

MICHIGAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH SPECIAL EDITION

Welcome to the National Bullying Prevention Month edition of *Michigan Family Connections* newsletter. The Family Center, with Michigan Family to Family, is dedicated to the prevention of bullying of children and youth, especially of those with special health care needs.

In this special edition, you'll be inspired by the winning artwork from our K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest, and gain awareness of bullying and the call to stop bullying in our communities. Hear about Bullying Prevention Initiative grants that are helping schools start bullying prevention programs and hear about the impact of one such program for a Michigan family.

We have gathered a list of important resources for families and professionals and invite you all to join our October webinar series for a line-up of presenters who are passionate about bullying prevention and awareness!

We hope, in these pages and with our Bullying Prevention webinar series, to inspire you to join the conversation and take action to help create safe and supportive schools, communities, and online environments during the month of October and beyond.

**The 1st Place Winner: Azalia, age 11
K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest**

Azalia:

"I chose to include kids in my drawing because it shows that different people can all be friends, and the saying says the kids can be friends and not bully each other."



FALL 2025

A newsletter for families of children and youth with special health care needs, and the professionals who care for them.

Connecting you with information and news you can use.

A virtual publication brought to you by the Family Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs and the Michigan Family to Family Health Information Center

NO
Bully
Zone

BULLYING AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

Bullying is a serious concern for Michigan youth. Children and youth with special health care needs, whose conditions or impairments may create the perception that they are different, weak, or alone, are at even greater risk of being bullied.

According to the 2022–2023 National Survey of Children’s Health, 35.1% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 in Michigan reported being bullied. That number climbs sharply to 59.1% for youth with special health care needs, and even higher—61.1%—for children with complex medical needs.

These statistics are more than just numbers; they tell the story of more than half of the children with special health care needs in our schools and communities—most likely a child you know, love, or care for—who has been or will be verbally assaulted, physically injured, or socially isolated or excluded.

What can be done to change this heartbreaking reality of bullying for our children and youth with special health care needs? To create meaningful change, the first step as parents and professionals, is to understand our children’s vulnerabilities and the



dynamics of bullying. Learn more with the resources found on page eight.

Notably, focus groups with parents of youth with special health care needs have highlighted a common theme: peer relationships are one of the most effective ways to protect their children from bullying. Learn how Children’s Special Health Care Services (CSHCS), is offering grants to help schools start peer-to-peer programs aimed at preventing bullying of children and youth with special health care needs on page four.

October’s National Bullying Prevention Month is a chance to join the movement to make a safer, more inclusive community for our most vulnerable children. Thank you for being part of the conversation!

2nd Place Winner: Amelia, age 10 K–12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest

Amelia:
“I drew my picture because I wanted to inspire kids to stop bullying and because I love to draw and paint.”



**3rd Place Winner, Avaya, age 10
K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest:**

Avaya:
"Our kindness
today leads to
a brighter
future for
tomorrow."



LAWS AND POLICY RESOURCES TO HELP WHEN YOUR CHILD WITH A DISABILITY IS BULLIED

Contacting your child's school administration can be an important first step if your child is experiencing harassment or bullying at school. When your child is the target of bullying or harassment related to their disability, it's important to know the federal and state laws and resources specifically designed for your child's situation. *

Under federal laws, schools are required to respond to harassment or bullying of a student with a disability. The school must take immediate and appropriate action.



Specifically, they are required to investigate, communicate about steps to end harassment, eliminate any hostile environment, and prevent harassment from recurring.

If the school is not taking necessary action, parents may consider filing a formal grievance with the Office of Civil Rights. For more on federal laws and processes for filing a grievance, visit [Rights and Policies](#).

In addition, all states have laws that address bullying, which may or may not be specific to students with disabilities. For a complete overview of state laws, visit: [Michigan resource page](#) on [StopBullying.gov](#).

Many school districts also have district-level or local policies that address how to respond to bullying situations. Contact your local district to request a written copy of the district policy on bullying.

**Shared with permission from the Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center's guide: "[Students with Disabilities and Bullying](#)."*

CSHCS BULLYING PREVENTION INITIATIVE (BPI) GRANTS

In response to the critical need to eliminate bullying, especially for our children and youth with special health care needs, Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS) initiated a grant program for schools to start or expand a peer-to-peer program.

Since 2021, CSHCS has awarded over \$579,000 through nearly 100 grants to help schools in Michigan implement programs that promote inclusion and peer support among students.

Schools can receive up to \$5,000 to launch or grow their Peer-to-Peer programs. Successful proposals are expected to:

- Foster a more inclusive school environment.
- Expand peer support networks,
- Increase social and emotional supports.
- Strengthen anti-bullying initiatives, especially for students with special health care needs.

