

What is Advocacy?

"Advocacy" can mean many things, but in general, it refers to action. Put simply, advocacy involves speaking and acting on behalf of yourself or others.

Take the **next 31 days** to commit to growing as an advocate. Each day, there is an advocacy task with resources to guide you.

Find Your Why

Day 1

Learn the History of the Children's Mental Health Movement

To be an effective advocate, you need to know the history, build on strengths, and have a goal for the future.

- Read: [Going Green](#)
- Read: [The History of the National Federation of Families](#)
- Share: [Children's Mental Health Week History](#)

Day 2

It's About Acceptance, Not Awareness

Acceptance is active. Awareness is passive. It's time to move beyond awareness and into acceptance. Learn what acceptance means to families and why NFF has made the commitment to acceptance.

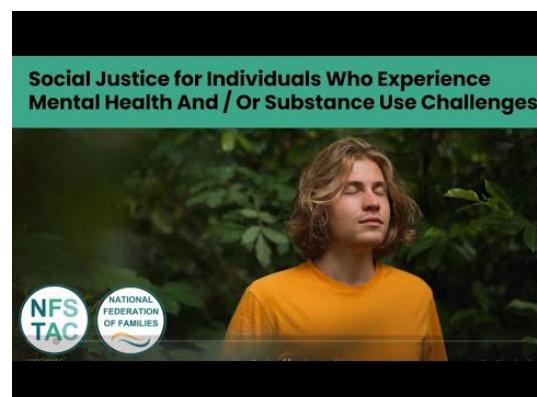
- Visit: The [Acceptance Campaign](#) to learn about the move to Acceptance
- Watch the [2022 Youth Mental Health Acceptance Panel](#)
- Review: [The Heart of Acceptance Infographic](#)

Day 3

Mental Health and Substance Use is a Social Justice Issue

What is social justice? What does working toward social justice mean for individuals, communities, and systems? Learn about social justice.

- Visit the [Social Justice Campaign page](#)
- Learn about [Equality versus Equity](#)
- Learn the [Impact of Social Justice on Mental Health](#)
- Review: [NFF's Social Justice Infographic](#)



Day 4

What is Mental Health Parity?

The 2008 Federal Parity Law requires insurers to cover illnesses of the brain, such as depression or addiction, no more restrictively than illnesses of the body, such as diabetes or cancer. Unfortunately, many insurers are still not following the law.

Learn About Mental Health Parity

- Watch: [What are Parity Rights?](#)
- Watch: [The System We Need: Parity](#)
- Review: [What is Mental Health Parity infographic](#)
- [Examples of Common Violations](#)
- Visit: [Parity Pinterest board](#)

Develop Your Voice

Day 5

Bringing Mental Health into the Conversation

Dialogue is where change begins. Mental health needs to be part of everyday conversation because taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Learn more about how to talk about mental health.

- Visit: [Talking Mental Health Pinterest board](#)
- [Seize the Awkward](#) for tips on starting conversations.
- [Normalizing Conversations About Mental Health \(hcbh.org\)](#)
- [Let's Talk: How to Normalize Conversations Around Mental Health | SonderMind](#)

Day 6

Commit to Using Acceptance Language

Acceptance is active. Awareness is passive. It's time to move beyond awareness and into acceptance. Learn why you need to commit to acceptance language use in your advocacy.

- Commit to using acceptance language.
- Talk to someone about acceptance today.
- Review: [Acceptance Versus Awareness Infographic](#)
- Review: [Mental Health Acceptance: Because Awareness is Not Enough infographic](#)
- Visit: [Acceptance vs. Awareness Pinterest board](#)

Day 7

Personal Impact is a Powerful Part of Advocacy

Think about how mental illness has impacted your life. We need more people with first-hand experience talking about mental health challenges. Just by sharing your journey, you can help others see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is not an oncoming, out-of-control train. Hearing about your life can help people who are struggling know they can make it through. It can also help break societal stereotypes about mental health.

