

# TEACHING & SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

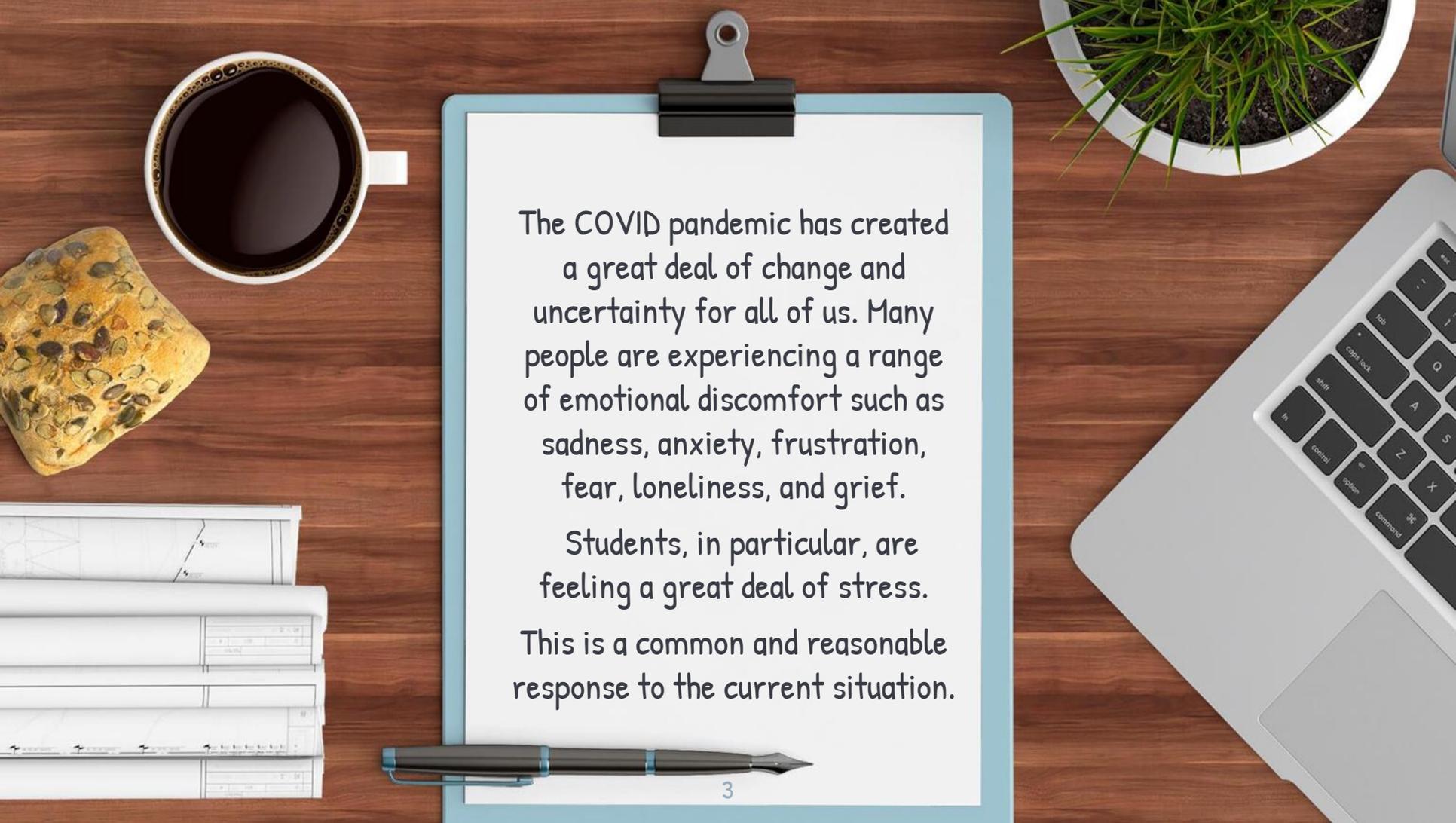
STUDENT COUNSELING  
THE CENTER FOR TEACHING & LEARNING (CTL)

ADAPTED FROM  
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WHAT IS GOING ON  
RIGHT NOW?

