

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS TOOLKIT



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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The Mental Health Awareness Toolkit serves as a manual to guide Action Teams and Individuals through the steps of bringing mental health awareness to your local schools, organizations and communities.

The more our communities know about mental health and mental health challenges/crises, the more we can do to provide protective factors and resources, identify and support peers who are struggling, and keep our communities healthy and safe!

This toolkit will walk you through what activities and events you can host, the proper language to use when discussing mental health, and what resources are available to youth and adults in your community.

*This toolkit does not discuss signs, symptoms or crisis response. If you are looking for that information, please see the resources page!

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

As you look through this toolkit, we want to encourage all of our teams and individuals to think about effective prevention strategies and best practices!

Plans for mental health awareness events and activities should be structured around evidence-based programs and practices. What does this mean? You should be looking to do and share things that are credible, reliable and effective based on data! What will statistically and beneficially engage the community? What statistics can you provide that can be sourced back to trusted organizations? What will support the cultural diversity of your community and display the cultural competency of your event? What will ensure the well-being of all participants?

In recent years, we have seen that many of the practices that used to be followed, like scare tactics, are not effective for our youth. It's best to remain informative, engaging and evidence-based to create an impact instead of relying on fear to start conversation and participation.

We always suggest that teams and individuals refer to the [Strategic Prevention Framework](#) as a resource for best practices. The SPF is a reliable foundation for assessing and planning prevention activities, events and more that are most effective and impactful for the communities they support!

THE MENTAL HEALTH BASICS

Mental health is a person's condition in regard to their psychological and emotional well-being. Good mental health isn't about being happy every single day but being able to cope through life's everyday challenges and stressors.

Our mental health, like our physical health, can go through up and down periods - but when the down periods begin to interfere with our day to day and last longer than usual, we might be experiencing a mental health challenge.

Sometimes mental health challenges can escalate to crisis situations where someone is at increased risk of harming themselves or others. It's important in both situations to know the signs and symptoms of these experiences and to know where to turn to for help: mental health professionals, medical professionals, first responders, mobile mental health crisis units, family and friends and more.

Everyone who experiences a challenge or crisis will need a different level of support, and that's okay. Some peers may be diagnosed with a disorder that can help them figure out what path to recovery and resiliency to take. Others may need temporary or consistent support from medication, medical or mental health professionals or even support from administration at school.

What's important is knowing that it's okay to not be okay! Help is always available and anyone who experiences a challenge or crisis is not alone. By promoting mental health awareness through team events, campaigns and more, we can support ourselves, our peers and our community at large.

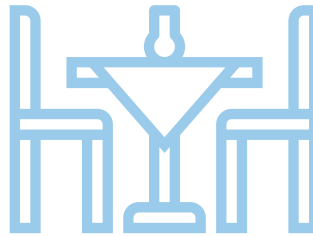
ENDING THE STIGMA

Hand in hand with effective prevention strategies comes using nonjudgemental, person-first and respectful language. It is essential, especially in prevention programming that we use language that is understanding and kind to end the stigma around mental health challenges and crises. By doing this, we can open to doors that allow people to get the help and resources they need!

5 WAYS TO END MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA



EDUCATE YOURSELF AND
YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT
MENTAL HEALTH



SHARE REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES
OF PEOPLE WITH
MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS



EXPLAIN MENTAL HEALTH
HAS A RANGE
OF SYMPTOMS



LISTEN TO AND SUPPORT OTHERS
WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS



SHARE STORIES OF OVERCOMING
MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

IMPORTANT DATES

There are a few important dates you can incorporate into events, campaigns or activities or that you can acknowledge with your Action Team or as an individual. This is just a quick overview but there are many more that can be found based on your specific events!

MONTHS

- March: Self Harm Awareness Month
- April: Stress Awareness Month
- May: Mental Health Awareness Month
- September: Suicide Prevention Month
- October: Depression and Mental Health Screening Month

DAYS

- End of February: National Eating Disorders Awareness Week
- Early April: Public Health Week
- May 7: Children's Mental Health Awareness Day
- September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day
- Early October: Mental Illness Awareness Week
- October 10: World Mental Health Day

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

With an audience, a possible time frame and data - what can you do? Check out the categories of ideas below and think about how you can expand on them with your own ideas!

