



BRINGING teen MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TO YOUR COMMUNITY



Mental Health FIRST AID
from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

**BORN THIS WAY/
FOUNDATION**



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CONTACT US

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teen MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

WHY **teen** MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) teaches teens in grades 10–12, or ages 15–18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in their friends and peers.

49.5%

of adolescents ages 13–18 live with a mental disorder.

More than 1 in 5 (22.2%) of them experience a severe impairment.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

50%

of all mental illnesses begin by age 14, and 75% by the mid-20s.

*Source: Archives of General Psychiatry****

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for youth age

15–19.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

WHAT IT COVERS

- Common signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges.
- Common signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis, particularly suicide.
- The impact of school violence and bullying on mental health.
- How to open the conversation about mental illnesses and substance use with friends.
- How to seek the help of a responsible and trusted adult.

WHO TAKES OR TEACHES tMHFA?

- Teens in grades 10 – 12 or ages 15–18.
- High schools, organizations partnering with a high school and youth-serving organizations are eligible to teach tMHFA.

THREE WAYS TO TEACH AND LEARN

- **In-person** – Lessons are conducted in person in six 45-minute sessions or three 90-minute sessions.
- **Blended** – Teens complete a self-paced online lesson, then participate in six live, Instructor-led sessions. These Instructor-led sessions can be:
 - » Video conferences.
 - » In-person classes.

Sources:

National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.) *Statistics: mental illness*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>

Kessler, R., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K.R., Walters, E.E. (2005, June). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 62(6); 593–602. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593

National Center for Health Statistics. (n.d.) *Adolescent health*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/adolescent-health.htm>

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tMHFA Supports Your Teens

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) teaches young people in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in their friends and peers.

tMHFA gives young people the skills to have supportive conversations with their friends and how to get help from a responsible and trusted adult.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO TEACH AND LEARN tMHFA

- **In-person** – Lessons are conducted in person in six 45-minute sessions or three 90-minute sessions.
- **Blended** – Teens complete a self-paced online lesson, then participate in six live, Instructor-led sessions. These Instructor-led sessions can be:
 - » Video conferences.
 - » In-person classes.

We'll work with you to ensure your staff are prepared to teach tMHFA and support young people in challenging or crisis situations. The program includes teaching notes, presentations and informational material to share with parents/guardians and families and a tMHFA manual for every teen taking the course.

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.

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Why Choose tMHFA?

tMHFA IS BASED IN EVIDENCE

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) is an evidence-based training program for teens that originated in Australia. The 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.

YOUNG PEOPLE TURN TO EACH OTHER

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.

tMHFA is a universal approach to mental health education. Schools and organizations are urged to train an entire grade level of teens if in a school or all the age-appropriate teens in non-school settings. The intent is to equip all teens — not just a select group — with the skills to help one another.

ADULTS ARE TRAINED TO SUPPORT

A critical step of the tMHFA Action Plan is to get the help of a trusted adult. tMHFA sites should have 10% of school staff trained in [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) (for adults helping young people) before teaching tMHFA to teens. This ensures that adults are available and prepared to help young people facing a crisis or challenge. Sites are encouraged to offer Youth Mental Health First Aid training to parents/guardians as well.

tMHFA IS TAILORED TO YOUR SITE'S NEEDS

tMHFA is designed to be delivered in the format and schedule that works best for your youth. There are three ways to teach and learn the program.

- **In-person** – Lessons are conducted in person in six 45-minute sessions or three 90-minute sessions.
- **Blended** – Teens complete a self-paced online lesson, then participate in six live, Instructor-led sessions. These Instructor-led sessions can be:
 - » Video conferences.
 - » In-person classes.

MHFA IS RECOGNIZED INTERNATIONALLY

More than 3 million people around the world have been trained in MHFA – more than 2.5 million in the United States alone.

*Yap, M. B. H., Reavley N. J. & Jorm A.F. (2013). Where would young people seek help for mental disorders and what stops them? findings from an Australian national survey. *J Affect Disord.*, 147, 255–61.

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Learning Objectives and Course Outline

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) teaches young people in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers. A critical step highlighted in the tMHFA Action Plan is connecting with a trusted adult.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO TEACH AND LEARN tMHFA

- **In-person** – Lessons are conducted in person in six 45-minute sessions or three 90-minute sessions.
- **Blended** – Teens complete a self-paced online lesson, then participate in six live, Instructor-led sessions. These Instructor-led sessions can be:
 - » Video conferences.
 - » In-person classes.

