around campus. Please **do not edit** the materials when using them to distribute and share.

Community Art Project

Are you ready to turn your or your peer's artistic talents into a powerful tool for mental health awareness? Art and creative expression have a profound impact on young adult mental health. They provide an outlet for emotions, a way to process experiences, and a means to communicate thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to express. Through art, individuals can explore their inner worlds, find healing, and connect with others who share similar experiences.

Grab your favorite art supplies – whether it's paint brushes and canvases or digital design tools – and let your imagination run wild. Create artwork that reflects the theme of Seize the Awkward, highlighting the beauty of reaching out, supporting friends, and embracing open conversations about mental health.

This activation should be done as a community collaboration. For example, collaborate with a local [NAMI Affiliate](#) or a [local AFSP Chapter](#) to help boost the event and provide local mental health resources. Team up with other campus members, clubs, or organizations to create larger-than-life murals, interactive installations, or collaborative digital art projects that spark conversations and uplift spirits.



IN-PERSON ACTIVATIONS

Community Art Project

Here are some artistic prompts you can use to get started:

- **Embracing Vulnerability:** Create artwork that represents the courage and strength in being vulnerable and sharing personal experiences related to mental health with friends.
- **Supportive Hands:** Illustrate a collaborative art piece featuring interconnected hands or figures, symbolizing the importance of reaching out and offering support to friends and peers.
- **Conversation Starters:** Design visual elements that serve as conversation starters about mental health, such as thought bubbles, speech bubbles, or symbolic imagery related to communication and openness.
- **Mindful Mandalas:** Explore the therapeutic benefits of creating mandalas or geometric patterns that reflect themes of balance, harmony, and self-reflection in mental well-being.
- **Nature and Healing:** Use elements of nature – like trees, flowers, or landscapes – to convey messages of renewal, healing, and the interconnectedness of mental and environmental well-being.
- **Positive Affirmations:** Incorporate uplifting quotes, affirmations, or empowering messages related to resilience, compassion, and the importance of seeking help when needed.



Once your masterpiece is ready, share it with your campus community. Display your community art in prominent locations on campus, organize art exhibitions, or host virtual galleries to showcase the creativity and passion behind STA.



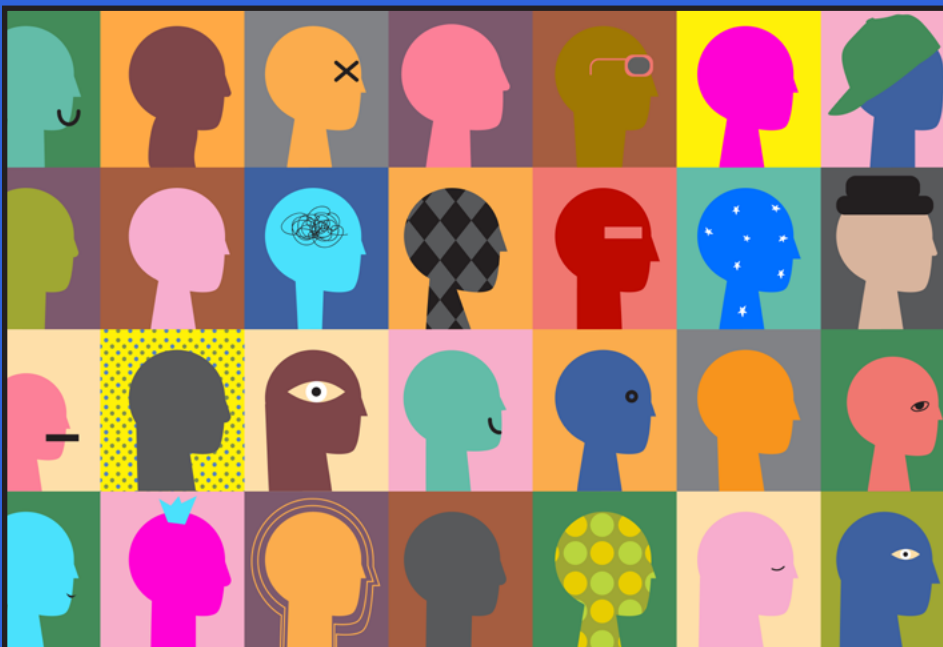
IN-PERSON ACTIVATIONS

“Seize The Sofa”

Set up a spot on campus to host this activation where students can sit down and chat with a friend about mental health. It doesn't matter if it's a bench, couch, or picnic blanket! Anywhere that is casual and comfortable works to facilitate these conversations for this in-person activity.

