

# Recommendations to Shape a Positive Mental Health Climate on College Campuses with and through Peer-to-Peer Networks



## **The Impact of Active Minds' Model and Peer-to-Peer Approach**

In a landmark study, research conducted by RAND Corporation and published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry found that the presence of Active Minds on college campuses could significantly increase the number of students who receive help for mental health issues that could otherwise have serious, lasting, and sometimes tragic consequences.

The longitudinal study of more than 1,100 students at 12 colleges found that as students become more involved with Active Minds, they are more likely to reach out to a classmate or friend who is struggling with a mental health issue such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. Additionally, even basic familiarity with Active Minds among the general student body increases knowledge and positive attitudes about mental health, creating a more supportive campus climate and increasing the potential that students in distress will seek mental health services.

The findings of the RAND study suggest that Active Minds' use of student-led individual, small-group, and large-scale education programs meaningfully influences not only students' knowledge and attitudes, but also their help-promoting behaviors within a single academic year.

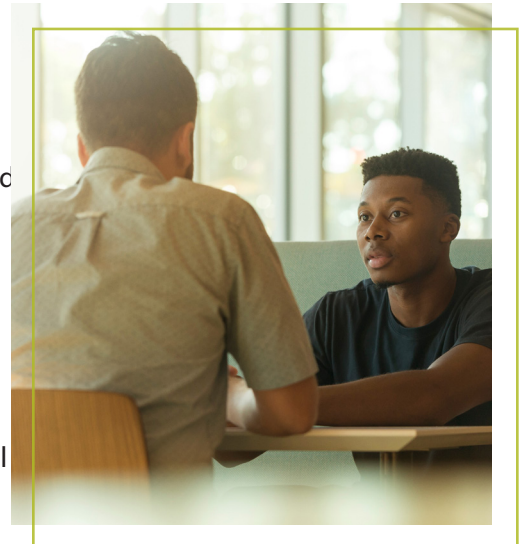
Being familiar with Active Minds, even if not actively involved, is associated with decreased stigma and improved student knowledge about mental health issues. Such changes in how the general student body views and understands mental health, brought about by Active Minds' constant presence and peer-to-peer approach, are instrumental in shaping a more supportive climate toward mental health issues on campus. This has important implications for addressing student mental health needs, as students with mental health problems are more likely to receive services if they feel the climate on their campus is more positive with respect to mental health.

The findings indicate that increased involvement in a student-led, peer-to-peer approach can change students' mental health behaviors, such as helping others with mental health problems. In the current climate, when campus counseling centers are reporting unprecedented demand for mental health support among students, there has never been a greater need for empowering students to help and advocate for their peers who may be struggling. Campus faculty, staff and administrators are in a unique position of power and decision-making to support that work.

## Recommendations for Campus Faculty, Staff and Administrators

Campus faculty, staff, and administrators leading student wellness initiatives often engage students as focus group participants but seldom as partners or co-creators. Institutions may reserve a student seat on their wellness committees, for example, or ask students for feedback on a program once it has been fully conceived or implemented. However, these limited approaches do not often allow for input that is representative of the student body or at a stage in the process in which feedback can significantly alter the direction of a program or policy initiative.

Active Minds' Framework for Student Mobilization helps ensure that efforts to improve student mental health engage students as equal partners in the work. **Active Minds supports campuses to offer SEATS at the table to students in ways that are:**



**Student-Informed**



**Transparent**



**Equitable**



**Sustainable**



**Actionable**

Quite often, colleges and universities are tackling student mental health head-on; yet, the student body may not be aware of these efforts, because the institutions are failing to engage students effectively. Student leaders, when engaged appropriately, are well-positioned to serve as a bridge between administrators and the larger student body to ensure that student mental health needs are met.

## Additional Resources from Active Minds

For more information, read our Framework and learn about our Chapter Network, Healthy Campus Award, and Transform Your Campus program on our website at [activeminds.org](https://www.activeminds.org).