

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

What is National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, often shortened to "Awareness Day," is a time to spread the word about the mental health and wellness of children.

For the American Legion Auxiliary, Awareness Day is also an opportunity to pay special attention to military children to ensure their unique challenges and strengths are supported by the community.

The overall goals of Awareness Day are to:

- Raise awareness of effective programs for children's mental health needs
- Demonstrate how children's mental health initiatives promote positive youth development, recovery, and resilience
- Show how children with mental health needs thrive in their communities



When is Awareness Day?

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Awareness Day is determined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) in May, during National Children's Mental Health Awareness Week.

But the date can be flexible! Some groups have held events at other, more convenient times for the organization or community – throughout May, in late April, or on the weekend before or after the official Awareness Day.

Why should we get involved?

Military children are strong and resilient, but they, too, make sacrifices and experience hardships associated with military life. Pre-deployment preparations, prolonged separation and changes in family roles during deployment, and readjustment following deployment place stress and uncertainty on the whole military family, but children often have a harder time than adults understanding the complexities of their circumstances.

The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that children of Guardsmen and Reservists are especially at risk for mental and emotional difficulties associated with deployment, since many of these families live in the "civilian world," far away from military installations and communities.

In addition, April is the Month of the Military Child, and May is Mental Health Month. Departments and Units can use this time to pay special attention to mental health and wellness of military children. By providing materials, hosting activities, and starting discussions about mental wellness in conjunction with other Month of the Military Child projects, Departments and Units can do their part to support military children and raise awareness about what it means to be a military child today.

Finally, Awareness Day is a great opportunity to spread the word about all the great things the American Legion Auxiliary does for military families. Awareness Day helps Departments and Units reach out to

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

community partners, schools, families, and other organizations and can help further build lasting, cooperative community relationships.

How can I get involved?

There are two main ways to get your department or unit involved in Awareness Day:

1. Host your own event, either with your own unit or in collaboration with community partners
2. Participate as a supporter of another organization's established events

Hosting Your Own Event

The advantage of Awareness Day is that there are very few rules or constraints on what type of event you can plan; you are free to do almost anything! The challenge of this freedom, however, is narrowing down your options and organizing an event that works for you and for the community in which you live.

Examples of Auxiliary-led Awareness Day events from the past include:

- **The Department of Michigan** helped children in several East Lansing schools create feelings books that were then donated to help military children cope with a parent's deployment. The Department also established a display at the East Lansing Public Library with samples of the feelings books and information about the deployment cycle, the American Legion Auxiliary, and Awareness Day. Their work was available for the public to view throughout the month of May.
- **The Department of New York** held a family fun day with door prizes, donated food
- **The Department of Oregon** worked with local schools throughout the month of May to talk about separation, challenges, and the feelings associated with them.

Other possible activities can include:

- **Holding an open house** at your unit and welcome local Guard and Reserve families to celebrate with you. Include games for the children and community support information for their parents.
- **Organizing a community picnic** or fair to bring together military and non-military families. Invite speakers from local mental health organizations, elected officials, representatives from a near-by military installation, and others to help educate the public and build support for military families.
- **Creating Hero Packs** or other military child support materials with Operation Military Kids.
- **Hosting a fundraising event**, such as a dinner or an auction, and use the proceeds to help a military family in need.
- **Dropping off literature and other materials** to local school counselors about how to best support children experiencing a loved one's deployment (please see "Additional Resources" section for links to information).

Participating as a Supporter of Another Organization's Event

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

Though planning your own event can be an exciting and rewarding way to serve the community, another option is to become involved in another organization's event. More than 40 organizations and their chapters participate annually in Awareness Day, so a community event may already be planned in your area.

Go to www.samhsa.gov/children for a complete list of participating organizations. With a Google search, you can almost always find contact information for a chapter in your area. Many organizations are eager for extra heads and hands to help carry out the day's events, and your department or unit may have skills they truly need. Are they hosting a community picnic? Consider providing baked goods. Are they organizing a fundraiser? Volunteer to help with set-up

Your participation is also an opportunity to include information about military children in their non-military events, form valuable relationships with other organizations, and spread the word about all the wonderful things the American Legion Auxiliary does for families and communities.

How do I involve others?

