



MHFA CO

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

GUIDE



We've compiled some tips and tricks for helping adult learners get the most out of your Mental Health First Aid classes.

1

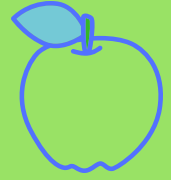
Organization

The Mental Health First Aid curriculum sets you up for success: the class should begin with a group agreement about the rules of engagement for the day. If participants don't mention confidentiality, or the "Vegas" rule of MHFA, throw it on the list. When adult learners come up with things themselves, they're more likely to go along with them for the day.

Use the first few slides and course overview as a chance to clearly explain the goals and expectations for the day. Don't forget to let your participants know when you'll take a break, and for how long! Well-timed breaks are critical for your participants' attention spans (and general goodwill from the class- more on this later). It's fine if your breaks don't fall exactly where the suggested breaks in the timing guide take place. In addition to a couple of 10 or 15-minute breaks, feel free to throw in a 2-minute dance party or a chance to stand and stretch, especially after lunch. Likewise, if you forget to set up the videos before class starts, take a 2-minute break.

2

Your Role



Depending on your audience, it can be intimidating to address a large crowd of potential First Aiders! Remember, in this context, you are the expert-- and you are the Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Project your confidence in the material and trust the curriculum. You by no means need to know the answer to every clinical or "what if?" question, nor do you need to facilitate a therapy group for your participants. Frankly, MHFA isn't the place to dive into the DSM-5, anyway.

When a participant asks a question about the material:

Answer! This is all you. Don't forget to direct them to the manual for additional resources and information.

When a participant asks a question about something beyond the scope of Mental Health First Aid:

Make sure you note that it's outside the scope of Mental Health First Aid. If you want to answer from your own experience, go for it, but be mindful of time.

When a participant shares their own story of an experience with mental illness:

Thank them for sharing their story- this takes courage! Take care to avoid engaging too much with any particular participant's experience, since MHFA is not therapy or a support group.

Don't forget the Parking Lot- it's there for any questions you want to return to on a break, or need to double-check before you answer. The Parking Lot is not a dumping ground for stuff you don't want to deal with: if you put it up there, make sure you get to it before the end of the day!

3

Your Participants

Adult learners are a unique audience, and they often bring a lot of knowledge and experience to the table. They like to know that the value of their experience is recognized, and they like to know how the training will be relevant to their lives going forward. Keep in mind that statistically speaking, there is an 11/10 chance that someone in your class will have personal experience with mental illness, and that someone in your class will have personal experience with a suicide loss. They may not be prepared for their own emotional reactions to the material.

Introductions can be a great opportunity to assess what knowledge the group already has about mental illness and recovery.

For example, in some classes, you may have a participant who has clinical training in a behavioral health role. In others, you may have participants with no experience or preconceptions about mental health. Perhaps most challenging of all, you will likely have classes with both! If there is time, allow participants to explain their role in the community early on in the day. This lets the instructors know what strengths and insights are already present in the room, since it is usually impossible to do any kind of assessment before the course, and since the mental health opinions quiz is not collected.

If you are teaching Youth Mental Health First Aid, use what you learn (or know in advance) about a group to decide which scenarios are most appropriate for your audience. For each scenario throughout the day, encourage the group to think about how they might handle the situation differently, should they be in a different role (e.g. teachers, coaches, family friends). Parents often acknowledge that despite their professional training, caring for their own child is very different, and much more difficult.



4

Inclusivity: more than a one-page conversation, we know.

When you teach Mental Health First Aid or Youth MHFA, you will encounter trainees of diverse identities and from many communities. This short guide is part of our Best Practices Manual for MHFACO (which you can find at www.mhfaco.org), and we're reproducing it here as a starting point for you to explore ways to make your classes inclusive and respectful of the identities of all your participants:

Ask your participants for their preferred gender pronouns at the beginning of a training, or offer that they may write them on their name card. This gives folks the option of declaring their gender identity, and prevents you from mis-gendering a participant (incorrectly referring to someone who identifies as a man as a woman, for example). Examples of gender pronouns are she/hers/herself, he/him/himself, they/them/themself.

You may have discussed person-first language in your instructor training, and it is important to maintain awareness for yourself as well as for your trainees about the impact that person-first language can have for people affected by disabilities and mental health conditions. The following resources are great for continuing education about person-first language:

<https://www.thearc.org/who-we-are/media-center/people-first-language>

<http://www.tcdd.texas.gov/resources/people-first-language/>

This handout from the CDC may also be of use to you and to your participants:

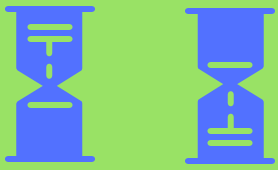
https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter_photos.pdf

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges and suicide. You may want to provide the following resources for support in addition to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and Colorado Crisis Services:

The Trevor Project Hotline (for LGBTQ+ and questioning youth): 1-866-488-7386

The Trans Lifeline (for transgender and questioning youth and adults, manned by people who identify as transgender): 877-565-8860

If you are serving a community that you do not know well, do some research beforehand! It is important to be aware of cultural considerations for your audience. If you are not sure if any special considerations apply to your audience, reach out to an organization that serves the particular group you are going to train- these organizations are usually excited to hear from you and to help you best meet the needs of the community.