CSHCS has partnered with Grand Valley State University's START (Statewide Autism Resources & Training) Project to use their peer-to-peer program model for all youth with special health care



needs. Their evidence-based peer-to-peer program pairs students with and without disabilities during the school day, embedding meaningful connections into the school structure. The result? A powerful sense of belonging for all students.

As Michigan schools gear up for a new academic year, the continued investment in peer-to-peer programs offers a hopeful path forward—where every child, regardless of their needs, can feel safe, supported, and seen.

Information on 2026–27 BPI grants, a January informational webinar, and applications can be [found here](#).

4th Place Winner: Paislee, age 11 K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest

Paislee:
"I put a school because that is one of the most important places to be kind. The flag reminds students to always be nice to each other. My wish is for everyone to be friends with each other and stick up for one another if there are bullies."



LINKS: BUILDING CONNECTION, PREVENTING BULLYING

Written by Samantha Oard, parent and Family Leadership Network representative

At our local elementary school, the LINKS peer-to-peer program is quietly transforming lives. Designed to ensure no student feels alone, LINKS pairs children with special health care needs—or those simply in need of a friend—with thoughtfully selected “linked buddies.” These peer partners spend intentional time together, whether it’s sitting at lunch, offering support in class, or shooting hoops during open gym.

For my son, Tanner, participating in his elementary schools LINKS program, was incredibly impactful. His first Links’ buddy made such a lasting impact, that Tanner still talks about their friendship three years later. On days that could have been tough and isolating, his buddy was there, asking about Tanner’s weekend, favorite games, or just listening. Those simple moments brought comfort and connection when they were needed most.

The goal is simple, but powerful: make sure every student has someone in their corner. And the ripple effect is real. One act of kindness—like a star athlete sitting with someone new—can shift the culture of an entire team. What begins as a one-



Samantha Oard and her son, Tanner on-one friendship can grow into a movement of inclusion. LINKS doesn’t just build confidence for the students involved—it reshapes how others view and treat their classmates.

When kindness is modeled, it spreads. And when students feel seen and supported, bullying has less room to grow. Because sometimes, it only takes one friend to change someone’s whole day. LINKS makes sure that a friend is always there.

Honorable Mention Entry: Kate, age 8 K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest

Kate:
“I did not know what to do at first, and then I thought of doing a school and a kid. I messed up a couple of times, but I made it work. My friends gave me ideas and now I am very happy with my work.”

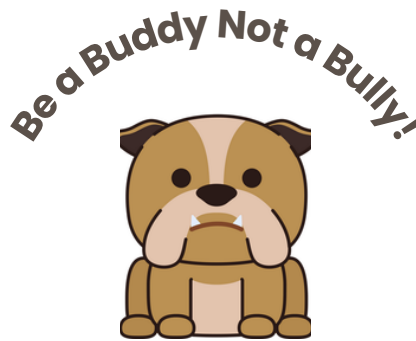


NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH WEBINARS WEDNESDAYS IN OCTOBER

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. With one in five students reporting they have been bullied, chances are a child or youth you know and care about has been or will be bullied.

The Family Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs is committed to the prevention of bullying, and is offering a series of webinars for parents, family members, educators, healthcare providers, and other professionals during the month of October.

National Bullying Prevention Month is an opportunity to take action to create safe and supportive schools, communities, and online environments. Please join us as we offer information and education to address and prevent bullying. Webinar descriptions and registration links are included. Please share with others who would be interested in joining these webinars.



Tues., Oct. 7th – 11:00 to 12:00 pm
Bullying Prevention for Children with Disabilities with Judy French from the National Bullying Prevention Center: Learn about bullying dynamics, types of bullying, and recognizing the signs of bullying. Discover ways to nurture self-advocacy in children with disabilities and the role of the community in bullying prevention for all children. [Register Here](#)

Tues., Oct. 21st – 11:00 to 12:00 pm
Raising Resilient and Bullyproof Kids with Tom Thelen, Author of Mental Help 101 for Teens: Learn to help kids and teens when they face bullying, mental health challenges, and the ups and downs of adolescence. Get the tools to break the stigma around mental health and reignite your passion for helping kids who may be experiencing bullying. [Register here](#)

Tues., Oct. 14th – 11:00 to 12:30 pm
Understanding ACEs and Promoting Positive Childhood Connections with Michelle Walters, ACEs Community Champion: An introduction to Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) and Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). Receive a framework to build stronger and more positive connections for children and communities. [Register here](#)

Tues., Oct. 28th – 11:00 to 12:00 pm
Beyond Labels: Celebrating All Abilities with Max Hinga, Special Olympics MI Athlete Leader and Global Messenger, and other youth: Hear first-hand experience with bullying and how peer support can positively impact relationships and help ensure that children with special health care needs are included in activities within their schools and communities. [Register here](#)

OK2SAY – STOP THE SILENCE, HELP END THE VIOLENCE

Often someone knows about the threat of violence or other safety concerns in our schools, but they fail to report the threat before it is carried out. This culture of silence, in which students suffer harm that could have been prevented, is being transformed by Michigan's [OK2SAY](#) program.

