

Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour training course designed to give members of the public key skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as CPR training helps a layperson without medical training assist an individual experiencing a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps a layperson assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The evidence behind Mental Health First Aid demonstrates that it makes people feel more comfortable managing a crisis situation and builds mental health literacy — helping the public identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness. Specifically, studies found that those who were trained in Mental Health First Aid have greater confidence in providing help to others, greater likelihood of advising people to seek professional help, improved concordance with health professionals about treatments, and decreased stigmatizing attitudes.

Mental Health First Aid certification, which must be renewed every three years, teaches participants to:

- Recognize the potential risk factors and warning signs for a range of mental health problems, including: depression, anxiety/trauma, psychosis and psychotic disorders, substance use disorders, and self-injury. Youth Mental Health First Aid addresses mental health challenges common among adolescents, including: depression, anxiety, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavioral disorders, and substance use disorders.
- Use a 5-step action plan to help an individual in crisis connect with appropriate professional help.
- Interpret the prevalence of various mental health disorders in the U.S. and the need for reduced negative attitudes in their communities.
- Apply knowledge of the appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help resources available to help someone with a mental health problem treat and manage the problem and achieve recovery.
- Assess their own views and feelings about mental health problems and disorders.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID SCHEDULE

SESSION 1 (four hours)

Part 1 (two hours)

- What is Mental Health First Aid?
- Mental Health Problems in the USA
- The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan
- Understanding Depression
- Understanding Anxiety Disorders

Part 2 (two hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Suicidal Behavior & Depressive symptoms
- What is Non-Suicidal Self-Injury?
- Non-crisis First Aid for Depression and Anxiety

SESSION 2 (four hours)

Part 1 (two hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Panic Attacks
- Crisis First Aid for Traumatic events
- Understanding Disorders in Which Psychosis may Occur
- Crisis First Aid for Acute Psychosis

Part 2 (two hours)

- Understanding Substance Use Disorder
- Crisis First Aid for Overdose
- Crisis First Aid for Withdrawal
- Using Mental Health First Aid

EXPECTATIONS FOR CERTIFICATION

- Each participant must be present for the entire course and pass a final written exam.
- Each participant must receive a mandatory program manual and local resource information.

TENETS OF FIDELITY

The US program uses the term 'fidelity' to describe the core elements of the original Mental Health First Aid kept intact in its adaptation for American cultures. The elements outlined below are expected to be honored by those providing the program throughout the US.

- **Presentation:** The course is to be facilitated by one or two certified instructors. Facilitators should present to a group size which they are comfortable managing and which includes enough participants to foster group discussion. The recommended course size is 15-25 participants, although instructors do have flexibility based on their experience to determine a course size which fits the above criteria and works for their needs.
- **Delivery:** The Mental Health First Aid-USA Curriculum is specifically designed to appeal to adult learners. The teaching notes offer a variety of suggestions for discussion topics, exercises, and other activities designed to keep participants attentive and actively engaged in the course. This is specifically designed so the pace of the course changes on a regular basis and requires participants to be involved in the content. As such, instructors should not only focus on keeping the content and discussions moving forward at appropriate intervals, but also ensure that all participants are in an environment where they can be involved in discussion.
- **Content:** The curriculum is divided into four sessions covering six topic areas. While the program is not scripted, to allow for flexibility of discussion, instructors are expected to present all non-optional slides, exercises and program videos in the order which they are presented in the teaching notes. Additional content added for local purposes is allowed, but should be limited to helpful resources and minimal tailoring for audiences in exercises. Modifications or supplements to the curriculum slides are not permitted.
- **Spirit:** Mental Health and substance use issues can often be viewed as somber, serious or 'heavy' topics. The program itself is designed to give appropriate weight to the severity of certain mental illnesses and addiction disorders while still emphasizing hope for recovery and presenting the material in a relaxed, comfortable environment for course participants.