

Build community support. It takes all of us to remove stigma. There are Zero Reasons Why our communities can't work together. We are Zero Reasons Why. There are Zero Reasons Why we can't make mental health equal to physical health. This is the movement. There are Zero Reasons Why we can't create change. Raise awareness. Make your voice heard. There are Zero Reasons Why we can't work together to stop teen suicide. Advocate for mental health. Let's make a difference



**ZERO  
REASONS  
WHY<sup>®</sup>**

**TEEN ADVOCACY GUIDE**

# Amplifying Teen Voices for Change

## WHAT IS A TEEN ADVOCATE?

A teen advocate is someone who serves their peers and community through outreach and awareness campaigns. They help educate others by publicly promoting a cause and proposed solutions.

**Advocacy:** Providing public support for and recommending a particular action relating to causes and/or policies.

**Community Outreach:** Reaching out to the community to provide education and support to peers for a cause.

**Awareness Campaign:** A wide range of efforts to shed light on a specific goal and bring in support.

## WHAT DOES A CAMPAIGN LOOK LIKE?

We refer to Zero Reasons Why® as a campaign. A campaign like ours combines the process of raising awareness for an issue and addressing misconceptions. Other examples of campaigns include #MarchForOurLives or #BlackLivesMatter.

A campaign typically includes these elements:

**Messaging:** we use attention-grabbing words and imagery to try to get others on board with the cause. It's all about spreading the word and generating excitement!

**Grassroots Efforts:** we build a community of support by getting everyone involved. We activate our own networks on social media, at school, in our communities—whatever it takes to get people talking and taking action.

**Collaboration:** we look out for other exciting things happening related to our cause. When we team up with others, we can make an even bigger impact.

**Government Engagement:** we reach out to people in charge, like elected officials, to try and change policies that affect our cause. We start by getting support from local leaders and work our way up to higher levels.

It takes  
all of us.

There are #ZeroReasonsWhy  
we can't create change.

## WHAT DOES A ZERO REASONS WHY TEEN ADVOCATE LOOK LIKE?

The Zero Reasons Why campaign is driven by teen advocates who want to see mental health conversations elevated and the suicide rate amongst their peers reduced. Whether serving as one of our teen leaders, being a digital advocate on social media or sharing why we care, teens are at the center of our efforts to remove the stigma of mental health.

The Campaign is looking for teens dedicated to removing the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide prevention. Anyone who would like to represent the Campaign in their community is welcome.

Specifically, we are looking for teens:

- willing to speak publicly about the cause, activate teens within their school or spread awareness in the community.
- wanting to take the initiative to identify new ways to spread the message and support the three pillars of the Campaign.
- willing to organize or run events in the community or in their school.
- dedicated to doing the work, working as a team and encouraging their peers.
- willing to recruit other teens at their school to participate.

## WHY DOES BEING AN ADVOCATE MATTER?

Mental health advocates play an important role in raising awareness, challenging stereotypes and creating understanding for an often ignored or stigmatized topic. We actively work towards breaking down barriers that stop teens from seeking help. We work to create a future where everyone feels supported and mental health topics are no longer taboo.

Speaking up for mental health creates a more empathetic and inclusive society. Through advocacy, people are empowered to share their experiences, find support and prioritize their own mental wellbeing.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGE BUILDING IN ADVOCACY

Making a real difference in mental health requires all of us to work together. That means building connections between different groups: young people, mental health experts, parents, educators, community organizations, and policymakers. When we bring these diverse perspectives together, we can make an even bigger impact.

To do this, it's important to speak and listen to each other in a respectful way. We want everyone to feel included and safe to share their thoughts. By having open conversations, we can bridge the gaps between us and build understanding. It's also important to be open to feedback and recognize that mental health is connected to other important issues in society.

When we all work together, we can create real, lasting change in our communities.

## EXTENDING REACH WITH DIGITAL ADVOCACY

A key component of the Campaign is **digital advocacy**: the use of technology (social media, email, online articles, etc.) to spread awareness and mobilize a group of people around a cause. Social media has become a central component of digital advocacy for almost every movement (including ours!) in recent years because of its ability to amplify voices and quickly spread a message to large audiences. It's a great way to show your support for the causes you care about, and encourage others to do the same.