Here are some reflection questions you can share to get started based on opening the conversation, navigating emotions, supportive relationships, wellness, and finding resources:

- How do you know when your friend is going through a rough time?
- What are activities you suggest to decompress with friends when dealing with daily stressors?
- What are some ways you start a conversation with your friends about mental health?
- How have you reached out to friends in the past when you were going through a tough time?



IN-PERSON ACTIVATIONS

“Seize The Sofa”

Find more content on SeizeTheAwkward.org and check out [NAMI's Say It Out Loud free online card game](#) to guide chats if you need more inspiration. By creating a safe, casual, and supportive space for authentic conversations around mental health, you can model what it looks like to be there for a friend. You can create this space by choosing a comfortable setting, playing gentle music, providing refreshments, promoting inclusivity, and providing clear expectations for the experience.

For help on how to activate, consider tapping campus leaders from student organizations or clubs to help promote the activation and create social content. You'll also want to secure the help of mental health experts to answer questions about having these conversations. It's crucial that you enlist the support of your campus' mental health services so they can provide boundaries for the conversations, redirection when needed, offer knowledgeable guidance for the participants and help identify cases where more help (professional) might be needed. They can help identify when more help is needed and speak to professional mental health resources available to students.



Try capturing video and/or static content of the activation that you can share on social media or in campus emails and newsletters to promote with students across campus. Another idea to consider is submitting your stories to the [AFSP Real Stories](#) blog for publication in the organization's monthly newsletter and social media feed. These extensions can serve as powerful tools for raising awareness, providing education and fostering a supportive community around mental health on campus.

**SAY
IT OUT
LOUD!**



SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS

Instagram Takeover

Invite your campus's students, administrators, organizations, mental health experts, and champions from AFSP and NAMI to join forces and amplify the Seize the Awkward message.

Here's how it can work: Dedicate some time during your key [mental health activation points in the year](#) (or any other time that's appropriate), to invite a different guest to take over your organization or college Instagram stories or an Instagram Live. They can share their perspectives, tips, and personal stories related to mental health conversations and supporting friends.

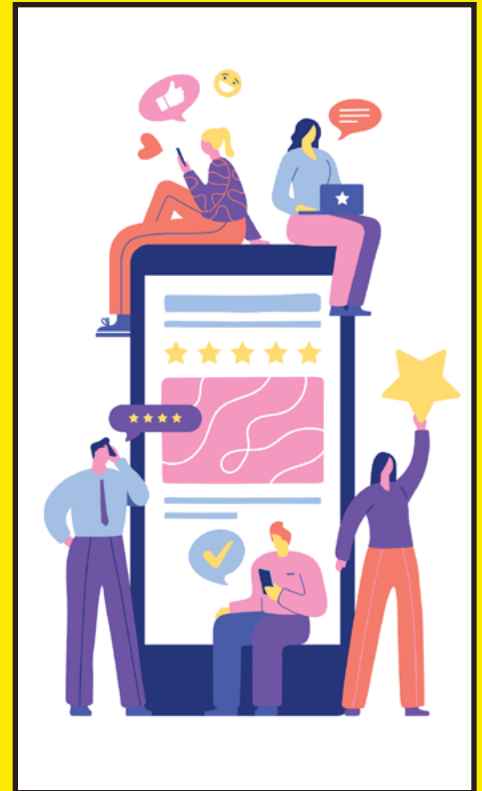


SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS

Instagram Takeover

Make sure that you don't share other peoples' personal stories about their mental health struggles and focus on the importance of having these conversations. A story of a simple check-in and its impact can be enough. **Here are a few prompts you can use to get started:**

- **Submit Your Story:** Do folks on your campus have a powerful message or experience to share around when their friends made them feel seen and supported? Encourage them to submit their story for a chance to be featured in an Instagram takeover.
- **Engage and Share:** Invite folks to tune in to your Instagram takeover, engage with the content, ask questions, and share their thoughts. Make sure that you assign someone to check for questions and be prepared to answer. Enlisting the support of a mental health expert is recommended when answering questions about this topic.
- **Collaborate with Champions:** Connect with representatives from your [local AFSP Chapter](#) and [NAMI State Organizations and Affiliates](#) during your takeovers. Learn from their expertise, get insights into mental health advocacy, and share resources for support.
- **Foster the Community:** Ensure someone or a team is connected by checking for questions. And use our [safe messaging guidelines](#) and tips to understand how best to answer questions about mental health.
- **Spread the Word:** Use these Seize the Awkward GIFs, hashtags, and graphics to spread the campaign message on your Instagram. Together, we can reach more people and make a difference in promoting mental health awareness and support.



