Children’s Mental Health Acceptance Week
The meaning and importance of the shift from Awareness to Acceptance

Why? Awareness is passive. Acceptance inspires 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
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.

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.

Acceptance means understanding that it’s not something they can turn on and off.

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

It means seeing people first – acknowledging their strengths, not just their challenges or diagnosis.

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!
For Youth Who Experience Mental Health and/or Substance Use Challenges

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

“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!”

#familyvoice  www.ffcmh.org  #acceptance
**Mental health challenges** are nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical diagnosis, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental health diagnoses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these). **Mental health** is associated with emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts. It is also a factor in how an individual handles stress, relates to others, and in making choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. It's critical that we talk about these challenges and that we do so in a person-centered way.

### Reframing Language

**WHY CHANGING OUR THINKING, OUR ACTIONS, AND OUR LANGUAGE MATTERS**

The terms we use to describe mental health challenges matter. We have all heard derogatory terms used to describe someone who has a mental health challenge. Here are a few to jog your memory: Cuckoo; Mad as a hatter; Screwy—having a screw loose; Bananas; Loopy; Crackers; Wacko (whacko); Loony; Insane; Nuts; Freak; Psycho, Crazy; Weirdo. Can you imagine mocking someone with a diagnosis such as cancer or heart disease? Here's how we can do better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UPDATED LANGUAGE</th>
<th>OUTDATED LANGUAGE</th>
<th>WHY IT MATTERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice and discrimination</td>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>Prejudice refers to thinking, discrimination refers to action—both can be changed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Being aware doesn’t call for action, change in behavior, or thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing or living with a mental health challenge</td>
<td>Suffering from a Mental Illness</td>
<td>People who experience mental health challenges can and do live healthy, fulfilling lives. Suffering implies one is unwell, unhappy, or can't recover.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiences/has been diagnosed with emotional, mental, and/or behavioral health challenges</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
<td>Being diagnosed, experiencing symptoms of, or having been diagnosed with a mental illness is a common part of the human experience. The term disturbed perpetuates prejudice and creates a barrier to treatment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person experiencing / living with or diagnosed with a mental health challenge</td>
<td>Mentally Ill Person; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenic, bipolar, OCD, etc.</td>
<td>Certain language exaggerates mental illness and reinforces prejudice. Always use person-first language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person who experiences substance use challenges</td>
<td>Drug Abuser, Alcoholic, Addict, Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Avoid words that suggest a lack of quality of life for people with substance use concerns. Terms like addict reduce a person’s identity, deny dignity/humanity and imply powerlessness or the inability to recover.</td>
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The importance of using person-first language when talking about mental health and substance use challenges cannot be overstated. This is true for members of the media, support and treatment professionals, family members, friends, and the community at large. Person-first language separates the individual from the symptoms they experience—maintaining their identity as people with strengths who have the power to recover. Here are a few examples.

**Person-first phrases**
- A person living with a mental health challenge
- A person with substance use challenges
- My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder
- My daughter experiencing schizophrenia
- The individual I’m supporting who is experiencing depression
- My father who experiences alcohol misuse

**Phrases that hinder recovery**
- The mentally ill, psycho, crazy, lunatic
- Addict, meth head, burnout, druggie, junkie
- My son is bipolar
- My schizo daughter
- A depressed individual
- My alcoholic father

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<th>Phrases that hinder recovery</th>
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<tr>
<td>Experiencing Mental Health Symptoms that Interfere with Daily Life/Activities</td>
<td>Emotional breakdown, Nervous breakdown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Died by Suicide</td>
<td>Committed Suicide; Completed Suicide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person in Recovery</td>
<td>Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Family Support Workforce includes family peers, clinicians, and others who support families</td>
<td>Professionals and Family Peer Specialists separates family peer support professionals from others</td>
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<td>Family peer support (FPS) is provided from one family member with lived experience as a primary caregiver to another caregiver in the effort to strengthen the whole family's well-being. FPS will assist family caregivers in navigating child, adult and family serving systems</td>
<td>Peer Support This term is more typically associated with adult peers.</td>
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**Using terms that don't acknowledge an individual’s symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support that promote recovery.**

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

Emphasize strengths and the ability to recover, not limitations.

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.