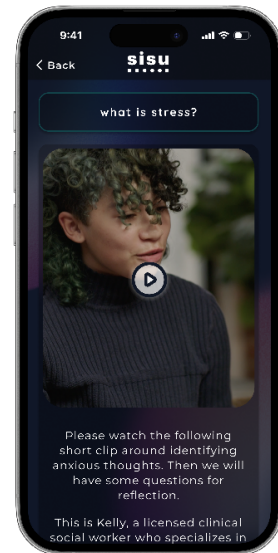


Delivering mental health support to teens and their families *before* a provider is available.

Created to address dangerously long wait times for therapeutic services, **sisu** is a new online platform that gives teens and their caregivers the tools and support to begin addressing mental health needs before a licensed provider is available.



A therapist-approved platform created for families across the U.S.

Sisu offers a unique ecosystem of care for teens and their families by combining mental health education, skill building, and personalized support. At a cost of just \$30 per week, sisu provides:

- **Near-peer mentoring for teens** provided by young adults with training to best support them and respond to potential crisis situations.
- **Therapist-approved curriculum** to build mental health skills, delivered in TikTok-style videos featuring real teens.
- **Family support sessions** led by licensed clinicians acting in a coaching capacity.
- **Unique ecosystem approach** empowering teens and caregivers to strengthen their relationships and build mental health skills together.

Packages now available for schools and organizations.

Sisu is ideal for schools looking for additional mental health support for students and families. Built on an intentionally low-tech platform, sisu can be accessed on a computer or cellphone, and is FERPA and COPPA compliant. Employers can also offer sisu as a mental healthcare benefit to employees. **Learn more at sisu-way.co.**

American teens are in crisis and facing dangerously long wait times for care.

American teens are in an unprecedented mental health crisis as they experience record rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Between 2001 and 2019, the suicide rate for young Americans ages 10 to 19 jumped by 40%, while emergency visits for self-harm rose by 88%. In 2021, almost 25 percent of teen girls said they had made a suicide plan; among LGBTQ teens, nearly 25% said they attempted suicide within the last year.

The majority of parents are worried about their teens' mental health, with more than 8 out of 10 parents reporting they're at least somewhat worried about depression, anxiety, alcohol, and drug use negatively affecting the life of US teens. Yet, only about 20% of children with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders receive care from a specialized mental health care provider.

According to the CDC, teens can't access mental healthcare for many reasons. The reasons include a lack of providers in their area, a prevalence of waitlists for clinical care, high costs, lack of insurance coverage, and difficulty for caregivers to get clinical care. Nationwide, there is a shortage of licensed mental health providers. By 2025, the US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that there will be a shortage of 10,000 mental health professionals.

To solve this problem, the CDC recommends improving school-based services and connecting youth/families to community-based sources of care. However, only 8% of American school districts meet the recommended ratio of school psychologists to students. More than 5.4 million public school students (12%) attend districts with no psychologists.

Teens, desperate for any kind of mental health support, are increasingly turning to TikTok — which can have dangerous outcomes. According to the New York Times, mental health providers are seeing an uptick in teenagers diagnosing themselves with mental illnesses — including rare disorders — after learning more about the conditions online.

Sisu addresses this critical shortage of mental health clinicians by providing teens and their caregivers with safe, therapist-approved content and support. Central to the platform's approach is social and emotional learning (SEL), which empowers teens and adults to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Bringing evidence-based SEL programs into young people's homes has been shown to make it more effective, which is why sisu prioritizes SEL for both teens and their caregivers. Sisu also provides 1:1 support for both teens and their caregivers. Teens are matched with a near-peer mentor, which has been shown to lower the overall costs of mental healthcare and improve quality of life. Simultaneously, caregivers can address their own mental health needs in sessions with a family support specialist.

Sources: CDC, CNN/Kaiser, US Dept. of Health and Human Services, APA, New York Times, CASEL, Mental Health America

Sisu provides an inclusive ecosystem of care for teens and their caregivers.

Sisu's unique ecosystem approach empowers the teen to build mental health skills, gives the caregiver access to professional support, and strengthens their relationship with each other.

Upon joining sisu, a teen is matched with a near-peer mentor who is at least college-aged, has experience in crisis interventions, and provides coaching support through asynchronous messaging.