Lastly, consider joining the AFSP Lifesavers Ambassador program as a student creator and influencer. Learn more [here](#).

Shine a spotlight on mental health conversations and support – one story at a time!

SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS

Informational Post

Here are some simple ways to spread awareness and support for mental health conversations:

- **Share Seize the Awkward Content:** Check out our [Seize the Awkward Content section](#) for ready-to-post graphics, GIFs, and other downloadable materials.
- **Follow & Share from @SeizeTheAwkward:** Start by following our official Seize the Awkward [Instagram account](#). This is where you'll find engaging content, inspiring stories, and resources to promote mental health conversations and support. Take a scroll and repost this content on your organization's or university's Instagram stories.
- **Tag and Connect:** Don't forget to tag @SeizeTheAwkward and use our campaign hashtag (#SeizeTheAwkward) to help reach a wider audience and create a buzz around mental health conversations.
- **Spread the Word:** Encourage your followers, friends, and colleagues to join in reposting. You can even make it a challenge by encouraging folks to repost for a fun incentive. Consider making a post from your organization or campus social account, then encourage campus community members to comment once they've reposted/tagged to enter the challenge. This way, you can track participation.



Let's use social media as a positive space for mental health conversations and support.

SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS

Campus Interview Series

By conducting a limited number of “street” / “tiny mic” interviews with peers for social media, you can share the Seize the Awkward message in a candid and conversational way.

- What’s your favorite question to ask when checking in on a friend?
- What does great support from a friend look or feel like in your experience?
- Can you share a time when reaching out to a friend for support made a difference for you or someone you know? (Remind them not to share any identifying details – let’s protect our friends’ privacy.)
- What words of advice would you have for someone who might feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the idea of checking in on their friends?
- What mental health resources do you recommend to other students?



Don’t forget to use #SeizeTheAwkward and tag @SeizeTheAwkward!



SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS



Safe Messaging Guidelines & Tips

Here are some tips you can use when spreading the word about mental health on your campus and on social media. Remember that mental health is a complex topic and can sometimes be difficult to talk about. This section is to help provide some information and considerations about safe language when discussing mental health with students and peers.

- If your friend is struggling, one of the most powerful things you can do is **encourage them to seek support**.
 - Sharing a little about **relevant, personal** experience can be helpful.
 - If you do share from your own experience, keep your story relatively brief and make sure that there is a key takeaway that's relevant to your friend's situation.
 - Share times that you sought out help or how friends supported you through a hard time.
 - Share examples of how friends have checked in on you and show that you are someone they can talk to about mental health.

- Seize the Awkward is focused on encouraging teens and young adults to reach out to their friends long before they're in crisis. However, if suicide enters the conversation, offer a message of hope like "you are not alone," and help-seeking guidance like help is always available – and guide them to 988 or the Crisis Text Line at 741741.
 - It's okay to use the word suicide. It's a myth that talking about suicide can give someone ideas. Research shows that talking about suicide may help people feel more comfortable seeking help if they need it.
 - It's OK to ask "are you thinking about suicide?"
 - Encourage them to get professional help to address thoughts of suicide.

SOCIAL CONTENT IDEAS



When Creating Content

While we are encouraging young adults to open up about mental health, we also must be mindful of sensitivities surrounding the topic. Below are some things mental health and suicide prevention experts recommend when creating content:

