



*Welcome to*

# Addressing Mental Health Challenges

Corporation for  
NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE 

 **VISTA**  
Volunteers In Service To America

# Today's Speaker



**Jessica Burch**  
Corporation for  
National and  
Community Service



**Elaine Williams**  
Counselor/Coach/  
Consultant

# Session Goals

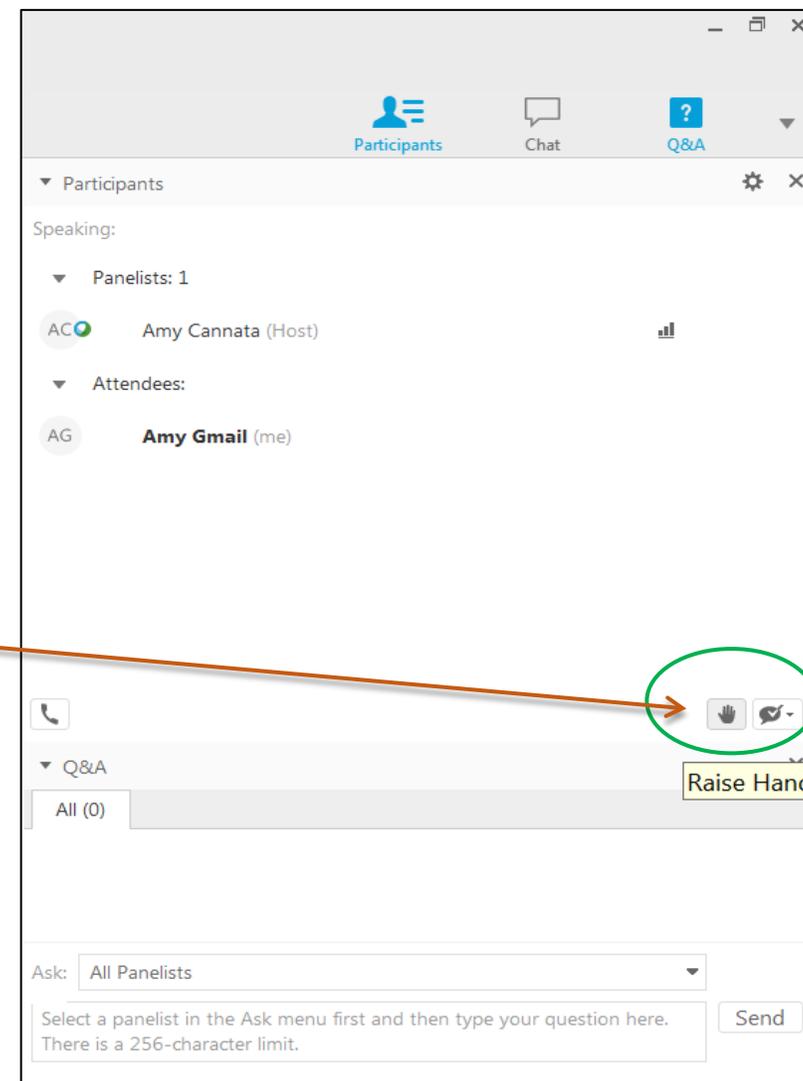
By the end of the webinar, you will be able to:

- Define mental health and the prevalence of mental illness in the U.S.
- Identify symptoms and patterns that might signal a need for increased supervisory support.
- Utilize Positive Inquiry to identify each VISTA's unique needs, strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Recognize the steps needed to pro-actively build relationships that support positive mental health for VISTAs.
- Identify steps to be taken when supervisor support is not enough.

# Raise your hand if...

You know someone who has been effected by a mental health disorder.

