

our minds
matter

youth advocacy & activism matters



overview

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

Have you ever wanted to stand up for something you believe in? Maybe you've seen someone treated unfairly or noticed that your school doesn't take mental health seriously enough. That feeling you get—the one that says *“this isn't okay and I want to do something about it”*—that's the heart of advocacy and activism. And guess what? **You don't have to be an adult to make a difference. Your voice matters, and your actions can spark real change.**

Advocacy means speaking up to make sure people's needs and rights are respected. That can mean standing up for a friend who's being bullied, sharing your story to raise awareness, or asking your school to offer more mental health support.

Activism takes it further—it's about *doing something* to create change in your community and the world. This could be organizing a mental health awareness day, creating a social media campaign, or joining a youth-led movement. You might feel like you're "just a teen," but **young people have always been at the center of powerful change.**

“Young people are not the leaders of tomorrow—they are the leaders of today.”

- Malala Yousafazi

key aspects of youth advocacy

If you're ready to get involved, here are a few things that make youth advocacy strong:

- **Passion:** Speak up about what matters to you.
- **Knowledge:** Learn the facts from trusted sources about what you're fighting for.
- **Courage:** It takes bravery to speak up, especially when it's uncomfortable.
- **Collaboration:** Work with others—change is stronger when you're not alone.
- **Creativity:** Use your unique voice, ideas, and talents to reach people.
- **Persistence:** Change doesn't happen overnight—keep going!

youth impact

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

youth voices that make a difference

In February 2026, OMM teen leaders Jasmin Goodwin and Abhisneha Jones spoke on Capitol Hill for the launch of Safer Online Standards, an initiative that aims to make the digital world safer for youth wellbeing.

March for Our Lives – After the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, students like X González and David Hogg organized massive protests, spoke in front of lawmakers, and started a national conversation about gun violence and school safety. Their voices made headlines and pressured lawmakers to act.

Fridays for Future – Greta Thunberg started a solo school strike that inspired millions of students around the world to join her in demanding urgent action on climate change.

In 2020, high school students in Nashville organized one of the city's largest #BlackLivesMatter marches, bringing out over 10,000 people.

Zyahna Bryant, a teen from Virginia, started petitions and organized rallies that led to the removal of Confederate statues in Charlottesville.

Students have also successfully lobbied school boards to add mental health days to absence policies or require mental health education in health classes.

In January 2026, students at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD staged a walkout in protest of the shooting of Renee Good and to ask their school district to sign a commitment not to cooperate with ICE.

advocacy & identity

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

why does identity matter in advocacy?

Your identity—like your race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, disability, or mental health—affects how you experience the world. It also shapes the issues you care about and how people respond to your voice. When you bring your identity into your advocacy, you're standing up for your truth—and showing others they're not alone.

Just as important as bringing your own identity to advocacy is being a good ally. Allyship is when you advocate for the needs and treatment of people who have an identity you do not share. Being a good ally means being a good listener, trusting the lived experiences of other people, and centering the folks most impacted - even if that means challenging or changing your own outlook.

here's why it matters

- **Different challenges, different needs:** How a person's different identities influence and interact with one another is called intersectionality. A Black teen speaking out about mental health may also have to address racism in how care is given. A trans student may advocate for both mental health support and safe bathrooms. Understanding identity helps make advocacy more real and relevant.
- **Representation matters:** When youth from different backgrounds speak up, others feel seen, included, and inspired. Diverse voices add to the collective impact. For example, when Indigenous youth advocate for environmental justice, they bring in traditions, land knowledge, and lived experience that others might overlook. The more voices we include—especially those often left out—the more powerful and fair the change becomes.

When we speak up, we also need to listen—especially to people whose experiences are different from our own. Real change is made together.

what about self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It's knowing your needs, asking for help, and setting boundaries. It's different from advocacy for others - which focuses on helping someone else or a bigger issue - but just as important. In fact, self-advocacy is often the first step toward becoming an advocate or activist. You learn to trust your voice, understand your needs, and know that you matter.

For many people, especially those in unsupportive environments or with chronic conditions like a disability, self-advocacy can be exhausting. Standing up for yourself is hard work. Remember to take breaks, ask for support, lean on community, and celebrate your successes when you can.