The teen also works through self-paced, 12-week curriculums on specific topics like Stress & Anxiety or Gender & Identity. The content, which is therapist-approved, is delivered in the teen's native digital language with interactive elements and short videos featuring real teens' stories. The caregiver also has access to the curriculum.

To ensure the caregiver also receives support, they will meet regularly with a family support specialist who is a licensed mental healthcare provider acting in a coaching capacity. The teen has the option to attend those sessions with the caregiver. Otherwise, the caregiver can use the sessions to discuss how to best support their teen and/or focus on their personal mental healthcare needs.



Finally, the caregiver and teen are invited to participate in shared experiences with the goal of strengthening their relationship. Each week, they are both prompted to do the same activities, such as answering a question or journaling about a specific topic, and then share their responses with each other offline.

“We designed sisu to help teens and their caregivers build social and emotional wellness skills that will help them on their journey to health,” explains Erin Little, sisu’s founder and CEO. “If you’ve never been to therapy before, mental healthcare can be very overwhelming and even intimidating. Sisu is designed to give families a supportive, inclusive foundation for mental health before they can be seen by a clinical provider.”

Like TikTok — but therapist approved.

Sisu's curriculum for teens is delivered primarily through short-form videos and authentic content featuring real teens' mental health stories. This approach was inspired by TikTok, which many Gen Z teens now turn to for mental health advice.

“So many teens are going on TikTok to learn about mental health — but that can actually be very dangerous,” says Erin Little, founder and CEO of sisu. “A lot of the mental health content on social media is created by people with no training in mental health whatsoever. Sisu is designed to deliver therapist-designed educational content in the digestible and authentic format Gen Z teens want.”

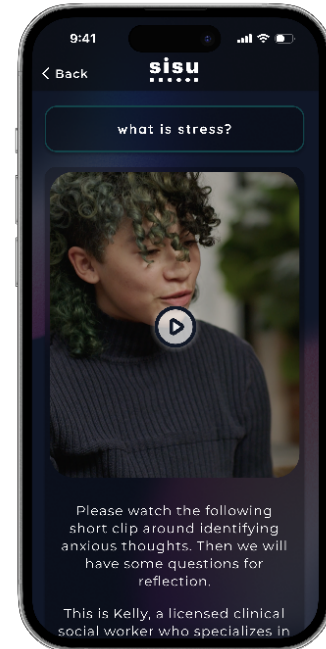
The videos delivered on sisu, which range in length from 2 to 5 minutes, show a therapist-led session featuring real teens discussing their personal experiences with topics like stress, anxiety, loss, and grief. The session features Dr. Jennifer Jackson, a Columbia University-trained clinical psychologist, using a trauma-informed approach to facilitate a discussion with four teens from diverse backgrounds. In addition to helping the teens process their mental health experiences, Dr. Jackson narrates exercises to help sisu users reduce their stress responses.

The documentary-style videos were produced by Emmy-winning filmmaker Hannah Gregg and filmmaker Joseph Purfield, whose work has appeared on BBC, HBO, Netflix, Amazon Prime, FX, and Hulu. Working as co-directors, Gregg and Purfield strove to make the videos as inclusive as possible, including choosing the word “we” instead of “you” throughout the curriculum.

“If I look back to any resources like sisu that I looked for growing up, they could sometimes be so othering,” says Purfield. “With the filming, we wanted to make sure that people feel included, that other people are experiencing this. It’s not just an individual problem you’re facing. We’re doing this together.”

Gregg agrees. “Just being a teen with mental health issues that were not supported in a way that I would have liked, this was so important to me to figure out how we make the content safe and inclusive,” she says. “We didn’t want to make something that is talking down to you by telling you everything will be solved if you just go take a walk and get more sleep. We wanted to make a practical tool that’s actually going to help you.”

[See an example of sisu's video curriculum here.](#)



About Erin Little

Erin Little is the founder and CEO of sisu, a mental health skill-building platform for teens and their families. Erin, who was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes at age 11, has devoted her career to advancing healthcare and education equity at the global level through her work as a serial healthtech founder, educator, and advisor to NGOs and prominent early-stage investment groups.

Erin first experienced the disparities in American healthcare when she struggled to get insurance while working for a large healthcare company and then as a first-time entrepreneur, all while having a chronic illness. After turning to the black market to access life-saving insulin, Erin shifted her focus to building inclusive healthcare solutions. This included interning in the pediatric oncology department at the University of Chicago and founding several +Acumen networks, a nonprofit investment fund dedicated to creating solutions for people who live on less than \$2 per day.