- While we acknowledge that starting a conversation can feel awkward, **avoid referring to people or the idea of having conversations about mental health as “awkward.”**
- Use **“people-first” language**. For example:
 - Instead of saying “the mentally ill” or “mentally ill people,” say “people struggling with their mental health” or “people experiencing mental health challenges.”
 - Learn more with [NAMI’s Language Matters](#) resource.
 - Learn more about [AFSP’s Sharing Your Story Safely](#) resource.
- Instead of “suicidal people,” say “people struggling with thoughts of suicide” or “people in crisis.” Help young adults understand that treatment, coping strategies, professional help and peer-to-peer support can benefit anyone, at any time. If you provide specific examples, be sure to include language that makes it clear that it is unique to your own experience (e.g., I found that group therapy and meditation worked for me).
- Avoid making light of or minimizing any mental health struggle or poking fun at mental illness.
- Avoid overly dark stories or sharing explicit details about trauma, self-harm, suicide, death, abuse, or treatment. We encourage you to share stories that focus on how you managed the situation and steered towards a more optimistic or hopeful outcome.
- Avoid calling out an individual friend’s name or sharing their personal story without their consent. Please do not share explicit details of ways friends harmed themselves, or may have hidden disordered eating or substance misuse.
- On social:
 - Do not engage with inappropriate, negative, **or inflammatory comments.**



If someone shares they are in a crisis, please direct them to call 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or 911 in case of an emergency.

CAMPUS EVENT IDEAS



PSA Screening and Discussion

One of the best ways to facilitate conversation is to encourage people to gather and watch Seize the Awkward's PSAs and social videos. This idea can give students a common reference point to explore their insights. Ideally, you should include a campus mental health professional and/or local AFSP and NAMI partner.

We encourage you to provide participants with resources they can pursue if they want to learn more, follow up with a mental health professional, or share resources with a friend following this discussion. This can include local and campus-based resources (e.g., on-campus counseling center) as well as national resources available to them. For a list of recommended national resources, please see the [“Resources for Students”](#) section.



Check out our current [videos](#) to foster a unique and personal conversation.

On the following pages, you'll find questions to get the conversation started.

CAMPUS EVENT IDEAS



PSA Screening and Discussion

Here are some questions that apply to all of the videos:

1. Have you ever experienced the “awkward silence” with a friend?

While the campaign focuses on the “awkward moment” of reaching out to a friend, the importance of having a conversation about their mental health—in spite of it being potentially awkward—should be the goal of this discussion.

2. What’s your favorite way to check in with a friend?

There are a variety of ways one can check in, but simply having a caring conversation and “being there” is a great start. Ongoing communication can help to determine how a friend is doing or if they might require professional help.

3. Were you ever in a situation where you felt you should reach out to a friend? Did you? Why or why not? When you’ve reached out to a friend, what did you say?

When reaching out to a friend, it’s important for students to express concern and be specific about why they’re concerned (e.g., “You’ve been missing class a lot,” “You seem a little down lately and I just wanted you to know that I’m here for you.”). This can let them know they are not alone and they have a support system to lean on. In this discussion, it’s also important to not make anyone feel bad or guilty about not having reached out to their friend, but rather to explore why they may have been hesitant and what would have made it easier.

4. Why do you think people don’t reach out to their friends when they sense something could be wrong?

This conversation could be around fears of intrusion, making their friend angry or uncomfortable, making things worse or even not knowing what to do if their friend is struggling. Talking about mental health with friends can be intimidating for students, and that’s why it’s important for us to seize these awkward moments so we can begin normalizing those conversations. Checking in with a friend does not need to involve a complicated, heavy conversation. Sometimes a simple “hey, I’m here if you want to talk” or “I’m here for you” is enough to help a friend.

5. Would anyone like to share a personal experience with their mental health?

This is a good opportunity to hear from the audience about their own experiences and build upon the conversation based on what is shared. While everyone’s experience is unique, hearing what helped someone else could inspire the next person to have that conversation with their friend.

6. What is one piece of advice you would give to someone who is supporting a friend struggling with their mental health?

Try to leave the conversation on a positive and action-oriented note by equipping students with the resources and confidence they need to check-in and support a friend.

CAMPUS EVENT IDEAS

Guided Mindfulness Activity

Take a deep breath and step into a space of calm, connection, and support. Bring your campus together for a “Seize the Awkward”-inspired guided mindfulness exercise. We recommend that you collaborate with a campus mindfulness organization or a staff member whose role is to promote wellness on campus to design and lead this activity.