ONLINE

- Host a webinar
- Create an online challenge
- Share statistics
- Create PSAs or videos
- Run a social media campaign
- Create a hashtag or profile picture

IN SCHOOL

- Hold an assembly
- Host an awareness week
- Provide green ribbons for everyone for Mental Health Awareness
- Include information in daily announcements
- Hold an essay or poster contest

IN COMMUNITY

- Ask local businesses and orgs to display ribbons
- Host a community-wide event or speaker
- Identify prevention organizations, resources and facilities to share with peers
- Ask local orgs to sponsor your event(s)

AT HOME

- Talk to family and friends about mental health
- Hang a ribbon on your door to show support
- Have family and friends join in wearing purple or in events/activities
- Review local resources with friends and family



IMPORTANT SAFETY REMINDERS



Mental health awareness events, activities and campaigns are very serious and require critical attention to detail - the statistics should be credible, the events should be safe and, overall, anything you do should be considerate of those who have experienced mental health challenges or who know those who have.

These are serious topics, ones that can be intimidating, scary and emotional to discuss. It's important that resources are available for those who may be struggling or for those who may have experiences related to the topic. Whether that means having counselors at your event, numbers available to call, or information available, it's important to support your audience!

Two of the most important contacts you can offer anyone and everyone through whatever action plan you choose to follow are the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and the Crisis Text Line. These operate 24/7 and are open to all, with multiple language options.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline - (800) 273 - 8255
Crisis Text Line - 741741

TEEN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

The teen MHFA course teaches high school students how to provide mental health first aid to their friends. The course was developed in response to research indicating that young people have a preference for sharing problems with peers.

In tMHFA, teens learn about the following:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depressive disorders
- Eating disorders
- Alcohol and other drug use disorders
- Psychotic disorders

Mental health crisis situations covered in tMHFA are:

- Having thoughts of suicide
- Threatening violence or harm to others
- Engaging in self-injury
- Being very intoxicated on alcohol or other drugs
- Experiencing a traumatic event such as bullying, abuse, or assault

How to Bring tMHFA to Your Snowball Team

- With your OS membership we offer a discount to bring tMHFA to your youth leaders.
- You can contact Riley Cleary at riley@ilabh.org for availability

Things to Note:

- 30 students max per training group.
- We can train 150 students at a time.
- Implemented in three 75 minute sessions or six 45 minute sessions.
- 100% OS Adults must be Youth MHFA certified.
- Virtual sessions will be offered soon!

≡ THE tMHFA ACTION PLAN ≡



teen Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches young people how to identify, understand, and respond to mental health crises among their friends. The tMHFA program is currently being piloted in high schools across the country.

*Information provided by the teen Mental Health First Aid curriculum Learn more at [MHFA.org/teens](https://mhfa.org/teens)



RESOURCES

WEBSITES

- [National Council for Mental Well-Being](#)
- [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Health](#)

PROGRAMS

- [Mental Health First Aid Classes](#)
- [Find Your Anchor](#)
- [More Than Sad Program: High School Students, Teachers & Parents](#)
- [It's Real: College Students & Mental Health](#)
- [Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention](#)

NUMBERS

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: (800) 273 - 8255
- Crisis Text Line: 741741
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+): (866) 488 - 7386

SOURCES AND CREDITS

This toolkit was made based on suggestions from the SPF-trained staff of the Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, Operation Snowball and the Cebrin Goodman Teen Institute. These staff are not responsible for any medical issues or otherwise that occur at any events hosted based on this toolkit. Teams and individuals hosting events are responsible for what occurs at their specific events.

This Toolkit is meant to be used as a basis for planning and is not suggested as the *only* way to plan. This Toolkit is meant to serve Snowball Teams and CGTI attendees in action planning within their communities and to support thorough, organized and detail-oriented events and is based on the experience of past event-planning and hosting, the SPF framework and years of training.

This toolkit should be used by and shared with Operation Snowball and Cebrin Goodman Teen Institute Actions Teams only and was made with that specific use and implementation in mind.