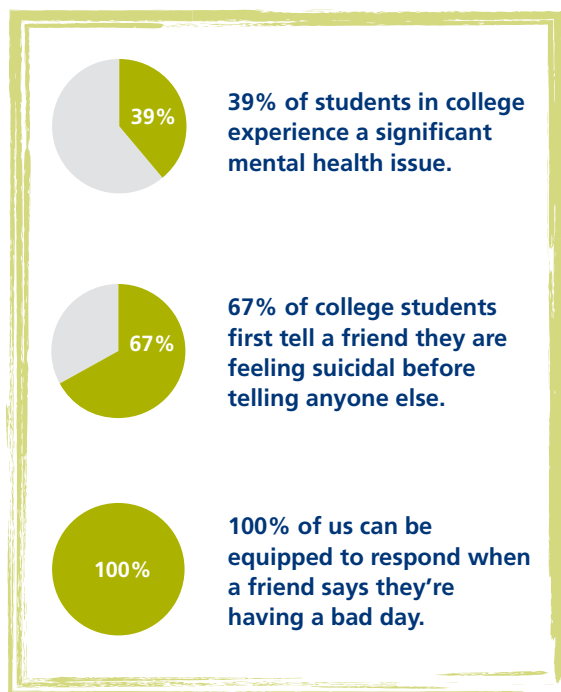


# V-A-R

## CONVERSATION GUIDE



Active Minds' everyday guide for everyday challenges



**LOOK AROUND YOU:** 50% of your peers will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. Mental health issues are prevalent among young adults, but young adults are also much more likely to talk about mental health than their parents or grandparents. Sadly, many still suffer in silence. You can help change that.

**VALIDATE, APPRECIATE, AND REFER — OR V-A-R —** is an easy way to show up for a friend, to actively listen, and to help them cope when they're having more than a bad day.

This guide will help you to facilitate an engaging and informative conversation about V-A-R with your chapter members. *Before your session, we encourage you to prepare by watching the V-A-R video, and by going to [activeminds.org](http://activeminds.org) to learn about mental health and increase your knowledge about mental illness.*

Your V-A-R training is intended to be used during a chapter meeting or a specially-called session on mental health. Steps 1-3 can be done in less than 15 minutes, but the full session can run for 30 minutes or up to a full hour depending on the size of your group, or if the optional practice step is included.

### STEP 1: BEGIN THE DIALOGUE WITH YOUR CHAPTER

**SHARE:** Start with a statement or by sharing a story to ground people in the room, establish trust, and set the stage. This can be as personal as you feel comfortable: the key is authenticity.

Some options to guide your opening statement or story:

- Why is learning about helping a friend with their mental health important to you?
- Do you have a personal mental health struggle that you are willing to share?
- If friendship brought you to your Greek Life organization, why is "showing up for a friend" something you care that other people know how to do?
- Why should each person in this room understand this set of skills and information?

## STEP 2: INTRODUCE V-A-R AND SHOW VIDEO

**SAY:** “V-A-R is Active Minds’ everyday guide for everyday challenges. It’s about showing up for each other in our everyday struggles. The letters V-A-R correspond to three steps: Validate-Appreciate-Refer. The steps are easy to understand, easy to do, and easy to remember. V-A-R conversations can take many forms: phone, in-person, text message, Facetime, and more. The medium doesn’t matter as much as the message that you care.”

**SHOW:** Play the Active Minds’ Validate-Appreciate-Refer video (approx. five minutes in length).

**Access video:** [activeminds.org/GreekLifeVAR](http://activeminds.org/GreekLifeVAR)

**Password:** GreekLifeVAR

## STEP 3: DISCUSS THE V-A-R PROCESS

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Think about a time someone said something helpful to you that you really needed to hear. What was it that they said that helped? What did it feel like?
- What do you remember more: the words they used or the feeling that they gave you?
- Why is it difficult to have these conversations? What gets in the way?
- What are some new phrases you’ve learned that you can now commit to using when a friend shares that they are struggling?

### WRAP-UP:

V-A-R is a tool for us to use for everyday struggles. But it’s important to know when it’s more than a bad day. If you hear a friend mention the word “suicide” or suggest they are considering hurting themselves, it’s critical to help them seek professional help. You can make seeking professional help easier by grabbing your own brochure from the counseling center, keeping the call line for your counseling center on hand, or meeting one of the counselors so that you can tell your friend what the counselor is like.

**We can all be prepared by knowing campus, local, or national resources such as the Crisis Text Line, text “BRAVE” to 741741, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255).**

## STEP 4 (Optional): PRACTICE WHAT WAS LEARNED

**INSTRUCT:** Before using the conclusion content above, ask the group to break into small groups (3-5 people per group is ideal). Each small group should work together to create V-A-R responses to other common verbal indicators of struggle. Each group can take one or more indicator, and either come up with their own or use one of the following prompts:

- “I have too much going on.”
- “I didn’t go to class this week - I just couldn’t do it.”
- “It’s hard to get going with my day sometimes.”

**ASK:** Request that each group (or a few, depending on the number of groups) share how the exercise felt to them:

- What was helpful about it? Challenging?
- What are some examples of what hasn’t been helpful to hear in the past?

**For more information, mental health resources, and tools to learn how to help a friend, visit the Active Minds website at [activeminds.org/VAR](http://activeminds.org/VAR).**