*Click this button to raise your hand.*



# What Is Mental Health?

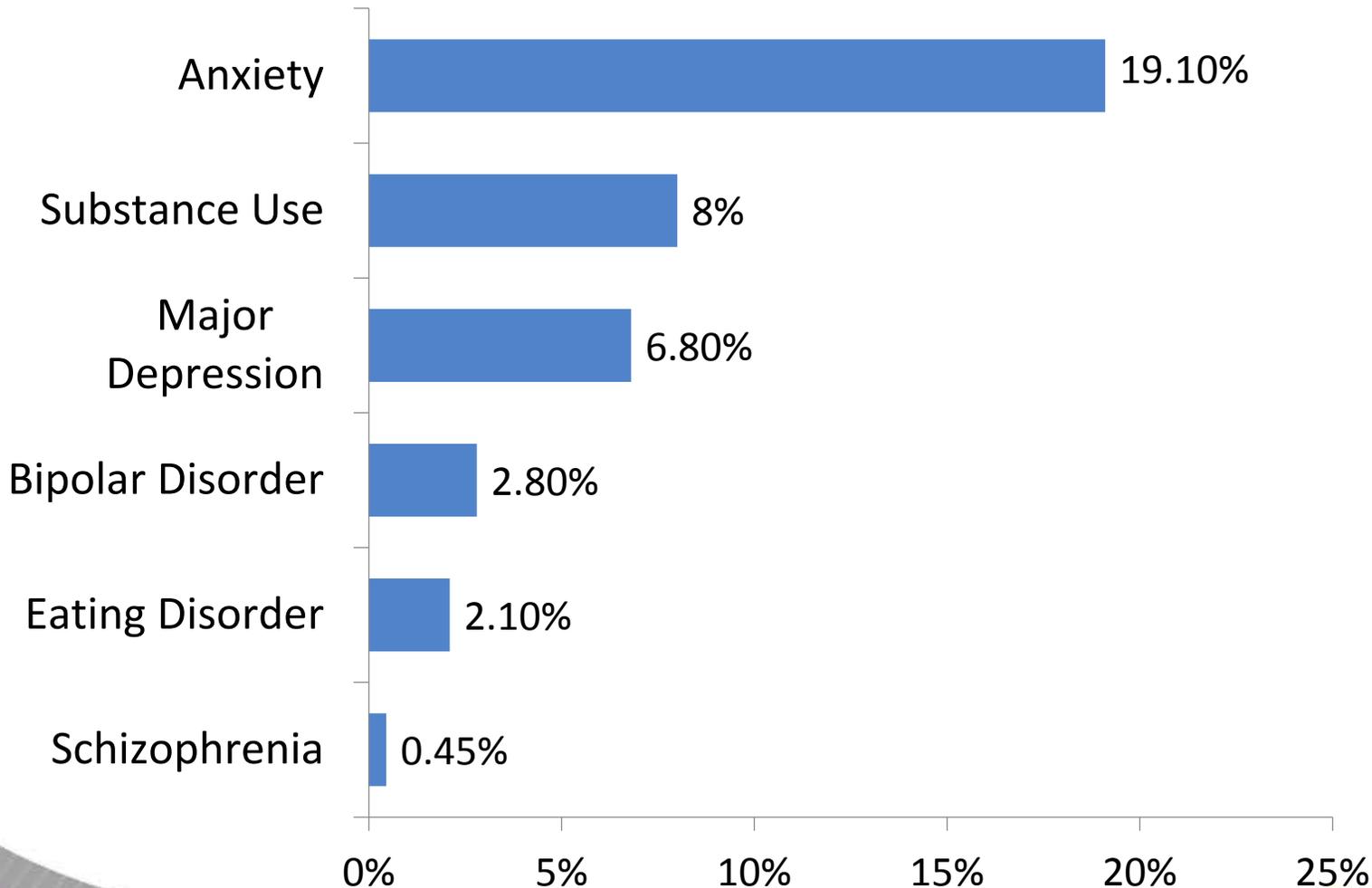
- Includes emotional, social and psychological well-being
- Affects our thoughts, feelings and actions
- Determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices

## Contributing Factors:

- Biological (genetic and brain chemistry)
- Life experiences
- Family history of mental health problems

Adapted from: Ohio State University Extension,  
<https://learn.extension.org/events/2679>

