

Student Advocacy Toolkit

Campus Mental Health Changemakers

A practical guide for students who want to make a difference in mental health support on their campus. Learn how to advocate, organize, and create lasting change.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
— Margaret Mead

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Welcome, Changemaker!

You've taken the first step toward making mental health support better on your campus. Whether you're starting from scratch or looking to amplify existing efforts, this toolkit will give you the knowledge, strategies, and resources to make a real impact.

Student advocates have been at the forefront of every major mental health policy improvement in higher education. Your voice matters, and this guide will help you use it effectively.

Why Student Advocacy Matters

- 1 in 3 college students experience significant symptoms of depression or anxiety
- Only 40% of students with mental health conditions receive treatment
- Average wait time for campus counseling appointments has increased 30% since 2010
- Student advocacy has led to increased funding at over 200 institutions

Students are uniquely positioned to advocate for change because you understand the lived experience of navigating mental health on campus. Administrators and policymakers need to hear directly from those affected by current policies and resource gaps.

Getting Started: Know Your Campus

Before you can advocate for change, you need to understand your campus's current mental health landscape.

Questions to Research:

- What mental health services does your campus offer? (Counseling center, peer support, crisis services)
- How many counselors are on staff? What is the student-to-counselor ratio?
- What is the average wait time for an appointment?
- Are services free or is there a fee? Are there session limits?
- What training do RAs, faculty, and staff receive on mental health?
- Does your institution have a suicide prevention plan?
- What happens when a student needs to take a medical leave for mental health?

Building Your Campaign

Step 1: Define Your Goals

Effective advocacy starts with clear, specific goals. Vague goals like "improve mental health" are hard to measure and achieve. Instead, focus on concrete changes.

Vague Goal	SMART Goal
Better counseling services	Hire 2 additional counselors by Fall 2025
More awareness	Host 4 mental health events per semester
Help students in crisis	Implement a 24/7 crisis text line by Spring 2025
Train faculty	Require mental health first aid training for all RAs

Step 2: Build Your Team

You don't have to do this alone. Recruit allies who share your passion for mental health advocacy.

- Fellow students affected by mental health challenges
- Student government representatives
- Greek life, athletic, or cultural organization leaders
- Sympathetic faculty or staff members
- Campus counseling center staff
- Local mental health organizations

Step 3: Gather Support

Decision-makers respond to numbers. Document the need and demand for change through:

Petitions: Collect signatures (aim for 5-10% of student body)

Surveys: Gather data on student experiences with mental health services

Testimonials: Collect anonymous stories (with consent) about how current gaps affect students

Research: Compile data comparing your campus to peer institutions

Meeting with Decision-Makers

Eventually, you'll need to present your case to administrators, deans, or board members. Here's how to make those meetings count.

Before the Meeting:

- Research who has authority over your issue (Dean of Students, VP of Student Affairs, etc.)
- Request a meeting formally via email—explain your purpose briefly
- Prepare a one-page summary of your request with supporting data
- Practice your talking points with your team
- Anticipate objections and prepare responses

During the Meeting:

- Be professional, respectful, and concise
- Lead with shared values (student success, campus safety, institutional reputation)
- Present data and stories together—numbers + human impact
- Make a specific ask—don't leave without clarity on next steps
- Offer to be a partner, not just a critic

After the Meeting:

- Send a thank-you email summarizing what was discussed
- Follow up on any commitments or timelines
- Keep your supporters informed on progress
- If you hit a wall, escalate strategically (media, board, alumni)

Taking Care of Yourself

Advocacy work can be emotionally demanding, especially when you're working on issues that may personally affect you. Remember:

- Set boundaries—you can't pour from an empty cup
- Share the load with your team; don't carry it alone
- Celebrate small wins along the way
- Seek support if advocacy work triggers difficult feelings
- It's okay to step back when you need to

Additional Resources

Griffin Ambitions Resources

griffinlink.com/resources.html

Student Self-Assessment Tool

griffinlink.com/student-self-assessment.html

Active Minds

activeminds.org

JED Foundation

jedfoundation.org

NAMI on Campus

nami.org/Support-Education/Mental-Health-Education/NAMI-on-Campus

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

988lifeline.org

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

Join the Campus Advocacy Network

Connect with student advocates across the country through Griffin Ambitions' Campus Advocacy Network. Get additional training, share strategies, and be part of the national movement for student mental health.

Email info@behavioralhealth.us with the subject line "Campus Advocacy Network" to get started.

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