Mental Health and the Aging Population

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Mental Health
FIRST AID
MISSOURI

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

MHFA USA Founding Partner

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The Interactions That Stay With Us



Think about an interaction with an older adult that you continued thinking about after your workday ended.

What made that interaction stick with you?

Learning Objectives

- Recognize how aging and mental health challenges show up in older adults.
- Examine how cognitive and emotional empathy influence helping responses.
- Describe how repeatedly supporting others can affect your ability to respond effectively.
- Apply Mental Health First Aid principles to identify self-care strategies before, during and after supporting older adults.

How Common are Mental Health Challenges?

1 in 8

adults age 60+ experience a mental health challenge

1 in 11

adults age 60+ experience a substance use disorder

Need ≠ Care

Not everyone who needs treatment receives it.

SAMHSA, 2024

What You Might Notice

- Sad or depressed mood lasting longer than two weeks
- Social withdrawal; loss of interest in things that used to be enjoyable
- Unexplained fatigue, energy loss, or sleep changes
- Confusion, disorientation, problems with concentration or decision-making
- Increase or decrease in appetite; changes in weight
- Memory loss, especially recent or short-term memory problems
- Feelings of worthlessness, inappropriate guilt, helplessness; thoughts of suicide
- Physical symptoms that can’t otherwise be explained: aches, constipation, etc.
- Changes in appearance or dress, or problems maintaining the home or yard
- Trouble handling finances or working with numbers

Behaviors You May Encounter

- Repeating questions
- Frequent complaints
- Rejection of help
- Strong reactions
- Distrust
- Difficulty following through with tasks


Notice subtle emotional patterns
anxiety
worry
calm
frustration
fatigue
joy
tension
ease
curiosity
focus
hesitation
rest



What tells you you've reached your limit?

You may notice…

- replaying conversations
- less patience
- difficulty disengaging
- feeling responsible for outcomes
- ambivalence
- emotional exhaustion

Understanding Without Carrying

Cognitive Empathy

“I can understand what you may be experiencing.”

Emotional Empathy

“I begin to feel some of what you are experiencing.”





Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue - a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for patients in significant emotional pain and physical distress. (Anewalt, 2009; Figley, 1995)

What Changes in How We Respond?



Listening **Patience** **Reactions** **Decisions**


Do Anything
Do Everything
Do Nothing
HikingArtist.

Mental Health First Aid

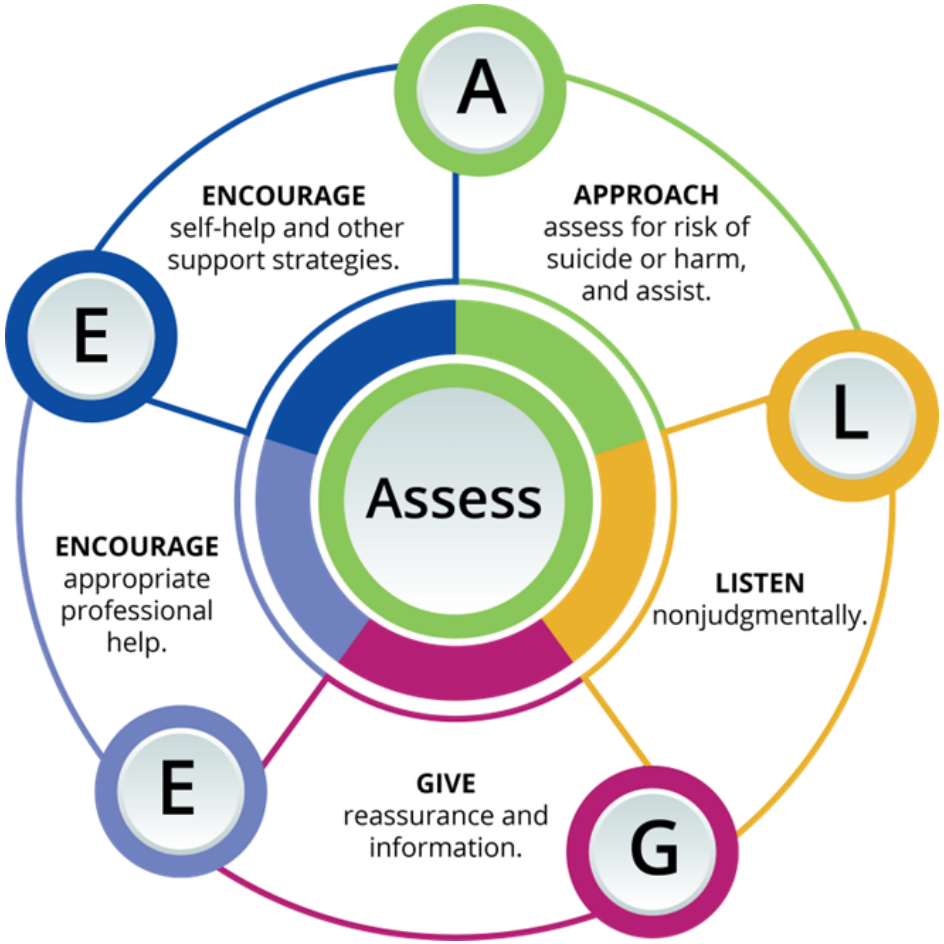
Mental Health First Aid is a skills-based training course that teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis.