COMPONENTS

- **tMHFA Self-paced Courses:** Instructors help teens in Blended classes access these sessions via Mental Health First Aid Connect, our online learning platform. Each self-paced course directs teens to reference additional content in the tMHFA manual and prepares them for the corresponding Instructor-led session with the base knowledge to support the discussion and activities. Lessons introduce teens to foundational content including an overview of the tMHFA Action Plan and key definitions such as mental health and mental health challenge.
- **tMHFA Instructor-led Sessions:** Instructors facilitate these sessions in person or via videoconference. Instructors use the tMHFA Blended Teaching Notes to guide the session, which builds on the content teens learned in the self-paced course. Instructors can review the content, respond to questions and then facilitate discussions that make the information relevant to the teens. Instructors guide teens through activities that allow them to practice skills such as having a supportive conversation with a friend and using the tMHFA Action Plan.
- **Skill-building Scenarios:** Three animated skill-building scenarios help teens apply and practice their tMHFA skills. Teens “meet” virtual peers and use the tMHFA Action Plan to help them navigate difficult situations.

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.

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OUTLINE OF 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 else involved.

1. Mental health in general, what mental health challenges are and how common they are in teens.
2. Impact of mental health challenges on teens, how people with mental health challenges can get better, professionals who can help.
3. Helping a friend who is in crisis because they are suicidal, introducing the tMHFA Action Plan (Look, Ask, Listen, Help Your Friend) and learning how it can be used in a crisis situation. A video shows a teen helping a friend who is experiencing suicidal thoughts.
4. 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 (Look, Ask, Listen, Help Your Friend) in these types of crisis situations.
5. Helping a friend who may be in crisis due to substance use and helping a friend who's developing a mental health challenge.
6. Recovery and resilience.

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Teen Safety

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) 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:

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.
- 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.

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.

INFORM tMHFA PARTICIPANTS AND PARENT 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 MHFA 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.

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Evidence-based Content

teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) is an evidence-based program developed in Australia in 2015 by Dr. Laura Hart at the University of Melbourne and Dr. Claire Kelly at Mental Health First Aid Australia. It teaches young people in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers.

In partnership with researchers in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the National Council conducted an evaluation of tMHFA in the United States. Preliminary results from the research study show the effectiveness of the program.

SIX MONTHS AFTER TAKING TMHFA, TEENS REPORTED USING THE SKILLS THEY LEARNED TO HELP A FRIEND:

- 57% of teens reported that they had encountered a peer experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis.
- 88% of those teens reported using their tMHFA skills to help their peer.
- 67% reported they used their tMHFA skills to help someone in their life experiencing stress.

INSTRUCTORS ALSO SHARED FEEDBACK:

- Following the tMHFA training, 505 of the approximately 7,000 teens trained approached an Instructor or other personnel to voice a concern about their own or a friend's mental health.
- 248 teens used their Exit Ticket* to request a check-in during the tMHFA training.
- 98% of Instructors reported they thought the tMHFA training was relevant to their teens.
- 99% of Instructors believed the training made a positive impact on their teens.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- More than half of teens recognized a peer experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis.
- When asked, an overwhelming 88% of them reported using their tMHFA skills to help a peer.
- Instructors believed the training made a positive impact on their learners.

This data is preliminary. Research publications are forthcoming.

**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. Sites must establish a protocol to have Instructors and/or a site staff person read every Exit Ticket and contact any teen who requests help.*

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What Participants Say

The National Council and Born This Way Foundation brought tMHFA to the United States in spring 2019. Since then, thousands of young people have been trained in tMHFA and many have used the skills they learned to help their friends.



With the virtual expansion of teen Mental Health First Aid we will continue supporting the mental wellbeing of students during this vulnerable and traumatic time. Young people need each other and the tools to virtually support one another. Equipping teens with this knowledge brings us one step closer to our goals of validating their emotions and eliminating the stigma around mental health.” - **CYNTHIA GERMANOTTA, *President and Cofounder, Born This Way Foundation***



As I sat through teen Mental Health First Aid , I cried. There were about 30 of us in the room and, from the start, my peers began to open up about their own struggles. That day, I heard how my classmates had been abused, tossed from home to home and traumatized throughout life. I had never felt less alone. In that classroom, I began to realize that everyone has a story that includes pain and struggles. And as we learn how to share our stories, we feel less helpless and more empowered.”
- **DREW VORIS, *teen Mental Health First Aider***



