Children's Mental Health Acceptance Week

The meaning and importance of the shift from **Awareness** to **Acceptance**

**Why?** Awareness is passive. **Acceptance inspirs action!** (asking for help, seeking treatment, offering support)

- Awareness means you know it exists
- **Acceptance** means you make a personal connection and **take steps** to learn more

- Awareness means you acknowledge the issue
- **Acceptance** means you **work to understand** and offer compassion and sensitivity to others

- Awareness means you share concern
- **Acceptance** means you **offer help and support** without judgment

- Awareness means you are informed about the issue
- **Acceptance** means you **embrace** it and are invested and committed to **inspiring** and **building support** in your own community

**Awareness Is Not Enough!**

It's Time to Step into Action.

- **Acceptance** is the next step towards building an inclusive, supportive society that celebrates all children and youth
- **Acceptance** moves us to advocate for equitable support and family-driven treatment options
- **Acceptance** supports social justice for children who experience mental health challenges - and their families

Show others that **children’s mental health matters.**

Take action during Children’s Mental Health Acceptance Week - and **every day of the year!**

www.ffcmh.org
Supportive Community

Acceptance means my child isn’t embarrassed or afraid to ask for help. It means children with mental health challenges are accepted, supported, and feel wanted and worthy. It means being held in the caring hands of everyone in the community. It means being treated with the same dignity and respect as others. It means being brought into the fold - into the group. It feels like protection. It means my kids are happier and feel understood.

Acceptance means I am loved and cared for as I am. It means having patience and making the effort to try to understand what someone is going through.

Acceptance means having the right to be unique - to express your feelings, thoughts, and opinions without judgment.

Acceptance means feeling free to discuss your challenges without feeling like others are judging or discrediting your experiences.

Acceptance means seeing people first - acknowledging their strengths, not just their challenges or diagnosis.

We asked children, youth and families - “What does acceptance of mental health challenges mean to you?”

In 2022, the National Children’s Mental Health campaign was redefined to emphasize the need to move beyond awareness.

Because awareness ISN’T ENOUGH.

Acceptance means recognizing that our mental health is as important as all other health issues.

It means acknowledging that we all have mental health needs that require care, just like brushing our teeth.

It means responding to mental health conditions with treatment and support like any other disease.

Acceptance would mean my child feels safe to say she is going to see her therapist, just as freely as she says she is going to the doctor or dentist.

It means a more empathetic approach towards children who struggle with mental health issues and recognizing it’s not something they can turn on and off.

Acceptance means understanding that a mental health diagnosis is not the end - that coping skills and support are available.

It means understanding when someone has an emotional disability and is symptomatic, they need support, not punishment.

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Acceptance means educators and community members would understand my child’s behavior, and that is a reflection of trauma that she experienced - not her personality or our parenting skills.

Acceptance means respecting that I am the expert on my child and trusting that I know what’s best for him/her.

Acceptance means the world!
We asked parents and caregivers, “What access and opportunities would your child gain if their mental health challenges were supported and accepted in your community?” Here’s what they said.

**Supportive Community**

- Easier to make friends
- Access to a school psychologist or counselor
- Relationships/connections with supportive adults & peers
- A meaningful role in the community

“Support and resources would be devoted to ensuring my child can be as successful as any other child in the community.”

**Appropriate Education**

- Inclusion rather than isolation
- Well-established accommodations for I.E.P.s & 504 plans
- Participation in prosocial sports, clubs & school activities
- Support, rather than discipline, for difficult behaviors

“We with appropriate support, youth could achieve a higher level of education, leading to expanded employment choices, financial growth, independence and stability for their future.”

**Improved Treatment**

- More likely to seek help; less reluctant to ask
- Having skilled providers in every community
- Families/youth would guide treatment planning
- Effective treatment is available – when it’s needed

“Access to skilled providers and referral services would be a relief. Coordinated efforts between schools, families and support agencies is imperative.”

**Increased Funding**

- For research on mental health challenges
- For schools, camps and other programming
- Equitable insurance reimbursement for treatment
- To support families balancing work and care needs

“Our children need resources, support, and the chance to learn, grow, and – most of all – thrive as they are. We need equity!”
The Heart of Acceptance
What Acceptance of Mental Health Needs Means for Youth and Young Adults

Getting to the heart of the matter, young people shared how acceptance would change the way they think and feel about themselves.