# Mental Health Disorders in the U.S.

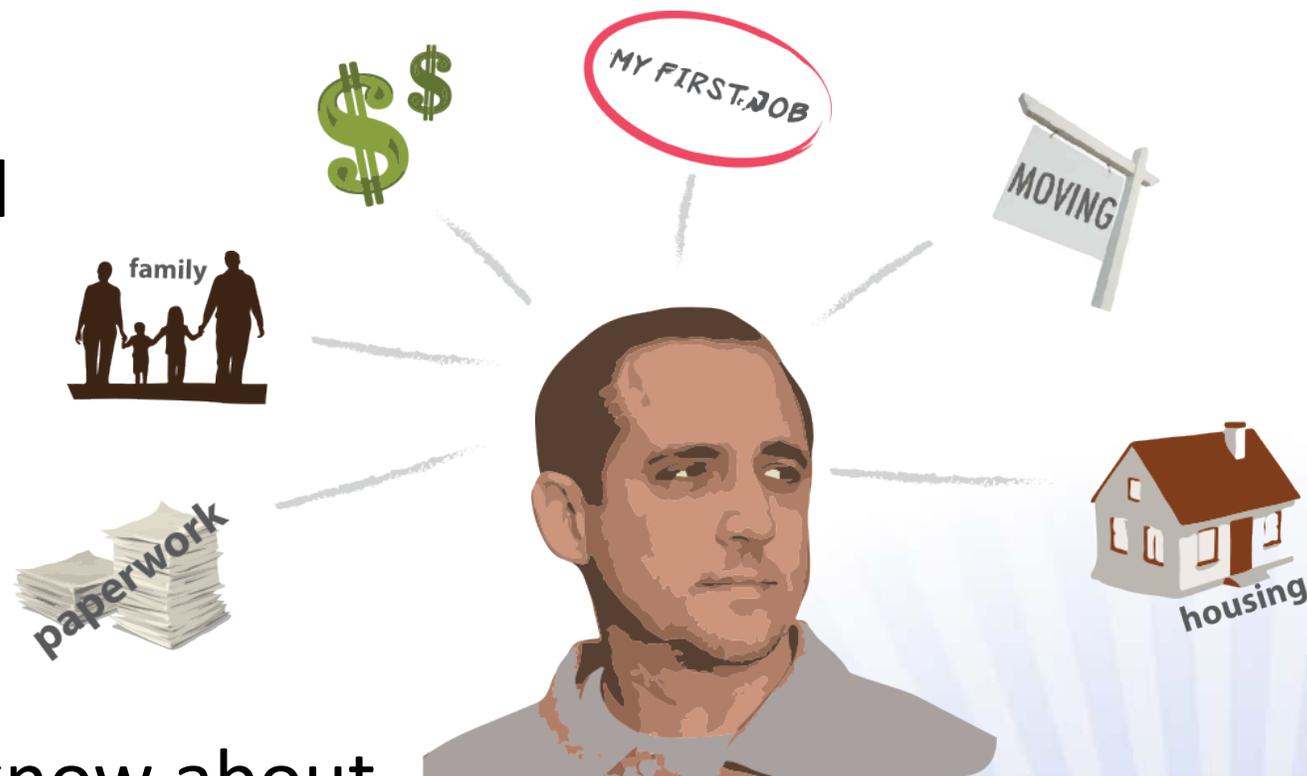


- 1 in 5 American adults experience a mental health disorder each year.
- Half of all mental disorders begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24.

Adapted from: Ohio State University Extension,  
<https://learn.extension.org/events/2679>

# Starting VISTA can be life changing

- Paperwork
- Poverty level living stipend
- Moving to serve
- First job
- Family
- Housing search
- Other things we may not know about



# Most VISTAs Adapt & Thrive

VISTAs thrive when there is:

- Detailed VAD
- Strong On-Site Orientation Training (OSOT)
- Thoughtful introduction to the community and staff
- Clear expectations
- Obvious path for support



# Some VISTAs May Struggle to Adapt



VISTAs with less coping abilities may require:

- Quick assessment of their vulnerability
- Increased support and understanding
- Sensitive communication
- Clear boundaries and expectations
- Longer or enhanced OSOT

# New Beginnings Create Discomfort

## Typical Coping Symptoms and Patterns

- Anxiety and self-doubt
- Temporarily nervous about the unknown
- Relationship-building stressors
- Recognition of the need for good communication
- Temporarily feels losses, lonely, isolated