The teen Mental Health First Aid training has truly opened my eyes to a variety of new resources, helped me to become who I am and connected me with other people my age who have been working hard to make a difference in our own respective communities. My experience with teen Mental Health First Aid had a great impact on my community by showing that mental health is a serious matter and there are people who care and resources to help.”
- **JADYN BELLANDER, *teen Mental Health First Aider***



We have incorporated the training into our sophomore health curriculum. Teaching students to be aware of mental health issues in peers has been beneficial in multiple ways. We find students are more aware of their peer struggles and students are more accepting and understanding of mental health issues.”
- **DOUGLAS FULTON, *Principal, Freedom High School, South Riding, Va.***



Since the training we have noticed more students have been reporting concerns about their friends who are struggling. We believe teen Mental Health First Aid has had a significant impact on our sophomore class and we will continue to train our sophomores. I believe teen Mental Health First Aid should be implemented in every high school. Our teens are struggling and we need to help them. We need to educate them about mental health and stop this epidemic of depression and suicide. We need teens to take mental health seriously and report to an adult any time their friends talk about suicide.”
- **AMY MORAN, *tMHFA Instructor***.



The impact of this program was immediate and far-reaching for these students. The feedback was focused on how most of the Valley High School seniors wished they had this training earlier to help them better cope with the stress and pressure of high school. It was a revelation to the trainers to learn that these young adults were self-aware enough to realize that tMHFA program wasn't just beneficial for their future, they recognized moments in their past that they could have used the training as well.” —**ANDREW MAGNESS, *tMHFA Instructor***.

Additional teen Mental Health First Aider and Instructor testimonials can be found on the [MHFA blog](#).

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Bring tMHFA to Your Community

Teen mental health is more important now than ever before. With your support, **teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA)** can provide young people with the information and skills to be mindful of their own mental health and support their friends and peers.

Any school, youth-serving organization, or organization in partnership with a school that wants to bring tMHFA training to teens at their site can apply to become a tMHFA Site. Schools and organizations must be accepted to teach tMHFA.

If you are interested in bringing tMHFA to teens in your community, [schedule a call](#) with a member of our team to learn more about the requirements and begin your application.

Here are a few tips to start a conversation with your local school or youth-serving organization:

GATHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Prepare to have a conversation with community leaders by understanding the latest information and resources about teen mental health and tMHFA. These resources can be a great place to start:

- From the World Health Organization : [Adolescent mental health \(who.int\)](#)
- From the National Institute for Mental Health: [Child and Adolescent Mental Health \(nih.gov\)](#)
- From Mental Health First Aid USA: [Mental Health First Aid for Teens](#)

Taking [a Youth Mental Health First Aid course](#) will give you a sense of what the training looks like and help you understand how to assist the teens in your community.

EMAIL YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION'S LEADERSHIP

The first step is to begin the conversation. Adapt the following letter to pitch tMHFA to your school or organization's leadership.

Dear [Insert Name],

I am writing about an exciting new training program, teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA), specifically designed for teens in grades 10-12 or ages 15-18. This program was developed in response to critical mental health needs of young people — nearly half of adolescents ages 13-18 have a mental disorder and suicide is one of the leading causes of death among teens — as well as research indicating that young people have a preference for sharing problems with peers, but that their friends do not always have the knowledge or skills to help.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing brought tMHFA, an evidence-based training program that originated in Australia, to the U.S. in partnership with Born This Way Foundation and adapted for young people in America. It teaches teens how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers. It gives them the skills to have supportive conversations with their friends and how to get help from a responsible and trusted adult.

The program is available in both in-person and blended learning options.

Given the difficulties our young people have faced over the past year, this training is more important now than ever before. Let's discuss the possibility of bringing this important program to our youth this school year! You can also [schedule a call](#) with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing directly to learn more and begin an application.

Thank you,
[Insert Name]

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Requirements to Bring tMHFA to Your School or Organization

To teach **teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA)** at your school or youth-serving organization, you must meet the following requirements:

- Must be able to implement tMHFA for teens in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18. At this time, grade 9 and post-secondary students are not permitted.
- Must be able to meet the criteria of implementing tMHFA with fidelity:
 - » If teaching at a school, the course should be taught to an entire grade level of students (not individual classes) in the school. If teaching at a youth-serving organization or program, the course should be taught to an entire group of students at the youth-serving organization or program.
 - » Schools or organizations should have approximately 10% of staff at the site trained in tMHFA. 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 should be taught in classes of approximately five to 30 teens on non-consecutive days. The program should not be taught in large, assembly-style sessions.



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