

Issue 1, Spring 2022

The SYZter Studies

an academic journal, created by SYZters, for SYZters

Let's talk about

*Mental
Health*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Introduction to Mental Health	4
Chapter 1: Burnout	8
Chapter 2: Depression	10
Chapter 3: Empathy & Healthy Boundaries	14
Chapter 4: Toxic Emotions & Situations	18
Chapter 5: When to Say No & Ask for Help	20
Chapter 6: Self-Forgiveness	25
Chapter 7: Self-Care	28
Sources	30
Resources	32



CREATOR'S NOTE

One of the Ten Rays of SYZterhood is scholarship — to support and emphasize academic achievement. Since 1994, Sigma Psi Zeta Sorority, Inc. has excelled in academics time and time again. Our members are living embodiments of the scholarship ray. However, we realized that we were still lacking an academic publication within the sorority. And that's how the idea for the SYZter Studies came into fruition.

The main objective and purpose of the SYZter Studies is to practice and demonstrate scholarship in conjunction with the other rays. This academic research journal will be released bi-annually with each issue focusing on a chosen key topic that members and our community can access to read, learn, and utilize as a resource.

If you would like to get involved in future issues, please reach out to Trang Bui, Vice President of Programming, at programming@sigmapsizeta.org.

*With Sigma love,
Angel Tran*

Disclaimer

This academic journal consists of credible research from Breanna (Bre) Marshall's mental health webinar series. Bre is a member of the Alpha Lambda Chapter and graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology with a BFA in New Media Design and an immersion in Psychology. Her passion for mental health awareness and learning led Bre to start the webinar series along with the contribution from other SYZters.

In this first issue of The SYZter Studies, we've highlighted only a small portion of topics from Bre's webinar series and translated it to journal format. If you are interested in the viewing the entire webinar series or attending one in the future (which we highly encourage), please reach out to Bre. Her contact information as well as the sources used are provided at the end of this journal.

Additionally, while this presentation is based on research from reputable sources and some SYZters involved are licensed professionals, Bre and myself — the person writing this — are not. Please seek professional aid if you need. Several topics are quite heavy and may be difficult to read through, so please take that into consideration and take care of yourself. Resources are also provided at the end of this journal.

Finally, thank you to Bre and her amazing contributors for the webinar series and their commitment to mental health awareness. Without them, this academic journal would not exist.

Introduction to Mental Health

What is mental health and mental illness? Why do we keep talking about it?

First and foremost, everyone has a mental health. It's highly complex as our mental health affects how we think, act, feel, etc. According to research, in 2014, one in five American adults experienced mental illness. One in 10 younger adults experience a period of major depression. Serious mental health issues, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, are experienced by one in 25 Americans.

The 10th leading cause of death is suicide. Unfortunately, less than 20% of children with early signs of mental health issues find the help they need. Usually, the cause of these issues are from uncontrollable forces.

Again, everyone has a mental health — even if you have not been diagnosed with a mental illness.

Mental health vs. Mental illness

Mental Health:

Everyone has a mental health.

“Mental health refers to our emotional and psychological state, our social well-being and how we feel about ourselves and interact with others. Mental health is not the same as mental illness, although poor mental health can lead to mental and physical illnesses.”

- Someone with a mental illness can impact your mental health as well without you having a mental illness.
- Mental illnesses CAN be treated, but treatment looks different for every individual.
- Mental illness can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, social standing, religion or race/ethnicity. People with mental illness often experience distress and problems functioning at work, home and in social situations.

Mental Illness:

NOT everyone has mental illness(es).

“Mental illness refers to a wide range of disorders that affect mood, thinking and behavior... Mental illness is not something the person can “overcome with willpower,” and can be caused by biological factors such as genes or brain chemistry, trauma and abuse, and family history of mental illness.”

Most common mental illnesses

1. **Anxiety Disorders** — 40 million U.S. adults
2. **Mood Disorders** — 1 in 10 adults
3. **Psychotic Disorders** — 3% of people experience a psychotic episode in their lifetime
4. **Dementia** — Worldwide, around 50 million people, nearly 10 million new cases every year
5. **Anorexia** — 9% U.S. population

Effects of poor mental health

- Burnout
- Low energy
- Not productive
- Absenteeism
- Other long-term health effects
- Inability to consistently make healthy decisions

In the Sigma context, we see burnout everyday. We see SYZters not attending events or a severe lack of Sigma spirit. Taking care of mental health issues will at least help decrease these effects even if all of them cannot be contributed to mental health.



Recognizing your mental health

It's important to know what your limits are. While you should look out for others, do not sacrifice your own well-being for others. You are your own first priority. Recognize the pressures and evaluate your coping mechanisms or other ways you cope with stress and poor mental health.

Trying to balance school, work, Sigma, personal life, and everything in between can be detrimental and affect your mental health. Remember: **you come first.**

Effects of good mental health

- Recognizing your potential
- Better coping with the stressors in life
- Productivity
- Meaningful Contributions
- Better energy levels
- Lower crime rates
- Improved quality of life and relationships

Again, looking at this in the Sigma context, we see increases in productivity and energy as well as the Sigma spirit being rekindled.

Good mental health also leads to improved relationships between members and better SYZterhood. There is also better leadership and working together as an organization is seen as a positive rather than an obligation.

Introduction

Signs someone may not be okay

This is a list of major signs, but mental health issues can appear in a variety of ways. This list is not the end all, be all.

