

The History of Children’s Mental Health Acceptance Week (CMHAW): Why Green?

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To combat bias and discrimination! In the 1800s, the color green was used to brand people who were labeled “insane.” The children’s mental health community decided to continue using the color green, but with a completely different focus. Green signifies new life, new growth, and new beginnings. Therefore, we wear green ribbons to raise public awareness, better the lives of children with serious emotional disorders and show our support of these children and their families.

The History of Children’s Mental Health Acceptance Week

1949 The National Mental Health Association declared May as Mental Health Month. Although this nationally recognized observance began as Mental Health Week, with an increase in public interest and a broadening scope of issues, it grew into a month-long awareness campaign.

1950s-60’s Through the next 2 decades, special emphasis was placed on educating the public around mental illness and inviting them to state hospitals and other locations to learn more. In the late 1960s, this national observance was expanded, and May was declared Mental Health Month.

1970s In the 1970s, observances shifted to community based events as state hospital “patients” were moved to community settings.

1992 A group of parents in Missouri got together and decided that one of the most important projects they could undertake was to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding children’s mental health. They formed a coalition of parents, professionals and other stakeholders and created Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week. Over the next five years three more states, Kansas, Illinois and Ohio began their own celebration of Children’s Mental Health Week. The National Federation of Families later joined the coalition and promoted the mission.

1996 PAL, today called [PPAL](#), launched the first Children’s Mental Health Week in Massachusetts. Its theme was “One Youth at A Time” and included posters, a tool kit, as well as public service announcements. The campaign has grown each year since then.

2004 The National Federation of Families declared the first full week of May as Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week nationally. National Federation partners and all 120 Federation chapters and state organizations were invited and encouraged to participate in a week-long celebration of advocacy and awareness efforts.

2006 The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services launched an annual national initiative called "National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day," which occurred during Children's Mental Health Awareness Week until 2020.

2007 The National Federation of Families launched the Annual Green Ribbon Campaign, one of its most important awareness and education campaigns. The green ribbon is a key symbol in social marketing and awareness efforts. It is an uplifting campaign that aims to spread awareness through positive public health promotion and by initiating dialogue in local, national and international communities.

2022 The National Federation of Families updated the campaign name, changing the "a" from awareness to acceptance. This significant shift to "acceptance" speaks more directly to the goals of the campaign - to eliminate the bias and discrimination that individuals with a mental illness diagnosis or symptoms experience.

Today, this nationally recognized event continues to increase public acceptance and educate communities to expand the general public's understanding of children's mental health needs and their resulting impact on families.

Join the Green Ribbon Campaign!

The Green Ribbon Campaign is part of our social marketing and acceptance effort. This inspirational campaign allows us to celebrate children and provide hope and unity throughout the children's mental health arena and the family movement. It also spreads acceptance for our cause. We encourage everyone to wear green during Children's Mental Health Acceptance Week.