## Prolonged Symptoms and Patterns

- Anxiety and doubt continues to grow ... obsessions /fear/procrastination
- Edgy, irritable, distracted, confused, inability to focus, etc.
- Relationship barriers persist
- Conflict-prone, blaming/judging messages, anger, poor listening skills
- Pattern of feeling isolated and depressed easily triggered / continues

# Stress Signs and Symptoms

Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Memory problems</li><li>• Inability to concentrate</li><li>• Poor judgment</li><li>• Seeing only the negative</li><li>• Anxious or racing thoughts</li><li>• Constant worrying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moodiness</li><li>• Irritability or short temper</li><li>• Agitation, inability to relax</li><li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li><li>• Sense of loneliness and isolation</li><li>• Depression or general unhappiness</li></ul>
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aches and pains</li><li>• Diarrhea or constipation</li><li>• Nausea, dizziness</li><li>• Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</li><li>• Loss of sex drive</li><li>• Frequent colds</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eating more or less</li><li>• Sleeping too much or too little</li><li>• Isolating yourself from others</li><li>• Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li><li>• Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax</li><li>• Nervous habits (e.g., nail biting, pacing)</li></ul>

# Key Ingredients for Continuing Success



*Build strong foundations  
between you and your VISTA  
from the start!*

*Here are some tips...*

# Knowing Communication Styles



- *At PSO, you also talked about communication styles, let's share our styles with each other.*
- *Are they complementary or different?*
- *If different, what accommodation(s) do we need to make to ensure clear communication and consistent feedback with each other?*

# Connecting Support Needs to the Individual Development Plan

- *Let's talk about what you need personally and professionally to succeed this year.*
- *At PSO, you worked on an IDP, **Individual Development Plan**. Let's look at your goals and plans together and see how we can ensure you achieve both personal and professional goals during the next 12 months.*
- *Let's look at the resources available to support you in achieving your IDP goals?*

