

screening guide EDUCATION EDITION



### WHY THE S WORD? A Letter from the Director

My name is Lisa Klein and I'm the director of THE S WORD. As a survivor of both my father's and brother's suicides, I have struggled with the 'whys' for years, along with the guilt, shame, and confusion that lingers in suicide's wake.

There is no more highly-charged personal issue for me, and for that reason I am driven to document it and open a much-needed conversation. As a society, we're often in crisis mode.

How do we get ahead of this? Yes, we need to to listen and talk to people when they are on the edge, but how do we reach people before they get to that edge?

Thanks to the help of friends in the lived experience and suicide prevention communities, we've created this toolkit in the hopes of helping you feel a little more empowered to ask for help, and to provide help as well. Suicide is a big deal. It is scary and not the easiest conversation to have.

But not having that conversation has made it one of the leading causes of death in this country. It is time to end the silence and boldly talk about suicide. We can, and we must, help each other not just to survive, but to thrive.

Suicide alone is not the problem, it is the deafening silence that surrounds it.

> Speaking the word isn't the problem, it's the silence that follows. If you need to talk to someone, call 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline).

CONTENTS



Pages 4-5 Four Tips to an Impactful Screening.

#### Pages 6-7

Tips for a successful Q+A once the film is over.

15

Pages 8-11 Suggested screening Q+A's.



Pages 12-29

Different talking points, what they are, and how to use them. Page 30

Resources, links, and handouts you may find helpful.



### FOUR TIPS TO AN IMPACTFUL SCREENING



### Read the Guide

Really. We've carefully created this for you with help from experts, including those with lived experience. With a little bit of planning and prep, you're sure to have an impactful screening. Let's get back to it.



### Invite a "Safety Net"

Have a mental health professional, crisis counselor, or otherwise experienced person in these conversations with you at your screening. They'll be able to support anyone especially affected by the film and you'll likely feel more confident in your post-film Q+A discussion. Not to mention, it's a great way to connect your audience with a real example of your local support system.

### Partner Up

What local organization, club, or company is concerned about how many people we're losing by suicide every year? Connect with your neighboring **AFSP** or **Active Minds** chapter or another prevention network. Invite a like-minded group, politician or influencer to co-present and help make this screening a community effort with invested interest in real change where you live.



Give a Short but Sweet Film Intro

Offer a quick "thank you for coming" and ask everyone to please stick around for a conversation after the film. And, introduce 'safety net' (from #2) guests in the room so everyone knows there's support with us should we need it.

TIP: Set up a resource table before the screening so anyone who's interested can stop and chat.



THREE WAYS TO A GREAT Q+A

# THE FILM HAS JUST WRAPPED, AND IT'S QUESTION AND ANSWER TIME. DON'T STRESS! HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO MAKE IT GREAT...



### **Discussion Starters**

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In this guide, they're our "Talking Points." Take a look through them and choose one or two points to discuss in your limited post-discussion time. Explain what the subject is and invite one to three experts to join a panel conversation to talk about it.



### Make it Conversational

Open it up to the audience. We're here to talk about suicide, so let's make this an open, friendly, and conversational environment. On the next page we put together some warm-up FAQs and responses to help prep you for what you might be asked.



### What Can I Do?

Great question. Let's make that, "What can we do?" It's time we stopped relying on the one to help the rest. Every one of us here today can be an ambassador of THE S WORD by holding mental health to the same degree of care as our physical health. Talk about it, listen for it, ask directly, and speak with kindness.

Generally, suicide prevention, like most things, is dealt with when we are already in crisis - otherwise known as downstream.

We want to take this conversation upstream by thinking of ways we can prevent suicide before people get to that edge. It starts with connection - being our brother's and sister's keepers by identifying risk factors and warning signs. **See page 11** for details.



# THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE MORE CONFIDENT YOU'LL BE FOR YOUR SCREENING Q + A!



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What do I say to someone who's lost somebody to suicide?

### A:

Ask them what their loved one's name was, what they were like, what they liked to do. Give them an opportunity to talk about their life, not just how they died. *Go to page 18* for a few more suggestions.



### Q:

Is it really ok to ask someone if they're thinking about suicide?

### A:

Talking openly and directly about suicide can save lives; saying the "S" word can give permission to have an honest conversation. Don't wait for someone else, **#BeThe1To** make a difference. For tips to asking the tough questions, **go to page 15**.



### Q:

Should I call 911 if someone I know says they're going to kill him or herself? A:

That option is always in your toolbox, but the first thing is to listen with empathy and compassion. It's possible the person just needs to talk, so be there to listen and find out what kind of support they want or need. You can always call <u>988 Lifeline</u> together and get advice on where to go or what to do next. With that said, trust your gut. If you don't feel that the person is "safe," 911 is still an option.