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the center is a blue clipboard with a black clip at the top, holding a white sheet of paper with text. To the left of the clipboard is a white cup of dark coffee, a loaf of bread with seeds, and a stack of papers. To the right is a silver laptop keyboard and a small potted plant. At the bottom of the clipboard is a black pen.

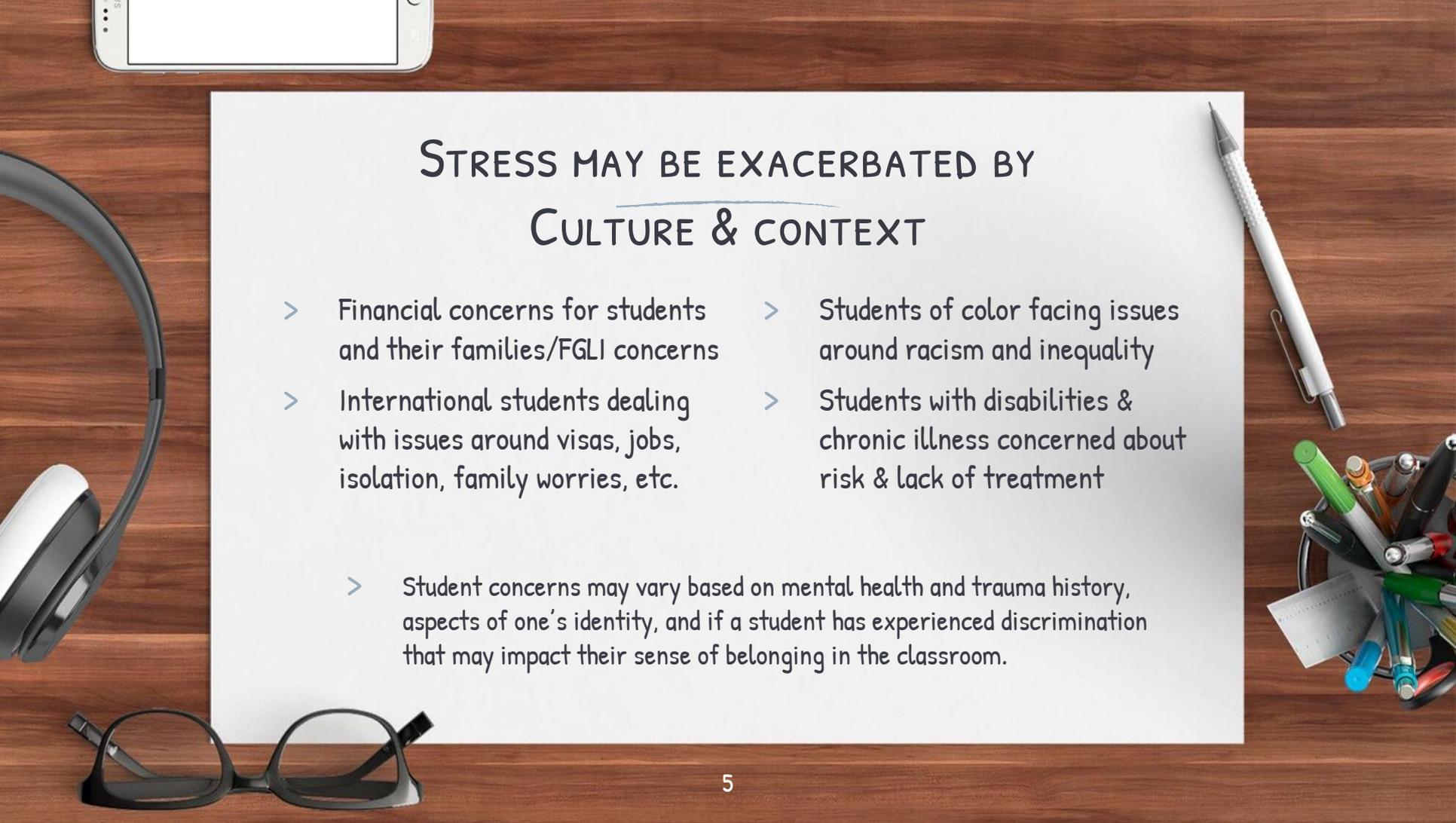
The COVID pandemic has created a great deal of change and uncertainty for all of us. Many people are experiencing a range of emotional discomfort such as sadness, anxiety, frustration, fear, loneliness, and grief.