- Sleeping patterns = too little or too much
- Pulling away from typical hobbies/ activities or other people
- Lacking in energy
- Feelings of numbness, helplessness, or hopelessness
- Use of vices more frequently
- Severe mood swings
- Thinking of/ or committing self harm
- Inability to perform daily tasks as usual
- Acting out of character
- Socially withdrawn
- Going through a difficult life event
- Reckless behavior
- Disengagement



What to do to help

Personal:

- Get help if needed
- Connect with others
- Increase physical activities
- Develop coping mechanisms
- Get enough sleep
- Talk to someone you trust
- Healthy diets

Others:

- Encourage seeking help
- Reach out
- Combat stigmas against mental health
- Do not label them as their diagnosis or harmful words like “crazy”
- Express support
- **Treat them with respect**

Recognize that everyone is different and their form of treatment or support may vary from your own or from a previous experience. Check in with others and don't let people fall behind. Check in with everyone, not just a few, unless that's all your mental health can handle at the moment. But remember, we are all SYZters, so try to reach out to various SYZters. Good practice is to normalize asking someone if they're mentally available to listen or aid you. If not, don't take it personally as we all need to protect ourselves as well. At the same time, don't let someone suffer in silence. **If you are able to, please try to listen and help.**

“You don't have to struggle in silence. You can be un-silent. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it.”

— Demi Lovato

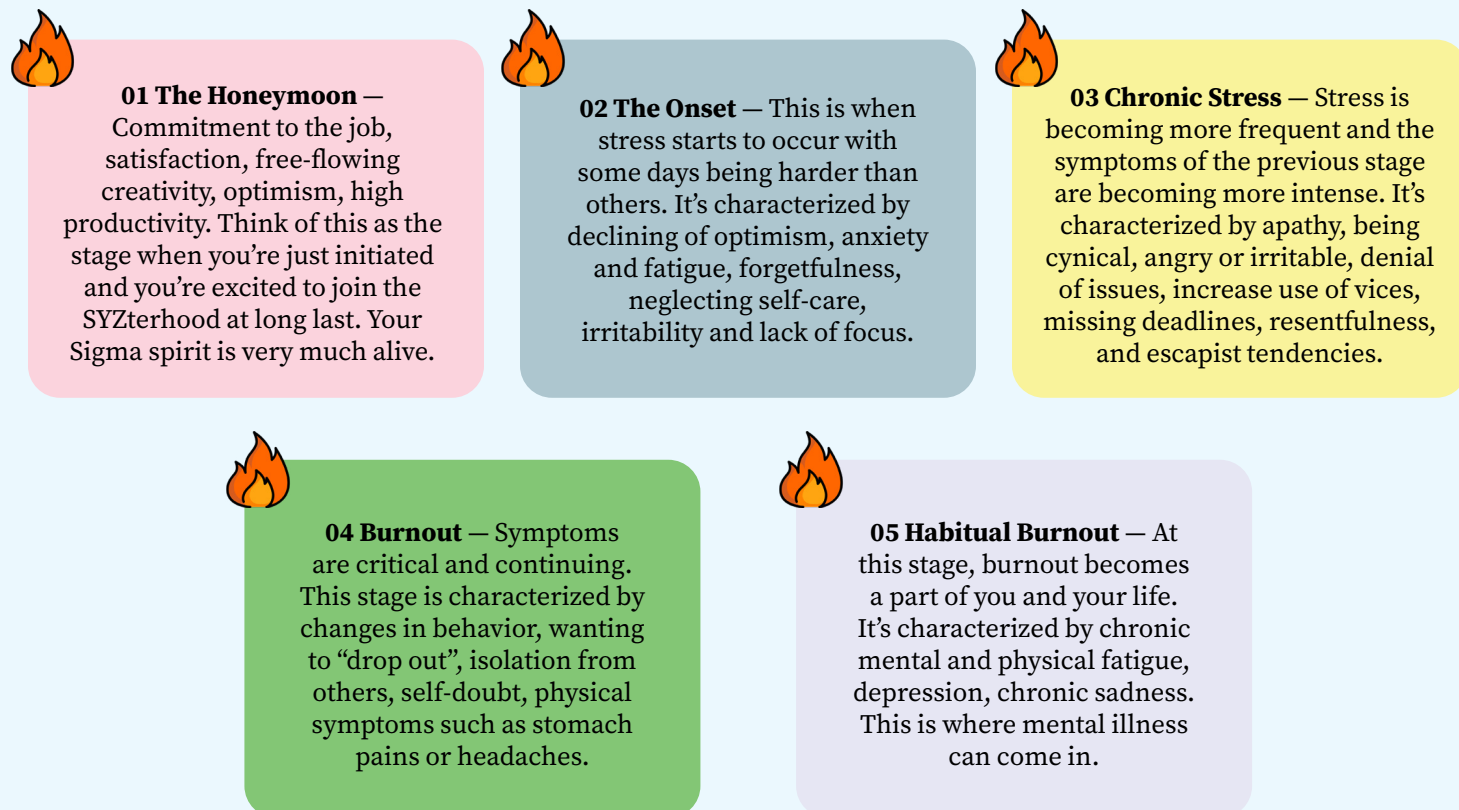
Chapter 1: Burnout

Let's combat burnout!

Burnout is finally defined as “a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.”

The difference between stress and burnout: “If excessive stress feels like you're drowning in responsibilities, burnout is a sense of being all dried up.”

The five stages of burnout



The 3 Rs: recognize, reverse, and resilience

In order to combat burnout, remember the 3 Rs: recognize, reverse, and resilience. **Recognize** the warning signs of burnout. **Reverse** the negative effects and/or damage by managing stress and getting help. And finally, take care of yourself emotionally and physically in order to build **resilience** to burnout!

- **Seek support** — Support can come in the form of co-workers, SYZters, anyone you're close to, or even new friends. Be sure to limit interactions with negative-minded people.
- **Giving** — Helping others helps you both reduce stress. This does not mean to take on more responsibilities; just a compliment or hang-out session can help immensely.
- **Changing your mindset** — Try to focus on the positives of your work; there is always some value to your job/position.
- **Reevaluate your priorities** — This is about boundaries. Take time to find what makes you happy, get plenty of rest and focus on your health. Try techniques such as taking a daily break from technology, meditation, grounding, yoga, etc.
- **Exercise** — We hear about exercise and its benefits a lot, but it really does help reduce stress and burnout. Even a 30 minute walk will help.
- **Reevaluate your diet** — The foods you put in your body do have an impact. Minimize sugar and refined carbs, eat more Omega-3 fatty foods, and drink alcohol only in moderation.
- **Improve self-care overall** — Reflect on your daily accomplishments and make sure you have a living space that is serene, peaceful, and organized so that you have a safe space.
- **Give yourself assigned breaks** — Try setting aside 10 minutes a day to mediate or take a 15 minute break from studying.

