

A person in a dark coat is walking away from the camera down a long, dark hallway. The hallway is dimly lit, with light coming from the end of the corridor, creating a misty or foggy atmosphere. The walls and floor are dark, and the overall mood is somber and isolated.

# **The Loneliness Epidemic: Strategies to Support Student Mental Health**

# Welcome & Introductions



**Karry Kiste-Toner, Associate Dean  
of Retention MA, LPC**

**Melanie Dancer, Student Success  
Counselor, MA, LPC**

**Erica Robb, Student Success  
Counselor, Doctoral Candidate, LPC**



# Institutional Snapshot



## Annual Enrollment

**Credit-Seeking Students:** 9,360

*Delta is the 9th largest of Michigan's 28 community colleges in student headcount.*

## Student Characteristics (Fall 2022)

### Race

African-American: 9.2%

Asian: 1.1%

Caucasian: 74.2%

Hispanic: 8.2%

Multi-racial: 3.4%

Native American: 0.3%

Other: 3.6%

### Enrollment Status

Full-time: 29%

Part-time: 71%

Average Student Age: 25

Veterans Using G.I. Bill Benefits: 271

Dual Enrolled Students: 1,175

# Agenda

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Deep talk activity

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What is loneliness?

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Why is it critical to address on a college campus?

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How can I recognize a student in distress?

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How do I refer to mental health & wellness resources on my campus?

