

Young adulthood is a critical time in a person's life when they may experience great stress from multiple life changes like leaving high school, moving from home and beginning college. We also know through research, that the teen years are a time when mental health conditions often present for the first time. While effective treatment options are available, for some people, getting help takes time and finding the right treatment option may also take persistence to find what works best.

Today, COVID-19 may also place an immense strain on the mental health of young people. According to [research](#) fielded by Seize the Awkward and Chegg.org, half of high school and college students report experiencing anxiety and a third report experiencing depression since the pandemic began. There is hope. With COVID-19, tele-mental health options are now more accessible, and research also tells us that reaching into self-care strategies and staying connected to others proves helpful during this time.

The friends of those struggling with mental health issues can be incredibly supportive by simply checking in and staying connected and listening. However, if things don't begin to get better or you notice changes in normal behavior, reach out to a trusted adult or access help at SeizeTheAwkward.org to get the help that they need when they need it.

Seize the Awkward empowers young adults aged 16-24 to get involved when they suspect a friend is experiencing mental health issues or may be at risk for suicide.

Key Campaign Talking Points

- There are so many ways to start conversations about mental health with a friend. Especially now, reaching out can make a big difference.
- COVID-19 has also been part of our lives for over a year now. The social isolation of the pandemic continues to present immense challenges when it comes to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.
- We don't need to physically be there, to be there for our friends.
- It's so important that we stay connected with the people in our lives, especially now.
- Whether it's over a virtual dinner, while playing video games, or via a call, text, emoji, or a GIF, what matters is that you reach out.
 - Anyone in need of immediate support can reach the Crisis Text Line by texting SEIZE to 741741 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 at any time.

Key Moments:

- **Mental Health Awareness Month in May**
During Mental Health Awareness Month, we continue to raise awareness about the importance of speaking about mental health and encourage young adults to check in with their friends or start a conversation with a friend who might be struggling.

Minority Mental Health Awareness Month in July Minority Mental Health Awareness Month was developed to raise awareness of the unique mental health struggles facing underrepresented groups. In recognition of the month, we provide BIPOC-focused mental

health information and resources that BIPOC young adults and their friends may find helpful.

- **National Suicide Prevention Month and National Suicide Prevention Week in September**
September marks the start of the school year and gives teens and young adults a great opportunity to check in with peers about their mental health. During this transitional time, we hope to encourage individuals to start a conversation with a friend who may be struggling. This is especially important as friends get back in touch after the summer apart or head off to college for the first time.
- **World Mental Health Day in October**
Following September, we use World Mental Health Day to drive home the importance of reaching out and checking in on a friend's mental health.

About the issue:

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst young adults and for every youth suicide, it is estimated that 100-200 others attempt suicide.
- Young adulthood is a critical time in a person's life when they may experience great stress from multiple life changes like leaving high school, moving from home and beginning college or a job. It's also a time when mental health issues frequently emerge and, despite effective treatment options, there are often long delays between the first appearance of symptoms and when people receive counseling or treatment.
- Friendships play an integral role in young adults' lives. They can often intuitively sense when something is "off" with their friends and want to do something to help. However, they may be unsure about reaching out because they are afraid of damaging the friendship, hurting their friends' feelings, saying something that is wrong or making the situation worse, not being able to help, or misinterpreting their friends' behaviors.
- These barriers can lead to isolation in friendships and potentially greater risk for those in distress. Young adults recognize when their friends are struggling and want to help, but don't feel like they know how to. Yet, those struggling with mental health desire and need their friends' support. In fact, when they do look for support, 76 percent of young adults will turn to a peer.
- By trusting their gut instincts when something is off with a friend and saying something, even if it's awkward, messy, or imperfect, a friend can create a space of trust for a conversation about mental health. And in turn, these conversations can help to prevent something much worse from happening later.

Key Messages

- Friends of teens and young adults are often the first to recognize early signs of mental health problems and when they do seek support, an estimated 76% of young adults will turn to a peer.



SEIZE THE AWKWARD



American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention



The Jed Foundation

- Teens and young adults are ready and willing to have conversations about mental health, they're just missing the language and tools to do so.
- Talking about mental health can be awkward, but it can really help. Just starting a conversation with a friend, no matter how awkward it may feel, can make a real difference in someone's life.
- Anyone in need of Immediate support can reach the Crisis Text Line by texting SEIZE to 741741 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 at any time.
- The Jed Foundation (JED), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the Ad Council, and Droga5 have launched *Seize the Awkward* in 2018 (and released a new phase of work in May 2020) to empower teens and young adults (16-24) to reach out to a friend who is struggling with mental health issues (and who may be at risk for suicide). The campaign aims to educate young adults about mental health, encourages young adults to create a safe space for their friends to share more, and teaches them how to have those conversations and how to support a friend in need.
- The campaign drives viewers to SeizeTheAwkward.org. The website provides various resources to help young people "seize the awkward" by reaching out to a friend who may be struggling with mental health issues.
- *Seize the Awkward* (STA) aims to encourage and empower young adults to reach out to a friend who may be struggling with their mental health. By leveraging moments of vulnerability in their friendships, they can create a safe space for their friends to open up about mental health.