

V-A-R

CONVERSATION GUIDE



ACTIVE MINDS' EVERYDAY GUIDE FOR EVERYDAY CHALLENGES

LOOK AROUND YOU: 50% of adults will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices. Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. When it comes to mental health challenges, know that you can help.

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 or bounce back 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 sisters or alumnae chapter members.

Before your discussion, we encourage you to prepare by watching the V-A-R video and visiting the [Active Minds](#) and [National Institute of Mental Health](#) websites to learn about mental health and increase your knowledge about mental illness.

This V-A-R training is intended to be implemented during an alumnae group meeting, discussion among sisters or a specially called gathering on mental health. Steps 1, 2 and 4 can be done in less than 15 minutes, but the full session can run for 30-60 minutes, depending on the size of your group or if the optional practice step 3 is included.

STEP 1: BEGIN THE DIALOGUE WITH YOUR GROUP

SHARE: Start with a statement or story to ground people in the room (virtual or in person), 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 how to help a sister or 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 Alpha Chi Omega, why is “showing up for a friend” something important to you?
- Why should we each understand this set of skills and information?

STEP 2: INTRODUCE V-A-R AND HOW-TO 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 (5 minutes).

- **Access video:** activeminds.org/GreekLifeVAR
- **Password:** GreekLifeVAR

STEP 3 (OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY): PRACTICE WHAT WAS LEARNED

INSTRUCT: Ask the group to break into small groups (three to five people per group is ideal). Each small group should work together to create V-A-R responses to common verbal indicators of struggle. Indicators can be created by the group or based off the examples below:

- “I have too much going on in my life. I feel like some days I wish it would just stop.”
- “I don’t think I can go to work this week; I just can’t do it.”
- “It’s hard to get out of bed some days.”

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?

STEP 4: 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?

SAY: “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 researching a local counseling center near you, 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 community, local or national resources such as the Crisis Text Line (text “BRAVE” to 741741) and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK).”

For more information on mental health resources and tools to learn how to help a friend, visit the Active Minds website at [activeminds.org/VAR](https://www.activeminds.org/VAR) or the Alpha Chi Omega Alumnae Mental Health Resources web page.