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Ideas to foster connection

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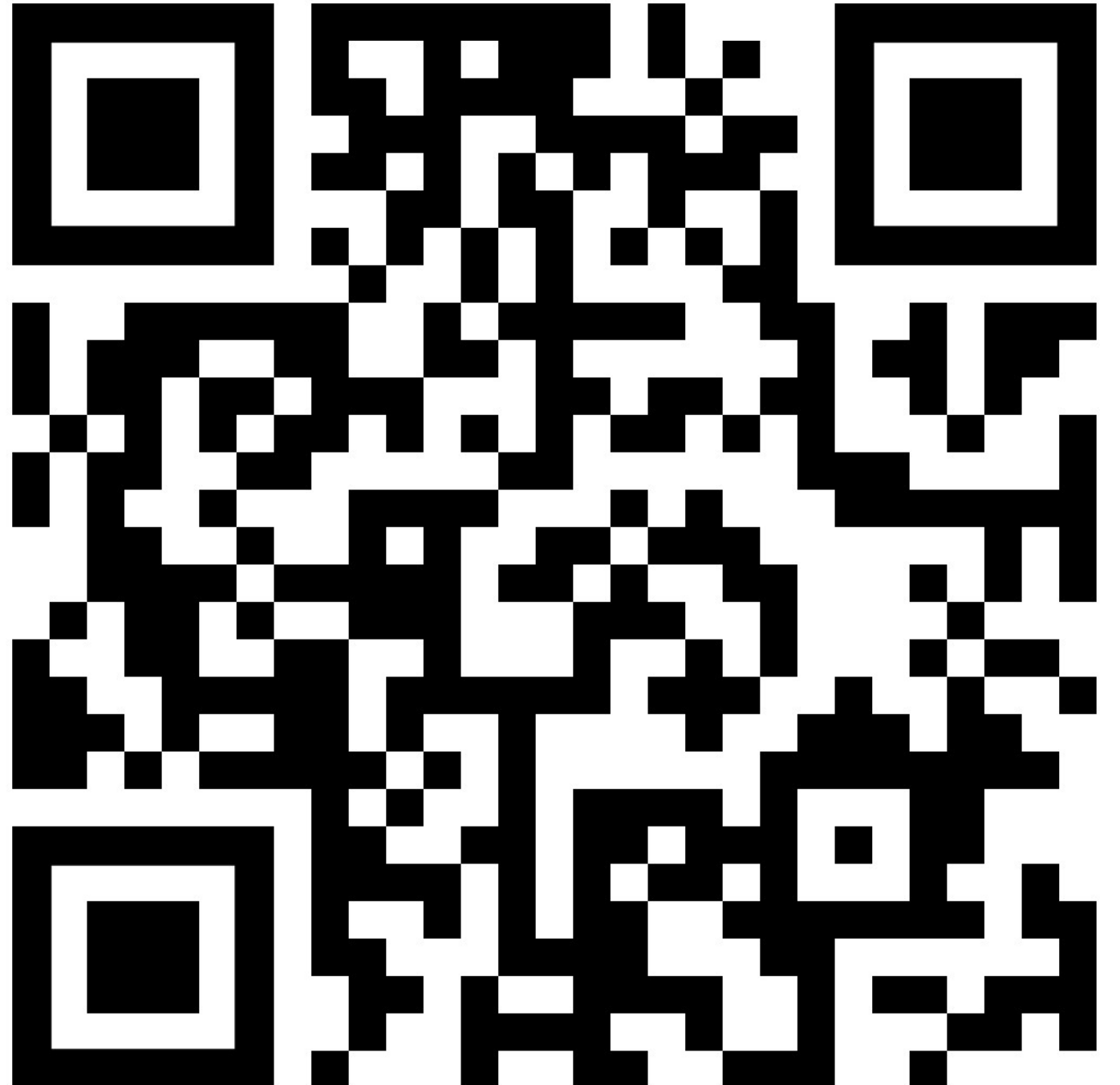
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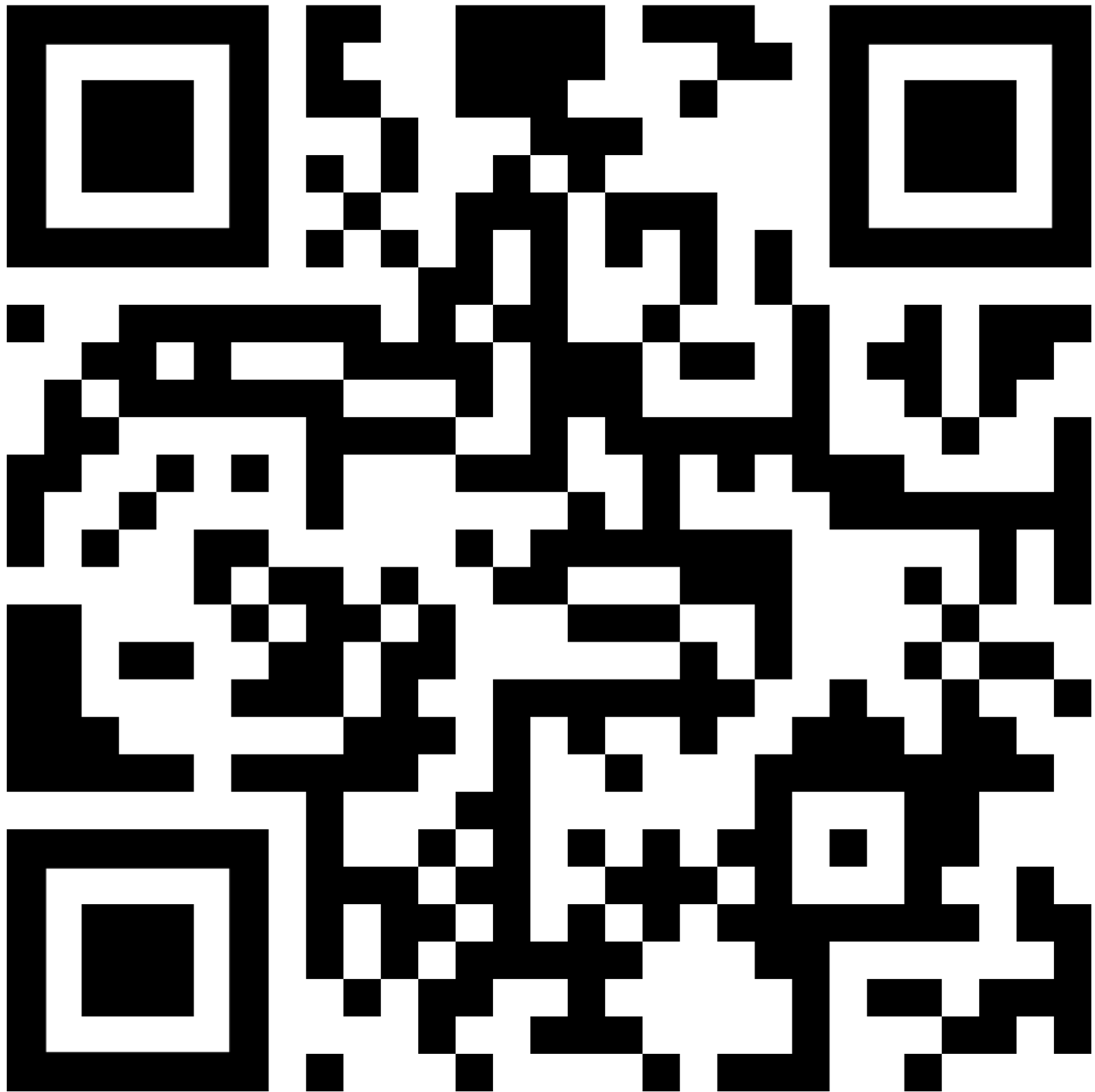