The average recovery time is 6-9 months. It's important to prevent burnout ahead of time or it will consume more of your life. For example, if someone experiences burnout in the fall semester, they'll still be burned out going into the spring semester and so on, so forth.

Signs of burnout

- Fatigue and/or frequently ill
- Headaches or muscle pain
- Sense of failure and self-doubt
- Feeling trapped, helpless, or defeated
- Withdrawing from responsibilities
- Isolation
- Procrastination
- Use of vices
- No motivation and negative outlook
- Easily irritable and frustrated

Potential causes

- Sigma on top of school and work
- Lack of recognition or reward for work
- Feeling as if you have no control over your work
- Overly demanding job expectations
- Monotonous or non-challenging work
- High-pressure
- Lack of support relationships
- Too much on your plate
- Lack of adequate sleep

Chapter 2: Depression

What is depression and its causes?

While depression is a common mental illness, it should be taken very seriously. About half the people with depression do not seek help or even get it diagnosed. Depression affects how you think, act, and feel, and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical issues.

It also affects your day-to-day functioning and symptoms look different for everyone.

Some causes of depression include:

- **Biochemistry** — refers to brain chemicals

- **Genetics** — depression can run in families
- **Personality** — “People with low self-esteem, who are easily overwhelmed by stress, or who are generally pessimistic appear to be more likely to experience depression.”
- **Environment** — “Continuous exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty may make some people more vulnerable to depression.”

The good news is that depression is treatable.

Types of depression

1. **Major Depression/Major Depressive Disorder** — 16.2 million adults in the US alone have had at least one major depressive episode
2. **Persistent Depression/Dysthymia/Chronic Depression** — duration of 2 or more years; potentially not as intense as major depression but still affects your day-to-day
3. **Double Depression** — experiencing major depression before or while you ave persistent depression
4. **Manic Depression/Bipolar Depression** — consists of periods of time with extreme happiness, which alternates with depressive episodes
5. **Depressive Psychosis/Major Depressive with Psychotic Features** — categorized as depressive episodes where you lose touch with reality (hallucinations, delusions); can also cause physical symptoms as well
6. **Perinatal Depression/Postpartum Depression** — postpartum is only after giving birth, which perinatal encompasses both postpartum and during pregnancy; usually caused by hormonal changes; can be as severe as major depression
7. **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder** — a severe form of PMS; symptoms are mostly psychological; Premenstrual versus PMS-PMDD affects your day to day functioning, not just discomfort and bouts of emotions

8. **Seasonal Depression/Seasonal Affective Disorder** — its major depressive disorder but follows a seasonal pattern, usually occurs in winter months
9. **Situational Depression/Adjustment Disorder** — similar to major depression, but occurs due to a specific event or situation
10. **Atypical Depression** — this is depression that will go away in response to positive events; can happen during a major depressive episode or persistent depression

Symptoms

- Withdrawing from things you once got pleasure from
- Ruminating about mistakes
- Escapism
- Breaking down over “small things”
- Delaying chores and responsibilities
- Apologizing when you have done nothing wrong
- Avoiding conversations and thoughts about the future
- Trying not to be alone with your thoughts
- Regression to find comfort in things that gave you comfort when you were younger
- Apathy
- Struggling to get out of bed
- Neglecting hygiene
- Having no appetite
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Struggling getting through normal activities
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Digestive problems



Bad vs. Good coping mechanisms

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| • Drugs | • Comparing yourself to others | • Meditating | • Socializing with friends |
| • Drinking (includes caffeine) | • Romanticizing the past | • Journaling | • Spa day |
| • Smoking | • Avoiding a person or situation that causes stress | • Listening to music | • Crying |
| • Retail therapy to excess | | • Yoga | |
| • Excessive sleeping | | • Going to the movies | |
| • Isolation | | • Reading | |
| • Jumping to conclusions | | • Going for a walk | |
| | | • Engaging in a hobby | |

Can depression be prevented? YES!

Prevent future depressive episodes or even a first episode to avoid depression altogether.

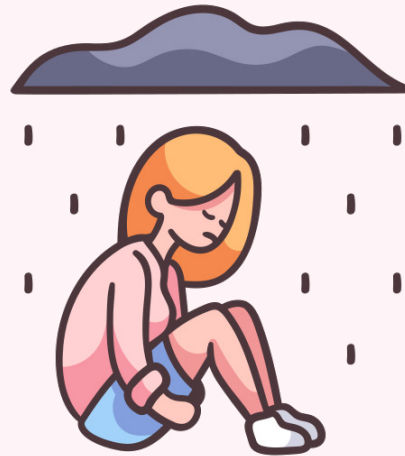
Here are some tips to help prevent:

- Exercise regularly
- Cut back on social media time
- Build strong relationships
- Reduce the number of decisions you need to make in a day/week
- Reduce stress levels
- Maintain your treatment plan
- Get enough sleep
- Remove toxicity
- Eat well with good nutrition and maintain a healthy weight
- Manage other chronic conditions
- Reduce alcohol and drug use, including nicotine
- Plan for unavoidable, known triggers (For example, an anniversary of a loved one's death coming up)

How to help someone with depression

As SYZters, there are several ways to help someone else with depression.

- Sit besides them while they weather the storm
- Hugs and affection
- Remind them they are not alone
- Make them a hot meal
- Offer to do things with them
- Bring them water
- Create a relaxing and healing space
- Help with daily tasks
- Remind them you're there to listen and actually be there for them
- Reassure them you are not judging them
- Tell them beautiful things! (Like how much they mean to you!)
- Listen empathetically
- Reassurance



What NOT to do

- Minimize the situation
- Guilt trip
- Gaslighting
- Invalidation
- Telling them to “snap out of it” or “just be positive”
- Ignore signs/dismissing
- Perpetuate stigmas
- Pointing out that people “have it worse off”
- Making that person seeking help feel like a burden
- Judging them
- Take it personally
- Try to “fix” them

Avoid making these statements

Minimizing/invalidating sounds like:

- “We all get sad from time to time”
- “Just be grateful”
- “It’s a phase”
- “You just need to get out more”
- “Everything happens for a reason”
- “You have no reason to be depressed”
- “You’re making things up or are making them sound worse than they are”
- “Just think positive”

Respect needs to be MUTUAL

It’s important to remember that if you want respect in return, you do need to give it. This applies in the Sigma setting, but also any setting. In this case, if you are having a depressive episode, please try to **communicate that** to the best of your ability.

