



The Laurie, Heather and Alex Wier Saint Joseph Mental Health Awareness Scholarship offers two \$2,500 awards—one for a boy and one for a girl—who are currently in 5th, 6th, or 7th grade—and who will be entering 6th, 7th, or 8th grade at St. Joseph or CN—are eligible to apply. The scholarship's purpose is to ease tuition costs while encouraging students to speak openly about mental health and reduce the stigma surrounding it.

Specifically, applicants are to follow the below prompts and write an essay focusing on one of the following areas of mental health:

- Eating Disorders; Conditions like anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder are prevalent among teens, often influenced by body image concerns and societal pressures.
- Anxiety Disorders: Many teens experience excessive worry, social anxiety, or panic attacks, often linked to academic pressure, social expectations, or personal insecurities.
- Depression: Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities can significantly impact a teens' daily life and well-being.
- Substance Abuse: Some teens turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism, leading to addiction and other mental health challenges.
- Self-Harm or Suicidal Thoughts; Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents, making early intervention and support crucial.
- ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder): Many teens struggle with focus, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, affecting their academic and social lives.
- Social Media Impact: Excessive screen time and online interactions can contribute to anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues due to cyberbullying and unrealistic comparisons.
- Bipolar Disorder: Teens with bipolar disorder experience extreme mood swings, shifting between manic episodes (high energy, impulsivity) and depressive episodes (low energy, sadness). These fluctuations can impact school, relationships, and overall well-being.
- Schizophrenia: Though rare in teens, schizophrenia can cause hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized thinking. Early signs may include social withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, and unusual thoughts or behaviors.



The essay prompts aim to encourage thoughtful reflection while maintaining an awareness and focus on mental health. Essay prompts should be used springboards, not a checklist—address whichever ones help tell the story and keep the spotlight on mental health. Essays should be no more than three typed, single-spaced pages. Applicants need to include full name, current grade, the school attending next year, mailing address, phone number, and email address. A parent's name, email, phone number, and signature are also required.

1. **Understanding the Signs** Choose one of the listed mental illnesses and describe its common symptoms. How might someone recognize these signs in themselves, friend or a loved one? Why is early awareness important?
2. **Breaking the Stigma** Mental health stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help. How does stigma affect those living with the mental illness you chose? What can individuals and communities do to create a more supportive environment?
3. **Seeking Help and Support** If someone experiences symptoms of the mental illness you selected, what steps should they take? What resources and organizations—like NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)—are available in your community to provide education, advocacy, and support?
4. **Personal Reflection and Social Impact** Do you have a personal connection or experience with mental illness, either directly or indirectly? How has this shaped your understanding? How do you think schools and communities can better support mental health?
5. **Media and Mental Health** How is the mental illness you selected portrayed in media (TV, movies, or social platforms)? What are common misconceptions, and how can accurate representation improve public understanding?

For more information, please contact Adrienne Carroll, Chair of Saint Joseph Church Tuition Assistance Committee. adrienne@stjosephcolumbia.org