

# MHFA

Mental Health First Aid



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



**Originally developed at the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University and adapted and modified for Wales**

# Mental Health First Aid

**October 2009**

**Mental Health First Aid**

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# Introduction

**Why Mental Health First Aid?**

**What is MHFA?**

**The Five Basic Steps**

- **Ask about suicide**
- **Listen non-judgementally**
- **Give reassurance**
- **Encourage self help**
- **Encourage seeking appropriate help**

# Suicide in Wales

- Approximately 330 Welsh people of all ages and from all walks of life die by suicide each year.
- Figures increase by at least 50% in financial crisis; unemployment for longer than a month; problems with the police; homelessness; domestic violence, including sexual abuse; running away from home or expulsion from school.
- The more stressful life events you experience, the greater the increase in suicidal thoughts..

# Suicide – The evidence\*

\* *Suicide in Wales – Briefing document to Bridgend LHB, NPHS, January 2008*

Suicide Hotspots 1996 - 2006	(highest rates)	Suicide “Coldspots” 1996 – 2006	(lowest rates)
Males	Females	Males	Females
1. Neath Port Talbot	1. Conwy	1. Vale of Glamorgan	1. Blaenau Gwent
2. Denbighshire	2. Cardiff	2. Monmouthshire	2. Caerphilly
3. Merthyr Tydfil	3. Swansea	3. Torfaen	3. Newport
4. Carmarthen shire	4. Denbighshire	4. Cardiff	4. Monmouth shire
5. Conwy	5. Merthyr Tydfil	5. Newport	5. Wrexham

# Step 1 - Ask about suicide

**Assess level of risk.**

**A useful aide to memory:**

- **C**urrent plan
- **P**rior behaviour
- **R**esources

# Suicide warning signs

- Expressions of hopelessness or helplessness.
- An overwhelming sense of shame or guilt.
- A dramatic change in personality or appearance.
- Irrational or bizarre behaviour.
- Changed eating or sleeping habits.
- A serious drop in college or work performance.
- A lack of interest in the future.
- Written or spoken notice of intention to complete suicide.
- Giving away possessions or putting affairs in order.

# **How to help someone who is suicidal**

**If person is distressed and threatening do not get involved physically.**

**Do not leave them alone, stay with them.**

**Seek immediate help:**

- Dial 999.
- Phone their GP and ask them to come out.
- Pass on any information you have gathered.

# Review Risk



ARE YOU HAVING THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?..... **YES**

## CURRENT FACTORS

### Current Suicide Plan

How? How prepared? How soon?..... **YES**

### Pain

Do you have pain that at times feels unbearable?..... **YES**

### Resources

Do you feel you have few, if any, resources?..... **YES**

## BACKGROUND FACTORS

### + Prior Suicidal Behavior

Have you ever attempted suicide before?..... **YES**

### + Mental Health

Are you receiving or have you received mental health care?..... **YES**

## RISK ALERT

**suicide**

**prepared**

**desperate**

**alone**

**familiar**

**vulnerable**

# Contract Safeplan

## ALL SAFEPLANS

- Keep safe
- Safety contact(s)
- Safe/no use of alcohol/drugs
- Link to resources

## RISK SPECIFIC SAFEPLANS

- Disable the suicide plan
- Ease the pain
- Link to resources
- Protect against the danger/ support past survival skills
- Link to health worker

# ASIST

Working mostly in small groups of one trainer to no more than 15 participants, **ASIST** uses many different teaching processes to create a practice-oriented and interactive learning experience.

As well as teaching a tried and tested intervention model, the course encourages and allows participants to explore and reflect their own feelings and attitudes to suicide.

The emphasis of the **ASIST** workshop is on suicide first aid, on helping a person at risk stay safe and seek further help. Attendance at the full two days is essential.

# ASIST

## Learn how to:

- Recognise invitations for help
- Reach out and offer support
- Review the risk of suicide
- Apply a suicide intervention model
- Link people with community resources

The workshop increases caregivers' knowledge and confidence to respond to a person at risk of suicide and skills learned are put to use to save lives.

# Mental health first aid

MHFA does not teach people to be therapists. However, it does teach people how to recognise the symptoms of mental health problems, how to provide initial help and how to guide a person towards appropriate help.

*“MHFA is the help given to someone experiencing a mental health problem before professional help is obtained”.*

Aims:

- to preserve life where a person may be a danger to themselves or others
- to provide help to prevent the mental health problems developing into a more serious state
- to promote the recovery of good mental health
- to provide comfort to a person experiencing a mental health problem

# Mental health first aid

*“Mental Health First Aid is exactly what it suggests, a first aid approach to mental health”.*

- MHFA) has become an international activity: Australia, Hong Kong, Finland, Singapore, Canada, Scotland and Ireland have all introduced mental health first aid; England are working on it, Wales now has over 90 instructors and it is being rolled out across the country

# Why Mental Health First Aid?

- Mental health problems are common.
- There is a stigma associated with mental health problems.
- Many people are not well informed about mental health or mental health problems.
- Appropriate help is not always on hand.
- People may lack the insight to realise that they need help or that help is available.
- The majority of people often do not know how to respond.

# Impact of mental health problems

- One in four Welsh adults will experience some form of mental health problems in any year.
- 30–40% of absences from work are caused by mental health problems.
- Mental health problems are a major cause of long-term disability for some people.
- 72% of people who are disabled through mental health problems are unemployed, yet most want to work.

# Stigma

Almost 5 in 10 people surveyed in Wales believe that someone who experiences depression from time to time is unsuitable for the role of a primary school teacher.

37% would be unhappy if a close relative married or formed a long-term relationship with someone who has a mental health condition

more information on the research can be found at the Equalities Commission in Wales website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)  
Telephone 0845 604 8810

# Course outline

## **Session 1 (3 hours)**

- Why mental health first aid?
- Welsh mental health policy.
- What is mental health?
- Common mental health problems.
- Attitudes and anti-stigma campaign.
- The five steps of mental health first aid.
- What is depression?
- Symptoms of depression.
- Depression in the workplace.
- Risk factors for depression.

# Course outline

## **Session 2 (3 hours)**

- Suicide in Wales.
- Crisis first aid for suicidal behaviour.
- Crisis first aid for overdose.
- First aid for depression.
- Treatment and resources for depression.

# Course outline

## **Session 3 (3 hours)**

- What are anxiety disorders (PTSD, GAD, social phobia, panic disorder, agoraphobia, OCD)?
- Symptoms of anxiety disorders.
- Alcohol, drugs and anxiety disorders.
- Crisis first aid for panic attacks.
- Crisis first aid for acute stress reaction.
- Treatment and resources for anxiety disorders.

# Course outline

## **Session 4 (3 hours)**

- What are psychotic disorders (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)?
- Symptoms of psychotic disorders.
- Risk factors for psychosis.
- Crisis first aid for acute psychosis.
- Treatment and resources for psychosis.
- Mental health legislation.
- Other expressions of distress, including self-harm.
- Action planning for using MHFA (Wales).