If you don’t communicate that, the other party (parties) have the right to be upset unless it was a life threatening emergency on your end. You do have a responsibility to complete the tasks on your plate, but if it is too much, that’s completely understandable.

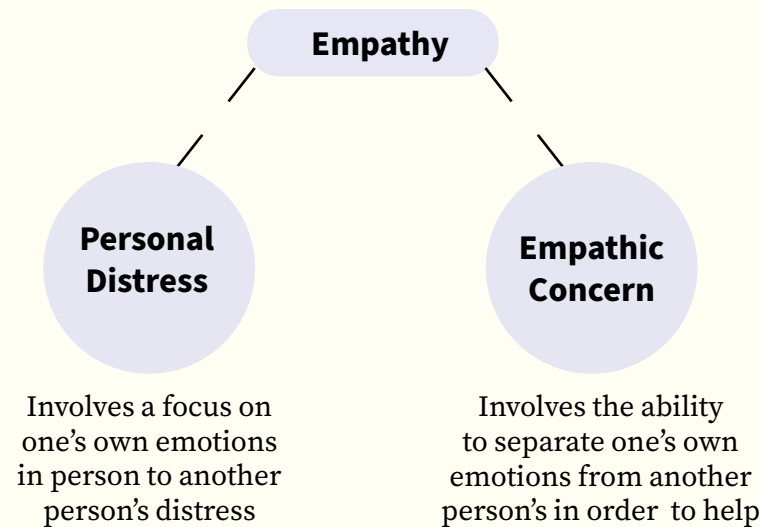
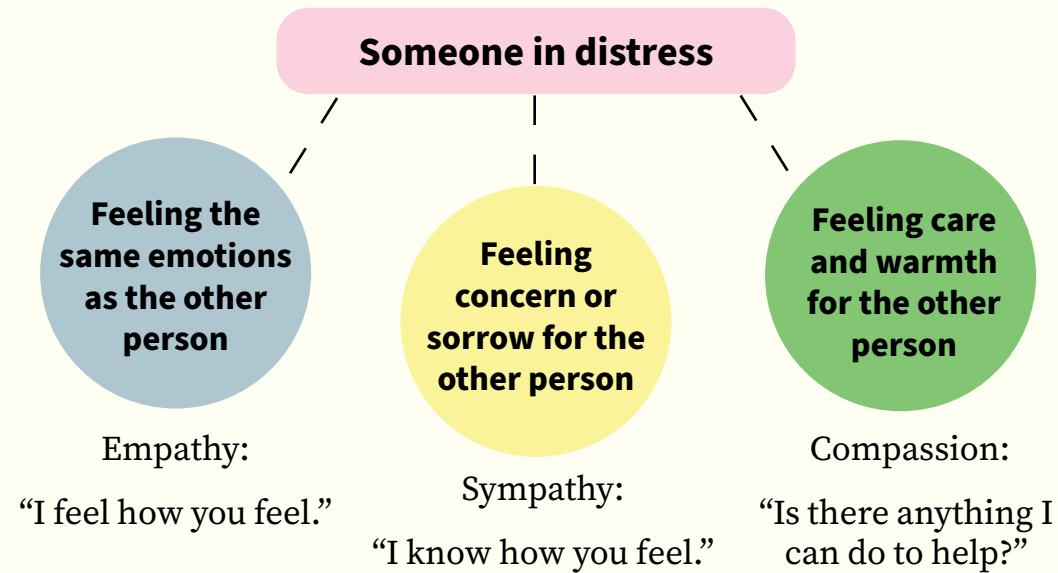
At the same time, the task needs to be done, so talk to someone else and let them know as soon as possible, so the task can be re-delegated.

Reminder: Having depression is NOT your fault.



Chapter 3: Empathy & Healthy Boundaries

What is empathy and how can we set healthy boundaries?



Empathy burnout

When individuals spend so much of their emotional strength relating deeply to the problems and stress of others that they forget to care for themselves.

We just keep feeling with a person (feeling and feeling and feeling).

Without the empathy
Empathy
burnout

Shift Your Thinking
Consider empathy as a skill, not just as a feeling (or an "ability").
Remember it takes practice

Set Clear Boundaries
Figure out for yourself what you are willing to do and what you are not willing to do.

Empower Others
Assist the other person in figuring out the solutions but do not become the solution.

Don't Take Things Personally
Even if you can feel the other person's feelings, it does not mean that it is your problem.

Take Care of Yourself
Be aware of your own reactions and make sure to take time for self-care activities.

Boundary setting: the “how”

Name Your Limits — Consider what you can tolerate and accept and what makes you feel uncomfortable or stressed.

Tune Into Your Feelings — Ask yourself: "Is this mine?" Any discomfort or resentment?

Give Yourself Permission — Decision is 98% of the battle. Remember that you are WITH them, but you are not FOR them.

Be Direct & Assertive — Do it clearly, calmly, firmly respectfully, and in as few words as possible. Do not justify, get angry, or apologize for the boundary you are setting. At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary, Do it anyway.

Self-care, self-care, self-care — Make self-care a priority. Schedule your time and communicate your needs.

Grounding Techniques — Discard any excess energy that is not serving your highest good. (Don't be concerned where the energy originated, be it with you or another person).