What Participants Learn

- Risk factors and warning signs of mental health and substance use challenges.
- Information on depression, anxiety, trauma, psychosis and substance use.
- A 5-step Action Plan to help someone who is developing a mental health challenge or is experiencing a crisis.
- Available evidence-based professional, peer and self-help resources.

Mental Health First Aid Action Plan



Approach, assess for risk of suicide or harm and assist

Listen non judgmentally

Give reassurance and information

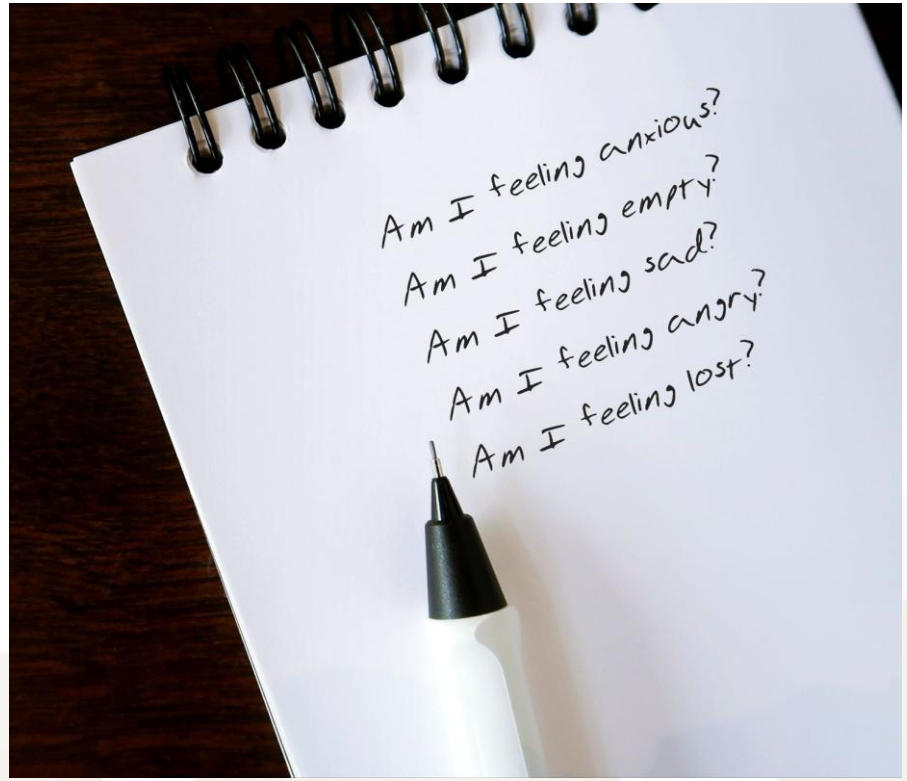
Encourage appropriate professional help

Encourage self-help and other support strategies

Before Providing Support

What am I bringing into this interaction?

- Capacity: Do I have the attention and emotional capacity to be present?
- Stress: Am I already carrying stress from another interaction?
- Safety: Is it safe and appropriate for me to step in?
- Support: Do I need to tag someone in?



Self -awareness starts before the conversation does.

During the Interaction

Am I listening without judgment?

Am I taking on their emotions?

My Response

Am I becoming overwhelmed?

Am I responsible for the outcomes?

What Do I Need After the Interaction Ends?

- Do I need support, conversation or debriefing?
- What restores my energy or attention?
- What is one strategy I will use?



Get Involved in Mental Health First Aid

There are several ways to bring MHFA to your community:

Attend a Course

Enroll in a scheduled Adult MHFA training.

Host a Training

Partner with us to offer a private or regional MHFA training for staff.

Become an Instructor

Expand local capacity by becoming a certified MHFA Instructor.

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Questions?

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