Students, in particular, are feeling a great deal of stress.

This is a common and reasonable response to the current situation.

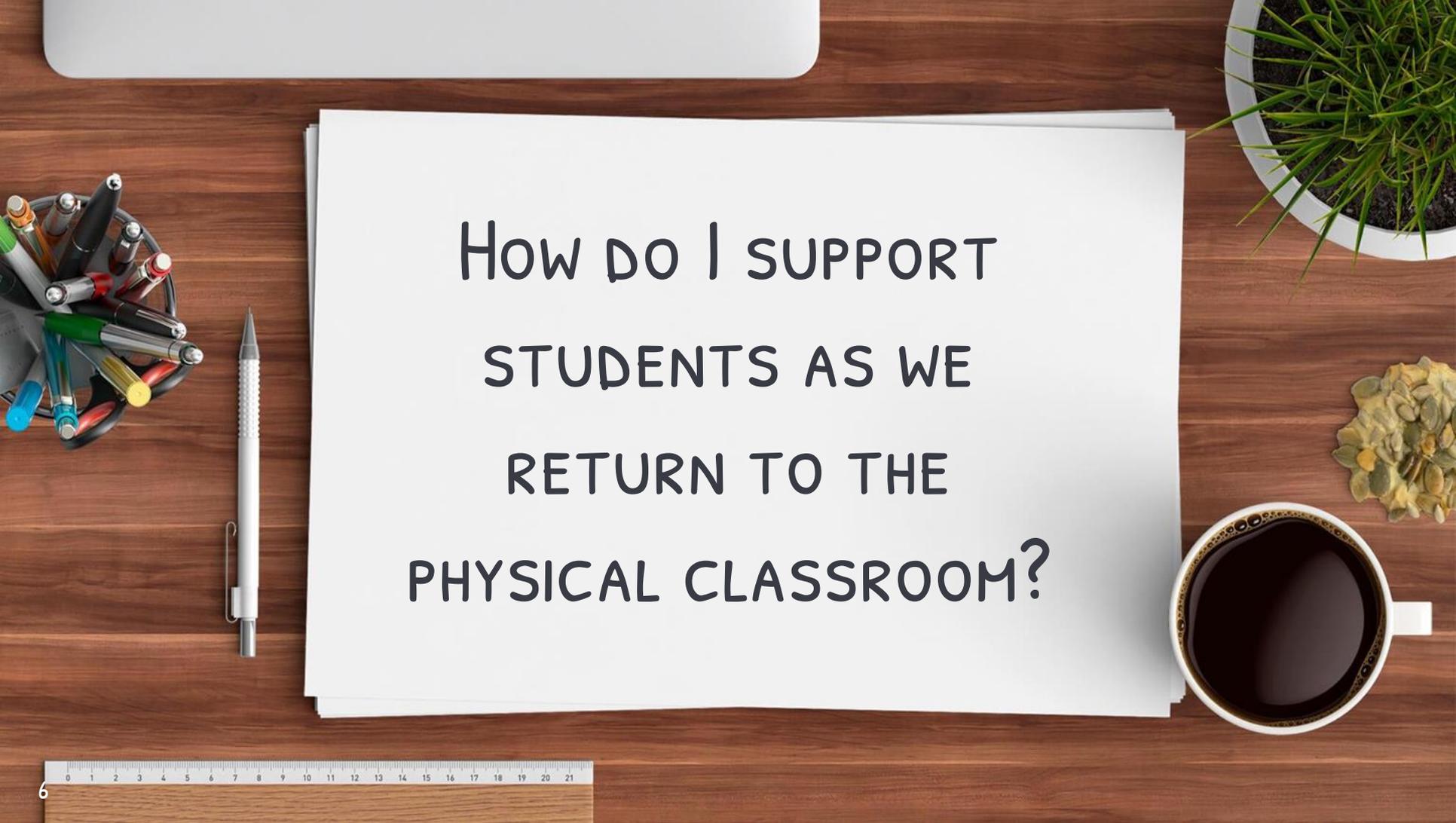
# STRESSORS FOR STUDENTS

- > Layers of loss (graduation, jobs, time with friends)
- > Isolation & loneliness
- > Complicated family dynamics
- > Family or friend illness or death due to COVID
- > Difficulty maintaining self-care
- > Mental/physical health conditions
- > Anxiety related to social situations
- > Difficulty adjusting to changing norms and policies
- > Worries about being academically underprepared for the coursework
- > Domestic and international news incidents
- > Creating boundaries with others



## STRESS MAY BE EXACERBATED BY CULTURE & CONTEXT

- > Financial concerns for students and their families/FGLI concerns
- > International students dealing with issues around visas, jobs, isolation, family worries, etc.
- > Students of color facing issues around racism and inequality
- > Students with disabilities & chronic illness concerned about risk & lack of treatment
- > Student concerns may vary based on mental health and trauma history, aspects of one's identity, and if a student has experienced discrimination that may impact their sense of belonging in the classroom.



HOW DO I SUPPORT  
STUDENTS AS WE  
RETURN TO THE  
PHYSICAL CLASSROOM?

# GENERAL TIPS

- > Humanize yourself (with boundaries) by sharing how you are feeling and giving your students opportunities to share, too
- > Recognize that there will be varying levels of student comfort indoors and when working in groups
- > Assume the best in our students; students can care about their academics AND struggle at the same time
- > Focus on teacher-student rapport and student connectedness
- > Provide predictability alongside flexibility
- > Send emails and/or schedule meetings to check in with students

Glazier (2016), Imad (2020), Imad (2021), Newhouse (2020)

# SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- > Share information with your students about mask-wearing in your syllabus and discuss it during the first class meeting
- > At the beginning of every class session, briefly remind your students of the masking policy