Self-compassion meditation

1. I don't have to fix everything for everyone. I know I can feel this person's misery, but there is a lesson in it for them. If I jump in, I'm depriving them of valuable learning.
2. What they are feeling is none of my business. I know I can feel it, but it's none of my business. Allow them the privacy I would want. Don't be an emotional peeping Tom!
3. I have to remember that just because I can read everything they're thinking and feeling, it doesn't mean they can read me. I must accept others for who they are. We are all just human.
4. I release what is not mine to feel. I release what is not mine to feel.
5. This too shall pass. This too shall pass. I can breathe and I can release. This too shall pass. And besides, it's not even mine. Give it back with love and a hug.



“Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another.”

— Alfred Adler

Chapter 4: Toxic Emotions & Situations

What is toxicity?

“A toxic person is anyone whose behavior adds negativity and upset to your life. Many times, people who are toxic are dealing with **their own stresses and traumas**...they act in ways that don't present them in the best light and usually upset others along the way.”

“Toxicity in people isn't considered a mental disorder. But there could be underlying mental problems that cause someone to act in toxic ways, including a personality disorder.”

However, toxic situations and people CAN affect your mental health.

At some point, we've probably ALL been toxic and potentially not even realized it.

While it's important to cut the toxic people out of your life, the person you might want to look at first is YOU. Because maybe the most toxic person in your life is yourself.

Signs of a toxic person

- Manipulation
- Inconsistent behavior
- You feel you deserve an apology but it never comes
- Always having to defend yourself
- Uncomfortable around them
- Poor self-esteem in their presence
- Always need your attention
- Drama
- Disrespecting your boundaries
- Substance abuse
- Self-absorption
- Dishonesty and deceit
- Tendency for conflict

Impacts of toxicity

“Arguably the most devastating thing about toxic relationships is that they trap victim and perpetrator (and in many cases, the people involved play both roles at various times) in a cycle of stress and negativity that feels impossible to escape and over time conditions the players to accept the situation and not even try to get out.”

Impacts of toxic behavior

- You feel you deserve an apology but it never comes
- Always having to defend yourself
- Uncomfortable around them
- Low self-worth
- Helplessness
- Feeling drained
- Lack of boundaries
- Ongoing drama and conflict
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Depression
- Insecurity
- Paranoia
- Feelings of seclusion



What does toxicity look like in your organizations?

- Low morale/no enthusiasm
- Constant confusion and dysfunction
- No one speaks up when things are not feasible but complain to others
- Lack of communication
- Never ending gossip and drama
- Fear
- Interactions are more formal than friendly
- Non-direct communication
- Insistence of policies over people
- Status and visibility are far more important than anything else
- High turnover rates
- Unhappiness is seen and felt but not talked about
- No community
- Cliques or groups
- No recognition or reward

Dealing with toxicity

- Real, honest introspection
- Remove yourself from the relationship or job
- Don't play into or get drawn into a toxic person's reality
- Pay attention to how this person makes you feel
- Discuss! (Speak up to others that can potentially create a solution too)
- Put yourself first! (Saying “no”)
- Make yourself unavailable or limit your time together
- Encourage help and support
- Remain calm
- Find your allies – support system!
- Focus on what you CAN control
- Document everything

Chapter 5: When to Say No & Ask for Help

The people-pleasing habit

People-pleasers are some of the nicest and most helpful people you can meet. They spend much of their time helping others. They're great organizers. You can always count on them for favors.

There is a reason for this, it is because the word 'no' doesn't exist in their vocabulary. That's the problem. For many, saying yes is a habit. When someone requests your help, do you set aside whatever you're working on and say "Sure!"?

Here is the bigger issue: do you regularly feel unhappy, stressed, and exhausted as a result

of constantly putting other people's priorities ahead of your own?

Saying no to people is one of the most important skills you can develop. It frees you to pursue your own interests both personal and professional. To that end, it'll boost your productivity, improve your relationships, and fill you with a sense of confident calm that may seem impossible to you at this moment.

The ability to say no is liberating, but developing the skill can prove challenging.

Risks of people-pleasing habits

People-pleasing might seem harmless, but it can lead to serious health risks (both mental and physical) especially when taken to the extremes.

- **Poor self-care** — By putting others first, one may spend less time relaxing, exercising, and planning healthy meals. As a result, they're more prone to health problems.
- **Overcommitment** — By saying yes to everything, people-pleasers over commit. With less time to keep everyone happy, this can quickly develop into a cycle of anxiety and stress.
- **Resentment** — Because people-pleasers feel like they can never say no, it's easy for silent anger to build up over time. This often leads to resentment, which damages even the strongest relationships.
- **Manipulation** — By always saying yes, especially to request for favors, one may allow others to taken advantage of them. Even worse, exploitive people will see them as easy targets when they realize they can't say no.