> Speaking the word isn't the problem, it's the silence that follows. If you need to talk to someone, call: 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline)

### Suicide Prevention 101

Don't ever underestimate your ability to help someone remember their reasons to live. By helping to reduce pain and increase hope we can help people decide to stay.

But you need to know what to look for, and what to be paying attention to. It's important to know the warning signs to look for that may indicate someone is thinking about suicide, but we also need to pay attention to what is going on in a person's life (risk factors). You want to be especially vigilant if the warning signs seem related to a risk factor or recent life stressor (break-up, job loss, etc.) The more warning signs, and the more risk factors, the greater the risk for suicide. On the next page is a common list of warning signs and risk factors. But remember, we all react differently to stress and we all have

a different "poker face." Also, we are all impacted by events in our own unique way. So, the most important thing to remember is trust your instincts. You know your friends and family better than anyone. If anything inside you tells you that they may be thinking about suicide, then you need to talk to them about suicide. (Visit page 17 for more info.) You don't have to be an "expert" in suicide prevention to help, you are already an "expert" on the people in your life. If something doesn't feel right, it's probably not right. But you'll never know if you don't talk to them. Create a safe place to check in (often).

Watch for the "Calm before

*the Storm.*" When you have been supporting someone through a difficult time and they show a sudden increase in mood you want to pay close attention. Often when someone makes a plan for suicide after being down for a long time, their mood can improve. This can be mistaken for the person feeling better, but can be a time when you need to really check in and ask about suicide.



TIP: Watch for the "*Calm Before the Storm*." This is when you see a sudden increase in mood, make sure you pay attention to this.

### Warning Signs

Some warning signs may help you determine if a loved one is at risk for suicide, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change. If you or someone you know exhibits any of these, seek help by calling the **988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline)**.

### Warning Signs

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- · Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

### **Risk Factors**

- Mental disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and certain personality disorders
- Alcohol and other substance abuse
- Hopelessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- History of trauma or abuse
- Major physical illnesses
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Family history of suicide
- Job or financial loss
- Loss of relationship(s)
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide
- Lack of social support and a sense of isolation
- · Shame associated with asking for help



For more information visit: www.SuicidelsPreventable.org

# SAFETY PLANNINGBE AN ADVOCATE

- MENTAL WELLNESS
- WAYS WE CAN RESPOND
- PEER-TO-PEER



### TALKING POINT #1: PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT SAVES LIVES

What's peer-to-peer support? One-on-one help through practical, or emotional support.

### DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR ROLE IN PREVENTING SUICIDE. RELATIONSHIPS CAN HEAL.

This isn't fluffy, fuzzy stuff, but hard neuroscience. We are hardwired to bond with others and isolation has proven to kill. The predominant factors that lead to suicide are pain, hopelessness, lack of connection and feeling like a burden. Our goal here is to up the hope (just a bit), and down the pain (just a bit). Feeling connected is critical: today and for the long run.

This part can be really hard and you might think, "I can see that they're sad and not doing well, but do I really want to go there? If I don't know, I don't have to carry this responsibility... they'll probably be ok." So often we're afraid we'll screw it up, so we don't say anything. Give the conversation a chance, actively listen, and then remember to take care of yourself. You can offer to call one of the resource lines (see back of this guide) together for guidance. For this, you don't have to be a mental health professional. Peer-to-peer is about you and me. Start by having empathy. Sometimes we need to get a little in the muck of it with someone.

Watch this video and see what we mean:



You matter, and you don't have to deal with this on your own. If you feel like you need support, reach out. That can be someone in your personal life, or there are a number of great resources out there see page. 30

Find more ideas, here.

### TALKING POINT #1 (CONT.) PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT SAVES LIVES

What's peer-to-peer support? One-on-one help through practical, or emotional, support.

### YES, SUICIDE IS A BIG DEAL. BUT TALKING ABOUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.

Ask the question: Are you thinking about suicide? By asking the question openly and directly, you're letting that person know that you are willing to 'go there' and talk openly about suicide. Don't worry about having all the answers (we have some resources in here to help), just be present and listen.

#### THERE'S NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL GUIDEBOOK.

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Instead of telling someone what you think they need, ask them. Be ready to listen. Ask about their **safety plan**, or make one together. It's not just about today, but also tomorrow, next week and into the future. Thoughts of suicide don't go away overnight, and your ongoing support will be important. These talks can be really tough and emotionally taxing, so have layers of help -- a network of support to call. It can help ease the feeling of being a burden, and create a community of understanding.