- > Emphasize the importance of everyone's health and safety, including staying home when sick
- > Consider setting up study groups that meet on Zoom - to help students connect with and support each other
- > Consider co-creating classroom norms with your class around in-class behavior, including physical spacing and interacting

# BUILD FLEXIBILITY INTO YOUR SYLLABUS

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- > Have policies dedicated to:
  - Staying home when sick
  - Submitting late work
  - Missing some class and small assignments without penalties
  - Having to isolate or quarantine
  - Having technical glitches/limitations
- > Encourage students to:
  - Interact early and often (helps you discover issues before they get more serious)
  - Make choices about what they need to miss
  - Share about concerns with you

# NORMALIZE ASKING FOR HELP

- > When we proactively acknowledge that it is not uncommon to miss class or need help, it sends a message that it is normal to run into issues and can help students feel more organized and empowered to reach out for help
- > To do this, you might consider:
  - Sharing with your students about a time when you asked for help or were offered help by a professor
  - Sharing about how valuable you think it is to speak to a mental health professional



HOW DO I SUPPORT  
STUDENTS'  
WELL-BEING?

## Tips from CAPS I CARE Training:

- > Identify warning signs
- > Check in with care
- > Explore options

**I CARE**

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

[Learn more: I CARE Training](#)

Reiff et al. (2018)

# IDENTIFY WARNING SIGNS

- > Sudden Changes in Behavior:
  - Shifts in mood or anxiety levels
  - Suddenly isolating from others
  - Struggling with an upsetting life events
- > Patterns of Behavior:
  - Difficulty with motivation, energy, or sleep
  - Deterioration of work or participation
  - Multiple absences
  - Concern expressed by others
- > Your Instinct
  - If you sense that a student may be struggling, trust your instinct!
  - Check in. Lead with curiosity and care for the student.