# Continual Inquiry

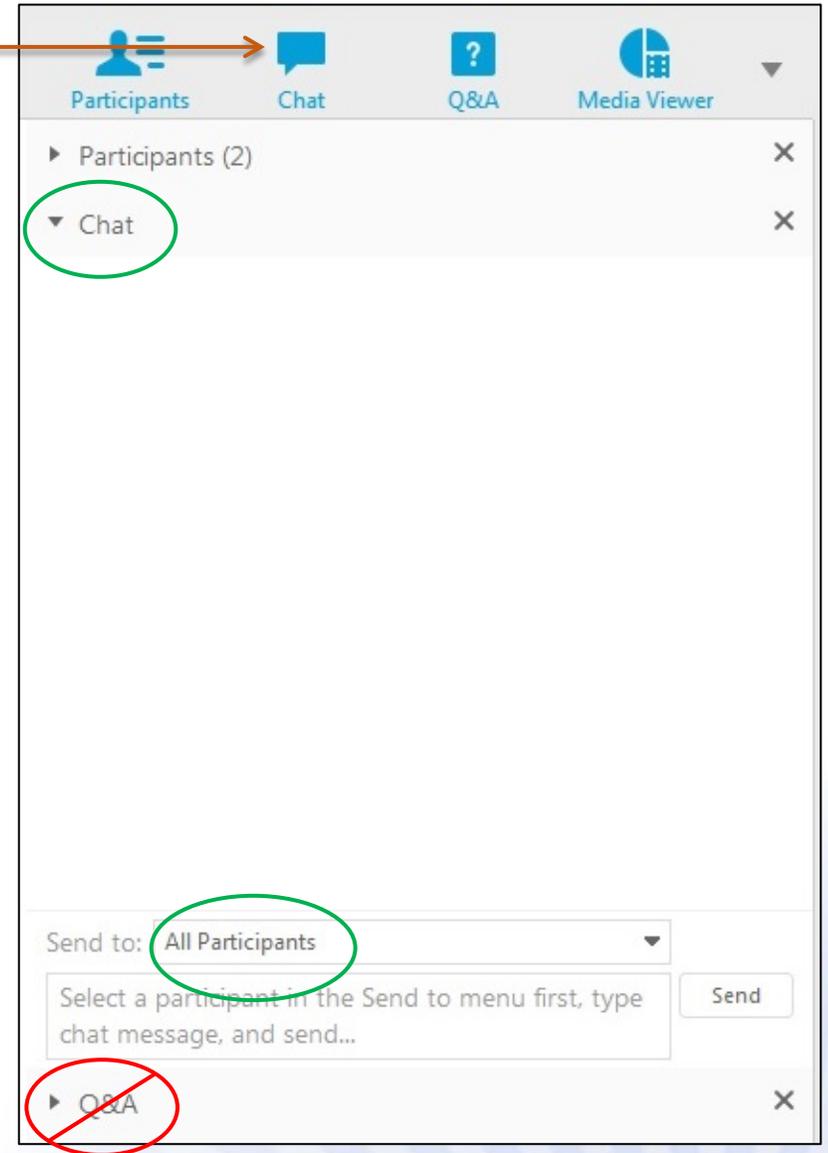


- *Do I have all the information I need to consider and meet this VISTAs unique needs to ensure their success?*
- *Am I asking and reflecting on this question frequently?*
- *What resources do I / will I need?*

# Chat Question

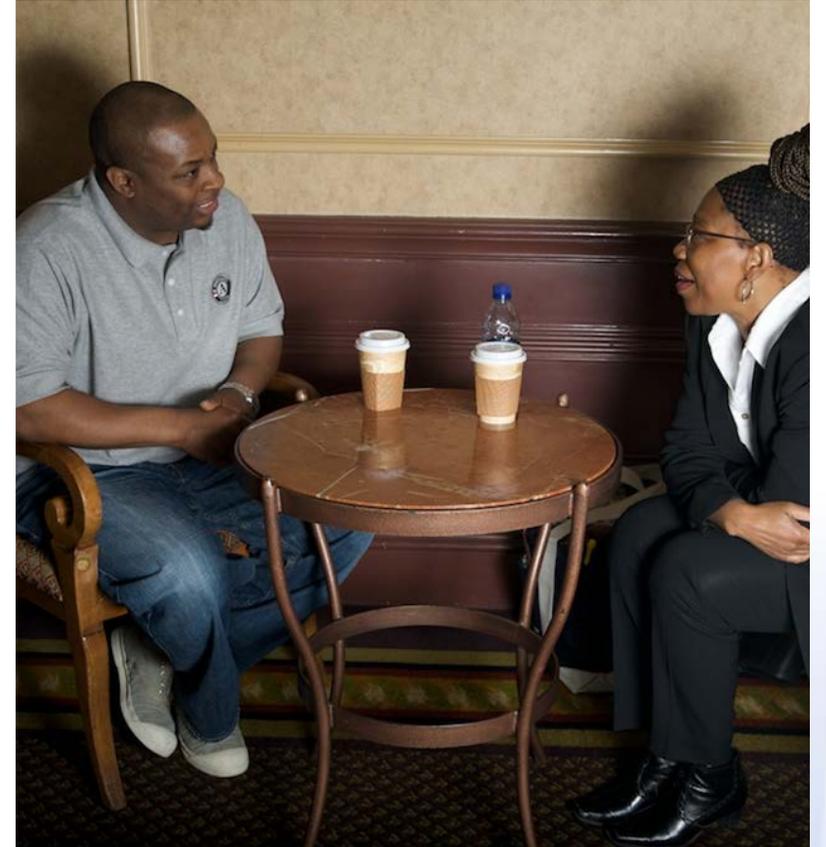
- What other key ingredients help build a strong foundation with VISTA members?

Click this button if you don't see the chat panel.



# What is Positive Inquiry?

- Addresses the person's strengths and positive potential
- Deliberately seeks to discover the VISTA's unique gifts, traits, and qualities
- Focuses on mutual and clear expectations and boundaries
- Focuses on empathy & *building relationships*



# Core Components of Positive Inquiry

A deep desire and ability to:

1. Listen, understand, exclude judgment or assumptions
2. Ask open-ended questions, dialogue, consistently clarify
3. Ensure confidentiality
4. Create a safe environment to support openness
5. Recognize and respect unique communication styles