The OK2SAY student safety program allows students to confidentially report tips on potentially harmful or criminal activities before they occur. Tips go to specially trained OK2SAY technicians who address the immediate need and forward the information to the appropriate place. Tips go to schools, local law enforcement agencies, community mental health agencies or the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

In 2024, the OK2SAY program received 11,671 tips spanning 25 categories. Bullying was the leading concern, with over 2,000 tips shared.

Tips to OK2SAY allow for early intervention and prevention of harm. And with every tip to OK2Say, courageous students are showing they care and want to make a difference for their fellow students and in their schools and communities. Remember, it's OK2SAY.



Stop the Silence. Help End the Violence.

Submit OK2SAY Tips 24/7 by:

**Call: 8-555-OK2SAY
(855-565-2729)**

Text: 652729 (OK2SAY)

Email: OK2SAY@mi.gov

Website: www.ok2say.com

Phone Apps: [iPhone](#) [Android](#)

Honorable Mention Entry: Braydon, age 10 K-12 Bullying Prevention Art Contest

Braydon:

"My brother and I holding hands to show affection to stop and prevent bullying."



BULLYING PREVENTION AND AWARENESS RESOURCES



State of Michigan Bullying Prevention Initiative & Resources

The MDHHS [Children's Special Health Care Services \(CSHCS\)](https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/cshcs/bullying-prevention-initiative) program offers grants for school districts to adopt programs to reduce bullying for students with special health care needs, which includes students who have physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions. <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/cshcs/bullying-prevention-initiative>



GVSU's Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START) Project

Grand Valley State University's START Project's evidence-based peer-to-peer program model helps schools incorporate anti-bullying initiatives specific to students with special health care needs to promote belonging for all students.

<https://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter/>



OK2SAY

The OK2SAY student safety program allows Michigan's students to confidentially report tips on potential bullying, or other harmful or criminal activities to allow intervention and prevention of harm before threats are carried out. Bullying is the most reported tip to OK2SAY.

<https://www.michigan.gov/ok2say>



PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC)

Pacer's NBPC leads social change to prevent childhood bullying, so that all youth are safe and supported in their schools, communities and online. They provide resources for students, parents, educators, and others, and recognize bullying as a serious community issue that impacts education, physical and emotional health, and safety and well-being of students. <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/>



StopBullying.gov

A national resource that provides tips on prevention, how to respond if bullying occurs, and guidance for youth, families, and educators. It also includes resources tailored to children with disabilities.

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/special-needs>



Michigan Alliance for Families

Information, support, and workshops to help families understand their rights, work effectively with schools, and navigate special education services. They host a comprehensive [bullying resources webpage](https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/bullying/).

<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/bullying/>



Edutopia

Resources to Prevent Bullying and Harassment at School | Edutopia

<https://www.edutopia.org/topic/bullying-prevention>



CRISIS PREVENTION
INSTITUTE

Crisis Prevention Institute

Proactive Approaches to Address School Bullying: A Guide for Educators <https://www.crisisprevention.com>

SIGN UP FOR THE MICHIGAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER, WEBINAR REGISTRATION LINKS, AND MORE!

To sign up for quarterly *Michigan Family Connections* newsletters, and/or to receive notifications of news, events, and trainings from the Family Center, register for GovDelivery emails by [clicking here](#) or by scanning the QR Code (right) with your phone's camera to receive a sign-up link. You may unsubscribe at any time.



SHARE YOUR IDEAS FOR IMPROVING MICHIGAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTERS!

Are there community resources or services you wish to know more about? Would you like to see certain topics or themes featured? Is your organization having a special celebration or event you would like us to spotlight? If so, please share your suggestions for making *Michigan Family Connections* newsletter more helpful for your family or clients by taking this very short survey: [Newsletter Survey](#)

WHO WE ARE

The Michigan Family to Family (MI F2F) Health Information Center is a federally funded project*.



MI F2F shares resources and information on disability and health issues with families of children and youth with special health care needs in Michigan.

MI F2F also works with health and other professionals. MI F2F helps families make informed decisions and supports families to partner with professionals.

For more information and resources, look for us on Facebook or visit our website.



[MI Family to Family Website](#)

*This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The contents are those of the Michigan Family to Family staff and do not represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. The sharing of resources is for your consideration only. Use at your own discretion.

The Family Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (Family Center) is

the statewide parent-directed center within the Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS) Division at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).



The primary role of the Family Center is to offer emotional support, information, and connections to community-based resources to families of children and youth with special health care needs, including all children who have, or are at an increased risk for physical, behavioral, developmental, or emotional conditions.**

[Family Center Website](#)

CSHCS Family Phone Line:
800-359-3722

**The Family Center serves families with children with any disability, physical medical, mental health, developmental or intellectual condition.