A former full-stack developer, Erin co-founded the social impact startup Portapure. She then served as a business development fellow in Bombay for LGT Venture Philanthropy, one of the world's largest impact investors. While at LGT, Erin helped develop the idea for Sucre Blue, a nonprofit bringing next-generation diagnostics and medical delivery to underserved patients' doors. In 2013, Erin became the founder and executive director of Sucre Blue, which provided chronic disease screenings to over 50,000 villagers in southern India and received press coverage from BBC, *TIME*, and MSNBC.

Meanwhile, Erin continued to advocate globally for patients with chronic illnesses. In 2014, she joined the board of the Young Professionals Chronic Disease Network, which was based at the Harvard Global Equity Initiative. In 2017, Erin became the network's interim executive director and helped to improve access to medicines for 300+ million patients suffering from chronic disease and mental health conditions. As a patient advocate, Erin has spoken before the UN and advised numerous NGOs. She has also participated in Entrepreneur First, through which she helped build AI software and hardware for musculoskeletal (MSD) rehabilitation and prevention.

Erin, who is equally passionate about advancing educational equity, also worked as a teacher for all grade levels in Kansas City Public Schools, for which she received a "Teach of the Year" award. In 2019, Erin moved back to Asia to lead operations for the launch of the Hong Kong campus of Davis College, a Rwanda-based university, and then oversaw its pivot to online learning before the pandemic's onset.

In 2020, Erin returned to the United States to help launch Ayana Therapy, which delivers digital mental health therapy to marginalized communities, as Head of Product and Operations. She lives with her partner and their blended family in Kansas City.

Erin is a graduate of Loyola University Chicago and Draper University. She is currently earning her Master of Science in Data Science from Oklahoma State University.

Creating a modern solution for all families.

During the pandemic, Erin Little developed and ran delivery of digitally-driven, culturally competent mental health care. While working on that project, Erin and her team saw a big gap in the market for solutions that appealed to Gen Z's digital native preferences and core values. What's more, traditional family therapy often made teens feel like they were the problem.

Today's teens needed an approach to mental healthcare that did two things: helped bridge the generational gap with their caregivers and gave their families a shared language to communicate with during difficult conversations.

As a bonus mom to two teenagers, Erin knew teens were turning to TikTok for answers. And like her parents before her, many topics within Erin's house were not discussed for various reasons. She was determined to create a better way for families to have critical conversations and prepare youth for adulthood instead of figuring it out through trial and error like the generation before.

Drawing on her mental healthcare background, including creating the first mental health programming for the US Department of State YSEALI- ENGAGE program, Erin developed the idea for a platform that combined a TikTok-style curriculum with near-peer mentoring and family support from licensed providers.

Meanwhile, Healthworx Studio was working to develop a digital solution to make mental health support more accessible and affordable for American families. In 2022, Erin partnered with the Healthworx team to create sisu. After running a successful pilot program for 50 families, sisu launched in the spring of 2023.

About Healthworx Studio

Healthworx Studio is a non-profit venture studio organization with a mission to build healthcare businesses that improve healthcare access, affordability, and quality across patient, provider, payer, and other healthcare stakeholders. Founded in 2023, the Studio applies a phased approach to venture building that begins with a well-defined problem and prioritizes de-risking solution desirability, business model viability, technical feasibility, and the potential for long-term impact.

Over the next three years, Healthworx Studio aims to launch 6+ new businesses that go on to raise an outside round of investment capital and begin to scale in the market. Today, Healthworx Studio's portfolio of new businesses includes opportunities focused on caregiving, family and adolescent mental health, aging-in-place for seniors, and digestive health.

About sisu

sisu is a new online platform that guides struggling families with teens toward positive mental health. Created to address dangerously long wait times for therapeutic services, sisu gives teens and caregivers the tools and support to begin addressing mental health needs before a licensed provider is available. Uniquely, sisu's ecosystem approach empowers teens and parents to become partners in their family's mental healthcare through a combination of near-peer mentoring, family support specialists, and self-paced content modules featuring real teens' stories. Built on an intentionally low-tech platform, sisu is designed to be accessible to all teens ages 13-18 and their families across the United States.

Hi-res images are available [here](#).