# Positive Inquiry in Practice



# Positive Inquiry Language: *Open Ended Questions and Statements*

- *Help me understand .....*
- *What natural strengths and talents are you bringing with you to your VISTA experience?*
- *Describe what strengths you have that will help you cope with the unknown and unpredictable as you begin your VISTA year.*
- *Tell me what you need from me....*
- *Let's talk about our expectations of each other.*

# Positive Inquiry Language: *Focusing on Strengths*

- *Have you had previous situations where you had to deal with a new beginning and the lack of predictability that comes with that?*
- *Tell me how you managed those situations?*
- *What especially worked for you?*



## Focusing on Strengths *continued....*

- *What are your natural talents and strengths? How can we utilize them in your VISTA role?*
- *What could you use from your past coping strategies to help you adapt to your VISTA role and responsibilities?*
- *Describe what would help you feel confident as you begin your VISTA year.*

# Proactive Responses for Managing Psycho-Emotional Challenges



# Seek to Understand

1. Offer non-judgmental feedback about what you are observing as soon as you detect a pattern of struggle.
2. Inquire if this is a new or old pattern of responding to stress?

**New pattern**, what do they believe might help them cope better with their stressors?

**Old pattern**, what have they done in the past that has helped them manage their stressors?

# Listen Carefully

1. Listen for what they self-identify as needing right now.
2. Listen for information about whether they have been or are in counseling.

- Employ active listening
- Inquire what do they believe would help them manage their stress better right now?
- Inquire if there is someone they know who they could talk to about their stress level?
  - If yes, support that.
  - If no, would they be willing to talk to someone?

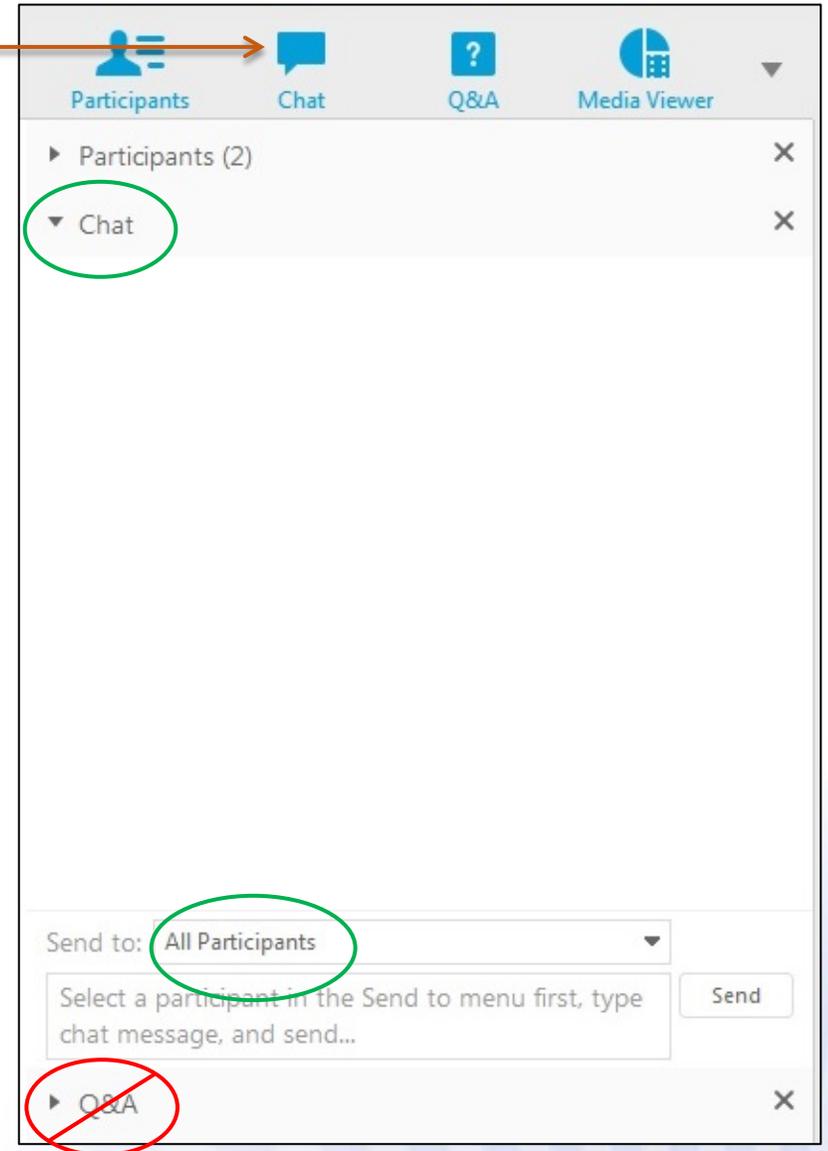
# A Case Example: Applying Proactive Responses During a Crisis Conversation