Timing



You don't have to worry about designing the course, but you do have to manage time throughout the course so that participants can focus on learning the material, rather than being hungry for lunch or late to pick up their kids.

Time management is so important to participants that it sometimes ends up becoming a ground rule: "break/finish on time." You don't have to promise specific times for breaks, but if you do, make sure you honor those commitments.

If you have divided up the curriculum with your co-instructor, respect their time as well. Don't steal time from your co-instructor and force them to rush through the next section!

Well-timed breaks also gives you leverage to ask for the full participation of the group when class is in session. Establish your method for bringing participants back from a break at the beginning of class, before you release their attention for the first time.

- 1. Raise your hand. Participants will slowly raise their hands as they notice, and this will bring others back from their conversations.**
- 2. Avoid standing at the front of the room when you are not facilitating. That way, when you stand to return to the training, participants will notice.**
- 3. Tell participants, "Clap once if you can hear me." "Clap twice if you can hear me." By the time you get to 3 claps, everyone will be paying attention.**
- 4. If you are having trouble, begin speaking in a soft, quiet voice. Participants will have to be quiet to hear, and may police themselves and return to full attention.**
- 5. Be creative! It helps if you establish the procedure at the beginning by explicitly telling participants what you'll do to come back from a break.**



You're the trainer! Do what works for you.

6

Stay current:

our favorite education and training resources



We podcast hard here at MHFACO. Some of our favorite podcast resources for education: The Edupreneur Podcast (new ideas and innovations for K12 teachers and beyond), #EdChat Radio (10 minutes!), The Bedley Brothers (interviews!), TEDTalks Health, TEDTalks Business, and TEDTalks Education. We're serious about TEDTalks.

Podcasts are a great way to boost your training game and keep up your inspiration by keeping your own love of learning alive. For a list of education-specific podcasts to check out, head over to <http://www.fusionyearbooks.com/blog/educational-podcasts/> MHFA trainers can learn a lot from K12 and higher ed instructors. Your participants will appreciate your best practices and your commitment!

It's important to remember what it feels like to be a learner - not something every MHFA instructor gets to experience on a daily basis. Humans love learning, but sometimes it's scary to come back to a formal learning environment as an adult, especially if we've had a bad experience. Try learning something new that you won't necessarily be good at (we know, you're talented, so this will be hard) to get in touch with the experience of starting as a beginner or learning outside your comfort zone. For some MHFA participants, that's what a training experience can be like.

Other ways to keep up your MHFA training practice:

Teach with a new co-instructor!

Seek out mentorship from an experienced instructor if you don't have a lot of practice, or offer to co-teach with a new instructor from your organization who was recently trained. Even if you're an old pro at the MHFA training day, training with a different experienced co- can be a great chance to see how someone else facilitates an activity a little differently, or to pick their brain about local resources for a particular community. Make sure you are comfortable teaching the whole curriculum: great instructors mix up which sections they teach each time to keep on their toes.

Many coordinators who host a MHFA instructor training will be happy to let you audit a day or two of the National training as well. There's no need to spend another 5 days immersed in the instructor training experience, but National trainers often know the most up-to-date protocols and changes happening at the NCBH, and can model an amazing training experience.

Reach out to an organizer near you and spend a morning or afternoon observing at a training!



What about that one section of the curriculum that you just hate teaching? The National Council has the whole course broken down into bite-sized video chunks at www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org. It might help to watch how someone else facilitates and how they manage time, or to check out sections you feel less savvy about, especially for your first few trainings.



What if?

What if I'm asked to host a training for a group of people who have a contract work day of shorter than 8 hours?

Borrowing some advice from our favorite National instructor, Jill Kluesner, the first thing to do is skip the optional activities! No matter how much you love 'Find Your Match,' today is not the day. The obvious consideration is whether you're able to maintain fidelity to the curriculum with the amount of time you have, doing justice to each aspect of the course without blazing through it. Take a working lunch and shorten your breaks (who actually needs 10 minutes to pee, anyway?). Reach out to coordinators who frequently work with school districts and other employers whose work force has a contract day shorter than the typical 9 hours (8 hours of teaching, 1 hour for lunch and breaks) to see what advice they might have. National Council recommends teaching the course in no less than 7:30.

What if a participant has a strong emotional reaction to the material?

It's normal for people to feel strong emotions during the MHFA course, especially if they have personal experience living with or caring for someone with a mental health diagnosis. If you're following best practices, you have a co-instructor for the course, so one instructor can continue to facilitate the material while the other finds a quiet, safe space to help the person who is overwhelmed.