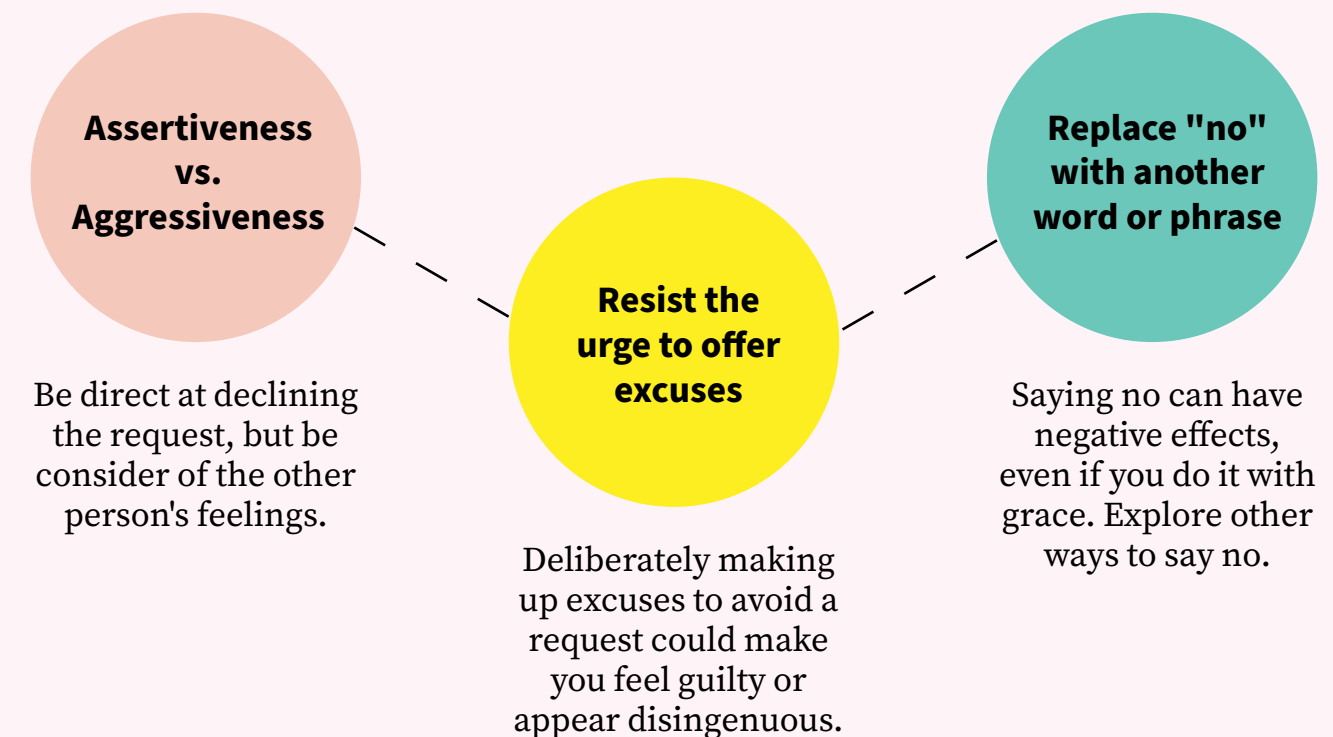
Learning to say no

To stop people-pleasing, one must learn **how** to say "no". This often requires trading popularity for respect, which is a problem for many people-pleasers, so they first need to get clear on **why** it's important to say "no".

Here are several reasons:

1. Saying NO to what is not important, validates what is important.
2. You will have more time for yourself and your loved ones.
3. Saying NO to things you do not want to do, increases time to do what you want to.
4. Your ability to deliver quality over quantity will increase.
5. When we learn to say NO, we establish boundaries.
6. We learn to have more control of our time and our activities.
7. Learning to say NO protects you from burnout and overload.
8. Saying NO is a sign of respect to you and the relationship.
9. You can't take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself.
10. You are the most important person in your life. Prioritize yourself!

Strategies for saying no



Asking for help

If you've ever glanced at the acknowledgments section of a good book, or listened to an Academy Awards acceptance speech, you know that no one achieves great things alone. Even with these seemingly individual accomplishments, there are countless people behind the scenes offering their skills, insights, and expertise to propel someone else into success.

As highly social animals, we humans depend on one another to learn and grow. What's more, research shows that helping others actually makes us feel good and that generosity is likely an important evolutionary adaptation for our species.

In a society that praises self-help and self-reliance, it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to ask our colleagues, friends, and even our family for the assistance we need. The mere thought of asking for help can eat away at our ego, undermine our confidence, make us question our abilities, and even paralyze us with anxiety. Yet in modern life—at a time when we are more digitally connected and emotionally detached than ever—the stark reality is that no one can go it alone.

Learning how to ask for (and accept) help is perhaps one of the greatest skills you can develop.

Why is asking for help so hard?

The primary reason is **fear**. We fear that we'll be turned down, laughed at, or revealed to be a fraud. Though these fears are usually unfounded, we are loathe to ask for help because this seemingly simple act carries a number of high social risks: rejection,

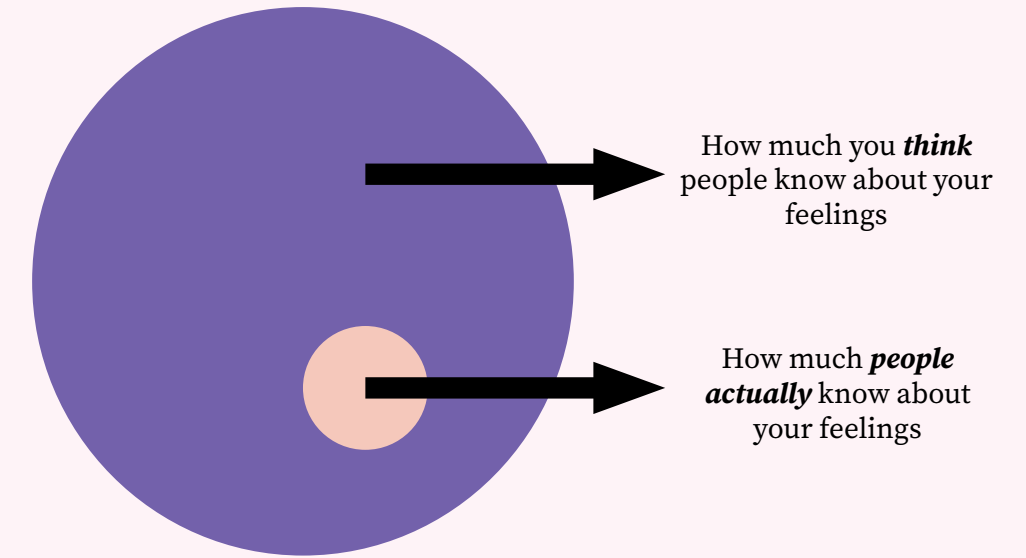
vulnerability, diminished status, and the inherent relinquishing of control. In the face of these threats, fear overrides reason and, as studies in neuroscience show, this risk of emotional pain activates the same regions of the brain as physical pain.

