

# Belonging Starts with You

## A CONVERSATION ON SOCIAL CONNECTION

When we think about the concept of social connection, we reflect on belonging to a group of people – our circles of friends, sisters, family members or colleagues that we call, text or meet up with for brunch on late Sunday mornings. Social connection is nothing new to sisters of Alpha Chi Omega.

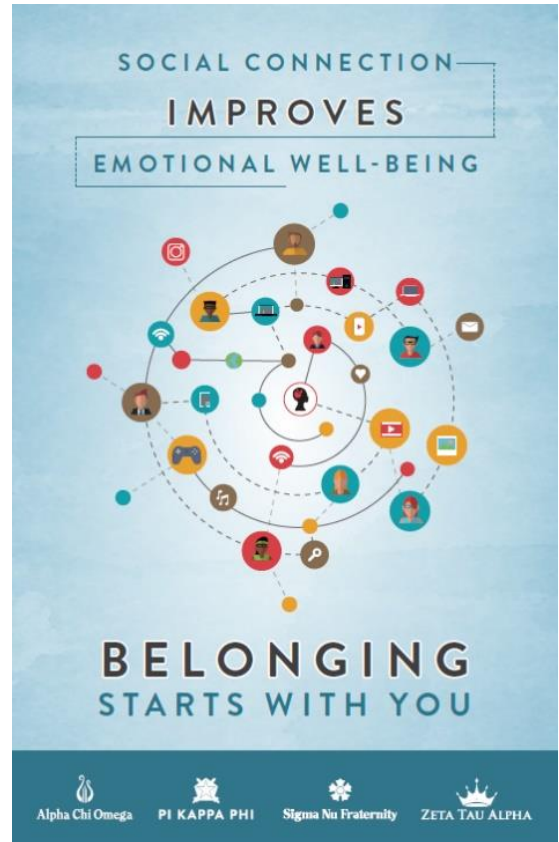
During the COVID-19 pandemic, social connection has looked different. Morning conversations with colleagues, family vacations, community events and religious gatherings have adjusted to keep ourselves and others safe. Daily routines have been modified to create balance between disrupted schedules and caring for ourselves and others. But even as we maintain our physical distance, we must remain socially close.

**RESEARCH HAS FOUND THAT SOCIAL CONNECTION IS VITAL TO OUR MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.**

This conversation guide allows you to personally reflect or start a discussion around social connection and emotional well-being with sisters, friends or family members. We have also provided strategies to help you create a sense of belonging.

### QUESTION 1: HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

Know that your feelings are valid, and you are not alone. We have all experienced obstacles and interruptions due to the pandemic. It’s important that we focus on prioritizing our emotional well-being. As we collectively navigate the pandemic, it’s OK to respond and react differently. We are all balancing different experiences and should not be in competition nor pass judgment on others.



## QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT YOU HAVE SOCIALLY CONNECTED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Maybe you participated in a virtual trivia night, watched Netflix with friends, walked outside with a small group, completed a DIY home project with a family member, played video games with your kids or attended a virtual happy hour.

### FIVE TIPS FOR CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Maintaining and creating relationships with others is not always easy. We must do our part to help create a sense of belonging.

1. Recognize and invest in the different types of relationships in your life. Think about how you engage within your circles of friends, family members and colleagues. You should intentionally create a sense of belonging among your various communities and find balance among your circles when connecting socially.
2. Prioritize connecting with new friends and reconnecting with those from your past. Make an effort by adding time to your calendar or weekly schedule to be present with people you care for.
3. Value the quality of the connection, not the quantity. You might be sending GIFs or emojis in your group chats to feel connection, but a 20-minute phone call may be better suited to create meaningful belonging. Laugh about memories and express gratitude for exciting life updates!
4. Use social media as a tool to connect. Don't just scroll by photos of life updates; take a moment to celebrate successes and grieve losses by reaching out to express your care.
5. Maintain an open and curious mindset. Try saying "yes" to new experiences or opportunities with others. Just because that reunion is over Zoom doesn't mean you should avoid attending. Don't let the awkwardness of technology keep you from connecting with others.

## QUESTION 3: WHAT CAN YOU DO IN THE NEXT WEEK TO RECONNECT OR CREATE A NEW SOCIAL CONNECTION?

Maybe it's connecting with a neighbor across the street, dropping off home-baked cookies to a friend, attending a virtual religious service, writing notes to express gratitude for loved ones or asking a new colleague to join you for a lunchbreak walk outdoors. Blending self-care activities with social connection can help create balance between taking care of yourself and others during uncertain times.

We must find ways to continue to create a sense of belonging by prioritizing social connection, even when it needs to happen virtually. It starts with you. One decision to create a connection can have a lasting impact.

#### QUESTION 4: HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT OTHERS IN CREATING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS?

Now that you have thought about creating a sense of belonging with others, it's time to keep the momentum going by empowering others to foster social connection. Ask those around you to invest in social connections so that we can collectively build communities of belonging. Periodically checking in on others to help ensure they are staying connected is a great way to express that you care about their emotional well-being.

#### WHEN IT'S MORE THAN A BAD DAY

As we navigate the pandemic, it is also important to acknowledge that sometimes it's more than just a bad day. While it's important to be there for others, we know that sometimes they may need to be referred to a mental health professional. Here are some helpful resources:

- Call 800-273-TALK (8255) to speak with someone from the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) for immediate, 24/7 emotional support.
- To connect with a crisis counselor from the [Crisis Text Line](#), text "HOME" to 741-741. To access a culturally trained counselor, text "[STEVE](#)" to 741-741.
- Visit [Therapy for Black Girls](#) to access a therapist for Black girls and women in your area.
- Call 800-662-HELP (4357) for the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's](#) (SAMHSA) National Helpline for confidential treatment referral and information for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.
- Visit the [Grief and Loss](#) website page from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on supporting people experiencing grief.
- In emergency situations, it is appropriate to call 911 to get connected to emergency personnel who can provide immediate medical attention.