Partnerships can be important to the success of your Awareness Day activities, since other organizations can help plan and organize, publicize events, and offer resources and expertise your department/unit may not have.

Partners can include other posts/units, other veteran and military service organizations, mental health organizations and service providers, schools, parents, Guard/Reserve Family Readiness Groups, and anyone else who has a stake in the wellbeing of military children.

To make partnership successful:

- 1. Determine Your Needs.** What do you want from a partnership? Do not be afraid to think big, yet start small.
- 2. Make a List of Possible Partners.** Brainstorm potential partners that can help you reach your goals.
- 3. Choose Likely Candidates.** Concentrate your efforts on potential partners who are most likely to say "yes." Consider:
 - Connections. If you have a board member or other strong contact at a company or organization, see if that person would be willing to introduce your program to the group's decisionmakers.
 - History. Has the group been involved with children's or mental health needs or given resources in the past?
 - Ownership. Your best corporate prospects are companies with local ownership, local franchises, or national organizations where charitable and/or media decisions are made at local branches or outlets.
 - Reciprocity. Determine how the organization can benefit from working with your program. What can you offer the partner in return for their support?

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

4. **Identify Contacts.** Every organization, whether a school, a business, or a city, county, or State government, has its own hierarchy of decisionmakers. Take the time to locate someone who can provide an introduction to the most appropriate contact within the organization. If that is not possible, these tips will help you prepare a more compelling presentation:
 - Find Out Who Calls the Shots. If you are looking for a governmental partnership, find out which entities, such as legislative committees or subcommittees, focus on children's or mental health needs; then find out who sits on those committees or subcommittees. If you are approaching a specific school, you can approach the school's principal; if you are approaching an entire district, contact members of the board of education. If you are hoping to form a corporate partnership, contact the company's corporate contributions, community relations, or community investment departments. You can usually find this information on corporate websites or by calling the company and asking for the name, title, and address of the person or group in charge of community relations.
 - Learn as Much as You Can About the Organization. Find out what other partnerships or contributions the organization has, whether it has experience with children's or mental health needs, and what it might hope to gain from an alliance with you.
 - Choose Organizations With Similar Missions To Reach Specific Audiences. Consider starting with other organizations that are already aware of military and veteran issues, organizations that focus on children, and other community partners with a stake in mental health issues.
5. **Make Your Pitch.** Nothing beats a personal relationship. If you already have an "in" with your target partners, use it. Your goal is to arrange a face-to-face meeting, where you can state your case and get their support. If you do not have a connection, you should make your first contact in writing-not by telephone or e-mail. Include the following:
 - A brief statement on the status of children's mental health in your community, the goals of your Awareness Day event, and what it can mean to that organization
 - How the partner will benefit-specifically, what you will provide in terms of recognition, linkages, or other items of value to the potential partner
 - Specific information about your local program
 - Options for how the partner can help, for example, by giving you a grant to sustain your program's annual operating expenses, featuring your program's success stories in a newsletter, or contacting media on your behalf to request public service announcements
 - General information about your program, including your nonprofit status
 - Contact information for you and your program
 - When you will call to follow up
6. **Follow Up.** Give your pitch a week to arrive, and then make the follow-up phone call. Be prepared to send your pitch again, possibly to a different person. Ask for a meeting where you can make your pitch face-to-face. When you meet with the prospective partner:

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

- Be clear about what you want the partner to do for you;
 - Come prepared with good information on costs and other things the prospective partner might want to know, including facts about Awareness Day itself;
 - Be flexible: Have alternative ideas available for the prospective partner to consider; and
 - Listen to what the prospective partner wants in return. Decide how your program can create a win-win situation for all.
7. **Come to an Agreement.** Work with the partner to specify exactly what you can expect from each other and when.
8. **Maintain the Relationship.** Like any relationship, the partnership needs attention in order to grow. Maintain two-way communications with your partners and keep them posted on news from your program and your Awareness Day plans-even if it is a controversial issue or unflattering portrayal of your program (it is better for them to hear it from you than from the media). In addition, be sure to send thank-you notes to program partners, and make sure they receive evaluation data. Working together will likely increase the partner's interest in your program and could lead to support for other Auxiliary programs.

What can I do to spread the word?