1. Find a quiet, private space to calm agitated state
2. Communicate a desire to understand
3. Inquire about past coping strategies
4. Offer options and include VISTA in the problem-solving
5. If need arises to inquire about medications, do so only as related to current VISTA stressor(s)
6. Obtain additional information from sponsor/state office as needed

# Chat Question

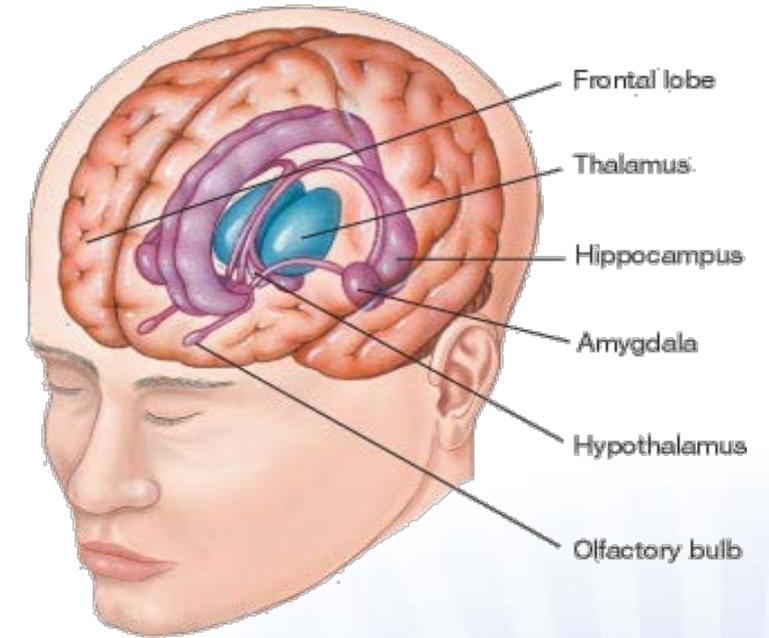
- If you have managed a crisis situation with a VISTA, what strategies worked well for you?

Click this button if you don't see the chat panel.



# Proactive Responses: Creating a Safe Space

- Do they have a history of Trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?
- Do they have a network of positive social support; or are they isolated and alone?
  - If yes, are they being triggered somehow?
  - If no, inquire if this is a new or recent pattern?



# Supervisor Reflections, Self-Awareness, & Tools



# Reflection and Self-Awareness

1. Your comfort with stress
2. Your boundaries
3. Your communication style
4. Your feedback style, consistency, predictability and structure
5. How comfortable are you working with someone who might have mental health issues?

# When Supervisor Support Is Not Enough

- Disclosure of suicidal thoughts, history of abuse, clinical depression, personality disorder, PTSD and associated stressors, likely indicates a need to make a referral.
- Referring to a mental health professional
- Utilizing community resources to access needed support
- Talk to your supervisor, human resources person, or VISTA State Office

# Mental Health Referral Sites

- <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- 1-800-273-TALK
- <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- 1-877-VET2VET

# Mental Health Education & Training

- [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov)
- [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)
- Community Assessment and Education to Promote Behavioral Health (CAPE) Toolkit <http://www.healthbench.info/>
- Avoiding Burnout During Service (on-demand webinar for members) <https://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/avoiding-burnout-during-service>
- “Life as a VISTA” webinar series <https://www.vistacampus.gov/vista-webinars>

# Confronting the Stigma

- ✓ Educate yourself and others
- ✓ Be aware of language
- ✓ See the person not the illness

Adapted from: National Alliance on Mental Health (Nami) website, [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

# Role Modeling

1. Welcoming, trusting and safe environment
2. Self-care
3. Openness and active listening skills
4. Consistency in providing feedback
5. Positive Inquiry

“Taking good care of YOU, means the people in your life will receive the best of you, rather than what’s left of you.”