The illusion of transparency

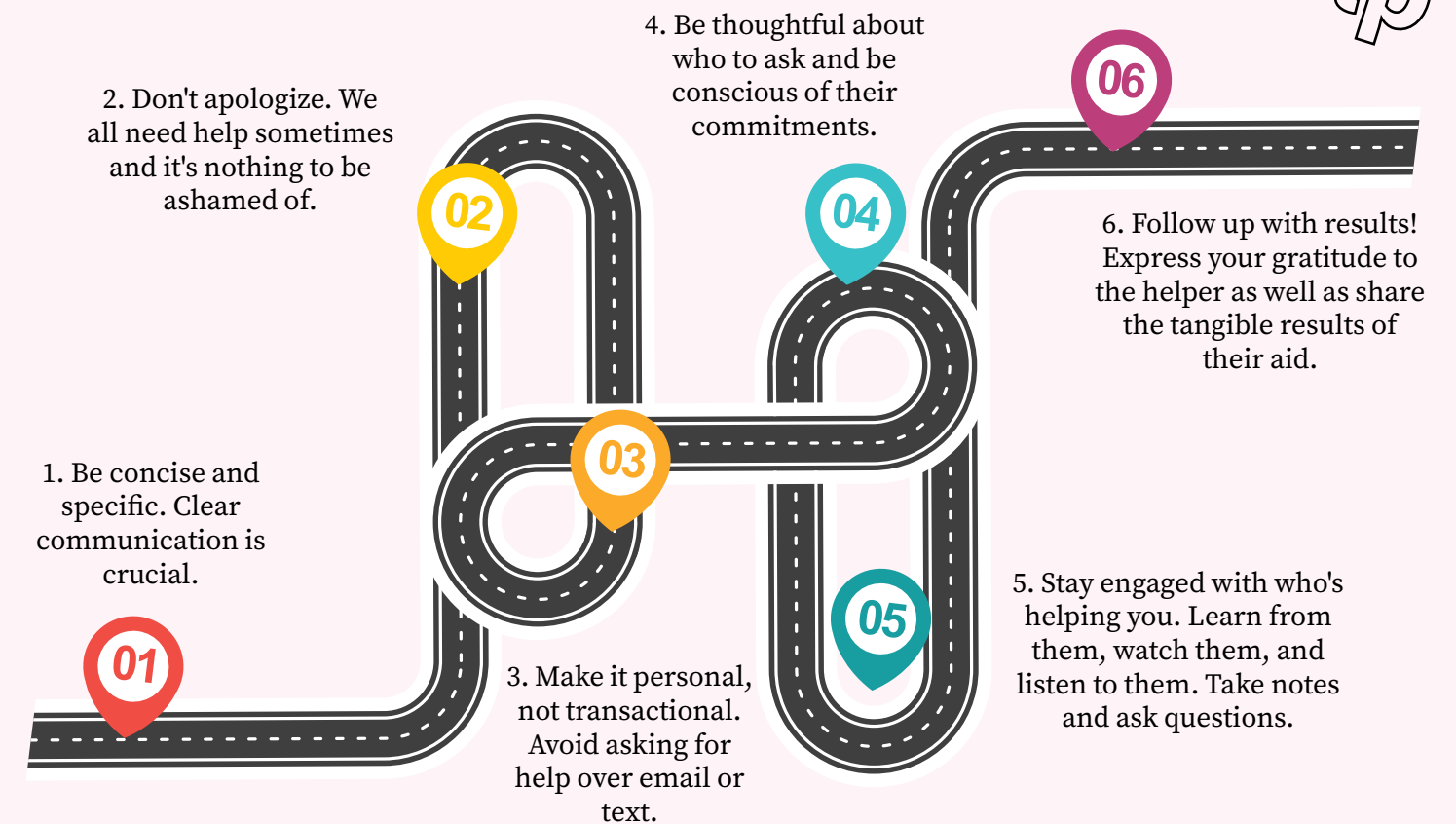
Another reason why asking for help seems so hard is that we are pretty terrible at articulating our needs in a way that someone can offer constructive aid. This is partially due to a cognitive bias that social psychologists call the **illusion of transparency**, or the mistaken belief that our feelings, thoughts, and needs are obvious to other people. Too often, we wait for someone

to notice our telepathic plea for help and inevitably get frustrated when no one does. It should go without saying that in order to receive help, you often have to ask for it. The high stakes and awkwardness of asking in our highly individualistic culture pose obstacles. But the best way to get more comfortable asking for help is to get better at it.

The gap between our subjective experience and what other people pick up on is known as the illusion of transparency. It's a fallacy that leads us to overestimate how easily we convey our emotions and thoughts.



The roadmap to asking for help



“The supreme act of forgiveness is when you can forgive yourself for all the wounds you’ve created in your own life...When you forgive yourself, self-acceptance begins and self-love grows.”

— Miguel Ángel Ruiz Macías

Chapter 6: Self-Forgiveness

What is forgiving?

Let's start with what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not saying what happened was okay. Forgiveness is not saying you accept the person who wronged you. Instead, forgiveness is choosing to accept what happened as it happened rather than what could or should have happened. Forgiveness can mean that you let go. Forgiveness can mean you love from a distance. Forgiveness can mean you step into your present rather than anchoring in the past.

More formally, it is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment

or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

However, there are scenarios in which forgiveness is not the best course for a particular person. Sometimes a victim of sexual abuse becomes more empowered when they give themselves permission not to forgive.

Forgiveness does not equal reconciliation. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses.

What about self-forgiveness?

Self-forgiveness is not an on-off switch, but a process that happens over time through emotional work and reflection. Self-forgiveness requires striking a balance between taking responsibility and maintaining a positive sense of self. When you successfully find this equilibrium, you reach self-forgiveness.

Pillars of self-forgiveness:

1. The release of negative emotions directed toward the self
2. The cultivation of positive emotions directed toward the self
3. An acceptance of responsibility



Is it that easy?

As humans, we have the tendency to focus on getting others to forgive us. "If only they would forgive me for my mistake, I would feel better." "If they can forgive me, I'll obviously be able to forgive myself."

But that is so far from the truth.

The reality is that we may never be fully forgiven by others, but that absolutely does not mean that we cannot find inner peace by forgiving ourselves. Additionally, even if everyone else that we have wronged forgives us, we will not feel peace and contentment until we truly forgive ourselves.

