

# Beyond the Surface:

*Building Strong Foundations in Youth*



## Cultivating Joy for Your Family This Holiday Season

The holiday season is here, and while it can bring joy and excitement, it can also create stress and pressure. Between the cost of gifts, busy schedules, and the feeling that you might be *missing out* if you don't do everything, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. One helpful strategy is remembering that it's okay to say no. Choose the traditions that matter most to your family, favorite treats, music, movies, Christmas lights, or quiet time together, and let go of the rest.

Slowing down benefits both adults and youth. Children feel holiday stress too, their routines change, families are busier, and they often sense when adults are overwhelmed. Because kids may not always have the words to explain their feelings, watch for signs like changes in sleep or appetite, headaches, stomachaches, or emotional outbursts. Keeping routines steady, avoiding overscheduling, and including regular movement can help everyone stay balanced. Simple moments, reading together, enjoying a snack, or taking a short walk, can help children feel safe and connected. The Article: *Creating Holiday Memories that Build Resilience in Adolescents* lists several strategies to help youth during this time.

Winter break often means more social media use, which can increase fear of missing out for both kids and adults. Remember that social media shows only the best moments, not real life. Talk early about holiday and gift expectations, listen to your child's concerns, and remind them that their worth isn't measured by what others post. Most importantly, focus on connection rather than perfection. By slowing down and savoring small moments, your family can create meaningful holiday memories that last.

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Improving Lives Through Healthy Minds  
810-648-0330

# Helping Youth Grow Their Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize one's own emotions, identify emotions in others, empathize with people, and respond appropriately to emotional situations. Youth with higher levels of emotional intelligence (EI) tend to have better social skills and stronger relationships, communicate effectively, and work well in teams. They often experience less stress in the face of change, demonstrate strong decision-making and problem-solving abilities, and exhibit greater confidence, resilience, and self-control.

Caring adults can help young people develop their EI by assisting them in recognizing and understanding their feelings, and by showing empathy rather than dismissing their emotions. When adults validate a young person's feelings and model empathetic responses, it supports the development of emotional awareness and healthy emotional expression.



Helping youth develop healthy coping skills is also important. Encourage them to take a moment to calm down in their room, listen to music, or go for a walk when they feel overwhelmed. Providing options for self-regulation can empower youth to manage their emotions in constructive ways.

Finally, be honest with your teen about your own emotions and embrace your imperfections and mistakes. Modeling vulnerability shows that everyone is a work in progress and normalizes continuous growth, rather than labeling a person as simply "good" or "bad." This approach encourages youth to value learning and self-improvement.

## Helping Children and Youth Identify and Normalize their Emotions

As parents and caregivers, we can help children and youth learn to recognize and name their feelings. A simple conversation starter like, "I've noticed you've been spending more time in your room lately. Are you ok?" can create a safe space for them to open up.

Here are a few tips:

- Avoid correcting their behavior right away, focus on listening.
- Try to see the situation from their point of view.
- Reassure them that their feelings are normal and that they're not alone.
- When the time feels right, help them problem-solve next steps.

To learn more, consider attending a Youth Mental Health First Aid Course. Visit [www.sanilaccmh.org](http://www.sanilaccmh.org) to enroll in our next free class.

## Sanilac CMH: Expanding Services, Dismantling Barriers

For more than 50 years, Sanilac CMH has provided behavioral health services to people in Sanilac County. In the past, we were required to focus mainly on Medicaid recipients with serious mental health conditions, developmental disabilities, or those in crisis. Getting outpatient services meant calling an access center, completing a pre-screening, and sometimes waiting up to two weeks for an appointment. Many people had to repeat their stories several times, which was stressful and sometimes retraumatizing. When we reviewed our services, we found a major gap—many community members needed timely mental health help, but limited resources and long wait times made that difficult.

That changed in Fall 2023, when we received a federal grant and became a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC). This important step allows us to serve more people in our county, including those with mild to moderate mental health needs, Veterans, people with private insurance or Medicare, and individuals who are uninsured through a sliding fee scale. We also added outpatient substance use treatment, and our caseload has grown by more than 25%. To make starting services easier, we launched an advocacy effort to remove the extra access-line step. As of October 1, 2025, anyone in Sanilac County can simply call Sanilac CMH directly at 810-648-0330 to begin services. Our crisis team continues to be available 24/7, and walk-ins are welcome Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We remain committed to improving well-being and providing mental health care that is easy to access, respectful, and supportive.

