

# Youth Mental Health First Aid FAQs

Youth Mental Health First Aid is designed to teach neighbors, teachers, parents, peers, and caring citizens how to help a youth or teen (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or is in crisis. Topics covered in the manual include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

## Topics Covered

Before you can know how to help, you need to know when to help. We call this mental health literacy – or a basic understanding of what different mental illnesses and addictions are, how they can affect a person’s daily life, and what helps individuals experiencing these challenges get well.

Mental Health First Aid teaches about recovery and resiliency – the belief that individuals experiencing these challenges can and do get better, and use their strengths to stay well.

## The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

**Assess for risk of suicide or harm:** When helping a person going through a mental health crisis, it is important to look for signs of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, non-suicidal self-injury, or other harm.

**Listen nonjudgmentally:** It may seem simple, but the ability to listen and have a meaningful conversation requires skill and patience. Listening is critical in helping an individual feel respected, accepted, and understood. Mental Health First Aid teaches you to use a set of verbal and nonverbal skills such as open body posture, comfortable eye contact, and other strategies to engage in appropriate conversation.

**Give reassurance and Information:** When talking to someone you believe may be experiencing symptoms of a mental illness, approach the conversation with respect and dignity and don’t blame the individual for his or her symptoms. Mental Health First Aid provides information and resources you can offer to someone to provide emotional support and practical help.

**Encourage appropriate professional help:** There are many professionals who can offer help when someone is in crisis or may be experiencing the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or addiction.



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