



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

April 29, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day

Thursday, May 5, 2016, is the National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day. Join the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) Initiative in celebrating the **National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day**. This day is to raise awareness about the importance of children's mental health. The national event will highlight strategies for integrating behavioral health with primary health care, child welfare and education. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Human Services is recognizing Children's Mental Health Awareness month and theme "**Finding Help, Finding Hope**" during the entire month of May.

In 2014, VDOE's Office of Student Services received a five-year "Project AWARE" grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Project AWARE is a part of VTSS. The VTSS is a data-driven decision making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral and social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students. Project AWARE supports the training of over 750 educators and community members each year in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA), an evidence-based program that teaches participants to recognize and respond to signs of mental health issues and crises in adolescents.

Empower the whole school community for a more seamless mental health safety net. Consider bringing a free Project AWARE sponsored YMHFA course to your school or community. Contact Ruth Saunders, YMHFA coordinator, at rlsaunders@vcu.edu or (804) 828-1482.

Please refer to the following online resources and tools to help support children's mental health awareness:
<http://www.samhsa.gov/children/national-childrens-awareness-day-events/awareness-day-2016>
<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/individuals-and-families/children-and-families/childrens-mental-health-awareness-month>
<http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>

Additional information and questions regarding YMHFA may be directed to Vivian Stith-Williams, school social work specialist by e-mail at Vivian.Stith-Williams@doe.virginia.gov; telephone (804) 225-4543, or Ruth Saunders, YMHFA coordinator at the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports - Research and Implementation Center at VCU, by e-mail at rlsaunders@vcu.edu; telephone (804) 828-1482.

SRS/VW

