



Toolkit for Schools and Youth Groups

This toolkit contains everything schools and youth groups need to participate in our legislative advocacy activities this year. As you prepare for this event, it's important to recognize that some of the content and discussions surrounding mental health may be difficult for some students/youth to process. A few resources to share with students for support include:

Crisis Text Line - Text HOME to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - (800) 273-8255

NY Project Hope Emotional Support Helpline - 1-844-863-9314

Want to learn more about public policy and advocacy?

Visit our webpage at <https://mhanys.org/mental-health-matters-day/youth-school-groups/> for videos and lesson plans that introduce students to key terms, the various levels of government, the importance of advocacy and public policy, and how to be an effective voice for through a relevant case. Lessons can be used in Government and Health classes or to prepare students to participate in Mental Health Matters Advocacy Days.

What else can you do in the classroom or individually?

- Explore the [MHANYS Legislative Briefing Book 2021](#) to learn about the 23 issues MHANYS will be advocating for this year to find the cause(s) that matter most to you.
- Keep an eye on current events to see how often mental health issues are given attention, both locally and nationally.
- Hold a roundtable forum on important mental health issues with classmates, community members, families, etc. Discuss with others, or consider individually, a policy change you would like to see happen in the near future.
- Research what a successful advocacy campaign looks like using a real case study? One possibility is to look at the personal story of Clifford Beers, the founder of the Mental Health Association movement. A brief synopsis of his story can be found on our website at the following [link](#).

Reach out to Representatives

Find your local, state and national representatives at the following [link](#) and then consider the following steps to make contact with them.

- Schedule a virtual call with state and local policymakers. Before meeting, consult our [Dos and Don'ts](#) tip sheet to help you prepare.
- Hold a Facebook Live 'town hall' style meeting and invite legislators.
- Initiate a letter writing campaign (emails, personal letters) to get your message out on a specific issue. Educators can provide templates for students.
- Conduct a social media messaging campaign (see page 3).

If you have any questions, please contact schools@mhanys.org or 518.434.0439

View event webpage at mhanys.org/events-main/mental-health-matters-day

Raise awareness – promote mental health literacy

Consider ways to engage in an awareness campaign to promote mental health literacy in your class and schoolwide during the advocacy days in March.

- Learn how mental health impacts youth and spread the word. For example, consider the following facts:
 - Half of all chronic mental illnesses begin by age 14.
 - In New York – which actually ranks better than most states on this measure – there are just five psychiatrists for every 10,000 children under age 18.
 - Statewide, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth age 15-19, with rates rising highest among black teens.
 - According to a nationwide survey conducted by the Trevor Project, 39% of LGBTQ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least 2 wks in the past year
 - Anxiety is the most common type of mental health disorders among children.

A printable copy of our [Youth Mental Health Fact Sheet](#), which includes many more statistics, could be posted around the school (hallways, bathrooms, screens for virtual learning), in a district newsletter or used for PSAs in morning announcements to reach students learning in-person or virtually. Other PSAs to consider include short clips from [Seize the Awkward](#) or [Bring Change 2 Mind](#).

- Promote our advocacy days schoolwide by creating a video, PSAs, signs, emails, social media campaign, etc. Showcase our [promotional video](#) for the event. These promos can also be sent home to get families engaged in advocacy.
- Record interviews with school support staff or local counseling professionals about the importance of seeking help and share those with the school community. Have professionals speak in the interviews about the importance of advocacy.
- Plan a school staff networking event for adults to share stories about self-care and coping strategies. Distribute information about the advocacy days to the school staff.
- Devote a day to wellness; maybe call it *Wellness Wednesday*. This could coincide with our rally on Wednesday, March 10 at Noon, and be dedicated to self-care/coping strategies. Resources on our website that are available to educators to develop quick activities include:
 - [Stress less poster](#)
 - [Mindful Stones video](#)
 - [Mindful Moments](#)
 - [Virtual Wellness Room](#)
 - [Apps for promoting wellness](#)
 - [Other ideas and activities to promote wellness](#)

Social Media Tools

Thank you for your participation in our annual MHANYS Mental Health Matters Advocacy Days!

Social media and digital communication provide us another opportunity to educate, empower, and advocate for change. With a collective voice, we can make an impact from any location!

Most legislators use social media. Students, educators, families, and basically anyone can advocate in the mental health matters movement by using social media!

Step 1. Decide social platforms to use (the more the better) and be aware of character count. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most popular

Step 2. Compile hashtags and account tags to use.

- a. Use this hashtag for every post: **#MentalHealthMattersDay**
- b. Tag your Assemblymember and Senator
- c. Tag your school
- d. Please remember to also tag MHANYS and follow us on
Facebook: **@MHANYSInc** Twitter: **@MHAcrossNYS**

Step 3. Review the issues. Visit mhanys.org/mental-health-matters-day/ to view MHANYS Briefing Book and Legislative Summary.

Step 4. Create content

- a. Use a photo/video to advocate for why “Mental Health Matters” to you.
- b. Draft a social media post to educate viewers about mental health and encourage their participation in MHANYS Mental Health Matters Day.
- c. Sample text for social media:
 - i. “Support mental health education and teacher training”
#MentalHealthMatters mhanys.org/mental-health-matters-day/
[@SchoolTag] [@AssemblymemberTag] [@SenatorTag] @MHANYSInc
 - ii. “Like peanut butter and jelly, salt and pepper, your mental and physical health go together. We support mental health in schools!”
#MentalHealthMatters [INSERT @SchoolTag] [INSERT @AssemblymemberTag] [INSERT@SenatorTag] @MHANYSInc
 - iii. “3for5 so communities can thrive. Human service providers deserve 3% increase today!” #MentalHealthMatters [@SchoolTag] [@AssemblymemberTag] [@SenatorTag] @MHANYSInc