# Deep Talk Pre-Survey

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# Deep Talk Post-Survey

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(Kardas et al., 2022)



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# Loneliness

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*the distress or the discomfort that is experienced when there is a gap between one's desired social connection and their actual experience.*

# Why focus on loneliness?

Mental and physical health are interconnected. Social isolation's adverse health consequences range from sleeplessness to reduced immune function. Loneliness is associated with higher anxiety, depression, and suicide rates. Isolation and loneliness are also linked to poor cardiovascular health and cognitive function.



– Tulane University School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine.  
“Understanding the Effects of Social Isolation on Mental Health”

# Loneliness in the News

- “You can feel lonely even with a lot of people around you, because loneliness is about the quality of your connections.”

-Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy

November 08, 2023

## The New Plague on Campus: Loneliness

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy launched his “We Are Made to Connect” campus tour last month, highlighting the role colleges can play in curing the loneliness epidemic.

By [Johanna Alonso](#)

May 23, 2024

## Loneliness Associated With Mental Distress Among College Students

By [Johanna Alonso](#)

### U of M study says 1 in 5 kids has ‘few to no’ friends



HEALTH

### Report: Majority of College Students Feel Lonely, Many Face Psychological Distress

Arrman Kyaw  
May 22, 2024



[Who We Are](#) [Our Approach](#) [Our Work](#) [Project UnLonely](#) [Connect With Us](#)

INITIATIVES

### Campus UnLonely

For young adults, college can offer self-discovery, lifelong friendships, and a better understanding of the world. This time of transition may also bring enormous social and emotional pressures, both of which are heightened as the coronavirus pandemic disrupts and reduces peer interaction. Facing unprecedented levels of loneliness, students are struggling with their health and academic performance. However, institutions can help students navigate this formative period with the Campus UnLonely initiative's programs that inspire engagement and foster community.