Forgiving yourself isn't easy because it is hard to accept the fact you made a mistake. Dwelling on it may lead to self-hatred, which

is what you should avoid. It may not be easy to forgive yourself if you're not able to take back what happened or make things right. It is hard to come to terms with something that doesn't line up with your values or beliefs. Sometimes deep feelings of regret and guilt result in doing something that's not part of your character.

Practicing how to forgive yourself encourages your mind and body to calm itself when facing unwanted emotions. When you don't forgive yourself, it is easy to fall into a mental trap of shame, anger, and despair.

Have you ever been forgiven by another, only to ruminate later about whatever it is you did wrong and how you "should have" done differently?

Working towards self-forgiveness



01 Identify
Identify the events or behaviors you wish to forgive yourself for.



02 Explore
Explore your responsibility for what happened. To what extent were you responsible?



03 Remorse
When you have acknowledged your level of responsibility, try to accept this responsibility.



04 Feelings
Be mindful of your feelings and look to challenge unreasonable standards.



05 Amends
Make amends when possible with the person you harmed.



06 Recommit
Learn from the experience, and make choices that align to your values.



07 Compassion
How would you speak to a friend who was going through the same thing?



08 Let Go
Let go of any negative feelings toward yourself.

Why is self-forgiving important?



Self-Confidence

The choice to forgive yourself empowers you to take responsibility for your words and behaviors. Once you abandon the view of yourself as a wrongdoer, you will regain self-confidence and start believing in yourself again.



Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer to a loved one. It can help you let go of negative thinking patterns and self-judgment.



Self-Acceptance

Self-forgiveness requires you to accept those parts of yourself that you previously considered unacceptable. Forgiveness of self involves understanding the difference between guilt and shame and overcoming your shame.

Forgiveness of self is a vital process associated with good mental health.

Through the process of self-forgiveness, you will learn to identify negative thoughts and emotions and replace them with compassion, empathy, and **love for yourself**.

Some important reminders

Self-forgiveness begins and ends internally. We may never be fully forgiven by others, but that does not mean that we cannot find inner peace by forgiving ourselves.

Self-forgiveness is a choice. By giving the gift of forgiveness, we are encouraged to confront and let go of our pain in order to regain their lives.

It did happen, but resentment is no longer useful. We are not avoiding responsibility, but we understand that dwelling in our mistakes won't help us or the situation.

Chapter 7: Self-Care

What is self-care?

Self care in essence is the mindful taking of time to pay attention to you, not in a narcissistic way, but in a way that ensures that you are being cared for by you.

As simple as it sounds, many of us pay little attention to self-care. This is why "deliberately" is one of the most important words in the definition. You need to be conscious of your well-being before you

can achieve true self-care. It starts from the simple acts like not checking emails at night when you know it affects your sleep and extends to more important decisions like going for a vacation or booking a massage when you feel you need one.

Beyond being an aspirational goal, engaging in self-care has been described as an "ethical imperative".

The unspoken truth of self-care

Finding balance is a process.

The truth is that if you are truly taking enough time for self-care, you may not be performing up to par in school, or extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular activities can then produce stress and guilt over the work that you could or "should" be doing.

This results in students not only feeling bad from stress, burnout and fatigue, but also feeling bad about their perceived failure at self-care.

What's important is self-awareness, monitoring and knowing our boundaries — when it is OK to slip in either direction or when it may undermine our competence.

Incorporating self-care in our everyday

Just because a behavior is “good for you” doesn’t make it self-care. Your perspective plays a role in determining what types of behaviors constitute self-care for you.

You need to get some sense of gratification out of it for it to be self-care. “Although activities such as running or meditating may

be good for your overall health and well-being, if you hate them, then they are not considered self-care.” (If you do find those activities energizing and fulfilling, however, they are potential self-care practices.)

Ultimately, your self-care routine should make you a better version of yourself.



Art

Listening to music, drawing, watching a movie.



Communicate

Calling a loved one or a friend that shines your mood.



Mindfulness

Practice gratitude, meditation, and grounding.

Overcoming barriers to self-care



Guilt

Self-care is about your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. And there’s nothing indulgent or selfish about that.



Lack of time

Shifting our mindset from abundance of time, to quality of time.



Unrealistic expectations

Unrealistic expectations are potentially damaging because they set us and others up for failure.



Change can be hard

Start with a tiny habit that you think you can successfully incorporate into your life.

Why should we practice self-care?

1. You are worth it.
2. More self-care equals more self-awareness, which equals more self-love.
3. You will be able to show up to the world from a place of inner peace, and things will likely feel much easier.

“You are worth the quiet moment. You are worth the deeper breath. You are worth the time it takes to slow down, be still, and rest.”

— Morgan Harper Nichols

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Questions? Comments?
Interested in attending or
hosting a webinar?

Contact Bre Marshall at
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Resources

- Campuses offer free counseling and psychiatric aid.
- Go off campus, if needed. If you are on your parent's health insurance or have your own health insurance, it may be covered. (The money for copays is well worth.)
- Spread the word and be an advocate.
- National Suicide Prevention Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Discussion Guide: <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/community-conversation>
- Apps such as Talkspace and Headspace
- 741741: free 24/7 texting service with a crisis counselor (not just for emergencies)
- <https://sigmapsizeta.org/mental-health-resources> (organized by respective states and universities)

Please remember that what works for you may **not** work for someone else, so don't force things on others if it isn't right for them. The same goes the other way! What works for someone else may **not** work for you, so don't force it on yourself.

Doing research is an absolute must. There are many resources available including (but not limited to) the ones listed above. If you are unable to see someone in person, online therapy and mental health apps are also options. Sometimes, meditation and grounding may help. This list is not comprehensive, but we hope that these resources are beneficial.

Finally, there is the importance of SYZterhood. Even though we all come from different background and walks of life, we are more similar than we realize. It's important to be there for each other and lift each other up in our darkest moments. Try to check in with SYZters if you can and don't be afraid to ask for help either. On that note, you must also look out for yourself and your mental health.

Before helping someone, make sure you have the mental and emotional capacity to do so. As the saying goes, "You can't pour from an empty cup."

Take care of yourselves. Look out for one another.

