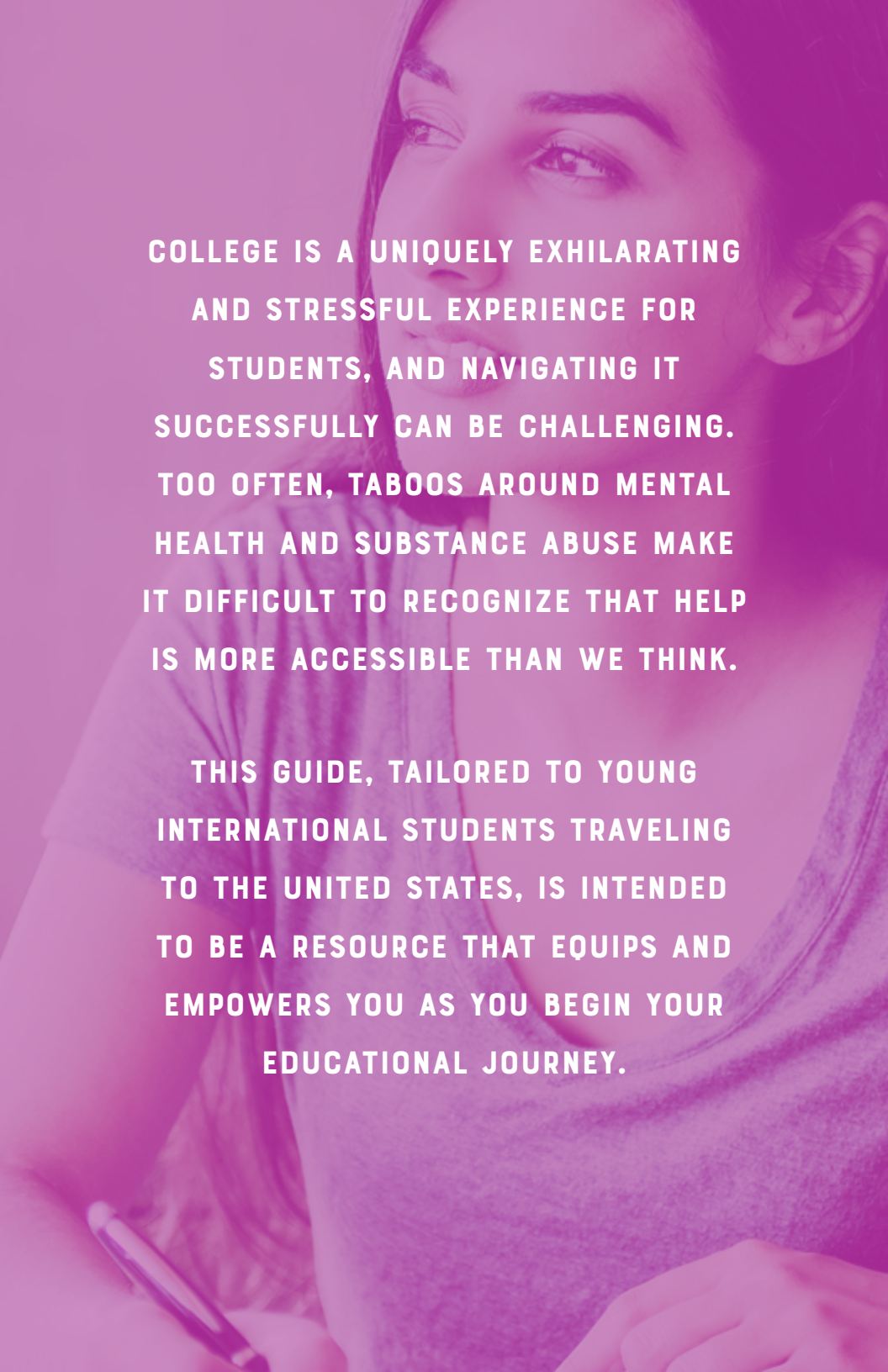


HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

HINDUAMERICAN.ORG



**COLLEGE IS A UNIQUELY EXHILARATING
AND STRESSFUL EXPERIENCE FOR
STUDENTS, AND NAVIGATING IT
SUCCESSFULLY CAN BE CHALLENGING.
TOO OFTEN, TABOOS AROUND MENTAL
HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE MAKE
IT DIFFICULT TO RECOGNIZE THAT HELP
IS MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN WE THINK.**