# Calm and Confident

## Zoey Bujak



Over the past year, Zoey has worked very hard on improving her mental health. She came to Sanilac CMH to learn how to manage her anger, and since then, she's made amazing progress at home and in school. "When I get really angry, I try to be quiet and walk away," she said. "If I'm home, I go to my room and take some time alone." These tools have helped her feel more in control and less overwhelmed.

One big lesson Zoey has learned is to focus on what she can control and let go of the things she can't. She uses art to relax and to help her focus, especially drawing nature scenes, dragons, and animals. "I used to not finish my drawings," she said, "but now I can focus and finish them. That feels really good." She's proud that her focus has also helped her do better with schoolwork.

She has also grown closer to her family. "I used to stay in my room all the time, but now I come out more and talk with my parents and sisters," she said. Her parents are proud of how far she's come, and so are her sisters, who are now starting to follow her example.

Zoey's team at CMH is proud of her, too. Her care manager says, "She's really learning how to take care of herself. She knows what she can control and works hard to keep getting better." She says she stays motivated by trying new things and doing what she loves, especially art. "Learning gives me excitement. I like adventures and am proud of how far I've come".

## Children, Youth, and Post-Holiday Blues

For children and adolescents, holidays provide a break from school and an opportunity to connect with friends and enjoy traditional holiday celebrations. Returning suddenly to regular schedules can feel jarring. The shift from holiday excitement to daily routine may trigger disappointment or emotional withdrawal.

Post-holiday blues vary by age and temperament, but common signs include moodiness, irritability, sleep trouble, appetite changes, difficulty concentrating, social withdrawal, or increased complaints about returning to school or activities.

In our page two sidebar article, we encouraged caregivers to help youth normalize and identify their emotions. This applies anytime young people have trouble with their emotions, feel unsure if an emotion is "ok," or come to us for support. When we respond openly and support mental health, we model the healthy attitudes we want them to adopt, thereby building trust, and fostering future interactions.

Take practical steps: re-establish routines. Be patient; re-adjusting to the routine may take a little time. Assign kids small goals, such as feeding the dog after school, brushing their teeth in the morning, or laying out clothes the night before. For older youth, getting back into the habit of homework. Plan enjoyable upcoming activities so everyone has something to look forward to.

Monitor symptoms closely. Post-holiday blues are usually temporary. If symptoms persist for more than two weeks, it may be time to seek professional help. Don't hesitate, give us a call at 810-648-0330 to schedule an appointment.

## About Sanilac County Community Mental Health

Sanilac County Community Mental Health is dedicated to delivering high-quality care to those it serves. We are committed to addressing the needs of each individual comprehensively to improve lives through healthy minds.



## Your Time is Valuable

We know your time is valuable. Balancing work, family, and daily responsibilities can make it hard to fit anything extra into your schedule. As parents and caregivers, we want to support our children and youth, but taking a full day off for a training isn't always possible. That's why Sanilac CMH has worked to make our services and community education options as accessible as possible.

We invite you to join us for Mental Health First Aid this February and March. Instead of spending eight hours in one class, you can now complete part of the course online at home and then attend a shorter, 4 - 4.5 hour in-person session. These classes are free, and registration is required. Scan the QR code below to sign up, or visit our website at [www.sanilaccmh.org](http://www.sanilaccmh.org).



### *Talk To Us:*

Sanilac County  
Community Mental Health  
227 E. Sanilac  
Sandusky, MI 48471

☎ 810-648-0330 Assistance 24/7  
🌐 [www.sanilaccmh.org](http://www.sanilaccmh.org)  
📘 [facebook.com/sanilaccmh](https://www.facebook.com/sanilaccmh)

Help is available; you are not alone.

If you need assistance for yourself or a loved one, we are here for you 24/7.

If a situation is potentially life-threatening, call 911 immediately.

### Youth Mental Health First Aid

## February 26

*(click here to register)*

**8:30 a.m. - 12:30 pm**  
Sanilac CMH  
227 E. Sanilac Ave.  
Sandusky, MI

*(The online portion must be completed before in-person date)*

Mental Health  
FIRST AID  
from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

### Adult Mental Health First Aid

## March 12

*(click here to register)*

**8:30 a.m. - 1:00 pm**  
Sanilac CMH  
227 E. Sanilac Ave.  
Sandusky, MI

*(The online portion must be completed before in-person date)*

Mental Health  
FIRST AID  
from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



**Mental Health  
FIRST AID**

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR  
MENTAL WELLBEING