[Learn More: Helping Others](#)

# SIGNS OF CRISIS

- > They demonstrate suicidal/homicidal thoughts, statements, or attempts
- > You've seen signs of self-harm (cutting, burning)
- > You notice they have extreme anxiety or panic (difficulty breathing)
- > You notice a loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there)

[Learn More: Warning Signs for Suicide](#)

# CHECK IN

- > Check in via email, phone, in-person, or virtual meetings to show support
- > Share what you are noticing:
  - “I noticed that you haven’t been to class for a few days, and I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing.”
- > Ask open-ended questions/prompts with curiosity:
  - “How are you coping these days?”
  - “Tell me more about that...”
- > Summarize with care:
  - “It sounds like this has been a particularly tough time for you.”

[Learn More: Helping Others](#)

# EXPLORE

- > After hearing how the student is doing...
- > Explore options for the problem
  - Can I give you some advice/suggestions?
  - Have you thought of ways to cope with this?
  - What are some things you've already tried?
  - Have you considered talking to someone about this?
- > Help connect the student to additional resources

[I CARE Training](#)

[Learn More: Helping Others](#)

Remember: You're not expected to be a counselor...but you can provide a caring presence in a student's life.





WHAT RESOURCES  
CAN HELP ME?

# REFERRING TO STUDENT COUNSELING

- > Show students that you care, but discuss your limitations:
  - "I can support you with this, but I think that a clinician at the Student Counseling can be most helpful to you in addressing this problem."
- > Be specific about why you are referring a student:
  - "Student Counseling has clinicians who are really good at helping students address stress related to the pandemic. I can provide you with information about their services."

[I CARE Training](#)

[Learn More: Helping Others](#)

# HOW TO ACCESS STUDENT COUNSELING

Call Us:

215-898-7021 (24/7); press #1 to speak to a clinician

(Consult with us 24/7)

Come In:

3624 Market St., 1<sup>st</sup> Floor West; can drop-in and meet with a clinician during regular business hours

\*Check the [website](#) for hours/updates

[Let's Talk](#) : no-appointment, drop-in service on campus

# WHO TO CONTACT IN A CRISIS?

## Mental Health Crisis

- > Student Counseling:  
215-898-7021 (24/7)
- > Press #1 to speak to a  
clinician

## Life-Threatening Crisis

- > Penn Police:  
215-573-3333  
(511 from campus phone)
- > Help Line: 215-898-HELP
- > Call 911

[I CARE Training](#)  
[Learn More: Get Help Now](#)

# HELPING YOURSELF & OTHERS

- > Encourage students to watch *I SHARE: Connection, Healing & Hope* to hear Penn students discuss the power of sharing and how they got support. Go to [Wellness at Penn](https://wellness.upenn.edu) watch the video.



- > Learn more here: [Caring for Yourself & Others: Stress, Distress, Crisis](https://wellness.upenn.edu)

## RESOURCES FOR COVID-19

- Website: [coronavirus.upenn.edu](https://coronavirus.upenn.edu)
- Email: [coronavirus@upenn.edu](mailto:coronavirus@upenn.edu)
- Social Media: @COVIDPenn  
(Instagram & Twitter)

[Learn More: Mental Health & COVID-19](#)

# WELLNESS AT PENN

Follow us: @WellnessAtPenn (Instagram)  
@PennTogether (TikTok)

Call us (24/7):  
Student Health: 215-746-3535  
Student Counseling: 215-898-7021

Visit our Website: <https://wellness.upenn.edu>

# LET US KNOW IF THIS WAS HELPFUL

Please take 2 minutes to complete our survey.