PROGRAM

OUR PARTNERS





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# Deep Talk Results

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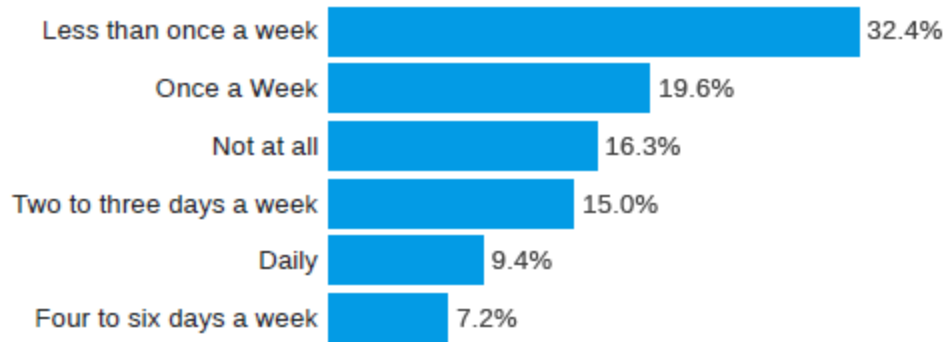
# Loneliness National Data



- **PREVALENCE AND PERVASIVENESS**
- Gen Z, or young people ages 18 to 22, are **significantly more likely to be lonely than any other generation** in the U.S. About 2 in 3 feel shy, feel like others don't understand them, and feel that people around them are absent ([Cigna](#)).

# Loneliness Delta College Data

Interaction with Peers



Field	Choice Count	
Not at all	16%	129
Less than once a week	32%	256
Once a Week	20%	155
Two to three days a week	15%	118
Four to six days a week	7%	57
Daily	9%	74
Total		789

Delta College, Fall 2022: Interpersonal Qualities (n = 1089)

**68.3% of respondents report having interactions with their peers once per week or less**

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# Loneliness & Mental Health Challenges

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- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance Misuse
- Trauma



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## Recognizing Signs of Distress

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- Stated need help (directly or indirectly).
- Infrequent attendance with minimal work turned in. Or....
- A sudden change in attendance.
- Repeated requests for deadline changes.
- Essays or creative projects with themes of loneliness, depression, suicidal ideation, or rage.
- Unexplained tearfulness.
- Increased dependance on you (Makes excessive appointments/hangs around after class or office hours).





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## Recognizing Signs of Distress

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- Traumatic significant life event.
  - Death of someone close, divorce, break-up with significant other, etc.
- Lack of energy/falling asleep.
- Change in personal hygiene/disheveled appearance.
- Smells of alcohol or other substances.
- Panic attacks.
- Social Isolation.
- Change in ability to focus/concentrate.

# What can you do to help?

- Understand available resources
- Encourage student-to-student connection in your classrooms



# Mental Health & Wellness Resources



- Know your resources
  - Identify community partnerships
  - Referral process
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# Best Practices

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- When possible, connect with the student first before referring to support services.
- Protect confidentiality as much as possible.
- Be mindful of mental health stigma.
- Promote student connection in the classroom.

# Promoting Student Connection On Campus

- Highlight campus engagement opportunities particularly in the first two weeks of classes. Consider giving extra credit for attending events, joining clubs, etc.
- Encourage students to find a class partner that they can share notes, study with, etc. and can hold them accountable for attending.
- Facilitate the establishment of standing study groups for your course.

# Ideas to promote student connection

## Join the 5 for 5 Connection Challenge!


Because we are made to connect

*Do you want to improve your mental & physical health? Deepen your friendships? Boost your immunity?*

### Join the Challenge

One of the important factors for a long-term happiness and health is our relationships. We're asking everyone to take **5 actions over 5 days** to express gratitude, offer support, or ask for help. How will you reach out & connect?

Visit [surgeongeneral.gov/challenge](https://surgeongeneral.gov/challenge) to learn more.




 Office of the  
U.S. Surgeon General



Use this space to reflect on your **5 for 5 Challenge** experience!