THINGS NOT TO SAY:

"HOW WOULD YOUR FAMILY FEEL IF YOU DID THAT?"

#### "THAT'S SELFISH."

"SUICIDE IS A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM."

...CAN YOU THINK OF A FEW OTHERS?

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Here are some suggested discussion points to get started talking peer-to-peer. Make sure you also take time to identify resources on your campus and in your area, too.

#### HAS ANYONE EVER TALKED TO YOU ABOUT THEIR THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?

- How did it go?
- What response do you think would be helpful?
- You've watched THE S WORD, what do you remember being a helpful way to respond?
- How have you (or could you) keep the conversation and support ongoing?

### HAS ANYONE YOU KNOW ATTEMPTED OR DIED BY SUICIDE?

- Have you ever talked about it?
- If you have, how did other people react?
- How did the conversation come up? (Did someone ask, or did you bring it up?)
- What felt like it worked or helped, what didn't?

### For Colleges

What do you think a peer support program could look like on your campus? Check out **George Washington University's GW Listens**. Do you think you would feel comfortable going to a campus program like this? Be honest.

### TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT SUICIDE CAN FEEL LIKE AN INTIMIDATING THING TO DO. BUT, IT'S OK TO SAY THE WORD.

"Ok, so you're having thoughts of suicide -- then we need to talk about suicide."

Remember when you were a kid and you needed to talk to your parents, but wanted to wait for "the right time?" That never really happened, right? There's no perfect time and you want to let your friend know that they can talk about this anytime.

Even though this conversation can be scary, don't let that stop you in your tracks. Being non-judgmental makes a big difference.

### For High Schools

Upstream prevention reduces the risk factors and enhances the protective processes that influence whether a young person will become suicidal. What role should a school have in developing these emotional and social skills? **Find strategies and information** on casting the net upstream.

YOU'RE MORE QUALIFIED FOR THIS THAN YOU THINK YOU ARE.

### TALKING POINT #2: WAYS WE CAN RESPOND: LIVED EXPERIENCE

The first video discusses how to talk with someone dealing with thoughts of suicide and the second is specifically geared toward those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Watch these videos then head to the next page to dive into a discussion.



Attempt Survivors Video



Loss Survivors Video

### DISCUSSION ON HOW TO RESPOND

Here are some tips on talking and listening to someone who's expressing thoughts of suicide. These are <u>warning signs</u> to look out for. Familiarize yourself with them and trust your instincts to know when to ask; if any part of you thinks that you should be asking about suicide, then you need to talk/ask about suicide.

#### **ASK + LISTEN + HAVE COMPASSION**

Compassion is less, "Look on the bright side," and more, "It sounds like things are really not great right now. Can you tell me more about that?"

#### TAKE THE CONVERSATION DEEPER BY ASKING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1."Are you thinking about suicide?" Be direct, this will help let the person know that you are comfortable having this conversation.

2. **"Do you have a plan?"** We're naturally more worried about someone who's thought it through and taken steps towards making an attempt. In addition, and depending on their plan, you can help to keep them safe by removing the "means" or weapons.

3. **"Why are you having these thoughts?"** Ask: When did it start? When is it the worst? What are you thinking about when you have these thoughts? On a scale of 1-10, how bad is it right now?

### WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO SAY WHEN SOMEONE SAYS THEY LOST A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE? HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS.

1. *Instead of saying "tell me about them" ask:* What was his/her name? What did he/she like to do? What was your favorite thing about him/her? Take the time to talk about the person and who he/she was in life. Try to be thoughtful around birthdays, holidays and the anniversary of the death (Give a call, stop by, spend some time). Let the person know that you haven't forgotten either.

2. *Try not to wrap a bow around it:* We often don't get to fully understand the 'whys' of suicide. Trying to find logic or "wrapping a bow around it" isn't as helpful as just being an active listener. Start from a place of compassion and it's hard to say the wrong thing.

\*\*The root of the problem is PAIN, thoughts of suicide are the effect. What we can do is try to better understand their pain in order to help connect and give hope that this will get better.



Make it a judgment-free space. Think of these discussion points as tips to keep in your back pocket for when you have the chance to really talk about this with someone.

### TALKING POINT #3: MENTAL WELLNESS

Diet, exercise, meditation, etc., is easier said than done when you're in a tough place.



Watch this video clip, then start your discussion.



### TRY MAKING A SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT

What are some ways to take care of yourself that actually work for you? Don't answer, 'jogging!' if that's not really your thing. Honestly, what do you do for yourself when you're stressed or overwhelmed? What are both the good and bad habits?