In this soothing and introspective session, participants will have the opportunity to:

- **Relax and reset:** Begin with a [breathing exercise](#) to help students relax and settle in for the mindfulness exercise. You can use one of these breathing exercises.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Using a resource such as this [grounding meditation](#) or a visualization exercise on YouTube, engage in a group mindfulness activity that allows participants to disconnect from the stressors of their daily lives and find a sense of calm.
- **Embrace connection:** After the mindfulness exercise, participants can connect with fellow students and staff in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. Encourage them to share experiences, insights, and thoughts on mental health and peer support.
- **Encourage mindfulness as a means to peer-to-peer support:** Provide participants with information about empowering activities that reinforce the message of “Seize the Awkward,” such as conversation starters or positive affirmations for friends. You can discuss these activities or give students flyers with step-by-step instructions based on STA resources.
- **Share resources:** Spread the word about available mental health resources and community organizations that promote mental well-being and peer support on campus.

No prior meditation experience is required – just bring an open mind and a willingness to connect with yourself and others.



CAMPUS EVENT IDEAS

Seize the Awkward Social

Think of the **STA Social** as a friendly spin on a community networking event—only with a mission. Create a welcoming, low-pressure space where students can come together for a powerful hour of casual connection, reflection, and movement. Whether it's hosted in a student lounge, campus quad, or community center, the goal is simple: make space for conversation and connection.

Here are a few things to consider as you plan your social:

- **Atmosphere:** Set the tone with music, cozy seating, light refreshments, and a movement-friendly space for activities. Consider things like coloring, puzzles, and cornhole that can engage your peers and make it less intimidating.
- **Conversation Prompts:** Place Seize the Awkward-themed reflection prompts in a bowl or jar for attendees to draw from. Prompts can be deep or light-hearted—but all should encourage meaningful, peer-to-peer dialogue. Check out a few below to get you started:
 - How have you made yourself proud recently?
 - What's something small that helps you feel grounded during a stressful week?
 - What's a small thing you crossed off your to-do list today?
 - Who checks in on you—and how do they do it?
 - How do you know when you need support?
 - What's something you wish more people understood about mental health?
 - How do you show up for the people you care about?
- **Movement Breaks:** Invite participants to move through the space to energize it and diversify the opportunities for connection
- **Community:** You don't have to do it alone! Partner with a few student orgs or mental health clubs like NAMI On Campus to help host and bring their communities.



Remember, the core of the STA Social is connection. Please reference our **Safe Messaging and Guidelines** sections for tips on cultivating the most inclusive and informed space you can.



CAMPUS EVENT IDEAS

Other Activity Ideas

There are many great ways to seize the awkward. Here's another list of activities you can encourage on your campus to help folks check-in:

- Decorate a dorm room with a friend.
- Sit down for a picnic and chat.
- Have a movie night.
- Get crafty and consider scrapbooking or collaging.
- Make a playlist for a friend with feel-good jams.
- Connect with nature.
- Try a new self-care practice with a peer.
- Explore a new spot around the campus with a group.
- Take a social media break together.





MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVATION MOMENTS

If you organize and activate events around certain recognized moments on the calendar, you can drive added attention to your activations and maximize the impact. Here are some of the best moments to host activities around:

JANUARY

- Mental Wellness Month

MARCH

- National Awkward Moments Day
- Self-Harm Awareness Month

MARCH 2ND

- World Teen Mental Wellness Day

APRIL

- Stress Awareness Month

APRIL 16TH

- World Semicolon Day

MAY

- Mental Health Awareness Month

JUNE 8TH

- National Best Friends Day

JULY

- National Minority Mental Health Month

AUGUST

- National Friendship Day
- Back-to-School

SEPTEMBER

- Back-to-School
- ### SEPTEMBER 10TH
- World Suicide Prevention Day

OCTOBER FIRST WEEK

- Mental Illness Awareness Week

OCTOBER 10TH

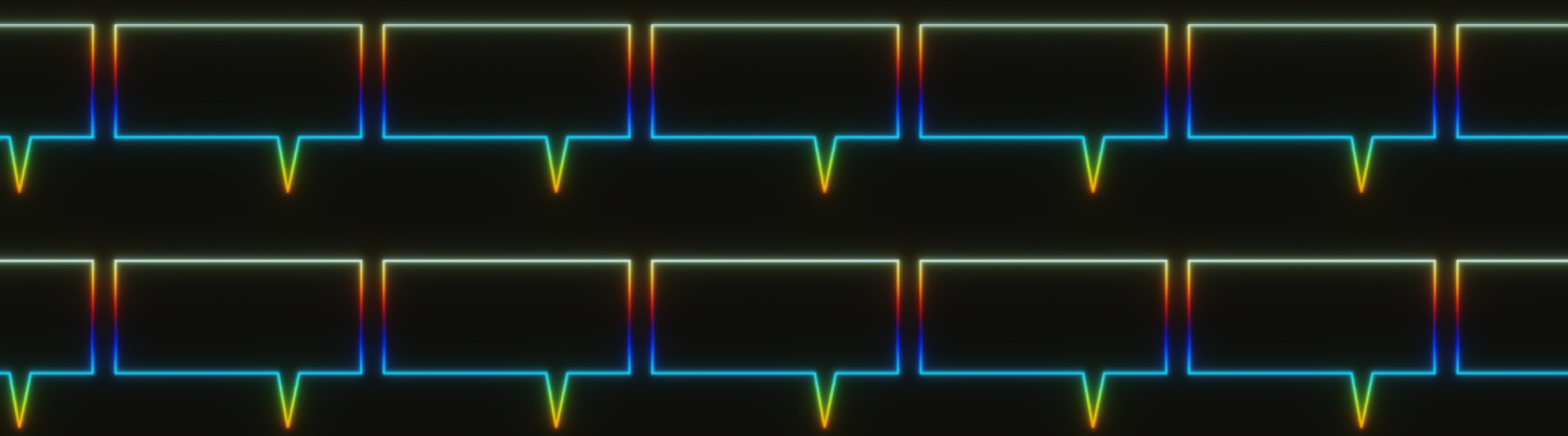
- World Mental Health Day

NOVEMBER 6TH

- National Stress Day

DECEMBER

- Seasonal Depression Awareness Month



SEIZE THE AWKWARD CONTENT

In order to help you #SeizeTheAwkward on your own, check out our graphics, social video content, and GIFs to share on your social media channels. Please note, content is ready to use as is and should not be edited or manipulated in any way.

When you find something that resonates, be sure to tag @SeizeTheAwkward and hashtag #SeizeTheAwkward! We can't wait to see what you share.

Graphics
(view and download [here](#))

Social Video Content
(view and download [here](#))

GIFs

- Find GIFs and stickers [here](#)!

More Resources

- [Spread the Word](#)



RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

If you or someone you know needs to talk to someone right now, **text, call, or chat 988** for a free, confidential conversation with a trained counselor 24/7.

You can also contact the Crisis Text Line by texting SEIZE to 741741.

If this is a medical emergency or if there is immediate danger of harm, call 911 and explain that you need support for a mental health crisis.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline](#)
- [Teen's Health Resources](#)
- [AAKOMA Project: Resources and Support for Diverse Teens and Families](#)
- [Trevor Project: Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention Nonprofit](#)
- [Amala Hopeline: The Muslim Youth Hopeline](#)
- [It's Real: Public Education and Awareness Program](#)
- [Interactive Screening Program for Institutions of Higher Education](#)
- [Find a Local AFSP Chapter](#)
- [Brave Talk](#)
- [NAMI College Guide](#)
- [Seize the Awkward](#)



FOR FURTHER READING

- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Blog](#)
- [NAMI Support & Education](#)
- [The Jed Foundation Resource Center](#)



ABOUT US

Originally created in partnership with [The Jed Foundation](#) (JED) and the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP) from 2018-2025, the campaign now continues under the leadership of AFSP and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI). Learn how you can Seize the Awkward by following [@SeizeTheAwkward](#) on Instagram and visiting [SeizeTheAwkward.org](#). Check out some information about Seize the Awkward's partners below.

[The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have experienced a **loss**. AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through public education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, with a public policy office in Washington, DC, AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states, DC and Puerto Rico, with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest **[Annual Report](#)** and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [TikTok](#).

[The National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization. NAMI is dedicated to building better lives for millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI's Alliance includes more than 700 NAMI State Organizations and Affiliates who work in local communities to raise awareness and provide support and education to those in need. Connect with NAMI on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), [TikTok](#), and [Threads](#).

The Ad Council convenes creative storytellers to educate, unite and uplift audiences by opening hearts, inspiring action and accelerating change. For more than 80 years, the nonprofit organization and its partners in advertising, media, marketing and tech have been behind some of the country's most iconic social impact campaigns – Smokey Bear, Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk, Tear the Paper Ceiling and many more. To learn more or get involved, visit [AdCouncil.org](#), join the Ad Council's communities on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#), and view campaign creative on [YouTube](#).