**THIS GUIDE, TAILORED TO YOUNG
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TRAVELING
TO THE UNITED STATES, IS INTENDED
TO BE A RESOURCE THAT EQUIPS AND
EMPOWERS YOU AS YOU BEGIN YOUR
EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY.**

TRANSITIONING TO GROWING AUTONOMY

Whether it's taking our first steps as a toddler or doing our first load of laundry in a college dorm, our growing autonomy can be



a source of both joy and fear. With the independence college brings, we are held accountable for our choices and actions in new ways that have ramifications for ourselves and our bodies! The pressure to be perfect in an instagrammed world, to live up to the expectations of elders who have made sacrifices to give us opportunities or to tie our self-worth to our academic achievements can be a very heavy load in a vacuum, much less in a brand new academic and social setting.

Dharmic values of self and community well-being, non-harm, discernment, moderation, developing equanimity, balance, etc., can help us find ways to give ourselves the space to make the

mistakes we need to make in order to grow, as well as the self-care that allows us to protect ourselves. Remember that the mark of adulthood

is not just independence, but also knowing when to ask for help.

MANAGING FINANCES

An important aspect of this autonomy is managing finances. While the opportunity to control this aspect of our lives can be empowering—like finding and obtaining sources of financial support through scholarships and jobs—it can also create stress. It's been well established that financial stress impacts our physical well-being. College is a time when we may feel this acutely. The balance between meeting our own needs while upholding the needs of the family and community that may be supporting us financially, or balancing our short-term and



long-term well-being can be a challenge. Our collectivist cultures which can promote family above all else in empowering ways, can also create guilt around finances in particular. Being assertive in navigating financial opportunities, seeking support from the university and the greater Hindu American community, as well as mindfully applying the dharmic values mentioned above are all essential to intentionally creating space that is fair to ourselves as well as fair to everyone we may feel dependent on.

ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN AMERICA AND DEALING WITH HOMESICKNESS

There are many facets to life in America that are incredible and exciting, AND they can also mark huge shifts from what you're used

to. Many students find adjusting to these changes very difficult. You're not the only one! Remember that this is expected, and doesn't negate that you belong here. Finding a balance between maintaining connections with our friends and family at home, while also forging new connections in the States is the key to navigating this adjustment.

You may experience cultural shock. You may struggle to adjust to the food in the dining hall. You may face prejudice. There may be subtle experiences of discrimination, and there may be gross incidences of racism, xenophobia, and hate based on one's faith, ethnicity, national origin, and other identity markers. You may be going from a place where you didn't think often about your identity because you felt

surrounded by others who looked like you, sounded like you, and behaved like you, to a place where you are a micro-minority across so many dimensions of your identity.

Holding the ability to discern between what is intellectual and cultural curiosity versus what is problematic can be challenging, and it can be tempting to avoid conflict in the name of assimilating and feeling a sense of belonging. Finding spaces to process what you are experiencing and understanding how you can advocate for yourself is key. Support is accessible, whether it is through your university itself or through connections to other international students. Remember that most universities have some

form of a cultural office that can be a great resource, in navigating all of the aspects of adjustment. The Hindu American Foundation is also here for you to help you understand your rights and responsibilities and equip you with tools to advocate for yourself.

THE LONELIEST GENERATION

Many have written about the [unique crisis younger generations face](#) in navigating the juxtaposition of being the most connected and simultaneously the loneliest generation yet. College is a wonderful time, where it's easier than ever to connect to people who are different from you in every dimension or similar to you in ways



you've never imagined! Know that it can take work to connect and rise above some of the damaging impacts of social media. You are empowered to be more than a statistic. Consider exploring

clubs that are focused on things you're interested in, joining an intramural sports team, or striking up conversations with dorm-mates and classmates.