### HAVE A SELF-CARE PLAN

#### . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

What are some steps you can take today to improve the way you take care of yourself tomorrow? We're not asking you to change your life all at once, but let's look at this piece-by-piece. For example, I shut down when I'm frustrated and I know I can get better at letting people know when I'm feeling this way. What are the three big things we do to stay healthy?

#### 1. Eat right 2. Sleep well 3. Exercise

...and what are the first three things we stop doing when we're stressed? You guessed it. Start with the little things -- they can sometimes be the toughest. And if you're struggling with all three then start with one. The rest will follow.



### GIVE A REAL ANSWER

"What can I do to help someone who's struggling?" Great question. Let's make that, "What can WE do?" It's time we stopped relying on the one to help the rest. Every one of us here today can be an ambassador of THE S WORD by holding mental health to the same degree of care as our physical health. Talk about it, listen for it, ask directly, and speak with kindness.



### IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY

The self-care convo, while so important, can feel like an extra burden and something to shame ourselves around when we don't do it. When you're super down it's hard to get motivated. This is where community (our friends) come in. Write down a list of people even if it's just one or two names - you can count on to bring you Chinese food, help drag you to that class you love, watch Netflix, etc. "Collective care" and proactively looking out for someone will help you do the work.

### DISCUSSION ON MENTAL WELLNESS

Mental wellness is psychological, physical, emotional, spiritual, personal, and professional. So, why's it important?

#### **COMPASSION FATIGUE**

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper." -Dr. Charles Figley

#### WHAT DO YOU DO FOR YOU? USE HANDOUT A TO GET A READ ON WHERE YOU MIGHT STAND.

Which areas can use some improvement? What's one thing you'd really like to be more consistent with for yourself? HOW CAN WE ADDRESS OUR MENTAL WELLNESS HOLISTICALLY (MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT), RATHER THAN JUST, "FROM THE NECK UP?" USE HANDOUT B

It's often agreed that our mental health is not viewed the same way as our physical health. Why is that a problem?

What are the benefits of full body mental wellness?



A: Self-Care Assessment



### SELF-CARE

CARE OF THE SELF WITHOUT MEDICAL OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATION. ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES WE CAN ENGAGE IN ON A REGULAR BASIS TO REDUCE STRESS, MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE OUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

### TALKING POINT #4: SAFETY PLANNING

Safety planning is helping to empower someone to support themselves. Rather than throwing a life vest, teach them how to swim.





Watch this short video then get started talking about what a safety plan is, what it looks like, and why it's so important.

### CONSIDER HELPING THEM CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan is a written list of coping strategies and sources of support. Here's a template to try yourself. When someone finds themselves in the "suicide zone" and can't see through the fog, this might help.



1

### DISTRACTIONS

When someone's going through a particularly bad time, distract them! "Remind me what your favorite movie is? Why not watch that for the next few hours?" ...what else is there that you know they like to do? Or, a place they like to go when they want to relax? When you're giving suggestions, it's easy to come off as judgmental. Try genuine ideas you know that person may really be interested in doing.



### HONESTY OPENS DOORS

There is no shame in feeling suicidal. Suicide is an option, but it doesn't have to be the choice you make. So, let's think of five more hopeful solutions. When the distractions aren't working and thoughts feel overwhelming, it takes courage to be vulnerable and share that with someone else. The buddy system: help to identify friend(s) to call, and "lifeguards" -- a therapist, a hotline or someone else to call when you can't reach your person. As that lifeguard or primary person, this isn't about guilting, but reminding them of their reasons to stay.

### DISCUSSION ON SAFETY PLANNING

It's good for all of us to have a safety plan when times are tough, whether or not we've had thoughts of suicide. We can all benefit from having a plan for what to do and who to reach out to when we need support.

#### USE THE SAFETY PLAN HANDOUT TO BEGIN CREATING A SAFETY PLAN OF YOUR OWN.

**#ItsOKToTalk** has been a trending hashtag in the mental health community. When we speak up and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, others will be too.

People do want to talk about this stuff, it's just tough to start the conversation. That can be especially true if you have had suicidal thoughts. Try saying that, "I've been thinking about suicide" or the other side of it, "Are you thinking about suicide?" Talking about it can be so healing if you just give it a chance.

This is the essence of peer support: use your own lived experience to help others. If you haven't had the experience, don't fake it, but start in a place that's open and kind. And if you have, it's ok to bring it to the discussion. Don't take over the other person's experience, but ask, "Can I share my own? An important piece in this is conversation is acknowledging and validating someone else's suffering. Try this:

- "You're right, sometimes life can really suck. But, what's worth living for?" ...maybe this isn't an automatic, easy answer. What can we come up with together?