They said:
- I would feel more confident
- I would believe in myself
- I would love and accept myself
- I would be true to myself
- I would be able to find my value
- I would not feel like a bad kid
- I would feel wanted
- I would feel accepted, supported, and worthy
- I would feel welcomed and supported
- I would feel happier and understood
- I would feel I am loved and cared for as I am
- I would not feel shameful
- I would feel empowered
- I would feel the right to be unique
- I would have the ability to live and thrive
- I would smile again
- I would feel free to share my feelings
- I would feel important and valued
- I would have a stronger, more positive sense of self
- I would feel like I have a place in my community
- I would better understand myself and the world I live in
- I would have a happier, healthier lifestyle
- I would be more willing to share
- I would feel better about myself
- I would feel self-love
- I would feel more positive
- I would feel good about myself
- I would learn, grow and thrive
- I would have a healthier mind set
- I would have a healthier self-image
- I would feel successful
- I would be more comfortable being a part of my community
- I would feel encouraged and empowered
- I would feel successful in my goals
- I would have some fun along the way
- I would feel I can achieve independence and stability
- I would have self-acceptance
- I would strive to contribute to my community
- I would have self-esteem
- I would have normalcy
- I would have a successful, normal, and cultivated life
- I would be able to enjoy things other children enjoy
- I would be confident and wouldn’t isolate myself

"I would feel like the sky’s the limit!"

#youthvoice
#acceptance
www.ffcmh.org
## Mental Illness

Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical problem, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities - and they are often accompanied by substance use. It’s critical that we talk about these challenges and that we do so in the right way.

## Challenges

### Substance Use

Mental health problems can be associated with use of substances. The term “Addict” is associated with a lack of control over substance use. It’s important to discuss substance use in the right way.

### Experiences

#### Person who

- **Mental Illness**: Diagnosed with a mental illness
- **Behavioral Health**: Living with or experiencing mental health challenges

#### Experiences/has been treated for

- **Emotionally Disturbed**: Mentally Ill Person; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenia, autistic, bipolar, OCD, etc.
- **Substance Abuse**: Drug Abuser; Addict; Substance Abuse

### Person

#### Experiencing /Living with or Diagnosed with a Mental Illness

- **Mental Health Symptoms that interfere with Daily Life/Activities**: Nervous breakdown; Emotional breakdown; Committed Suicide; Completed Suicide

#### Person who Experiences Substance Use Challenges

- **Addictions**: Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk
- **Peer Support Professionals**: Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk

### Person in Recovery

- **Family Peer Support**: Peer Support applies to adult peer support alone

### The Family Support Workforce

- **Support**: family support peers, clinicians, and others who support families

## Why Changing Our Thinking, Our Actions and Our Language Matters

### Why It Matters

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The importance of using person-first language when talking about mental illness and substance use cannot be overstated. This is true for members of the media, support and treatment professionals, family members, friends and the community at large.

**Here are a few examples.**

### Person-first phrases

- A person living with a mental health condition
- A person with substance use challenges
- My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder
- My daughter with schizophrenia
- My neighbor who has autism
- The client I’m treating for depression
- My father who has alcoholism

### Phrases that hinder recovery

- The mentally ill: psycho, crazy, untrustworthy
- Addict: meth head, tweaker, burnout, druggie, junkie
- My son is bipolar
- My schizo daughter
- The autistic boy down the street
- My depressed client
- My alcoholic father

### Using terms that don’t acknowledge an individual’s symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support and treatment that promote recovery.

### The term completed is associated with a crime. The term completed suggests an accomplishment.

### The Family Peer workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.

### There are specific differences between adult peers and family peers. They have different lived and systems navigation experience.

### The uniqueness of person-first language

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Think before you act. Think twice before you speak. Your words matter.

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### Contact Information

- National Family Support Center (NFSC):
  - Website: [www.nfstac.org](http://www.nfstac.org)
  - Email: info@nfstac.org

- Family and Community Mental Health (FFCMH):
  - Website: [www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org)
  - Email: fffcmh@ffcmh.org