

TEEN-TO-TEEN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Asked by Parents

1. What is Teen-to-Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA)?

The tMHFA course gives teenagers the skills they need to recognize and respond to mental health problems and crises in their friends, and to get the help of an adult quickly. Young people will often turn to each other when stressed or upset, and try to help each other, taking too much on. This course teaches them not to try to take on these problems alone. The tMHFA course is the equivalent of physical first aid, for mental health.

Students learn about the tMHFA Action Plan, different types of mental health problems and mental health crisis situations in young people, and the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It teaches students to recognize when a friend is experiencing major changes in their thinking, feeling and behavior, and when these changes may indicate the presence of a mental health problem. This is an education course and is not therapy or a support group.

2. How does the online course differ from the in-person course?

The course content for the online program, and in-person are the same. The only differences are the course's delivery platform and that we've amended the training activities to be engaging and comfortable for online learning.

3. Will my teen have to talk about their personal problems?

No. This is an education course and it is not therapy or a support group.

4. Will the sessions be recorded?

No, for confidentiality reasons, the course will only be offered through a live format.

5. Why do they have to turn their video on?

The safety and confidentiality of the teens is our utmost priority. Keeping videos on helps us stay engaged with the teens and ensure confidentiality.

6. What can my son or daughter do after the training?

After completing the training, your child will be trained to be an informal first-responder to mental health concerns in other teens. They will be able to identify and respond to a friend who may be struggling. They can add this to their resume, LinkedIn profile, or e-mail signature.

7. My child has experienced mental health problems in the past. Should they take the course?

Some young people with a history of mental health problems feel that this course will be too upsetting to be involved in. Others will want to be involved. We strongly recommend that you discuss with your child what they feel most comfortable doing, but don't make the decision for them. They also need to be aware that if they begin to feel upset during the course, they are free to stop attending. However, if your child is currently experiencing high levels of distress and is receiving mental health care, you should discuss it with their mental health professional.



8. What will they learn in the course?

A tMHFAider learns how to identify and respond to early warning signs that another teen is becoming unwell, is currently struggling with their mental health or is experiencing a mental health crisis (i.e., suicidal thoughts, self-harming behaviors or a panic attack). Please see the tMHFA Course Outline for more details.

9. Is my child likely to be upset by the course content?

For a very small number of students, talking about mental health and suicide could be distressing. You may wish to discuss this with your child. However, most find it very empowering to be given the tools to talk about mental health and suicide and to be able to help someone in need. We also emphasize that if someone they know has died by suicide, they are in no way responsible.

10. What if, during the course my child self-identifies as having an issue. Is there someone they can speak to? Will it be brought to my attention?

Yes, they can speak to the instructor. All tMHFA instructors are licensed mental health professionals that work at The LightHouse Arabia. They will be encouraged to speak to their parents or a trusted adult. It will be brought to a parent's attention if the teen is experiencing a mental health crisis.

11. Will talking about suicide put thoughts of suicide in my child's head?

No. This is a very common myth.

People who are having thoughts of suicide are usually relieved to have the chance to talk about their feelings, and this also makes it possible for them to get help. Those who are not suicidal, will not start thinking about suicide just because they have had a chance to talk about it.

If you would like more information, this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRV7-dYZNBw>) of Professor Anthony Jorm, co-founder and Chair of Mental Health First Aid Australia and an international expert on many aspects of mental health, has some insights.

If you would like to read about some of the research he talks about, read this Evidence Summary by Headspace, Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation (<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Resource-library/Health-professionals/suicidal-ideation-mythbusterv2.pdf>).

12. What is the tMHFA Action Plan?

The Action Plan is:

- **P**ay attention for warning signs
- **E**xplain your concern with empathy
- **A**sk how they are and listen
- **R**efer them to a responsible adult
- **L**ook after yourself and your friendship

13. Will my child learn to diagnose a mental illness or provide therapy?

No. The tMHFA course teaches participants to recognize the signs that a friend may have a mental health problem. It does not focus on specific illnesses, but on the pattern of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that show there might be a problem. It does not teach or encourage them to offer each other counselling of any kind, or to try to handle these problems alone. Diagnosis and treatment are the responsibility of properly trained mental health professionals. Participants are taught to seek help from a trusted adult who can get their friend this kind of help as soon as possible.



14. My teen doesn't have any mental health issues, so why should they take this course?

Mental health issues are very common. If your teen is not struggling, it is very likely they know someone who is. The tMHFA course can empower them to know how to respond and not take on someone else's problems alone. Half of all mental health conditions start by age 14 but most cases remain undetected and untreated for approximately 8 to 10 years. This is leading to a global epidemic of poor mental health resulting in depression being the leading cause of illness and disability amongst teens, and suicide being the 3rd leading cause of death amongst teens aged 15 to 19 years (National Institute of Mental Health www.nihm.nih.gov).

15. My teen is struggling with their mental health, is it okay for them to take this course?

Some young people with a history of mental health problems feel that this course will be too upsetting to be involved in. Others will want to be involved.

We strongly recommend that you discuss with your child what they feel most comfortable doing, but don't make the decision for them. They also need to be aware that if they begin to feel upset during the course, they are free to leave and follow up with their counsellor or a responsible adult in their lives. However, if your child is currently experiencing high levels of distress and is receiving mental health care, you should discuss it with their mental health professional.

16. Will my teen be taught strategies on how to remain calm if their friend is panicking or having a mental health crisis?

Yes, teens will be taught how to look after themselves – this is part of the tMHFA Action Plan 'Look after yourself and your friendship'.

17. Will my teen be trained on how to talk to me about their own mental health problems?

Yes. Teens will be trained on how to get a responsible adult involved whenever they, or a friend, may be struggling.

18. Shouldn't an adult be providing mental health first aid, instead of another teen?

While some young people will feel comfortable talking directly to a teacher, a parent, or another adult, research shows us that young people often turn to each other in times of distress. Friends often attempt to support each other in ways that mean they feel overly responsible. This program encourages them to get an adult involved instead, who can make arrangements for professional help.

It complements the Adolescent MHFA course which is available to adults who play a big role in the lives of adolescents (particularly parents and school staff).

19. Will they have direct contact with an Adult MHFAider or can they speak to any adult if they've identified that someone needs help?

Ideally, a teen MHFAider will speak to an adult MHFAider who will know how to respond and assist, but they can also speak to a school counselor, a parent or friend's parent, or any responsible adult.



20. Is there an age restriction?

Yes. The course is designed for teens between the ages of 13 to 18 years.

21. Are there going to be ongoing MHFA Support Sessions for teens as there are for adults?

Yes. There will be ongoing MHFA Support Sessions for teens. Please check our social media and website for upcoming dates (www.lighthousearabia.com/events).

22. What evidence supports this program?

Please visit the following sites to learn more about the evidence which supports this program:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22240091>

<https://mhfa.com.au/sites/default/files/teen-MHFA-infographic.pdf>

23. Will my child receive a certification?

Yes, they will receive a certification upon completing the course.

24. Will my child receive an accreditation card? How long is it valid for?

Unlike with Adult MHFA, there is no accreditation for the tMHFA program.

