

MHFA Certification Course Description

MHFA Certification

Acknowledgements

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Course Overview

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Certification course provides the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for participants to recognize changes in mental health, respond supportively, and apply practical actions for declining mental health and crisis situations. It helps participants build confidence, reduce stigma, and enhance their own mental health.

Objectives

MHFA Certification helps participants:

- Increase awareness of mental health
 - Distinguish between mental health, mental illness, and mental health conditions.
 - Recognize indicators of mental health across the continuum (optimal, declining, poor).
 - Understand key information about mental health disorders in Canada.
 - Identify factors influencing mental health positively and negatively.
 - Explain the Two Continua Model of mental health.
- Improve confidence to provide help
 - Apply the ALGES framework to scenarios about declining mental health and crisis situations.
 - Identify barriers to providing mental health first aid and how to overcome them.

- Ask effective questions to initiate supportive conversations.
- Demonstrate empathy and effective listening skills in supportive interactions.
- Communicate non-judgmentally using verbal and non-verbal skills.
- Provide reassurance and appropriate information in supportive conversations.
- Develop a list of professional, personal, and community resources and supports.
- Explain recovery-oriented approaches to providing support.
- Decrease mental health-related stigma
 - Explain mental health stigma, including self-stigma, public stigma, and structural stigma.
 - Recognize stigmatizing language and practice respectful alternatives.
 - Reflect on personal attitudes and biases that contribute to stigma.
 - Understand risks and limitations associated with diagnostic labeling.
 - Identify practical strategies to challenge and reduce stigma.
- Enhance mental health
 - Identify personal self-care strategies using the Three Pillars of Self-Care: reflective, purposeful, and boundaries.
 - Recognize when self-care is needed as a Mental Health First Aider and how to integrate it into daily life.
 - Commit to intentional self-care actions to maintain personal well-being as a Mental Health First Aider.

Course Structure

The course flows through eight sections.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants set the stage by establishing group norms and guidelines for a safe, inclusive learning environment. They share initial expectations and perceived challenges to foster engagement throughout the course.

2. Goals of Mental Health First Aid

The overall goals and outcomes of the MHFA course are presented. Learners clarify the purpose and responsibilities associated with being a Mental Health First Aider.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Clarify the course objectives and the role of a Mental Health First Aider.

3. What is Mental Health?

This module introduces definitions of mental health, mental illness, and related conditions. It also discusses the limitations of the DSM-5, the prevalence of mental health disorders, and the risks of labelling. Participants examine three different types of stigma—self, public, and structural—and their impacts. They practice identifying stigma and reflecting on personal biases to effectively challenge stigma. Finally, participants explore the Mental Health Continuum and the Two Continua Model, recognizing the complexity and variability of mental health.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Define mental health.
- Distinguish between mental health, mental illness, and mental health conditions.
- Better understand mental health disorders and their prevalence.
- Appreciate what support looks like to someone living with a mental health condition.
- Discuss risks and limitations associated with diagnostic labelling.
- Describe types of stigma (self, public, structural).
- Reflect on personal attitudes contributing to stigma.
- Explain the Two Continua Model of mental health.

4. Elements of ALGES

Through interactive learning, learners familiarize themselves with the ALGES framework and gain clarity on each action to respond to a person experiencing mental health decline. The structured approach prepares participants for supportive interactions.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Explain each action of the ALGES framework clearly.
- Identify indicators of declining mental health.
- Build a repository of questions to start a discussion about mental health.
- Demonstrate empathy.
- Effectively give reassurance.
- Handle challenges related to seeking mental health support.
- Understand the importance of a recovery orientation.
- Identify and practice respectful alternatives to stigmatizing language.
- Ask someone which support would be most helpful.
- Create a list of resources in their community.

5. Mental Health First Aid for Declining Mental Health

Through scenario-based activities, learners apply ALGES to situations involving declining mental health. They enhance skills in effective questioning, empathetic listening, and connecting individuals with resources, guided by recovery-oriented principles.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply ALGES to declining mental health scenarios.
- Challenge their assumptions about individuals needing support.
- Demonstrate effective questioning and non-judgmental communication.
- Provide empathetic reassurance, information, and connection to resources.
- Integrate a recovery orientation in providing support.

6. Self-Care for Mental Health First Aiders

This module highlights the importance of self-care practices for maintaining personal mental health while supporting others. Participants develop intentional, reflective, purposeful, and boundary-setting self-care plans.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the definition of self-care.
- Identify and apply personal self-care strategies.
- Discuss the Three Pillars of Self-Care (reflective, purposeful, boundaries).
- Commit to intentional self-care practices.

7. MHFA for Crisis Situations

Participants learn to recognize and respond effectively to mental health crises, including suicidal behaviour, panic attacks, acute stress reactions, non-suicidal self-injury, and psychotic episodes. They distinguish between crisis and emergency responses, applying ALGES appropriately.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Distinguish between crisis and emergency responses.
- Recognize warning signs of suicide.
- Recognize indicators of mental health crises (panic attacks, acute stress, non-suicidal self-injury and psychotic episodes).
- Effectively apply ALGES to crisis situations.

8. Wrap-up and Closing

Participants review key course learnings and identify actionable next steps. They commit to enhancing personal well-being beyond the course.

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Commit to self-care activities.
- Reflect on overall learning outcomes and their application.
- Identify next steps for ongoing mental health support and self-care.

Delivery Requirements

- The course modules are delivered in sequential order, as each module builds on learning from the previous module.
- Participant may take the course virtually or in person.
- Participants must complete all the modules in the same delivery format with the same group/cohort.
- The course is 12 hours in duration and may be delivered:
 - On two consecutive days, with breaks between modules
 - On two full days within two weeks, at six hours per day, with breaks between modules
 - On four half-days within two weeks, at three hours per half-day, with breaks between modules
- To receive a certificate of completion:
 - Participants must complete a full course.

Participant Materials

Handout

The participant handout assists the participants throughout the course. Received at the beginning, the handout is an integral part of the learning experience and is referred to throughout the course. The handout includes:

- Definitions of key terms and concepts
- Visual description of key information
- Learning scenarios and discussion questions
- Space to take notes during individual reflections and group discussions

Resource Hub

Opening Minds maintains an online resource hub with a comprehensive list of resources and support services for mental health and well-being. The English and French links to the resource hub are:

- r.openingminds.org
- r.changerlesmentalites.org

These can be accessed at any time and are included in the course handout that each participant receives.