KNOW WHEN YOU NEED HELP AND WHERE TO GO

Every human experiences sadness or stress at some point. These emotions have evolved with us because they have utility - they can help us see that we desire connection, and they can help us stay sharp in the face of challenges. For many of us, however, the transition to college can lead us from our functioning levels of sadness or stress, to feeling them at a level at which we are no longer able to meet our goals. Pay attention to this, and know that the greatest mark of strength can be recognizing when we could use some support.

If you're experiencing thoughts of death, know that you can [call or text 988 for immediate support](#) from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Contacting the 988 hotline is free, confidential, and has no impact on your immigration status.

Every university has a counseling

center that is available to all of its students, and these are great spaces to engage. Often, you may find that it's difficult to articulate the experience you're having, in particular as an international student. You can ask your college counseling center to connect you with referrals if they're unable to meet your needs themselves.

TYPES OF PROVIDERS

When navigating the mental health ecosystem in the United States, it's helpful to know some of the distinctions between potential providers.

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCP)

PCPs are medical professionals—including doctors, nurses, and physicians assistants—that are generally

the first entry point into navigating the health system and should be able to help you understand what is a physical health issue versus a mental health issue, in helping you start navigating accessing care. Your student health center should be staffed with PCPs who can help you navigate the rest of the system. PCPs are also licensed to prescribe medication for depression, anxiety, and other mental health struggles.

PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist is a doctor who has completed medical training, and is further equipped to provide you medication for your mental health needs and may be able to provide therapy as well.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Psychologists have earned their doctorates (PhD or PsyD) in psychology, and are equipped to both assess and treat your mental health needs in a comprehensive and long-term fashion.

SOCIAL WORKER

Social workers can have a clinical license (LCSW) that enables them to take a systemic view of understanding the

challenges you are facing and connecting you with resources to help you find change.

COUNSELORS/THERAPIST

Counselors/therapists such as a licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC) and licensed marital and family therapist (LMFT) are masters-level clinicians who are able to help you work through the issues that are immediately plaguing you.

QUALIFIED SPIRITUAL CARE PROVIDERS

Qualified spiritual care providers are chaplains that can be a useful resource to navigate complex campus culture, interpersonal challenges, and academic and administrative issues. Qualified Spiritual Care Providers are uniquely able to hold a compassionate space to explore issues you are facing and perhaps chart a way forward. In the Dharmas, “Spiritual” refers to the physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual facets of the human being, and so Spiritual Care Providers are expected to work in collaboration with other experts in these areas to ensure you have all the resources you need to thrive.

While some campuses have a Hindu chaplain, many do not; if this path appeals to you, inquire with the Dean about qualified spiritual care providers who have experience and training with interfaith chaplaincy.

These are all confidential resources.

There is overlap in what all of these providers can offer, and it can be challenging to know which provider will be the best fit for us and our unique concerns. However, all of these providers should know the bounds of their work and be able to guide you towards additional resources as needed.

There are many community resources available to help you access support in processing your thoughts and emotions and working towards meeting your well-being and goals. In particular, [remember that 988 is a free, confidential hotline](#) if you're

experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicide. All of these resources are confidential, and will NOT impact immigration status.

OVERVIEW OF AVAILABLE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES


- › 988 Suicide Hotline
- › College Counseling Center
- › Primary Care Physician (PCP)
- › Psychiatrist
- › Psychologist
- › Social Worker
- › Counselor/Therapist
- › Campus Chaplain

Listen to Hindu Leaders discuss the importance of mental health and contacting the 988 lifeline: [988 – National Suicide Prevention Lifeline PSA from Hindu Leaders](#)

SUBSTANCE USE & ABUSE

Adjusting to college life in the U.S., managing physical and mental health, and navigating substance use are all challenging on their own, but tackling multiple at once

can be overwhelming. Stories of students sustaining injuries, some fatal, or dying by suicide are tragic, especially as it can often feel like they could have been prevented



**THE TOXIC IMPACT
OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE
CULTURE, LIKE BINGE-
DRINKING ON COLLEGE
CAMPUSES, IS WELL
KNOWN. WHILE COLLEGE
CAN BE AN EXCITING
TIME TO EXPLORE NEW
EXPERIENCES, PRACTICING
BALANCE, MODERATION,
AND DISCERNMENT CAN
ALLOW YOU TO INDULGE
APPROPRIATELY WITHOUT
SACRIFICING YOUR SAFETY
AND WELL-BEING.**

with early intervention.

