

Beyond Academics:

Send Silence Packing® Supports Student Wellbeing

Send Silence Packing® provides valuable information, support and resources to college campuses as more college students experience mental health challenges.



Background & Significance of Send Silence Packing

Mental health issues among college students have increased with more than 60% of students meeting the criteria for one or more mental health problems. This represents a nearly 50% increase in less than a decade.¹ For students, challenges with their mental health can impact academic performance and threaten persistence. The negative effects of mental health issues include lower motivation, weaker relationships, difficulty studying, dropping courses or leaving school. For colleges and universities, this can lead to high demand for on-campus counseling services, strain on faculty and a reduction in student retention.

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Rooted in a multimedia story-sharing format, Send Silence Packing® is an immersive experience that inspires action for suicide prevention, connects participants with local and national mental health resources, and catalyzes conversations that contribute to a community's overall positive climate for mental health. Send Silence Packing has connected more than one million visitors in over 350 communities with resources and tools for skills and support. The exhibit serves as a mobilizing force to change the way people think, talk, and feel about mental health and, perhaps most importantly, how they show up for the people around them.

Who Attends Send Silence Packing?

Send Silence Packing is promoted to the entire campus community and welcomes all students. Attendees represent students who are lesbian, gay and bisexual (27%), transgender (7%), BIPOC (12%) and financially insecure (27%), among other student populations. Nearly two out of three attendees report that a mental health or substance use problem affected their academic performance in the past 12 months.

Some demographic groups experience higher levels of academic impairment due to mental health issues than others. Nearly 90% of students who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual report that a mental health problem impacted their academic performance, compared to 55% of their heterosexual peers. Similarly, 78% of students who struggle to meet basic expenses report an impact on academic performance, compared to 59% of students with financial security. Nearly half of students who attend Send Silence Packing are in one or both of these demographic groups.



Positive Impact of Send Silence Packing

Students who attend Send Silence Packing find it important and valuable. Over three-quarters (76%) of attendees say they used information they learned at Send Silence Packing to support their own wellbeing and 70% used it to support friends and family members over the subsequent six months. Send Silence Packing is valuable across all student populations, as the positive responses were shared across racial, gender, sexual orientation and socioeconomic groups.

How did college students perceive the Send Silence Packing exhibit?	Agree
I am glad that my campus held the Send Silence Packing exhibit.	96%
My experience with Send Silence Packing was valuable.	94%
I used information I learned from Send Silence Packing to support my own wellbeing.	76%
I used information I learned from Send Silence Packing to help support others, (e.g, friends or family).	70%
My attitude towards mental illness changed as a result of Send Silence Packing.	63%

Send Silence Packing improves students' perception of mental illness, with three in five students indicating more positive attitudes toward mental illness as a result of the exhibit. Students were also asked how they think the public views people with mental illness, also known as community stigma. After visiting the Send Silence Packing exhibit, students saw a reduction in community stigma, resulting in a more positive view of people with mental illness. Importantly, a decrease in community stigma is accompanied by an increase in a students' willingness to seek help during a mental health challenge.²

Send Silence Packing demonstrates a campus' commitment to student mental health and influences students' perception of campus climate in relation to mental health. Over 70% of attendees agree that "there is an emotionally supportive climate on this campus for students with mental health needs" and "my school emphasizes helping students with their social, emotional, and behavioral problems."

Improving students' perceptions of campus climate over time is also associated with an increase in willingness to seek help if they experience a mental health challenge.²

Providing students with support for mental health challenges is imperative to student success and retention. Send Silence Packing provides knowledge and information that helps students with their own wellbeing and support their peers. Send Silence Packing also improves student perceptions of campus climate and community stigma around mental health. Higher education administrators have an opportunity to support the conversation about mental health on their campuses by bringing Send Silence Packing to their students.

Methods

To learn more about students' knowledge and mental health needs, Active Minds and the RAND Corporation surveyed over 1,000 college students in 2022 on college campuses that hosted Send Silence Packing. Of those surveyed, nearly 400 students attended a Send Silence Packing exhibit on their college campus. The survey asked students their views of the exhibit six months after it was on their campus. Students were from six campuses in Pennsylvania, and included a mix of public and private, four- and two-year colleges and universities.



References

1. Lipson S.K., Zhou, S., Abelson, S., Heinze, J., Jirsa, M., Morigney, J., Patterson, A., Singh, M., Eisenberg, D. (2022). Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013–2021. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 306, 138-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.03.038>
2. Dunbar, M. S., Sontag-Padilla, L., Torbatian, A., Ye, F., Gatto, A., Horne, L. (2024). Changing campus climate matters: longitudinal associations between perceived campus mental health climate and changes in college students' psychological distress and help-seeking intentions. Under review.