- Send a press release to local and state media (for a sample, please see "Resources" section below)
- Have a community official, such as a governor, mayor, legislator, or other official sign a proclamation of support (for a sample, please see "Resources" section below)
- Customize and include Awareness Day articles in newsletters, newspapers, emails, and other notifications (for information on drop-in articles, please see "Resources" section below)
- Mobilize units to conduct events and media outreach
- Post information about Awareness Day on department and unit websites
- Distribute Awareness Day materials to units and other affiliates (such as community partners, other Veterans Service Organizations, etc).

Additional Resources

Drop-In Articles

Drop-in articles, also known as repro-proofs or camera-ready news, are an effective, cost-efficient way to spread information on children's and youth's mental health needs, as well as your success stories. A drop-in article is a type of news article that is written for direct insertion in community and weekly newspapers. Similar to a feature story in content, your National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day drop-in article should focus on soft news and have a longer shelf life than more time-sensitive news releases.

What Makes a Good Drop-in?

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

- A drop-in article should briefly articulate messages and facts about your program and children's and youth's mental health needs in an interesting way. Try to avoid listing straight facts and figures, but offer solutions to the problem and/or issue you are posing.
- Familiarize yourself with the article format and style found in weekly and community newspapers. As an insertion piece, your drop-in is more likely to be placed if it mirrors other articles written by newspaper staff.
- Make your article engaging and newsworthy. Raise your audience's awareness while pulling at their heartstrings by highlighting the challenges children, youth, and families face in dealing with mental illnesses-and the success your program has achieved in providing services to these families. Emphasize strengths by highlighting the "Thriving in the Community" theme.
- Keep it short, sweet, and easy to read. Limit your article to no more than 600 words and tailor it to an eighth grade reading level. Use bullet points to pull out important topics, and format the information so that the most important information is in the first part of the article. (Editors cut copy from the bottom up, so it is important to put your most critical messages at the beginning of the drop-in.)
- Give your article a direct link to the local audience. Focusing your drop-in article on children's mental health needs in your area will amplify the local appeal, increasing your opportunity for placement.

Who Wants This Intriguing Article?

Community newspapers tend to have much smaller staffs than larger daily papers-sometimes only an editor and several staff or contributing writers. Providing the paper with a drop-in article that provides newsworthy information on children's and youth's mental health and the valuable contributions your program makes to your area will save the newspaper staff time and get your mental health messages out there.

- When building a media list for drop-in distribution, be sure to collect the name, address, e-mail, and fax number for the editor-in-chief, editorial assignment editor, and feature editor-or whichever of the three are on staff with the papers you are targeting. Smaller community papers might only have a publisher or editor as a point of contact.
- Before sending your article, find out what format the publications prefer. Some prefer to receive camera-ready materials on slick paper, while others prefer electronic layouts, usually in PDF format. Still others prefer to lay out the articles themselves, so they will want to receive articles as Microsoft Word documents.
- Do not be afraid to target a wide range of outlets for drop-in distribution. The more places that receive your drop-in, the higher the odds for placement. The following is a list of examples for alternative drop-in article placement:
 - School newsletters or newspapers
 - Supermarket news handouts
 - E-blasts or fax blasts to your mailing list

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

- Faith-based organization publications
- Publications for ethnic minorities
- Mental health journals
- Business journals
- PTA/PTO newsletters
- School administration publications

Proclamations by Community Officials

It's a good idea to get your community involved early in the planning process. Because it can take a while to secure, one of your first steps should be to request a letter of proclamation from your governor, mayor, legislators, or other community officials.

Depending on the size of your community, it may sometimes be appropriate to contact community officials directly. Often, however, you should start with aides and staff members in an official's office and work through the correct channels to receive a proclamation.

Below is an example of an actual proclamation for Awareness Day that was signed by the mayor of East Lansing, Michigan, in support of the Department of Michigan's efforts in 2010.

