



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is Mental Health First Aid?

A: Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a 12-hour training course designed to give members of the Illinois public and professionals key skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. The evidence behind the program demonstrates that it does build mental health literacy — helping the public identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness.

Q: How much time does it take to complete the Mental Health First Aid program?

A: The Mental Health First Aid program runs 12 hours. It was originally conducted as four 3-hour sessions, but can also be conducted over a two-day period.

Q: What do Mental Health First Aid training participants learn?

A: The goal of Mental Health First Aid is to increase mental health literacy. Mental Health First Aiders also learn a 5-step process that teaches them to assess a situation, select and implement appropriate interventions, and help the individual in crisis connect with appropriate care. Participants are also introduced to the risk factors and warning signs of specific mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, psychosis, substance use, eating

disorders, and self-injury; engage in experiential activities that build understanding of the impact of illness; and learn information about evidence-supported treatment programs. An important component of the Mental Health First Aid training is the opportunity to practice the intervention strategy rather than just learn about it. This simple experience can make it easier to actually apply the knowledge in a real-life situation.

Q: What types of crisis interventions are covered?

A: Like CPR training helps a non-medical professional assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps an individual who doesn't have clinical training assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis, such as contemplating suicide. In both situations, the goal is to help support an individual *until* appropriate professional help arrives. Mental Health First Aiders learn a single strategy that includes assessing risk, respectfully listening to and supporting the individual in crisis, and identifying and contacting appropriate professional help. Trainees are taught how to apply this strategy in a variety of situations, such as helping someone through a panic attack or with an acute stress reaction, engaging with someone who may be suicidal, supporting a person experiencing psychosis and helping an individual who has overdosed.

Q: Are there differences between the Mental Health First Aid and Psychological First Aid programs?

A: Yes. The main differences between Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) are as follows:

- 1.) MHFA has a broader focus and is defined as follows:
"Mental Health first aid is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or in a mental health or substance use crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis resolves." Thus, it includes the full range of developing mental disorders and associated crises. PFA is usually solely focused on response to disaster and trauma.
- 2.) MFHA does provide some training in how to respond to a person who has experienced a traumatic event. However, this training is much less detailed than in Psychological First Aid.
- 3.) Psychological First Aid is often given by people with some specialist health training. MHFA training is designed for those who are not trained mental health professionals. The first aider's role stops once the appropriate professional help is reached.

Q: Where did Mental Health First Aid start?

A: Mental Health First Aid was created by Professor Tony Jorm, a respected mental health literacy professor, and Betty Kitchener, a nurse specializing in health education. The program is auspiced at the ORYGEN Research Center at the University of Melbourne, Australia. (www.mhfa.com.au)

Q: How was Mental Health First Aid introduced to the United States?

A: The National Council of Community Behavioral Healthcare adapted the original Australian version of the Mental Health First Aid program for U.S. audiences. In February 2008, the first class of 14 instructors were certified to teach the 12 hour Mental Health First Aid program. These instructors hailed from seven behavioral health organizations in six states (including North Central Behavioral Health Systems in Illinois). The National Council will continue to conduct future instructor certification trainings. In addition to adapting the core program and certifying instructors, the National Council will also be developing specialized training materials for a variety of audiences, providing ongoing technical assistance to Mental Health First Aid program sites, and partnering with local, state and national organizations to expand the reach of this important and innovative program.

Q: Which organizations participated in the first Instructor Certification Program in February 2008?

A: North Central Behavioral Health Systems (IL) is very proud to be among the inaugural Mental Health First Aid program sites in the United States. Other inaugural sites include, Denver Mental Health Center (CO), Seminole Community Mental Health Center (FL), Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (IL), Iowa State Department of Health (IA), Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center (KS), and Gateway Healthcare (RI).

Q: Has Mental Health First Aid been replicated in other countries?

A: Yes. To date, it has been replicated in England, Scotland, Canada, Hong Kong, Finland, Singapore, and now the United States.

Q: Why is it called Mental Health First Aid of Illinois?

A: North Central Behavioral Health Systems and Community Counseling Centers of Chicago formed MHFA of Illinois as a joint community education program to share resources and expand the program's scope.

Q: Who are the instructors?

A: Instructors are identified by the organization that is launching Mental Health First Aid in the community. Most often, instructors will be staff from behavioral health provider organizations, local/state mental health authorities, or mental health/addictions advocacy organizations. In some cases, the organization may tap partner organizations or identify volunteer leaders to conduct the programs. In all cases, the instructors must be affiliated with a Mental Health First Aid program site and meet general criteria around knowledge of mental health/substance use and ability to communicate and transfer knowledge effectively. North Central Behavioral Health Systems currently has 8 certified MHFA instructors to meet the training needs of communities in downstate Illinois.

Q: Who is the target audience for Mental Health First Aid?

A: Mental Health First Aid is targeted to a variety of audiences: friends and family of individuals with mental illness or substance use problem, professionals (such as police officers, human resource directors and healthcare workers), school and college leadership, faith communities or anyone interested in learning more about mental illness and substance use problems. The training venues will also vary as Mental Health First Aid program sites reach out to Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, hospitals, nursing homes, Rotary Clubs, PTAs, social clubs and other groups who make up the fabric of a community.

Q: Is there evidence to support the effectiveness of the program?

A: Yes, in fact, in Australia, four detailed studies have been completed and nearly a dozen journal articles published on Mental Health First Aid's impact on mental health literacy. One trial of 301 randomized participants found that those who 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. Unexpectedly, the study also found that Mental Health First Aid improved the mental health of the participants themselves. Findings from the other studies have echoed these outcomes. For further evidence supporting the implementation of Mental Health First Aid, please see the Evaluation section of the Australian Mental Health First Aid website. <http://www.mhfa.com.au/evaluation.shtml>

Q: What do MHFA participants receive?

A: Participants receive 12 hours of face-to-face education from a certified Mental Health First Aid instructor, a course manual, and folder with resource materials. Participants also receive a completion certificate if they attend the full 12-hours.

Q: What is the cost to attend or sponsor a Mental Health First Aid training course?

A: The current fee is \$ 50.00 per participant to attend a Mental Health First Aid training course. Organizations can sponsor a training for up to 16 participants for a fee of \$ 800.00 plus travel expenses.

Q: Are continuing education credits available?

A: North Central Behavioral Health Systems has been approved to provide continuing education credits through the following organizations: Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and the Illinois Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse Professional Certification Association (IAODAPCA). The fee for continuing education credits is \$ 300.00 per participant.

Q: What is the long-term vision for Mental Health First Aid?

A: We envision a day when Mental Health First Aid will be as commonly known and used as CPR and regular First Aid training. Mental Health First Aid has the potential to reduce stigma, improve mental health literacy, and empower individuals—the benefits are limitless!

Q: How can I learn more about Mental Health First Aid trainings in my community?

A: Contact the Mental Health First Aid of Illinois program at North Central Behavioral Health Systems by calling the information line at (815) 224-5039 or e-mail MHFAinfo@ncbhs.org.