	How I connected today	How the connection made me feel
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		

Share your connection story! #MadeToConnect

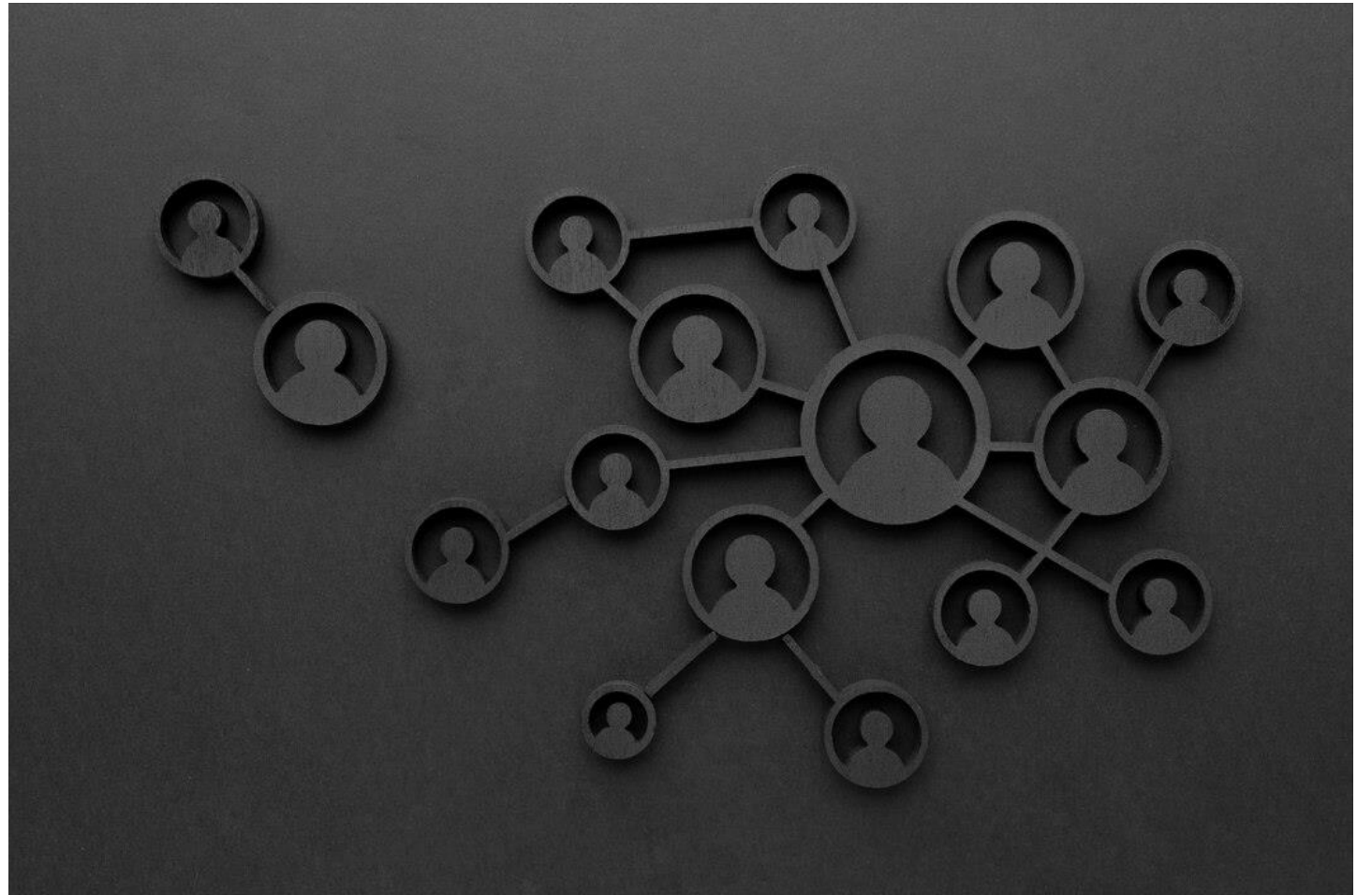
 @U.S.SurgeonGeneral  @Surgeon\_General  madetoconnect@hhs.gov



# Pair & Share

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How could you encourage student connection within the first two weeks of your class this semester?





# Questions

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## References

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