Thankfully, there are many resources available to students, and awareness of them can be an incredible safeguard.

The toxic impact of substance abuse culture, [like binge-drinking on college campuses](#), is well known. While college can be an exciting time to explore new experiences, practicing balance, moderation, and discernment can allow you to indulge appropriately without sacrificing your safety and well-being.

Use of substances, including prescription medications, illicit drugs, and alcohol, can occur for a variety of reasons, including to relieve pain, cope with stress, improve focus, or have fun.

[Substance use can impact your physical and mental health in several ways](#), such as increasing the risk of changes in blood pressure, heart rate, and coordination; feelings of being more awake or sleepy; decreased social inhibitions; pain relief; dependency; or changes in the appearance of your body. While these effects can feel positive, substance use can also lead to serious health consequences, including overdose and death. Being discerning about the impact

substances may be having on you is key to supporting your long and short term well-being and safety. Healthy and moderate use for some can morph into dependence, abuse, or addiction, and mindful discernment of the impact of substance use is important.

SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE USE, ABUSE, OR DEPENDENCE

If you notice...

- a growing tolerance for a substance and/or growing symptoms of withdrawal post use
- an impact on your social functioning or as a student or employee
- an increasing amount of time spent using or obtaining resources for a substance,
- or challenges to cutting back in spite of a desire to

...consider seeking support to manage potential underlying conflict and triggers to treat what could become a substance use disorder.

There are many resources on your campus and nationally to help you navigate your relationships with prescription medications, illicit drugs, or alcohol, whether they're moderation-based or abstinence-

based. This is just a small sample of resources available nationally.

RESOURCES IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MISUSE, OR DEPENDENCE

FINDTREATMENT.GOV

[FindTreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov) is a free and confidential hotline for those struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse. The Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration's portal helps connect to treatment for mental health or substance use disorders. You can also call 1-800-662-HELP, or text your zip code to HELP4U to connect to resources.

SMART RECOVERY

[SMART Recovery](https://www.smartrecovery.org) is a free, national, secular program that stands for "Self-Management and Recovery Training." SMART Recovery is grounded in Behavioral Therapy to help develop self-reliance and stop using alcohol.

MODERATION MANAGEMENT

[Moderation Management](https://www.moderationmanagement.org) is a free behavioral change

program and national support group network for people who are concerned about their drinking and desire to make positive lifestyle changes. Their goal is to empower people to accept personal responsibility for choosing and maintaining their own path, whether that is moderation or abstinence.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

[Alcoholics Anonymous](https://www.alcoholicsanonymous.org) is one of the more well-known programs in the US that offers a Christianity-based, twelve-step program for free to help those struggling with alcohol addiction, abstain. Narcotics Anonymous is related, and focuses on helping those who want to abstain from using all substances entirely.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE WHO MIGHT BE STRUGGLING

If you notice a family member, cherished friend, or classmate exhibiting signs of mental health or substance use struggles, you may wonder how you can be supportive. Below are three steps you can take if you are concerned about someone else:



**WE CAN FIGHT THE
STIGMA OF THESE
TOPICS BY BEING BRAVE
AND KIND IN ACTS AS
SIMPLE AS STARTING
CONVERSATIONS WITH
OUR FRIENDS ABOUT
HOW WE'RE DOING.**

When offering your support, communicate using objective, nonjudgmental language. Judgmental language is not helpful and can further harm your relationship with them or their mental health. Below is an example of how to and how not to communicate if you notice something is amiss with a friend.

DO SAY (NONJUDGMENTAL)

“Hey, I haven’t seen you in class in awhile, I wanted to check-in and see how are you doing?”

DON'T SAY (JUDGMENTAL)

“Hey you’ve been acting really weird and lazy lately, what’s wrong with you?”