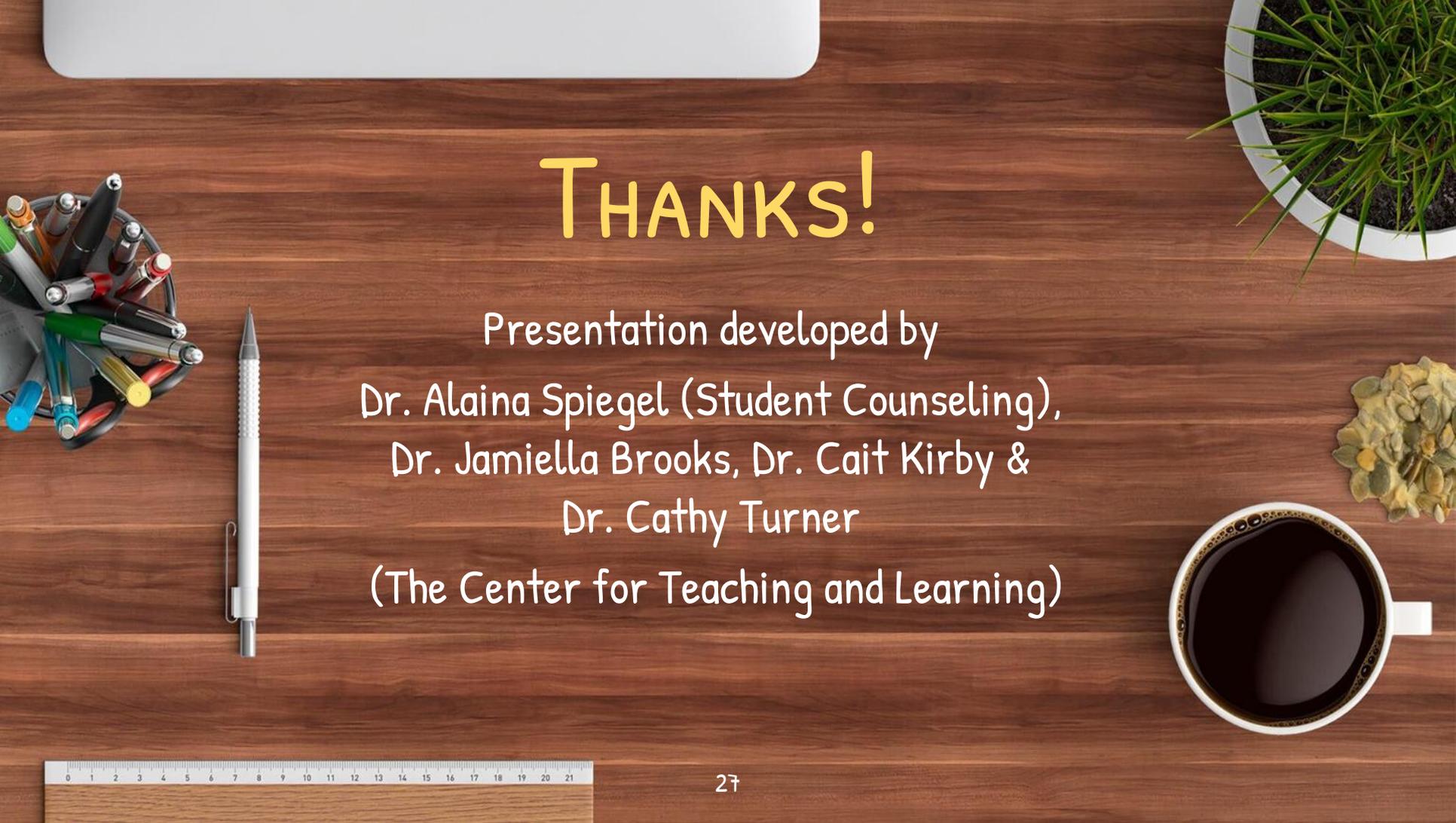
Access the survey by:

- > Clicking on: [Feedback Survey](#)  
or scanning the QR code



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# THANKS!

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