

## Youth mental health first aid

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### Introduction

Back in January, Prime Minister Theresa May endorsed the need for mental health first aid – particularly in schools, highlighting the importance of early intervention, and the importance of identifying mental health issues in children and young people who may be at risk of going unnoticed. So, what is mental health first aid, why do we need it, and how can schools get it?

This document provides a summary from our pupil wellbeing expert who recently completed the Youth Mental Health First Aid Instructor programme.

### What is mental health first aid?

Mental health first aid is exactly that: first aid for mental health. When we normally hear the term 'first aid' it's easy to picture CPR, ambulances and getting to grips with applying a sling. Mental health first aid is a first response programme designed to equip you with the skills to spot a mental health issue, and more importantly, to teach you how to respond.

### Where does it come from?

Originating from Australia, mental health first aid is the brainchild of [Betty Kitchener](#) and it has since been rolled out around the world. There are different streams: Mental Health First Aid (adults), Youth Mental Health First Aid, Mental Health First Aid (Armed Forces), and there is also a programme in development aimed at supporting older people.

### What does it cover?

Even if you've never heard of the term 'mental health' before, the two-day course will leave you feeling confident and capable of identifying when someone may be at risk and knowing what to do.

Modules on the youth programme include anxiety, depression, psychosis, suicide, self-harm and eating disorders. Delegates are taught how to recognise the signs and symptoms, and are given an opportunity to wrestle with the possible reasons someone might be suffering. Each module is packed with facts and statistics, based on recent research, and fitted around a teaching model unique to Mental Health First Aid built around the acronym ALGEE (**ask**,

**assess, act; listen** non-judgmentally; **give** reassurance and information; **enable** professional help and encourage self-help).

Delegates leave with a solid framework that has the potential to save lives in every possible setting. This is crucial training for anyone working with children and young people.

## How is it taught?

The two-day course is approximately a 70:30 balance of facilitation and teaching – a huge proportion of the course is spent in discussion, activity and practical application. It's interesting, stimulating and deeply encouraging, and all participants are given a comprehensive manual to work from and take away to refer back to later on. The trainers are very engaging and the whole learning experience is exceptional.

## What if we can't spare two days?

The course can also be taught as Mental Health First Aid Lite – massively trimmed down, but delivered in a few short hours or across a day. The other option is to send a member of staff on the Instructor Programme, so you have your own in-house facilitator and can roll it out in stages across the entire staff team. Everyone will benefit from this – from cleaners and caretakers all the way up to governors. Mental Health First Aid is the responsibility of everyone.

## Where do we go from here?

Theresa May's speech in full can be found [here](#).

To make enquiries about accessing Mental Health First Aid in your area, please follow the relevant link below. Please note, the costs associated to run a course may be at the discretion of individual trainers.

England: <https://mhfaengland.org>

Scotland: <http://www.smhfa.com>

Wales: <http://mhfa-wales.org>

Ireland: <http://www.mhfaireland.com>