- What's something you'd be interested in trying that you haven't tried yet?

Work together to come up with reasons to stay another hour, another day, another year. Though the reasons might take some time and searching, they're there.



Safety Plan Handout

### TALKING POINT #5: BE AN ADVOCATE

Our goal is this: To help you feel more confident having a conversation with someone about suicide; whether that's asking for help, or helping someone.





"You need to get in touch with the movement." "...Movement? What movement?" See what being an advocate is all about through this short clip.

### WE CAN'T AFFORD TO WAIT ANOTHER MINUTE

When we make suicide prevention a part of our normal discussions, we become part of the change that challenges mental health discrimination. This, opening-up and normalizing the dialogue, is something that saves lives.

### TALKING POINT #5: (CONT.) BE AN ADVOCATE

Our goal is this: To help you feel more confident having a conversation with someone about suicide; whether that's asking for help, or helping someone.

3



### WHAT WE SAY AND HOW WE SAY IT, MATTERS

#### . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

- Try not to use the word 'committed.' It's a word associated with crime or sin that brings out feelings of guilt or shame. Instead use the term "died by suicide." Avoid phrases like "a successful suicide" or "a failed attempt." Dying by suicide is not a success and attempting and surviving is certainly not a failure.
- Suicide ≠ Mental Illness. Suicidal people don't all have mental illness, and to say they do perpetuates a false idea and equivalency.
- Avoid saying: "How could they do that?" "It's so selfish." We'll never understand the pain someone was feeling at that moment, so it's not fair to judge. What we can try to do is be there for that person before pain outweighs hope.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ADVOCATE?

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention are two of this generation's most important social movements. Being an advocate means not shying away from conversations about suicide. It means keeping the conversation going when someone else is that brave soul to share their story. Here's a great example: Livethroughthis.org

### DISCUSSION ON BEING AN ADVOCATE

Being an advocate is an important step in normalizing the discussion around suicide and its prevention

### A COMMON REACTION TO SUICIDE IS, "IT'S SO SELFISH."

How can you respond in a way that builds understanding and empathy?

### HOW DO WE GET TO REAL, LASTING, SOCIAL CHANGE?

It starts with you. After seeing the film and our discussion today, what are some actions you are going to take to promote suicide prevention in your community?

#### WE'VE ALL EITHER SAID IT OURSELVES, OR HEARD IT, "IF [BLANK] HAPPENS, I'LL KILL MYSELF."

We get it, it's not meant to be taken literally. But, if we understand that every threat should be taken seriously, what's one way to re-direct this phrase?

### LET'S NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF KINDNESS. HOW CAN WE FOLD THIS INTO OUR DAILY ROUTINES?

You are not the other. They are not the other. We are all in this together. If you start there, from a place of compassion, it's a helluva lot easier.

# LET'S ALL WORK **TOGETHER TO** HELP PREVENT SUICIDE.

## We are one piece of a much larger picture - take a look at some of these resources that will help you put it all into focus.

Being an advocate is an important step in normalizing the discussion around suicide and its prevention.

#### 988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE: CALL 988

Free, confidential support and resources for you or your loved ones.

### CRISIS TEXT LINE: TEXT HOME TO 741-741

A 24/7 text line for people in crisis, "Volunteer Crisis Counselors are superheroes with laptops instead of capes."

#### THE TREVOR PROJECT: 1-866-488-7386

Provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24.

#### SUICIDE AWARENESS VOICES OF EDUCATION: (SAVE)

To prevent suicide through public awareness and education, reduce stigma and serve as a resource to those touched by suicide.

#### TRANS LIFELINE: US 877-565-8860 CANADA: 877-330-6366

A hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people.

#### LIVE THROUGH THIS: BY DESE 'RAE STAGE

Shows through a collection of portraits and stories that suicide does not discriminate.

### VETERAN'S CRISIS LINE: CALL 988, PRESS 1

Connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential tollfree hotline, online chat, or text.

#### **TEEN LINE: 800-TLC-TEEN (852-8336)**

A confidential teen-to-teen hotline that also provides community outreach services.

### SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS: (SOSL)

It can help to connect with others who have lost someone to suicide. Follow the link above to find a support group near you.

#### THE DIRECTING CHANGE PROGRAM AND FILM CONTEST:

Educating young people about the warning signs and changing conversations through a film program and contest.

#### SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF TEEN SUICIDE:

Encouraging public awareness through the development and promotion of educational training programs.

#### **ACTIVE MINDS:**

Student empowerment to change the perception about mental health on college campuses. Sound like you? Join or start a chapter on your campus.

#### For more resources, please visit our website: theswordmovie.com