Digital advocacy offers an accessible and inclusive platform to raise awareness, share stories and provide education and support – reducing stigma and fostering empathy. Research backs this up: the U.S. Surgeon General has stated that social media can serve as a positive source of connection, acceptance and self-expression for young people—especially for those who are often marginalized, such as LGBTQ+ or disabled groups.

You don't have to be an influencer to have influence. You can create real change. Impacting even one person makes a difference.

## WAYS YOU CAN START MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### Add Your Voice to the Movement

Share why you care and help us remove the stigma of mental health. When we share our stories, we remind others they're not alone. It helps us prioritize mental health and ask for help when we need it.

You can add your voice to the conversation at [zeroreasonswhy.org/share-your-story](https://zeroreasonswhy.org/share-your-story)

### Be a Digital Advocate

Using your platform on social media or in-person settings will spread the message more quickly. Start now by following our channels and sharing our content.



@zeroreasonswhy\_

Zero Reasons Why

**Pro Tip:** check out our Influencer Kit for tips, tools and shareable content!

### Activate Your School

Recruit friends to join the movement and help remove the stigma of mental health by raising awareness in your school and encouraging others to spread the word.

**Ways to rally your community:** put up posters, host a #ZRW Yellow Out or plan a school or community event to share the Campaign and mental health resources. This could be a mental wellness week in your school, hosting a booth at a community event or planning a Color Run or walk-a-thon – find something you're passionate about! You can find more inspo and info in our Event Planning Guide.



Advocating for mental health together is a powerful and productive way to create meaningful change – but it can feel difficult or overwhelming to know where or how to begin. This worksheet is designed to help guide you through this process by providing brainstorming questions and tangible steps you can take together to advocate for mental health.

---

What issue do you want to address/solve?

How does this issue impact your community?

Who has the power to help change this issue? (Ex., government officials, community leaders, local organizations, etc.)

What might some solutions to this issue look like?

How can you gain support for this issue? (Ex., social media posting, educational materials, local flyers, emails, etc.)

**Are there local Mental Health Advocacy Days you can attend as a group?**

*Search for your area's "State Capitol Day" at [afsp.org/calendar](http://afsp.org/calendar), or search for other local advocacy opportunities and note them below:*



**What current state or federal bills are being considered around mental health?**

*See current legislation by visiting [afsp.org/public-policy-advocate](https://afsp.org/public-policy-advocate) and searching under "Current Bills"*

**Who are your local representatives and how can you get in touch with them?**

*Find who represents you on local, state and federal levels by visiting: [usa.gov/elected-officials](https://usa.gov/elected-officials)*

**U.S. Senators**

**State Senator**

**U.S. Representative**

**State Representatives**

**Governor**

**Local Commissioners**

**Mayor**

**School District Superintendent**

*Contacting your officials about mental health policies is an important part of advocating for change. Elected officials are responsible for representing the interests of the people they serve, so by sharing your experiences, expressing support for mental health initiatives and raising awareness about gaps in services, you can help inform decision-making and shape legislation.*

# Sample Letter for Contacting Policymakers

Dear [Representative Name],

I am writing to you as a concerned [citizen/student] and a passionate advocate for mental health awareness in our community. I believe that mental health is an integral part of overall well-being, and it is crucial that we address this issue with urgency and compassion.

I am reaching out to you today to request your support for increased awareness, resources, and policies that prioritize mental health. Mental health issues affect a substantial portion of our population, and yet there is still a significant stigma surrounding these conditions. By supporting and creating mental health initiatives, we can foster an environment of understanding, acceptance, and support for those who are struggling.

Specifically, I would like to propose the following actions:

**Increase funding for mental health programs:** Adequate funding is essential to expand mental health services, including access to affordable counseling, therapy, and psychiatric care. Allocating additional resources to mental health programs will ensure that individuals in need receive the support and treatment they deserve.

**Implement mental health education in schools:** Introducing mental health education as a part of the school curriculum will help to reduce stigma, promote early intervention, and equip students with the knowledge and tools to maintain their mental well-being.

**Enhance community-based mental health services:** Strengthening community-based mental health services, such as crisis hotlines, support groups, and outreach programs, will ensure that individuals can access help in their immediate environment, reducing the burden on emergency departments and promoting timely intervention.

**Support legislation to protect mental health rights:** Advocate for policies that protect the rights of individuals with mental health conditions, including anti-discrimination measures in employment, housing, and healthcare. By promoting equality and inclusivity, we can create a more compassionate society.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Together, we can make a profound impact on the lives of individuals affected by mental health challenges. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]