



MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA REDUCTION

“Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a public education program which introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents, builds understanding of the importance of early intervention, and most importantly – teaches individuals how to help a youth in crisis or experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Mental Health First Aid uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to assess a mental health crisis; select interventions and provide initial help; and connect young people to professional, peer, social, and self-help care” ([Mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)). For more information about MHFA in Colorado, visit www.mhfacolorado.org.

Schools, in partnership with community members, can play a vital role in reducing the stigma of mental health.

A great starting point in mental health stigma reduction is training for all adults on Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). MHFA and MHFA Youth Curriculum are good mental health awareness building training sessions. Learn more about MHFA in the Framework.

The following are tips for school leaders, school board members, school staff, students, families, and community members to help aid in mental health stigma reduction.

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

- Generate awareness about the positive effects of school social, emotional, and mental health services that focus on prevention and early intervention of students’ social, emotional, and mental health needs.
- Find a champion who will promote awareness of students’ social, emotional and mental health needs, and normalize conversations about mental health.
- Build trust and collaboration with community mental health providers.
- Create—or embed in an existing team—a school and district-wide school behavioral health services team.
- Evaluate current behavioral health services, and create an action plan for the implementation of school behavioral health supports. Continually assess and identify strengths and gaps in current services.
- Help create a common referral system for student behavioral health needs, and encourage the use of referral mechanisms that effectively link students to treatment and intervention services in the school and in the community.

As the President plans to launch a national dialogue about mental health, the National Association of Secondary School Principals is encouraging school leaders to take part and hold mental health assemblies at their schools. Go to <http://www.nassp.org/Homepage-Docs/National-Dialogue-on-Mental-Health> to commit your school to an assembly that focuses on helping students enhance emotional health; decrease negative attitudes toward people with mental illness; and reach out to a responsible adult for help when needed.

FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

- Request that school leaders develop district-wide student behavioral health support systems that focus on mental health stigma reduction and support comprehensive social, emotional, and mental health services.

- Include health-related goals and long term planning and evaluation for social, emotional, and mental health systems in board meeting agendas.
- Integrate school behavioral health services in district improvement planning.

FOR SCHOOL STAFF

- Be a champion for creating comprehensive school behavioral health systems.
- Integrate social and emotional learning opportunities throughout the school day and across classes. For more information on social and emotional learning, see the accompanying social and emotional learning guide in the tools and resources section.
- Teach and/or assign project-based learning opportunities that integrate mental health stigma reduction into the curriculum.
 - Access the following website for stigma reduction tips out of UCLA at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/stigma.htm>.
 - Have students research famous and/or historical figures with a mental illness and use their research to guide a school-wide awareness campaign to reduce the mental health stigma.
- Help older high school students prepare for the many life changes after high school, including the stresses of adult life.

FOR STUDENTS

- Help decrease the stigma around mental health by designing a mental health awareness campaign.
- Present to your peers, teachers, and school leaders about the importance of fostering positive social, emotional, and mental health.
- Encourage healthy behaviors among your peers, and reach out to those who are different than you.

FOR FAMILIES

- Support your child's social and emotional development.
- Advocate for and ensure access to a continuum of school behavioral health supports.
- Serve on school health and wellness committees or other school teams that promote social, emotional, and mental health to ensure parent voice in mental health stigma reduction.
- Participate in community mental health awareness campaigns, and educate yourself, your child, and other community members about decreasing the stigma of mental health.

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Raise awareness about the need to reduce the stigma around mental health.
- Become an active and engaged voice for the promotion of behavioral health services in the community and school.
- Advocate for restorative practices not only within your school but also within your community.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides a toolkit to engage communities in discussions about mental health. To learn more about how the community can guide mental health awareness, visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/communityconversations/>.