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR NONJUDGMENTAL LISTENING

- Avoid giving advice. Focus on simply listening. While it is tempting to offer our experience and insight, unsolicited advice can create defensiveness and a sense of feeling misunderstood. Once they feel seen and heard, they will likely be more open to seeking support.
- Once they are ready to ask for and accept your help, connect them with resources, which are outlined in this guide. Without

judgment, directly ask them “Have you considered talking to a professional?” and follow up if they show openness. **Do not be insistent, pressure them, or lecture them on what you think will be most helpful.** Instead, you can offer to make phone calls yourself, accompany them to appointments, or simply continue to check in on them. How support looks can vary drastically based on what the person you are helping is looking for and asking for.

If your loved one is in immediate distress, please feel comfortable and confident in calling 911 for emergency services. **Nothing is more important than immediate physical safety in these moments.** 911 is equipped to support and connect with both life saving and long term resources geared at securing emotional and psychological safety in addition to physical safety.

Remember, we can fight the stigma of these topics by being brave and kind in acts as simple as starting conversations with our friends about how we’re doing. Connecting with loved ones can be an important part of self care, but supporting a loved one can also be very taxing, so be mindful of your own mental health as

you help a loved one through this difficult process.

You are resilient and built to make the most of this wonderful phase of

life. Strive to be intentional about understanding your needs and taking steps to meet them.

DHARMIC RESOURCES

As a diverse body of philosophical frameworks, Hindu Dharma traditions, practices, and knowledge sources concerned with seeking Truth for the sole aim of managing or freeing oneself from the repetitive ups and downs of life (moksha), has inspired countless resources that can provide perspective and practices to both understand some of the causes of stress and anxiety and manage their effects. Consider seeking out Hindu student clubs or groups on campus where peers may be engaged in spiritual discussions or other practices. A number of sampradayas such as BAPS Swaminarayan, Chinmaya Mission, ISKCON and Swadhyaya have their own student groups on campuses. There may also be yoga or meditation offered on or near your campus.

Here are a few to get you started:

- › [Insight Timer](#): a free app with hundreds of guided meditations and talks for sleep, anxiety and stress
- › [Talks by Swami Sarvapriyananda](#) of the Vedanta Society of New York
 - [Managing Suffering: The Vedantic View](#)
 - [Fighting Anxiety and Depression: Four Great Practices](#)
 - [Navigating Uncertainty](#)
 - [Increase Mental Strength](#)
- › [Inner Engineering for Students](#)
- › [Art of Living's SKY Campus Happiness](#)
- › [The Power of Unwavering Focus: Dandapani](#)

SUMMARY OF CONFIDENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- › College cultural adjustment centers
- › Call/text 988 suicide hotline
- › College counseling center
- › Student Health Center
- › Chaplains/Religious or Spiritual Life Centers
- › Smart Recovery
- › Sewa International SELF

IF YOU FOUND THIS GUIDE HELPFUL, PLEASE SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE WHO YOU THINK MIGHT ALSO BENEFIT FROM MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT.

PRACTITIONER BIO



Dr. Kavita Pallod Sekhsaria is the founder of KPS Psychotherapy, a private practice focused on providing psychotherapeutic services to the South Asian community.

Dr. Sekhsaria's doctoral dissertation

["Hindu Indian American Conceptions of Mental Health"](#) is focused on unpacking

how understanding a Hindu worldview of mental health can enable greater access to mental healthcare by the underserved Hindu American population.

Dr. Sekhsaria is

particularly dedicated to destigmatizing spiritual means for coping in the therapeutic space. Dr. Sekhsaria also serves on HAF's Board of Directors supporting the foundation's education and advocacy mission.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is an educational and advocacy organization established in 2003. HAF advances the understanding of Hinduism to secure the rights and dignity of Hindu Americans now and for generations to come. We do this by providing:

- accurate and engaging educational resources about Hinduism and Hindu Americans
- impactful trainings, advocacy and services that protect and promote religious liberty, free expression, equality and justice
- critical and creative programs empowering Hindu Americans to sustain their culture and identity

HAF is a non-partisan, non-profit tax-exempt public charity pursuant to Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)3.

To learn more, please visit our website at hinduamerican.org and follow us on social media: @hinduamerican.



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