

Supporting mental health and wellness in school

The mental health needs of children and youth are increasing. PACER's Mental Health Youth Advisory Board has developed the following ideas to share with schools and community organizations about how to support the mental health needs and wellbeing of youth. It's important to talk about mental health and wellness and ensure students have access to supports in school and in their communities. You can help!

Promote mental health and wellness

We encourage schools and community organizations to add regular activities throughout their events, school day, and year dedicated to fostering inclusion, kindness, and support and promoting mental health and wellness. Here are a few ideas:

- **Start a wellness club:** Create a club where peers can connect, build relationships, and learn new strategies for taking care of themselves and each other.
- **Get creative:** Share and practice a calming strategy over morning announcements, during lunch, or other assemblies.
- **Suggestion box:** Ask students to share what works for them or what supports they would like to have in school.
- **Post it walls:** Have sticky notes available with different mental health related themes and ask students to participate in completing sentences like: "It's okay...", "I feel...", "What gives me hope..."
- **School Public Service Announcement (PSA) competitions:** Host a fun and positive competition around creating unifying messages each year, such as "Stand Together," "You are not alone," etc.
- **Host a wellness fair:** The fair should offer opportunities for mental health focused community-based organizations to participate and include student-led activities, games, skits, etc.
- **Host educational events:** These events can educate students, staff, and parents about mental health and wellness.
- **Presentations:** Invite theater groups, authors, artists, and other professionals to present to and engage students, staff, and families using stories, art, and coping strategies (such as guided mindfulness) to address mental health needs and support wellness.
- **Add more wellness education to your school's curriculum:** This can include reading books with themes that address mental health and wellness.

Participate in mental health awareness campaigns

Options include World Mental Health Day held in October each year and Mental Health Month in May. Mental health organizations offer tool kits with printouts and activity ideas. An internet search will help you find the most current tool kits for that year.

- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)

Create a youth advisory board on mental health

Download PACER Center's [free toolkit](#) on how to help your school create a youth board to advocate and provide leadership for meeting the mental health needs of students.

Provide access to information

You can help by placing information about available supports throughout your school for where students can go to if they need support, as well as posting crisis information.

For crisis and suicide help, call 988, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This national network of local crisis centers provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. National Crisis Text Line: Text 741-741 or visit the website to chat. Trained counselors are available 24/7.

For more information on crisis and suicide help contact a PACER advocate at: [pacer.org](https://www.pacer.org)