Taking care of yourself is a form of activism, too.

healing through aciton

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

how activism supports your mental health

Getting involved in mental health advocacy isn't just good for your community—it can be good for *you*, too. There's growing research that shows activism can boost your mental health in lots of ways:

you feel more in control

When you speak up or take action on issues that matter to you, it can help you feel less helpless. That feeling of “I *can* do something” can be a powerful way to turn feelings of frustration, sadness, or anger and turn them into real, lasting change.

you make real connections

Activism often means working with other people who care about the same things. It's a great way to meet new friends, feel like you belong, and know you're not alone.

you find purpose

Doing something that matters gives you a sense of meaning. And when life feels meaningful, it's easier to deal with stress and bounce back from tough stuff.

you learn and grow

Advocacy helps you build leadership and critical thinking skills that can boost your self-esteem and help you shine in school and beyond. This helps you build confidence, problem-solving skills, and resilience over time.

Research backs all of this up—young people who are involved in causes they care about often feel more confident, less alone, and more mentally strong.

getting started

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

how to get started in mental health activism

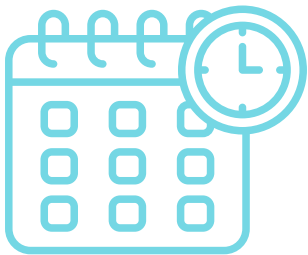
for teens who want to make a difference

You don't have to be an expert to speak up for mental health - you just need to care and be willing to take that first step. Whether you've faced your own challenges or want to support others, your voice *can* make a difference in your school, community, and beyond.

Here's how to get started:

decide how much time you can give

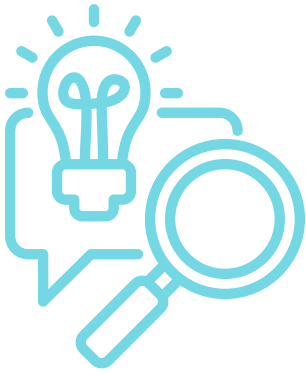
Before jumping in, think about how much time you can realistically commit.



- Is this something you can dedicate a few hours a week to? Maybe a few hours a month? Or maybe you just want to get involved in big events every few months? Some advocacy efforts, like signing an online petition, take just a couple of minutes, while others, like an in-person protest, can take much longer.
- You may not be able to give the same effort every day. Your other priorities, like school, friends, clubs, family, relationships, and work, are just as important as your advocacy goals. Being honest about your schedule helps prevent burnout and keeps activism from becoming stressful.

Even one hour a month can make a difference!

choose what you care about most



Mental health is a big topic—there are lots of ways to get involved.

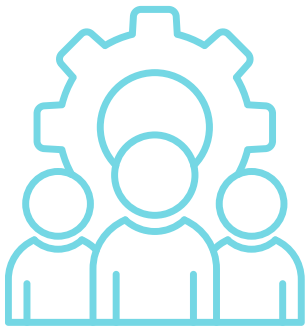
- Do you want to focus on suicide prevention? Ending stigma? Supporting LGBTQ+ youth? Immigrant mental health? There are so many areas that could benefit from your activism!
- Picking a focus can help you find the right projects and people to work with. Some people prefer to focus on areas they have personal experience with, while others may choose to focus on something they want to learn more about.

It's okay if your interests change over time!

find a group or organization to join

You don't have to do this alone!

- First, start by getting involved [in your school's OMM club](#) (or [start one](#) if it doesn't exist yet) if you're not already. Hosting meetings and school-wide campaigns is a form of activism you can do right in your school!
- Then, if you want to do more, look into local nonprofits or volunteer groups doing the work you care about.
 - Reach out to the OMM team at program@ourmindsmatter.org! We'd love to connect about how you can take your advocacy to the next level.
 - Ask a counselor or trusted adult for ideas
 - Check out the list of organizations at the end of this guide
 - Search online using phrases like “mental health advocacy opportunities near me” and “mental health volunteer opportunities near me”
- When you find something interesting, reach out! Fill out a contact form, or send an email or DM introducing yourself and saying how you'd like to get involved.
- If what you're looking for doesn't exist yet, start something! You'd be surprised how many people are waiting for someone to take the lead.



learn and listen

Good activists are always learning.



- Attend workshops, follow youth mental health pages on social media, or watch videos to understand more. **Always check the source to [make sure it's reliable](#) first!**
- Seek out, listen to, and amplify stories from people with lived experience — everyone's journey is different.
- Remember that you don't have to be the expert or have all the answers to uplift someone's story.

The more you learn, the more confident and informed you'll feel to speak out.

take action in small ways

You can start small and still make a big impact.