Side note: it is great to establish a 'thumbs-up' practice for participants to let you know they are OK when leaving the training space during the day.

If you are alone, it is completely appropriate to take a break in order to care for the person with dignity and respect. Depending on their reaction, it may be appropriate for them to rejoin the course after a break, skip a section, or be excused from the remainder of the day. Luckily, you're a Mental Health First Aid instructor, which means that you can ALGEE all day long. The most important concerns are the participant's safety, privacy, and comfort in these situations. It may be appropriate to refer the person to local professional care or other support services.

What if a participant reports a bad experience with local professional care providers?

It's entirely possible that this is the case: after all, care providers are human beings who make mistakes or are constrained by institutional policies that don't always seem conducive to the best care for a person in crisis, or to the kinds of care they need. It's important to have strong relationships with local behavioral health care providers in the area where you're instructing, if possible. That way, when something comes up in a class, you can respond by putting the participant in touch with the appropriate contact at the organization to address their concerns, as much as possible. It is also appropriate to acknowledge that health care relationships are deeply personal, and that the same care or the same provider may not be perceived to be (or actually be) equally helpful for each person with a mental health challenge. This is true of both primary care and behavioral health care, and is not your responsibility as a Mental Health First Aid instructor.

What if participants challenge me about the data in the curriculum?

For some of us here at MHFACO, it's hard not to nerd out (read: get carried away) talking about data and data-driven research. The fact is, there are no data without limitations. You are not responsible for the limitations of the data in the National Council's Mental Health First Aid Curriculum, nor are these concerns really relevant to the purpose of the data in MHFA. You can respond that the data are one available way to motivate our interest in Mental Health First Aid, and that additional research into the impacts and prevalence of behavioral health conditions is certainly warranted and welcomed. This can be a great chance to ask the class why it might be difficult to gather accurate data about the prevalence of mental health conditions.

What if a participant has a mobility challenge or other condition that might affect their participation in course activities?

It is your role as an instructor to make sure all the activities are inclusive and accessible. First and foremost, do not assume that a participant cannot do anything. You can definitely maintain fidelity to the curriculum while modifying the structure of a few activities! For example, rather than having participants move across the room for a 'Fact or Fiction' exercise, you can use thumbs up or down in the air. Similarly, participants can arrange the Disability Weights cards on a table surface rather than standing in a line at the front of the room. Videos for the Adult MHFA course are available with closed captioning. The Teaching Notes do not have specific directions for changing up these activities, so it might be good idea for you to take time to go through the course to make your own notes about how you will honor the different abilities of participants in a MHFA class.



Give the people what they want:

Raise your hand if you've ever taken a first aid class!

(99 % of class raises their hand)

Raise your hand if your office mandated you to take the class.

(85% of the class raises their hand)

Raise your hand if you know what ABC stands for.

(90% of the class raises their hand)

How cool is that?! Even if your participants are required to be in your class, they can still learn something. Now is your chance to make sure they have access to community resources the next time a crisis arises.

Here are some of the things we like to hand out at our MHFA classes:

- National Suicide Lifeline: 1 800 273 TALK (8255)
- Colorado Crisis Services: 1 844 493 8255
- Colorado Crisis Text Line: Text "TALK" to 38255
- National Human Trafficking Line: 1 888 373 7888
- National Human Trafficking Text Line: Text 233733
- CO Human Services Abuse Report Line: 1 844 CO4KIDS
- Trans Lifeline: 1 877 565 8860
- Trevor Project: 1 866 488 7386
- Safe2Tell: 1 877 542 7233
- Contact information and flyers for your local community mental health center, walk-in crisis center, and NAMI affiliate.

Local Instructor Resources

It's our job at MHFACO to make sure our instructors are well-supported, both in the classroom and outside it! If you have a classroom management or other MHFA question, please reach out to algee@mhfaco.org. If you have ideas, resources, or events that you would like to share with the rest of the Colorado instructor network, please send them our way as well! We want to celebrate the strengths of each person in our MHFACO community, and we want to know what you're up to. Connect with a coordinator at your local organization if you're not already part of a team - these folks are fabulous and work very hard to support class delivery and instructor growth!

www.mhfaco.org

The best classroom management happens outside the classroom! Take some time to check out the additional library we have built for our instructors by logging in with your email and password to the instructor site at www.mhfaco.org. We have additional frequently asked questions from instructors, guides to marketing the class, a Best Practices manual for new and old instructors alike, and more (heck, maybe it's even where you found this humble guide!).

events

You are part of a movement to improve community mental health literacy and save lives. Celebrate your impact with your MHFA instructor colleagues! MHFACO hosts frequent instructor gatherings, workgroups, and events to bring instructors together to share what we have learned and the momentum we're building together. Join us to re-energize your teaching practice and to sustain your passion for the important work that you do!

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If you made it this far, you're a trooper.

