

## HOW CAN WE CREATE A COMMUNAL ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH?

Social, educational, and religious communities can be a protective factor and environment for those struggling with mental health—but they can also perpetuate harm.

- Create an environment of open conversation free from shame, blame, and stigma around mental health and other often-related challenges such as addiction, aging, LGBTQ+ identity, and chronic illness.
  - Make sure your leadership—clergy, board members, educators, and other organizational leaders—have training in creating this open and safe environment. (See “What to do if a community member is experiencing suicidal thoughts.”)
  - Things to consider:
    - Do you have clear, nonjudgmental, empathetic responses to those who experience mental health challenges?
    - Do you have a consistent, compassionate way of assessing someone who is experiencing a mental health crisis or who might be putting themselves or others at risk?
    - Do you have a list of local resources, including crisis lines and culturally specific help lines, you can access on someone’s behalf or offer to them in times of need?



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- Develop and promote partnerships with mental health organizations in your area. Are there groups from NAMI or a Jewish Family Services agency that meet in your building or that can be advertised in your communications? Do you support volunteer efforts that benefit those with mental health challenges?
- Consider how your organization can promote, invite, or create programs, religious services, or resources that involve and speak to people with mental health challenges. Send a survey to ask if you are meeting the needs of your participants in this regard or to see if they have ideas for ways your organization can be more welcoming, friendly, or helpful to those who struggle with mental health, addiction, or other frequently stigmatized challenges.
- Pay attention to language. How we speak matters and sends a message to our community about what we believe about mental health. What messages do your community leaders send when they speak about those struggling with mental health? Does the language blame, shame, or further stigmatize? [This resource](#) offers some ways to use less stigmatizing language.

[Find another resource for faith communities on how to create safe spaces here.](#)