Sample Proclamation:

WHEREAS addressing the complex mental health needs of children, youth, and families today is fundamental to the future of [YOUR COMMUNITY OR STATE];

WHEREAS the need for comprehensive, coordinated mental health services for children, youth, and families places upon our community a critical responsibility;

WHEREAS it is appropriate that a day should be set apart each year for the direction of our thoughts toward our children's mental health and well-being;

WHEREAS [NAME OF YOUR ORGANIZATION], through its unique approach to serving children and adolescents, is effectively caring for the mental health needs of children, youth, and families in our community;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [NAME OF MAYOR, GOVERNOR, OR OTHER ISSUER], do hereby proclaim [DATE] to be [YOUR COMMUNITY OR STATE] National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day and urge our citizens and all agencies and organizations interested in meeting every child's mental health needs to unite on that day in the observance of such exercises as will acquaint the people of [YOUR COMMUNITY OR STATE] with the fundamental necessity of a year-round program for children and youth with mental health needs and their families.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

[SIGNATURE, DATE, AND SEAL AT THE BOTTOM]

Checklist and Timeline for Planning

Planning (Phase One)

- Determine the type, size, and atmosphere of the event.
- Select location and plan logistics (room setup, food, audiovisual equipment, accessibility to the physically challenged, etc.).
- Finalize the budget and timeline.
- Begin setting the agenda.
- Send out a "Save the Date" notice via mail, e-mail, or fax.
- Identify and invite speakers.
- Begin developing your materials.
- Determine what materials and services you will need from outside vendors. Do not forget food and beverages; room setup, including tables and chairs; signs and banners; decorations, including flowers; entertainment; and attendee giveaways.
- Research the names and addresses of individuals and organizations you would like to invite.
- Recruit and secure sponsors, if necessary.
- Set up your record-keeping process and create an event binder.
- Determine meal and food service needs.

Planning (Phase Two)

- Call potential speakers to seek confirmations.
- Touch base with sponsors to update them on your progress.
- Choose a caterer.
- Determine your catering selections.
- Provide your caterers with a head count by the deadline.
- Determine transportation access.
- Determine medical or mobility needs.
- Arrange for a central office space during the event.
- Finalize and print materials (except for the agenda and participant list, which should be printed the week before the event).
- Decide whether you will invite media.
- Distribute invitations.
- Determine audiovisual needs and make arrangements with the event venue.
- Other: _____

Development

Three Weeks Out

- If you are seeking media coverage, draft a media advisory.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

- Contact speakers to discuss their presentations and see if they need additional information or support.
- Compile a list of media outlets that may be interested in covering your event.
- Other: _____

Two Weeks Out

- Send out your media advisory.
- Start calling reporters to interest them in the event.
- Make a list of materials to be taken to the location and begin packaging them.
- Make staff assignments (including registration staff, note taker, audiovisual coordinator, and speaker greeter) and explain duties to all staff members.
- Other: _____

One Week Out

- Finalize the agenda and have it printed.
- Verify details with venue, confirm audiovisual needs, and send venue your room layout and any special instructions.
- Conduct a site walk-through.
- Continue calling reporters to encourage attendance.
- Touch base with speakers to make sure that they have the correct date and location of the event, as well as the time they are expected to speak. Give speakers the name of a contact person who will greet them upon arrival.
- Assemble materials for distribution to participants; send them to the venue.
- Print name tags, if applicable.
- Draft a press release describing the event for release on Awareness Day.
- Other: _____

Implementation

The Day Before

- Make sure that all materials arrived at the venue.
- Pack an "emergency kit" with any miscellaneous materials you may need (tape, scissors, stapler, pens, pencils, paper, phone numbers of speakers, etc.).
- Other: _____

Awareness Day

- Arrive early and check that the location is set up correctly and that audiovisual materials are available as requested. Check all microphones, projectors, audio equipment, and computer connections.
- Check the registration area. Make sure name tags and supplies are plentiful. Plan to have staff members at registration approximately an hour before the start of the event.
- Make sure staff are in correct locations and that all areas are covered for the entire event.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS

- Allow time for run-throughs if requested by your speakers or needed by entertainers.
- Make sure that signs directing people to the event are posted.
- Distribute the news release.
- Other: _____

After the Event

- Take time to say "Thank you" and celebrate your success with your partners.
- Conduct wrap-up meeting with planning committee.
- Prepare written summary and evaluation of event.
- Complete event binders and records.
- Review invoices and send payment.
- Contact organizations that attended the event to discuss collaboration for next year's Awareness Day and other activities throughout the year.
- Send thank-you cards and notes of appreciation to committee members, volunteers, presenters, sponsors, staff members, and others involved with the event.
- Other: _____

Where can I go for more information?

Please visit www.samhsa.gov/children for more information, resources, and support materials.