

# HEALING THE HEALERS

SPECIAL EDITION: COVID-19

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

## Faith Leaders & Chaplains + Rising Mental Health Needs of Teens & Young Adults in 2020

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

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# Introduction

At Odyssey Impact, we believe in the power of personal story to change perspectives, change attitudes, and even to change the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified in the U.S., Odyssey Impact responded to the needs of faith leaders, spiritual care providers, and faith communities by convening live town halls on requested topics. Experts, leaders, scholars, and on-the-ground providers shared their candid insights and questions arising in this unprecedented time.

Our hope is the following guide will help current Faith Leaders in their work to lead a thriving congregation or community and faculty as they prepare future faith leaders to navigate trauma.

May our networks of care be strengthened, our imaginations expanded, and our hope ignited.



For the creation of this written resource, we are grateful to Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University Maryland.



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# Expert Reflection and Discussion Guide

Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D.

In further exploring the conversation between faith leaders and experts about the mental health of teens and young adults from September 2, 2020, we invite you to consider the following three themes in light of your and your community's situation:

**Video Clip #1: Toxic Positivity: When the Glass Half Full Overflows**

**Video Clip #2: Intersectionality and the Stigma of Mental Illness**

**Video Clip #3: Care Strategies to Come Alongside Teens and Young Adults**

We invite you to reflect personally, with your staff or colleagues, or in small group discussions among those with whom you provide spiritual care. After viewing each of the following sections, please take time to reflect first on what the speakers share. Then, consider the prompts below for ways you may continue to respond and practice care amid the compounded crises in your midst.



## Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D.

Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University Maryland. She is a pastoral and practical theologian, a scholar-activist, and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Her research focuses on spiritual care and counseling with traditionally marginalized populations. She is the editor of *Navigating Religious Difference in Spiritual Care and Counseling* (Claremont Press, 2019), the author of *Women Leaving Prison: Justice-Seeking Spiritual Support for Female Returning Citizens* (Lexington, 2018), and the author of numerous peer-reviewed articles and chapters. Dr. Snodgrass has served as a pastoral counselor in churches, shelters, transitional housing facilities, and community centers, and she is the Clinical Director of Spiritual Support at Greater Baltimore Medical Center.

# Toxic Positivity: When the Glass Half Full Overflows

## Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 4:31-5:53)

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“Good Vibes Only.” “Stay Positive.” “Focus on the Glass Half Full.” Messages like these are rampant on social media, printed on t-shirts and water bottles, and the focus of millions of memes. Such messages can function like mantras for teens and young adults working through difficult situations. They can help us to cope with challenging emotions and to manage distorted cognitions. But such messages can also harm and impede healthy coping when they erase the space for teens and young adults to be anything except ok.

These and other positive messages may signal the presence of toxic positivity. According to Natalie Dattilo, a clinical health psychologist with Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, “while cultivating a positive mind-set is a powerful coping mechanism, toxic positivity stems from the idea that the best or only way to cope with a bad situation is to put a positive spin on it and not dwell on the negative” (Chiu, 2020, para. 6). When emanating naturally, positivity is not problematic. After all, hope is a theological virtue. But when hope eschews the possibility for lament, when teens and young adults are forced to don positivity in a manner that invalidates, negates, or oppresses their genuine state, such positivity can be toxic.

Addressing toxic positivity is essential as the rates of mental illness among teens and youth are on the rise. According to research published by the American Psychological Association, “More U.S. adolescents and young adults in the late 2010s (vs. the mid-2000s) experienced serious psychological distress, major depression, and suicidal thoughts, and more attempted suicide and took their own lives” (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau, 2019, p. 185). Teens and young adults are aware of and concerned about the rise of mental illness whether experienced themselves or by their peers. The Pew Research Center reported that “seven-in-ten teens today see [anxiety and depression] as major problems among their peers” (Horowitz & Graf, 2019, p. 2).

As teens and young adults cultivate their identities and seek independence, they long for spaces wherein they can be their authentic selves and experience a sense of belonging. Faith leaders and chaplains are uniquely positioned to create such spaces as we occupy positions of authority and maturity outside the proximal worlds of teens' and young adults' families and schools. In these spaces, faith leaders and chaplains need to acknowledge that telling teens and young adults to focus on the positive can delegitimize their experience of themselves and the world. Research shows that toxic positivity and the pressure to be happy can actually decrease well-being (McGuirk, Kuppens, Kingston, & Bastian, 2018). Teens and young adults who do not fit into the culture of "good vibes only" may engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms and maladaptive behaviors. When their emotions are deemed problematic or unacceptable, they may try to avoid them through use of drugs and alcohol, a cycle of numbing or escapism. Faith leaders and chaplains should create spaces that promote positive coping with all the emotions of life.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:**

Teens and young adults need to know, as Daniel Warshawsky reminded participants, that "it's ok to not be ok." How can you create spaces wherein teens and young adults know that "it's ok to not be ok?" What implicit and explicit messages can you use to communicate to teens that "it's ok to not be ok?" What strategies can you employ for caringly confronting individuals, families, and communities who foster and perpetuate toxic positivity?



## ★ Additional Resource

What is Toxic Positivity? Why It's OK To Not Be OK Right Now.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-toxic-positivity-coronavirus\\_l\\_5f04bca0c5b67a80bbff7cd3](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-toxic-positivity-coronavirus_l_5f04bca0c5b67a80bbff7cd3)

Toxic Positivity and Parenting During COVID-19

<https://teenworldconfidential.com/blog/2020/08/26/toxic-positivity-and-parenting-during-covid-19/>

“OK Not to Be OK” (Official Music Video) by Marshmello & Demi Lovato

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAPlzt2L7wE>

## ★ References

Chiu, A. (2020, August 19). Time to ditch ‘toxic positivity,’ experts say:

‘It’s okay not to be okay.’ *The Washington Post*.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/toxic-positivity-mental-health-covid/2020/08/19/5dff8d16-e0c8-11ea-8181-606e603bb1c4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/toxic-positivity-mental-health-covid/2020/08/19/5dff8d16-e0c8-11ea-8181-606e603bb1c4_story.html)

Horowitz, J.M., & Graf, N. (2019). Most U.S. teens see anxiety and depression as a major problem among their peers. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>

McGuirk, L., Kuppens, P., Kingston, R., & Bastian, B. (2018). Does a culture of happiness increase rumination over failure? *Emotion*, 18(5), 755-764.

<https://doi.org.10.1037/emo0000322>

Twenge, J.M., Cooper, A.B., Joiner, T.E., Duffy, M.E., & Binau, S.G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005-2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 128(3), 185-199.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/abn000410>

# Intersectionality and the Stigma of Mental Illness

## Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 24:21-31:11)

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Mental illness is highly stigmatized in the U.S. while mental health is under-promoted. The stigmatization of mental illness is perpetuated, in part, by a failure to acknowledge that mental health and mental illness are two poles of a continuum; most people move along the continuum as their mental wellbeing changes due to circumstance, environment, biochemistry, and other factors. Although many communities are working to destigmatize mental illness, individuals' intersectionality means we are apt to experience the stigmatization of mental illness in one or more of our primary identities.

Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how individuals' various social locations – our race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, religious location, and other identities – interact to result in both privilege and oppression. The messages teens and young adults receive regarding mental illness are impacted by their intersectionality. They may be encouraged in some areas of their lived experience to speak openly about issues of mental health, while in other areas they may be implicitly or explicitly silenced due to stigma.

LGBTQ+ teens and young adults in the U.S. are disproportionately impacted by mental illness. According to a study conducted with high school youth, 42.8% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students seriously considered suicide in the previous 12 months in comparison to 14.8% of heterosexual students (CDC, 2016). Panelist Dr. Rolf Nolasco explores how to care for the mental wellbeing of LGBTQ+ teens and young adults amid their intersectionality.



Immigrant and first generation teens and young adults face unique prejudice and stressors that place them at-risk for health, emotional, and behavioral problems (APA, 2008). Acculturative stress is common among immigrant teens and young adults and, if unacknowledged or addressed, can lead to depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues. Panelist Imam Jawad Bayat shares about the dishonor that teens and young adults can bring upon their families if they acknowledge their own struggles with mental illness, and how the conversation needs to shift to provide culturally competent care for immigrant youth.

African American teens and young adults are also disproportionately impacted by mental illness. A national survey conducted between 1991 and 2017 of 198,000 high school students indicated that suicide attempts by black adolescents increased by 73% despite decreases among other racial cohorts (Lindsey, Sheftall, Xiao, & Joe, 2019). Panelist Rev. Dr. Danielle Buhuro names the ways in which the mental health of African American teens and young adults is impacted by social injustices including poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, and inadequate health care coverage. She shares how faith leaders and churches can address these social injustices.

Faith leaders and chaplains can assist teens and young adults in reflecting upon the messages about mental health that are targeted toward their various identities and social locations. It is important that faith leaders and chaplains help teens and young adults to think critically about the mental health stigmas they may have internalized and to construct more life-giving beliefs and perspectives.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Teens and young adults are exposed to various perspectives on mental illness as a result of their intersectional identities. How can we speak openly with teens and young adults in a manner that acknowledges, but does not judge, the stigmatized perspectives of mental illness they may receive or believe? What strategies can be used to talk with teens and young adults about their intersectional identities and the tensions they may experience as a result of various perspectives on mental illness? How can we help teens and young adults to confront the stigmatization of mental illness within their communities?

## ★ Additional Resource

The Trevor Project. *Resources: Access information preventing suicide and Trevor's unique resources for LGBTQ youth.* <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>

The Congressional Black Caucus. *Ring the Alarm: The Crisis of Black Youth Suicide in America.* <https://mharslc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Blackyouthsuicide2020.pdf>

Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. *Young Adult American-Born Muslims and Mental Health: An Exploration of Attitudes, Challenges, and Needs.* <https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/young-adult-american-born-muslims-and-mental-health.pdf>

## ★ References

American Psychological Association. (2008). *APA resolution on immigrant children, youth, and families.* <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/immigrants>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016, August 12). *Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-related behaviors among students in grades 9-12 – United States and selected sites, 2015.* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/pdfs/ss6509.pdf>

# Care Strategies to Come Alongside Teens and Young Adults

## Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code -  
40:38-41:15 + 42:45-44:00 + 44:04-45:30 + 45:57-47:30)

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According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2019), teens in the U.S. expressed significant concern about anxiety and depression, alcohol and drug problems, and bullying and cyberbullying. And although their concerns regarding gangs, poverty, and pregnancy declined, they still remain marked. Add to this list issues of sexual and gender identity formation, and the expected developmental tasks related to identity and independence, and the stressors facing America's youth are daunting.

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods for mental health promotion and prevention. Yet caring for teens and young adults can be challenging. Ups and downs are a normal part of adolescence and young adulthood, which can make it hard to differentiate typical mood swings from a mental health concern. In addition, teens and young adults can sometimes struggle to express themselves and their experiences, and they may not feel comfortable sharing.

The problems faced today by Generation Z – teens and young adults born after 1996 – are not unlike those experienced by the Millennials and Generation X. But Gen Zers are navigating these issues in a radically different context as the U.S. experiences dual pandemics. “COVID-19 has reshaped the country’s social, political and economic landscape. Instead of looking ahead to a world of opportunities, Gen Z now peers into an uncertain future” (Parker & Igielnik, 2020, para. 2). Moreover, given that “one-in-four Gen Zers are Hispanic, 14% are black, 6% are Asian and 5% are some other race or two or more races” (Parker & Igielnik, 2020, para. 8), the pandemic of racial injustice and police brutality uniquely impacts this generation who are majority BIPOC (52%).

Given the power and authority ascribed to many faith leaders and chaplains, when we come alongside teens and young adults, our witness can carry tremendous spiritual import. We are trained, and hopefully gifted, in the ministry of presence. We need to remember in caring for teens and young adults, especially those in crisis, that being is as important as *doing*.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

How can we support the mental health of teens and young adults? How can we detect signs of, and initiate conversations about, suicidal ideation? According to panelists, most teens and young adults do not want to be talked at. Therefore, how can we develop conversations and come alongside youth in a way that normalizes discussions on mental wellbeing, particularly during the dual pandemics faced today in the U.S.? Panelists offer strategies for helping teens who are struggling in silence, for encouraging peers to speak up when they are concerned about a friend, for asking directly about suicidal ideation, and for exploring with youth who they feel called to be and become.

## ★ Additional Resource

Mental Health First Aid. *5 Tips for Talking to Your Teenager About Mental Health*.  
<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2017/06/5-tips-talking-teenager/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness. *Helping Get Teens Talking About Mental Health*.  
<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/March-2015/Helping-Get-Teens-Talking-About-Mental-Health>

## ★ References

Desilver, D. (2019). *The concerns and challenges of being a U.S. teen: What the data show*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/26/the-concerns-and-challenges-of-being-a-u-s-teen-what-the-data-show/>

Parker, K., & Igielnik, R. (2020). *On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about Gen Z so far*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>

## Additional Resources

### Lifelines

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**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1.800.273.TALK) 1-800-273-8255**

Support and assistance 24/7 for anyone feeling depressed, overwhelmed or suicidal.

**The Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741)**

**Trevor Project Lifeline (1.866.488.7386)**

Provides 24/7 crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.

### Resources by Panelists

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*Spiritual Care in an Age of #BlackLivesMatter: Examining the Spiritual and Prophetic Needs of African Americans in a Violent America* by Danielle J. Buhuro

<https://www.christianbook.com/spiritual-blacklivesmatter-examining-prophetic-americans-america/9781532648083/pd/648084>

A Guide to Mental Health in quarantine, with a prayer of hope at the end, created by Daniel Warshawsky. <https://www.usy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Refuat-HaNefesh-Mental-Health-Guide.pdf>

*God's Beloved Queer: Identity, Spirituality, and Practice* by Dr. Rolf R. Nolasco, Jr.

[https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Beloved-Queer-Rolf-](https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Beloved-Queer-Rolf-Nolasco/dp/1532606788/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=rolf+nolasco&qid=1599906305&s=books&sr=1-4)

[Nolasco/dp/1532606788/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?dchild=1&keywords=rolf+nolasco&qid=1599906305&s=books&sr=1-4](https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Beloved-Queer-Rolf-Nolasco/dp/1532606788/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=rolf+nolasco&qid=1599906305&s=books&sr=1-4)

## Online Resources

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Young Adult American-Born Muslims and Mental Health: An Exploration of Attitudes, Challenges, and Needs” presented by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding  
<https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/young-adult-american-born-muslims-and-mental-health.pdf>

Compassion in Action: A Guide for Faith Communities Serving People Experiencing Mental Illness and Their Caregivers  
[http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource\\_guides/compassion-in-action.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource_guides/compassion-in-action.pdf)

Essay about Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s struggles  
<http://stewartburnshistory.com/books-by-stewart-burns/cosmic-companionship-spirit-stories-by-martin-luther-king-jr/>

The Trevor Project. *Resources: Access information preventing suicide and Trevor’s unique resources for LGBTQ youth.* <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>

## Recommended Books

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[The Lifesaving Church: Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention](#) by Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe

[The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist’s Notebook](#) by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. and Maia Szalavitz

[Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain](#) by Daniel J. Siegel, MD

## Organizations

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**Black Therapists Rock:** <https://www.blacktherapistsrock.com>

**Therapy For Black Girls:** <https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>

**TherapyForBlackMen.org:** <https://therapyforblackmen.org/>

**Melanin & Mental Health:** <https://www.melaninandmentalhealth.com>

**The Association of Black Psychologists:** <http://www.abpsi.org/>

**National Alliance on Mental Illness:** <https://www.nami.org/Home>

## Training Opportunities

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**ASIST** <https://www.livingworks.net/asist>

**International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.** - Suicide Awareness: An Introduction for Crisis Responders [https://icisf.org/event/sa2020\\_4/](https://icisf.org/event/sa2020_4/)

**LivingWorks** <http://www.livingworks.net/start>

**Mental Health First Aid** <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

**QPR Institute** (Question. Persuade. Refer.) <https://qprinstitute.com/>

## Strategies for Coming Alongside Teens & Young Adults

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**TASC:** Tune in; Ask about suicide; this is Serious; and Connect with resources.

**Games for Change** <http://www.gamesforchange.org/>

Trauma therapies such as **EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) <https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction  
Emotional Freedom Techniques  
Tactical Breathing Techniques  
Psychological First Aid

Create a HELP group - Healing, Encouragement, Love & Prayer

## Film and Music

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**King in the Wilderness** <https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/king-in-the-wilderness>

**Cantatas** by J S Bach <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/>



## Partners

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**Chaplaincy Innovation Lab.** For more information on CIL visit: <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org>

**Interfaith Network on Mental Illness (INMI).** INMI is an interfaith non-profit whose mission is to increase awareness and understanding of mental illness among, staff, lay leaders, members of faith communities and the wider community to help them more effectively develop and nurture supportive environments for persons dealing with mental illnesses and their families and friends. Since the pandemic began, INMI has offered a compilation of resources to support mental health every Monday and offer a mental health program every Thursday evening. For more information on INMI visit: <http://inmi.us>

**Odyssey Impact** is the creator of **Healing the Healers**

Healing the Healers provides resources and support for clergy, laity, chaplains, social workers, first responders and other spiritual care providers who are facing community-level trauma. To see free recordings of other Town Halls, or for more information on our five part film series on Communal Trauma, as well as other supportive resources visit: <https://healingthehealers.org>