



CREATING STRONG MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

PTAs can be strong partners to school leadership in providing relevant school-based mental health supports and services to families and teaching positive social and emotional skills to kids.

WHY ARE STRONG MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS IMPORTANT?

All families contribute to their children's success and overall well-being. [Research](#) shows the more that families are involved, the more likely their children are to succeed, regardless of race/ethnicity, class or parents' level of education. Specifically:

1. The more parents/caregivers and communities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves.
2. Speaking up for children protects and promotes their ability to not only succeed academically, but to thrive in life.

While most schools understand the importance of creating an environment that supports students' overall mental health and wellness and offering services and programs to help families prioritize and strengthen their mental health, many are unable to do so successfully because they:

- Lack financial resources.
- Do not have dedicated mental health support personnel.
- Are overwhelmed with competing priorities.
- Do not know what families want or need.

This is where your PTA comes in! Forming a mental health partnership with school leadership will demonstrate the unique value of your PTA in reducing or removing some of the obstacles schools face in providing relevant, accessible and helpful mental health services and supports to ALL families. And your PTA can help make families feel more connected with what is happening within your school.

WHO SHOULD YOU PARTNER WITH?

Your PTA should partner with leaders at the district and local level who have the authority to make decisions that can either positively or negatively impact your school's climate like:

- School principals
- School counselors, psychologists or nurses
- District superintendents
- District psychologists
- District school health leaders



Your PTA should also partner with anyone in your school community who can impact or be impacted by the school-based mental health services or supports provided, such as:

- Families
- Students
- Teachers and aides

Tip:

Consider forming a “Healthy Minds Team” consisting of local and district school leaders, mental health support personnel, teachers, and families and students from a variety of racial, ethnic and financial backgrounds. Use this [Healthy Minds Team job description](#) to recruit volunteers.

WHAT SHOULD YOU PARTNER ON?

Your PTA should partner with school leadership to:

1. **Share out information about existing school-based mental health programs or services with families.** If this information is confusing or hard for ALL families to access and use give that feedback to your school leadership.
2. **Distribute mental health information and resources that help ALL families with their identified concerns and needs.** By collaborating with the school to use their communication channels, you can get much-needed information into families’ hands!
3. **Create an environment that support students’ mental health by connecting families with the information they need and being a voice for families.** Look for ways that PTA volunteers can support school-based mental health programs, staff or teachers.

Sample partnership opportunities that PTAs can take the lead on include:

- [Reaching out to families and assessing their:](#)
 - Mental health knowledge, needs, barriers
 - Knowledge and attitudes about existing school-based mental health programs or services.
- [Sharing information with families about:](#)
 - Mental health
 - Social Emotional Learning
 - Existing school-based mental health programs or services
 - Tools to help improve mental health and address challenges
 - How to have productive mental health discussions
 - Strategies to strengthen and prioritize mental health in your daily lives
- Mobilizing parent volunteers to support school-based mental health programs, staff or teachers.
- Connecting families with local mental health experts or community organizations.
- Fundraising for services or programs that promote and support students’ good mental health.

Advocating at the district level for increased mental health support personnel. This [Template Letter to School District Leadership](#) provides sample wording that you can use.



WHEN SHOULD YOU PARTNER?

PTAs should partner with school leadership throughout each school year.

At the beginning of the school year: Schedule a meeting with school leadership to discuss:

- Any existing school-based mental health services or programs, if they are used, and how they are promoted to families
- What student or family mental health data has been collected by your school or district before
- What other resources school leadership need to create an environment that supports students' mental health
- How your PTA can help

Throughout the school year: Have regularly scheduled Healthy Minds Team meetings to:

- Create, plan and implement your school's healthy minds strategy
- Determine measures of success
- Delegate tasks
- Share data, feedback or project status
- Discuss challenges and problem solve

At the end of the school year:

- Discuss feedback received from your school community on the usefulness, relevance, accessibility and helpfulness of family and school-based mental health resources and supports
- Brainstorm how the school and PTA can continue to support families' and students' good mental health during the upcoming school year
- Advocate at the district level for increased mental health support personnel
- Celebrate your accomplishments! Use Mental Health Awareness Month in May as an opportunity to promote your work and celebrate all that your school community has done to make mental health a priority.

HOW CAN YOUR PTA HAVE A SUCCESSFUL MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

PTAs and school leadership can have a successful mental health partnership by committing to:

- **Communicating** openly, respectfully and often.
- **Sharing** family and student feedback with each other.
- **Supporting each other** in a positive way.
- **Having clear roles and responsibilities** in meeting identified family mental health needs, filling in gaps in mental health knowledge and services, and addressing barriers to school-based resources or supports.