-Carl Bryan, tennis coach

# Next Steps

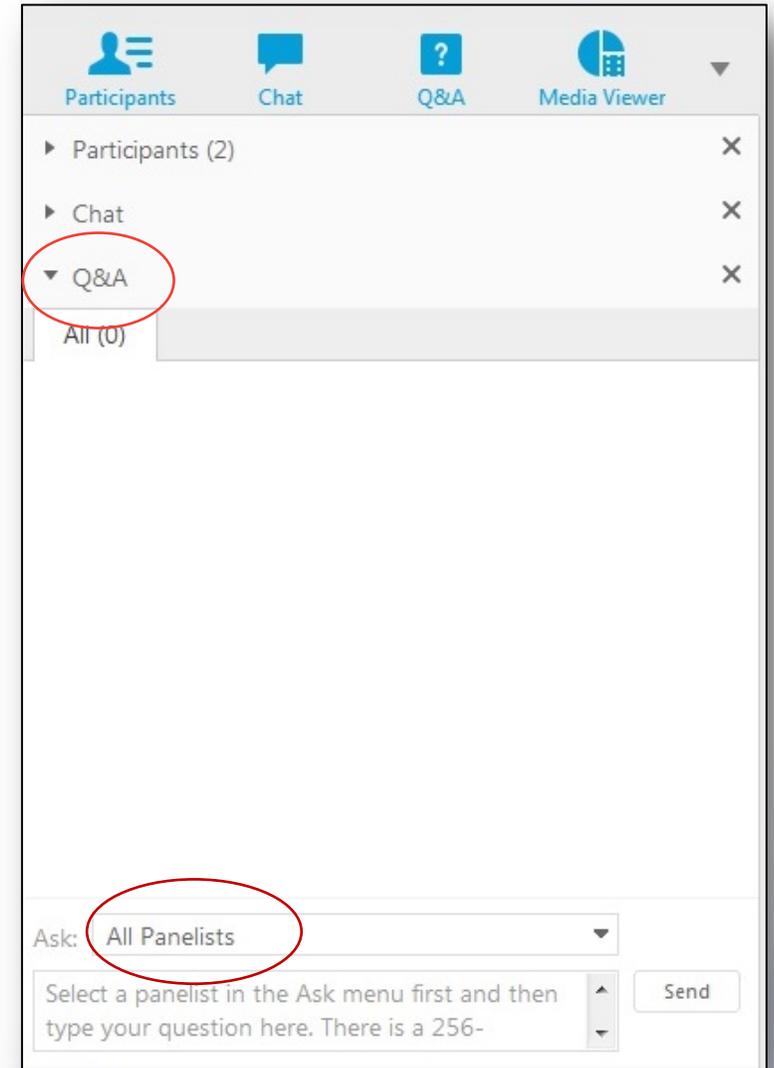
1. Develop a strong On Site Orientation Training (OSOT) for your VISTA
2. Identify what you need to learn and where to go to grow your skills
3. Identify both organizational and community resources you can call on
4. Create a culture of welcoming, trust, and safety and your organization
5. Be an advocate and challenge the stigma

# Evaluation

- Please take a few moments to share your feedback through the quick poll on the right side of the screen.
- How can we improve these sessions? What topics should we include in future webinars?
- Thank you very much for your time and participation!

# Questions ?

- To ask a question verbally, call in using the number on this slide and press \*1
- To ask a question electronically, use the Q&A feature located in the bottom right corner of the screen. Please ask “All Panelists”



# Thank You for Your Participation!

If you have further questions or for more information, contact us:  
[VISTAwebinars@cns.gov](mailto:VISTAwebinars@cns.gov)

Next supervisor webinar:  
**VISTA Member Retention**  
October 18th  
2:00pm Eastern

Upcoming VISTA member webinar:  
**Writing Winning Proposals**  
October 26th  
2:00pm Eastern

*Visit the Webinars page on the VISTA Campus  
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