- **Uplift the work that's already underway:** Share helpful and accurate info on your social media, safely attend a protest, or join a call to action.
- **Start local:** Think about changes you'd like to see in your school or community, and think about how to advocate for them to happen. This can look like:
 - Speaking at a school board meeting
 - Talking directly to a community leader, like a pastor or city council member
 - Leading a campaign at your school
 - Creating a petition
 - Meeting with your principal or school administration
 - Learning more about local laws and policies
 - Making flyers, posters, or social media posts to inform others

Every step forward is a step toward progress.

set goals and stay focused

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of activism, but having clear goals can keep you focused.



- **Set small, achievable goals**—whether it's getting 10 people to attend a meeting, creating a presentation about your cause for a school board meeting, or sharing a mental health fact on your social media every week.

Break down big tasks into manageable steps to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Crossing one thing off your to-do list is a great start!

This helps you see progress and stay motivated.

build your advocacy skills

Advocating for mental health doesn't mean you have to do everything at once - or alone. Start by identifying what you're passionate about, then explore different ways to grow your confidence and skills. Here are some ways to build your advocacy toolkit:



- **Practice your own story.** Your personal experiences can inspire others and make the issue feel real. Practice telling your story in a way that's honest, safe, and focused on change - not just pain.
- **Get comfortable with speaking up.** Whether it's public speaking, writing, or creating content online, there are many ways to use your voice. Pick the one that fits you best - and keep practicing.
- **Play to your strengths.** Not everyone has to be the loudest voice in the room. Some people lead by organizing events, others by creating powerful art, writing, mentoring peers, or handling logistics. Every role matters.
- **Learn from others in the movement.** Follow trusted mental health advocates on social media, listen to youth-led panels, or join workshops. You don't have to reinvent the wheel - many young leaders are already doing powerful work you can learn from or join.
- **Ask for Help.** If there is a nonprofit (like OMM!) or advocacy group that you respect, consider reaching out to them for ways to get involved or spread awareness.

Use your resources - there are lots of ways to learn more about getting involved online and in-person. Check out our curated list at the end of this guide.

These skills will help you be a more powerful advocate and will serve you in many other areas of life!

encourage others to join

Advocacy is stronger when it's shared. One voice matters - but many voices together can shift culture, challenge systems, and create lasting change.



- **Invite friends, classmates, teachers, and other adults in your life to join your cause.** Whether it's organizing an event, sharing posts, or just starting conversations, help others find a way to get involved that works for them.
- **Build a community around the cause.** People are more likely to stay engaged when they feel connected to others. Create spaces where it's safe to learn, make mistakes, ask questions, and grow together. And find time for fun! When folks feel connected, they're more likely to come back.
- **Be an ally.** Attend other groups' events and meetings and show support for other causes. When you show up for others, they are more likely to show up for you.
- **Remember: You don't have to do everything.** Trying to take on everything can lead to burnout. **Collaboration is key.** When you delegate and trust others with pieces of work, not only is the load lighter - it also brings in new ideas and energy.

The strength of a movement is in its people, and the more you include others, the more powerful the message.

celebrate your wins (big and small)

Activism is a journey, and every step forward is worth celebrating.



- Take time to acknowledge the progress you've made—whether it's a successful event, a new connection, or simply raising awareness.
- Celebrating helps you stay motivated and reminds you why you're doing the work.

Every effort counts, and it's important to recognize the change you're creating!

self care for activists

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

take care while you take action

protecting your mental health as a mental health activist

1

know your limits (and respect them)

You don't have to do everything, and in fact, you can't. Boundaries protect your peace.



Helpful Tip: Take breaks from heavy topics, say "no" to things that feel like too much, and don't feel guilty about logging off.

2

stay connected

Activism is hard - but you're not alone.



Helpful Tip: Create group chats, peer circles, or regular check-ins with other youth activists. Don't just talk about the hard stuff- share what brings you joy or keeps you going.

3

make time to recharge

Rest is not lazy. It's part of resistance.



Helpful Tip: Schedule downtime just like you'd schedule a meeting. Watch your comfort show, take naps, or unplug from social media.

4

journal it out

You're processing big emotions - writing them out helps. Consider using prompt like:

- "What's weighing on me today?"
- "What made me feel proud this week?"
- "What do I need to hear right now?"



Helpful Tip: If writing isn't for you, drawing it out works too!

5

move your body (your way)

Move because your body is holding a lot, and it needs some love, too.



Helpful Tip: Try a 5-minute dance break, a walk outside, lifting to feel strong, stretching to lo-fi beats, or skateboarding - whatever helps shake off the heaviness.

6

stay close to your "why"

Your passion is powerful - but it doesn't have to burn you out.



Helpful Tip: Remind yourself what you care about and what you don't have to carry alone. Revisit your goals and values often. Celebrate every win.