- [Storytelling for Advocacy: The Only Way You Get True Support \(callhub.io\)](#)
- Watch: [Telling Your Story with a Purpose](#)
- [The Power of Storytelling in Advocacy: Using Real Stories to Drive Change and Influence Public Policy](#)
- [Tips for Using Personal Stories in Advocacy](#)

Day 8

Preparing to Share Your Personal Story

Sharing your personal story about how mental illness has impacted your life is powerful. Sharing our lived experience helps others better understand mental health. It is a story you should carefully identify what to share and the purpose behind that sharing. Spend time today preparing to share your personal story. Write it down, edit it, say it out loud.

- Use [Seven Steps to Telling Your Story](#) – Template as your guide to developing your personal story.
- Use [Telling Your Recovery Story](#) - Template as your guide to developing your personal story.
- [How to Tell Your Story for Advocacy](#)
- [How To Publicly Share Your Mental Health Story | Advocating for Better Mental Health](#)
- [Tools for Building Power through Personal Stories](#)

Day 9

Celebrate Children's Mental Health Acceptance Day!

Spread the word today on all your social media about Children's Mental Health Acceptance Day. Don't limit yourself to your friends. Post comments and links about acceptance on community Facebook pages as well. Looking for something great to post? Check out:

- [NFF's Social Media for Mental Health Pinterest Page](#)

Day 10

Share Your Story

Now that you have mapped out your personal story it's time to try sharing. Choose someone in your life to share your personal advocacy story with and get feedback. **Reflect:** How did you feel after sharing your story? Do you need to make revisions based on your experience today on what to share to enhance your comfort level and message impact?

Day 11

Develop Your Elevator Pitch

Sometimes you have just a few minutes to engage someone about mental health and its importance. Having what is called an “elevator pitch” will help you make the most of the opportunities you have to share why children’s mental health is so important.

Remember to include **acceptance** in your pitch. You will want to practice your pitch aloud. Write down your pitch. Practice it in front of a mirror.

- [Crafting-Your-Advocacy-Message](#)
- [You Gotta Hear this Elevator Pitch](#) – Template for developing your pitch.
- Watch: [Elevator Pitch tips](#)

Day 12

Share that Elevator Pitch

Wear a green ribbon today and share your elevator pitch with anyone who asks about it. How did it feel? What do you need to revise?

Day 13

What Does it Mean to Be an Advocate for Mental Health?

Just like families, each advocate is different. We have areas of different levels of lived experience and are at different points in our journey, so each person advocates in different ways. Identify the ways you feel comfortable expressing your advocacy.

- Watch: [Advocacy 101](#)
- [How to be a Mental Health Advocate – Complete Guide - Unite for Change](#)
- [6 Ways to Become a Mental Health Advocate \(healthcentral.com\)](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be a Mental Health Advocate?](#)
- [How to become a mental health advocate in 7 steps - IDONTMIND](#)
- Visit: [How to Be an Advocate Pinterest board](#)

Educate Yourself

Day 14

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy can take many forms and be effective on many levels. Begin to explore advocacy by watching the video - [Families, Make Your Voices Heard: An Introduction to Advocacy](#) – a webinar presented by the National Family Support Technical Assistance Center (www.nfstac.org).

Day 15

Identify How You'll Stay Up to Date on Advocacy Issues

There is so much happening that it's hard to keep up. Identify a couple sources you will follow to get your advocacy news.

First Follow: [National Federation of Families Legislative and Advocacy Facebook page](#)

Then determine what advocacy organizations speak to you nationally and in your state and follow them.

- Read and Watch: [Where to Find Legislative and Advocacy Updates Nationally](#)
- Read and Watch: [National | National Federation of Families \(ffcmh.org\)](#)

Day 16

Participate in the Mental Health Day of Action

What is the [Mental Health Day of Action](#)?

The goal of Mental Health Action Day is to shift the culture of mental health from awareness to action. Today the goal is to ask everyone to dedicate one hour to take action for their mental health. Why one hour? Asking for one hour is simple, measurable, and flexible. Action looks different for everyone. Mental Health Action Day encourages everyone to take action for themselves, for their loved ones, or for their community based on what works best for them.

Ideas on how to spend your one hour of action:

- Post about mental Health on your social media.
- Go to [NFF's Social Media for Mental Health Pinterest Page](#) for ideas.
- Share your story with someone new.

Day 17

Explore the National Federation of Families Legislative and Advocacy Webpages

Spend today getting familiar with the National Federation of Families Legislative and Advocacy webpages. They can be a source of guidance for you on your advocacy journey.

- [Legislation and Advocacy | National Federation of Families](#)
- [Educate – Advocacy](#)
 - News to Know
 - Proposed Legislation, Policies and Funding
 - From the White House
 - From the States
- [Advocate](#)
 - National Advocacy
 - State Advocacy
- [Act – Advocacy Toolkit](#)

Day 18

Legislation to Know

The Federation works to keep you up to date on the latest bills being introduced and policies being implemented that affect mental health. Take time to get familiar with that section and the bills being introduced. This information is updated monthly. Determine what bills are of interest to you.

Visit [Key Information for Family Advocates](#) learn about what could affect you. Visit the Proposed Legislation, Policy and Funding Section.

Day 19

Dig Deeper into Advocacy

Now that you know more about what advocacy is and what it means to be an advocate, it's time to dig a little deeper. Explore one or more advocacy tools. Determine how you can be most effective in sharing your voice.

Visit the [Advocacy Toolkit | National Federation of Families](#) and click *Help Me Learn to Advocate*.

Day 20

Create Your Personal Advocacy List

Advocacy needs to occur at national, state, and local levels. Advocacy with the right person at the right level is how you can be most effective. You need to know your representatives at every level, how to reach them, and what might help connect you to them.

- Create **a list of all your representatives** and how to reach them.
- **Keeping it on your computer** allows you to easily add links to reach them.
- Later in your advocacy journey, **keep track of when and why you contacted them**.

Where to find your representatives:

- Search: [Who Represents Me? An Elected Officials Lookup](#)

When you enter your address, this site will give you your representatives' contact information, website, email, and links to their social media accounts.

- Locate your mayor by name, city, or population size.
- Find your county executive (the head of the executive branch of government in your county) by map search or your ZIP Code.

Day 21

Learn About Your LOCAL Legislators

Look at your **Personal Advocacy List**. Who is your mayor, county commissioner, school board representative, etc.?

- Visit their websites to learn more about each of them.
- Make notes of anything related to mental health that they mention.
- Look for ways to connect with them on a personal, common ground level.
- Sign up for any newsletters they offer.

Where to find your representatives:

- Search: [Who Represents Me? Elected Officials Lookup](#)
When you enter your address, this site will give you your representatives' contact information, website, email, and links to their social media accounts.
- Locate your mayor by name, city, or population size.
- Find your county executive (the head of the executive branch of government in your county) by map search or your ZIP Code.

Day 22

Learn About Your STATE Representation

Time to find your state representatives and Governor. Look at your Personal Advocacy List. At the state level, you'll want to learn about your governor, state senator, and state representative.

- Visit your state representative's, state senator's, and governor's websites.
- Make notes of anything related to mental health they mention.
- Look for ways you can connect with them on a personal, common ground level.
- Sign up for any newsletters they offer.

Where to find your representatives:

- Search: [Who Represents Me? Elected Officials Lookup](#)

Day 23

Learn About Your NATIONAL Representation

Now it's time to look at your national representatives—to learn about your senators and congressional representatives. Get that Personal Advocacy List ready.

- Visit each of your senators' websites.
- Visit the website of your congressional representative.
- Be sure to make note of any committees on which they serve.
- Make notes of anything related to mental health they mention.
- Look for ways to make a personal connection with them.
- Sign up for any newsletters they offer.

Where to find your representatives:

- Search: [Who Represents Me? Elected Officials Lookup](#)

Practice Advocacy

Day 24

Follow Your Legislators!

Social media is a tool legislators use. You can too! Following them allows you to see what they are posting and tells you what is important to them. Use social media to communicate with your legislators. Follow them on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Comment on their posts and tag them in your posts about issues. Always be polite.

- Grab that **Personal Advocacy List**.
- Follow all your representatives on social media.

Where to find your representatives' social media accounts:

- Search: [Who Represents Me? Elected Officials Lookup](#)

Day 25

Learn How to Communicate with Your Legislator

Now that you have identified, learned about, and are following your representatives, it is time to learn how to be most effective in communicating with them. Nearly all congressional staffers said letters from their constituents influence an undecided lawmaker, whether sent via mail (90%) or email (88%).

- Visit: [Contacting Your Legislator Pinterest board](#)
- Read: [Partnership to End Addiction 2020 Advocacy Toolkit \(drugfree.org\)](#) Pages 9 – 12 have the best tips!
- Read: [Writing Your Legislator: A Guide](#)

Day 26

Get Active with Local and State Legislators

You can make a significant difference in just 15 minutes! Pick a local legislator—county mayor, school board representative, etc.—and share your opinions about the major policy issues affecting you and your community. Email your state elected officials— state senators and state representatives—and share your opinions about the major policy issues affecting you and your community.

- Email and ask which bills they are supporting to promote children's mental health.
- If they have done something positive lately, mention that.
- If you can, mention something you learned about them from their website or Facebook. Try to find a personal connection.

Be sure to record your contact with them on your Personal Advocacy List.

Day 27

Get Active with Your Governor

Check out your governor's website and social media pages. Find an issue they support that you agree on and reach out. Start the relationship on a positive note.

- Find out if your mayor and governor signed a proclamation for Children's Mental Health Acceptance Week. Did your city light up something green? If so, send an email thanking them for their support for children's mental health issues. Be sure to add something about why it is important to you.
- Email and ask which bills they are supporting to promote children's mental health.
- If you can, mention something you learned about them from their website or Facebook. Try to find a personal connection.
- [Writing Your Legislator](#)

Be sure to record your contact with them on your Personal Advocacy List.

Day 28

Get Active with National Legislators

Nearly all congressional staffers say letters will influence an undecided lawmaker, whether sent via mail (90%) or email (88%).

- Email or write to your congressperson and senator.
- Ask which bills they are supporting to promote mental health.
- Mention something you learned about them from their website or Facebook page.

Be sure to make a note of your contact with them on your Personal Advocacy List.

Day 29

Learn About Committees

Learn how to watch committees, who serves on them, and why they are important. Get your Personal Advocacy List, find a committee on which your legislator serves, and watch a session. Follow up by emailing your legislator to let them know you watched the meeting.

Did you know that most committees have Facebook pages you can follow?

- Visit the **Navigating Committees** section of the [National tab](#) on NFF's Legislative and Advocacy page. Explore both the Senate and Congressional Committee tabs.

Day 30

Share Your Story for Advocacy

Have you, or has someone you know, experienced a parity violation? A problem getting the support and services needed? Consider sharing your story. Adding your story to other's experiences allows us to collect data. There is power in data and numbers when it comes to legislative advocacy.

Visit [Parity Track](#) to add your lived experience with care denial.

- [Examples of Common Violations](#)
- [Tell us your story](#)

Visit the [Inseparable Story Bank](#),

- Stories play an integral role in advancing mental health policy. We are gathering stories to shape our policy proposals, strengthen our advocacy, and ensure lived experience is at the center of our communications.
- Inseparable will not use stories from this story bank without first contacting you for your written permission.
- [Submit Your Story | Inseparable](#)

Day 31

Commit to Being a Mental Health Advocate Year-Round

You can effect change in your local community by being an advocate for mental health. Policy change is one way you can make a difference. This month you've taken the first steps.

- *Be Aware.* Knowing your legislators and how to connect with them is the first step to being a mental health advocate.
- *Be Present.* Follow your legislators' social media, read their newsletters, and attend their town halls.
- *Stay Connected.* Staying connected with legislators and proposed legislation is the final step of being a mental health advocate.

Maintain Your Commitment

Commit to staying on top of mental health issues and advocacy opportunities happening nationally and in your state.

- Follow: [National Federation of Families Legislation and Advocacy Facebook page](#)
Repost from the page throughout this year on topics and issues that are important to you.
- Visit [Key News for Family Advocates frequently](#)
- Connect with those doing advocacy work in your community.
- Stay connected to your elected officials.
- It's important that they hear the positives of what they are doing from you as well.

Should you have any questions or need guidance,
please contact Michelle Covington at mcovington@ffcmh.org.

<https://www.ffcmh.org/legislation-and-advocacy>

