

Mental Health Quick Takes

Suggested Talks and Discussion Guides

Developed in response to the coronavirus pandemic, this video series and accompanying discussion guide addresses mental health topics critical to successfully navigating times of unique challenges and mental distress. The videos are led by Ross Szabo, mental health expert and creator of the [Behind Happy Faces](#) program. Ross is known for his down-to-earth tone and practical approach to teaching mental health that has resonated with thousands of college students.

Like the [Sigma Nu Talks series](#), the concept is fairly simple – watch and reflect on each video on your own, or gather together a group of Sigma Nus, watch one or more of the videos, and create a conversation using the included discussion guides. The videos are intended to be watched in sequential order:

1. Definition of Mental Health
2. Separating Causes of Stress
3. Coping/Motivation
4. Control What You Can Control
5. Reframing Stress

The series can be watched and discussed in numerous different settings:

- On your own
- Chapter meeting
- Candidate meeting
- Big Brother/Little Brother bonding
- Groups of LEAD participants of any phase (i.e. I, II, III, or IV)
- Retreats

Each discussion guide includes:

- Direct link to the video on YouTube (each video includes a transcript)
- Overview of the video topic
- Suggested audience
- Discussion questions
- Application ideas for participants to implement the concepts from the video

As with many of the Fraternity's resources, the videos, discussion questions, and application ideas are intentionally designed to be flexible to be used in whatever way is most helpful for members and chapters. As a result of participating, you and your chapter will be better informed and prepared to embrace positive mental health despite anything outside of your control that may be thrown your way.



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Video #1: Definition of Mental Health

Overview

In this first video of the mental health education series, Ross Szabo, creator of the [Behind Happy Faces](#) program, challenges us to reconsider how we define mental health.

Video link (Approximately 3 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIMIXqpbsCg&>

Suggested Audience

- On your own
- Chapter meeting
- Candidate meeting
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Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think mental health is oftentimes viewed negatively?
2. What are three ways you can work on your mental health in a similar way to working on your physical health?
3. What do you think would help to make brothers more comfortable in sharing their experiences with mental health?
4. How might we apply those ideas for our chapter this term?

Application Ideas

- Create a plan for the next week to incorporate the three ideas you came up with in discussion question #2 above and enlist a brother, or several, to join you to hold each other accountable. After the week, discuss what impact each of you noticed.
 - **Why?** Good habits must start somewhere, and there is no better time than right now to build good new habits. By enlisting the assistance of a brother, you are also indirectly promoting positive mental health practices with others, which can generate meaningful conversations.
- Discuss with a brother, friend, or family member how mental health is currently portrayed in the media and how that portrayal compares to real-life mental health examples you have encountered or seen. How does that impact how we talk about mental health?
 - **Why?** Many of our views about mental health are taken from media and pop culture, which frequently miss the mark. By considering how much those portrayals differ from reality, we can begin to communicate the differences



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with others who also might be struggling with understanding accurately mental health.

- Talk to a brother, friend, or family member about redefining mental health to make it like physical health. Identify one thing you could do in the next week to support positive mental health (e.g. write in a journal, meditate). Schedule a follow-up check-in to hold each other accountable.
- Ask someone why they may not be willing to talk about their mental health and have a conversation about where that barrier comes from. You can explore the concept together to determine how it impacts your life and theirs and what could be done to change it.



Video #2: Separating Causes of Stress

Overview

This video provides practical advice on how to compartmentalize the things that cause you stress to help reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed, frustrated, or angry.

Video link (Approximately 2 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL0HGEguKN8&>

Suggested Audience

- On your own
- Chapter meeting
- Candidate meeting
- Big Brother/Little Brother bonding
- Groups of LEAD participants of any phase (i.e. I, II, III, or IV)
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Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What are the main causes of stress in your life right now?
2. If you had to pick, which of those causes of stress is the most affecting you today?
3. What can you do to proactively separate your causes of stress and keep them from becoming overwhelming?

Application Ideas

- Complete the following activity: First, make a list of your current causes of stress. Now write down the emotions that you feel from each specific cause of stress. You may have similar emotions for each cause of stress. Then, look at the list you made and determine which cause of stress is affecting you the most right now.
 - **Why?** This may seem like a simple activity, but writing things down is an important cognitive step. By writing your emotions down, you are clearly articulating them, which means you are recognizing them. This can be a significant step towards getting better and quicker at identifying your emotions in the future, which means addressing those emotions better and quicker.
- Write down five positive ways to moderate your stress on a notecard / post-it notes and place it somewhere readily available/seen, like a computer screen or as a saved wallpaper image on the home screen of your phone. Examples could include going for a ten-minute walk, praying/meditating, calling a brother or friend, or even working out.
 - **Why?** Good mental health requires each of us to have a well-stocked toolbox to handle stress when we experience it. If we do not have the right tools with us, we likely will default to easy (but ultimately failed) coping mechanisms like



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alcohol, anger, or drugs. Having a visible reminder easily available means you do not have to go searching for your mental health toolbox.

- When you start feeling your emotions getting the best of you this week, take a minute to pause and identify the cause of that stress. Think about what you can do to moderate that stress. Naming the cause allows you to focus on it.



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Video #3: Coping/Motivation

Overview

This video introduces obstacles to staying motivated and positive mechanisms we can implement to stay on track.

Video link (Approximately 2 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHWqI20hy9g>

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- Chapter meeting
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Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What are some activities in your life right now that you have not felt motivated to do?
2. What are some actions that you could take to help you find more motivation?
3. What are some of your past ineffective coping mechanisms that you have found yourself using recently? What can you do to become more aware of these coping mechanisms to change them?

Application Ideas

- Choose one activity that you have trouble finding motivation to do and deconstruct it to step-by-step parts. Use writing a paper as an example. One step could be writing an introduction paragraph or writing the thesis statement.
 - **Why?** By deconstructing activities down to step-by-step parts, we can follow Ross' advice and take baby steps towards accomplishing the overall activity.
- Reflect on the coping mechanisms you have regularly used in the past six months. Categorize those coping mechanisms into positive or negative. Consider how you could have eliminated the use of negative coping mechanisms during that time while maximizing the use of positive, effective coping mechanisms.
 - **Why?** Self-reflection is an important activity for any person, but it can also be the hardest. By identifying what coping mechanism does not work, we are taking a step towards avoiding them in the future.

Video #4: Control What You Can Control

Overview

This video details how identifying what is causing you stress that is within your control can help create an effective plan to overcome and positive cope with your stress.

Video link (Approximately 2 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXtRFZfQ3tU>

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Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What are some aspects happening in your life right now that you do not have control over?
2. What are things happening in your life that you do have control of?
3. Do you tend to pay more attention to things that are out of or under your control? Why do you think that is? Do you think you would feel better if you focused on the other?
4. Do you use your internal voice to help calm you down or do you use it to heighten your worries? Why do you think that is? How can encourage your internal voice to be more helpful?

Application Ideas

- Make a list of things you have control over even if the list includes the smallest parts of your life in which you have control (e.g. I control which apps I access on my phone, I control what I wear each day). Then, write down what you are grateful for about the things under your control.
 - **Why?** Focusing on the positive (what you can control) versus the negative (those things outside of your control) can boost productivity and your overall mood.
- Commit for one day to pause every 1-2 hours and write down what you are thinking at that specific moment. At the end of the day, look at what you wrote day and identify the thoughts that were positive and the thoughts that were negative. For the negative thoughts, write down how you could use the principles introduced in this video to make those thoughts more positive (e.g. was the focus on something you cannot



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control?, Is there something under your control that could influence the thought in a positive way?).

- **Why?** Self-reflection can be a powerful tool for self-improvement. Regularly practicing a new skill will build the foundation to forming a new habit, such as defaulting to a positive, rather than negative, mindset.
- Write down some boundaries you could use to help you protect your mental health. Boundaries could include not talking to specific people, using specific types of media, or prioritizing time for yourself.



Video #5: Reframing Stress

Overview

This video explains an effective technique for reframing stress into positive stress while avoiding the pitfall of going into an irrational spiral about the stress you are feeling.

Video link (Approximately 2 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orODNTWgLmo>

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Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What approach do you take to the things that are causing you stress in your life?
2. How do you typically frame these stress-inducing issues?
3. What can you do to change the way you frame stress in your life?
4. What can you do to stop irrational spirals when they begin happening?

Application Ideas

- Reflect on three current causes of stress in your life. Write down one to two ways you can reframe each to be more positive.
 - **Why?** Reflecting on recent experiences and processing how you could have changed your approach to those experiences is a useful skill-building exercise. The more you practice the skill of reframing stress, the easier it will be to implement regularly.
- Identify an irrational spiral about stress you have experienced. Write down one to two strategies you could have used to provide perspective to slow the spiral down or stop it completely.
 - **Why?** Writing down something makes it real. Seeing your irrational spiral about stress written down can help magnify the irrationality of the spiral you have found yourself experiencing. Recognizing the irrationality will be an effective tool to stopping yourself from going far down that spiral again.