7

share the load

You don't have to carry every campaign, post, or protest by yourself. And sometimes, activism means centering others and taking a backseat for the cause.



Helpful Tip: Work in teams. Rotate tasks. Let others lead sometimes.

8

practice a moment of mindfulness

You don't need incense or silence - just you and a pause. Mindfulness can happen wherever you are.



Helpful Tip: Try breathing in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4. Or notice 5 things around you. Or take 15 minutes to really taste and savor a meal.

9

talk to someone

You deserve support too.



Helpful Tip: Reach out to a friend, school counselor, therapist, trusted adult, or an online resource like Crisis Text Line (text MIND to 741741). Activists need care, not just courage.

10

protect your joy - it's revolutionary

Joy isn't just a break from activism - it is activism. Finding moments of happiness in a heavy world is how we remind ourselves what we're fighting for. Joy as an act of resistance has been a pillar of activism for many years, and stems from the Black liberation movement.

Your joy matters. Your joy heals. Your joy disrupts systems that profit from pain.



Helpful Tip: Do things that make you laugh, dance, play, or feel alive - even when the world feels heavy. Make space for joy on purpose.

You're Not Too Young to Lead Change

No matter your age, background, or experience, your voice is powerful—and the world needs it. Whether you're organizing events, supporting a friend, speaking out on social media, or just learning how to take care of yourself, you're already doing the work. Advocacy and activism aren't about being perfect or having all the answers—but about showing up, caring deeply, and doing what you can with what you have.

Every action you take, no matter how small, adds to a larger movement for healing, justice, and hope. **So keep going, keep growing, and keep believing: you have the power to make change—and you're not in this alone.**

more voices in the movement

YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM MATTERS

Looking for ways to get involved in youth mental health and make real change? These organizations combine advocacy, peer support, and education to create a world where young people thrive. Check them out and see how you can join the movement:

[advocates for youth](#)

Works with young people and adults to stand up for youth rights, including mental and sexual health. [Get involved in their campaigns here.](#)

[born this way foundation](#)

Started by Lady Gaga and her mom, this foundation (and partner of OMM!) encourages young people to be kind, brave, and take care of their mental health. [Join the Channel Kindness project here.](#)

[dosomething](#)

A youth-powered nonprofit that helps you create real-world impact through fun campaigns. [Join the National Youth Agenda here.](#)

[GSA network](#)

A student-led network that brings LGBTQ+ and allied youth together to organize and create safer schools. [Find out how to get involved here.](#)

[the JED foundation](#)

Focuses on protecting mental health for teens and young adults. [Check out their Student Advocacy Hub here.](#)

[NAMI](#)

The largest grassroots mental health organization in the U.S. [Learn how to speak up and create change here.](#)

[amnesty international](#)

A global group of over 10 million people fighting for human rights. They even have a special *Well-Being Workbook* just for youth activists. [Explore it here.](#)

[boys & girls club of america](#)

Supports young people in reaching their full potential. You can also learn how to lead and speak up for change. [Get started here.](#)

[GLISTEN](#)

Fights for safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ+ students. [Learn how to speak out against harmful laws here.](#)

[IDONTMIND](#)

A nonprofit that encourages open conversations about mental health. [Start your advocacy journey with their 7-step guide here](#)

[mental health america](#)

Raises awareness and pushes for better mental health policies across the U.S. [Join their advocacy network here.](#)

[national council for mental wellbeing](#)

Helps improve mental health and substance use services in communities. [See how you can get involved here.](#)

[PFLAG](#)

Supports, educates, and advocates for LGBTQ+ people and their loved ones. [Take action with them here.](#)

[u-report](#)

A UNICEF platform that lets young people speak up and share opinions on important issues. [Join the conversation here.](#)

[zero reasons why](#)

A teen-led campaign to end the stigma around mental health and prevent teen suicide. [Meet their youth advocates here.](#)

youth leadership opportunities

Want to step up as a youth leader? These programs are made for teens who are ready to speak out and make change:

- OMM's [Teen Advisory Council](#)
 - We bring on new leaders every August!
- Active Minds' [Mental Health Advocacy Academy](#)
- GLISTEN's [National Student Council](#)
- It Gets Better's [Youth Voices - Youth Ambassador Program](#)

Youth MOVE National Peer Center's [Youth Advocate Leadership Academy](#)



if you or someone you know is in crisis:

- Text **"MIND"** to **741741** for 24/7 free support from Crisis Text Line
- Text **"START"** to **678678** for 24/7 free support from The Trevor Project
- Call **988** for 24/7 free support from the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline