

# teen MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID



## DESCRIPTION

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) is an evidence-based training program for teens that teaches young people in grades 9–12, or ages 14–18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers.

Adolescence is a time of critical change and development, and the time when mental health challenges may first emerge. Those challenges may be the cause for falling grades, problems with close relationships and substance use. Take comfort knowing that your students will be prepared to provide support for their peers as well as better cope with mental health challenges themselves – and get assistance from a trusted adult.

## COURSE OVERVIEW

National Council for Mental Wellbeing, in partnership with Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, is currently conducting research to measure the skills, knowledge and confidence in providing tMHFA to a peer and actual usage of tMHFA by young people after taking the course.

National surveys and other studies show that young people will turn to their friends for support before approaching a parent, sibling, significant other, teacher, online service or professional/school service. This training teaches young people the skills they need to recognize and help their friends with mental health and substance use challenges and crises and how to get the help of a trusted adult quickly.

The course includes lectures, films, group activities, creative expression through writing and drawing, discussions, and skill-building practice through case studies and role play. It does not teach teens how to diagnose – instead, teens learn information about being a supportive friend, encouraging friends to seek help and knowing when it's time to get an adult involved.

tMHFA is a universal approach to mental health education. The intent is to equip all teens – not just a select group – with the skills to help one another.



## BENEFITS OF BRINGING tMHFA TO YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION:

- **Give** young people the skills to identify and respond to mental health and substance use challenges, including how to seek the help of a responsible and trusted adult.
- **Promote** a healthy and happy environment that recognizes the value of physical and mental health.
- **Empower** teens to open the conversation about mental illnesses and addiction with friends.
- **Address** the impact of school violence and bullying on mental health.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

### AFTER THE COURSE TEENS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Recognize early warning signs that a friend is developing a mental health or substance use challenge.
- Recognize warning signs that a friend may be experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis.
- Describe how to talk to a friend about mental health and seeking help.
- Explain when and how to get a responsible adult involved.
- Discuss where to find appropriate and helpful resources about mental health challenges and professional help.
- Apply the tMHFA Action Plan to help a friend with a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis.



## COURSE OUTLINE

tMHFA training is designed to be delivered in schools or community sites. Three interactives' sessions of 90 minutes each or six sessions of 45 minutes each.

- 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO teen MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID**
  - tMHFA does not teach teens how to diagnose – it's information about being a supportive friend, encouraging friends to seek help and knowing when it's time to get someone involved.
  - Mental Health in general, what mental health challenges are and how common they are in teens.
- 2. IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES ON TEENS**
  - Learn How people with mental health challenges can get better.
  - Professionals who can help and types of help.
- 3. LEARNING THE tMHFA ACTION PLAN**
  - Helping a friend who is in crisis because they are suicidal.
  - Introducing the tMHFA Action Plan
  - Learn how the tMHFA Action Plan can be used in a crisis situation. (Video shows a teen helping a friend who is experiencing suicidal thoughts)
- 4. USING THE ACTION PLAN TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING A CRISIS**
  - Helping a friend who is experiencing another type of crisis, such as threatening violence or harm to others, engaging in non-suicidal self-injury or experiencing a traumatic event such as bullying, abuse or assault.
  - Practice using the tMHFA Action Plan in these types of crisis situations.
- 5. HELPING A FRIEND WHO MAY BE IN CRISIS**
  - Learners learn how to help a friend who may be in crisis due to substance use.
  - Helping a friend who's developing a mental health challenge.
- 6. RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE**
  - Learners learn that recovery is possible.
  - Helpful school, community and national resources.

### The tMHFA ACTION PLAN five steps, which can be used in any order.

1. **LOOK** for warning signs.
2. **ASK** how they are.
3. **LISTEN UP**
4. **HELP** them connect with an adult.
5. **YOUR FRIENDSHIP** is important.

## TEEN SAFETY

The tMHFA course teaches young people how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers. It does not teach them to diagnose.

The tMHFA course discusses topics such as mental health and substance use challenges, mental health crises (including suicide), school violence and bullying. Some young people may find those topics distressing. To ensure teen safety, MHFA USA works with schools and organizations to implement key safety measures:



### 1. SAFETY PROTOCOL

Sites must have a protocol in place for responding to a learner experiencing distress.

At a minimum, the protocol should cover:

- Following up immediately with a teen who says they are or have been suicidal. This is an urgent matter. A site/school mental health professional must follow up with them immediately. A site's protocol for responding to a teen in distress should be implemented.
- Discussing course content with any individual teens who may be at increased risk, such as those who have been touched by suicide.
- Staff can talk with any teen they were concerned about before the tMHFA course, even if that teen doesn't request help.
- At the end of every session, instructors are required to collect an Exit Ticket from each teen. This Exit Ticket provides teens with a discreet way of asking for help for themselves or a friend.
- The Exit Ticket process.
  - After each session, all participants must complete an Exit Ticket.
  - The Exit Ticket is an opportunity for teens to ask questions, say something they've learned and ask that an adult check in with them.
  - The Instructor(s) must read over the completed Exit Tickets before leaving the site to identify any teens requesting follow-up by a site/school mental health professional.
  - Before the instructor leaves the site, they must give the names of teens who request follow-up to the site/school mental health professional or other identified staff member, the site/school mental health professional must contact the teen at the earliest opportunity.

### 2. MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN THE CLASSROOM

Sites must have Adults available during the course to provide additional support:

- A site/school mental health professional must be available during the class.
- At least two adults must be in the training room (virtual or in-person) at all times. They do not both have to be tMHFA Instructors, but they can be. The classroom teacher and school counselor are both great options to help Instructors manage the class.
- Sites may ask local mental health professionals or other social service staff from outside the school or organization to be available while the program is being taught.

### 3. INFORM tMHFA PARTICIPANTS AND PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Sites are encouraged to keep participants and parents and caregivers informed:

- Conduct three introductory tMHFA information sessions. Sites must present informational sessions for parents/guardians, staff and teens. Because the program is new, it's important that family, staff and teens understand what it's about. Each group should have an individual informational session.
- Send letters with information about the course and how parents/guardians can help. Parents/guardians are encouraged to support their teens during and after the course. These letters should provide tips, national resources for additional help and more.
- Provide information about opting out. If parents or guardians have any questions about tMHFA or concerns about their child participating in the training, they should be able to contact someone at the school or organization to learn more and ask questions. Make sure there is a contact readily available.



### REQUIREMENTS TO BRING tMHFA TO YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION

In order for Kentucky RHIO to teach tMHFA at your school or youth-serving organization, you must meet the following requirements from the National Council of Mental Wellbeing:

- Must be able to implement tMHFA for teens in grades 9-12, or ages 14-18.
- Must be able to meet the criteria for implementing tMHFA with fidelity:
- Schools or organizations should have a minimum of 5% of staff at the site trained in Youth MHFA. This will increase the capacity of staff members to adequately address any mental health and substance use challenges among teens.
- The school or organization offering the training must have a safety protocol in place to ensure youth safety, including how to respond to a teen who's in distress and indicates they would like to be seen.
- The course must be taught in classes of approximately 5 to 30 teens on non-consecutive days. (There must be at least one day, but no longer than two weeks, between sessions). The program should not be taught in large, assembly-style sessions.

Sites are encouraged to provide Youth MHFA training to parents and caregivers before the tMHFA course begins or concurrently with the tMHFA course.

