

Learning Mental Health First Aid

Skills make a difference to assist vulnerable members of our community

By SHANA BURGESS and JAMIE KATZ

Gardner-Edgerton School District integrates Mental Health First Aid as a strategy to address mental health.

Mental health challenges can be a hurdle in the classroom. Teachers and staff are in a unique position to notice mood and behavior changes in students. Additionally, many staff build rapport with their students who often seek support from them.

Gardner-Edgerton School District partnered with Johnson County Mental Health Center to offer Mental Health First Aid to staff across the district. More than 300 staff from the high school, middle schools and elementary schools have become certified Mental Health First Aiders.

Mental Health First Aid equips staff with the skills to intervene during crisis and non-crisis mental health challenges. The training also teaches skills on reaching out, listening non-judgmentally and referring students to services that they may need from the community. As a result, Gardner-Edgerton staff is more skilled at recognizing and responding to mental health concerns and feels more confident in helping students and families who experience a mental health challenge.

coworker or neighbor to get professional help or use self-help strategies.

Mental health disorders cut across social economic status and race, and can happen at any time during a person's life. In Johnson County, approximately 113,711 individuals — approximately 20 percent of the county's current population — have experienced a mental health problem within the last year.



Mental Health First Aid

Johnson County Mental Health Center embraces the philosophy and teachings of Mental Health First Aid and frequently offers training throughout the community. Since 2011, more than 2,000 community members have been certified in Mental Health First Aid.

"I am proud that the Mental Health Center has been a leader in offering Mental Health First Aid to our community," says

Tim DeWeese, director of Johnson County Mental

Health Center. "Providing citizens with the tools necessary to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders only strengthens our community and makes the county a great place to live, work and raise a family."

Johnson County Mental Health also partnered with Johnson County Department of Corrections to train more than 75 staff members, including corrections officers, probation officers and case managers. Similar to the training for Gardner-Edgerton School District, corrections staff gained knowledge to better understand mental illnesses and substance use disorders along with skills to help them respond to mental health related incidents appropriately without compromising safety.

"As we see more and more clients who experience mental illness, Mental Health First Aid provides education and tangible ways for staff to support clients," said Rachel Mestad, training coordinator with Johnson County Department of Corrections.

Mental Health First Aid is intended for all people and organizations that make up the fabric of our community. The course is beneficial to anyone interested in learning more about mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, psychosis and substance abuse.

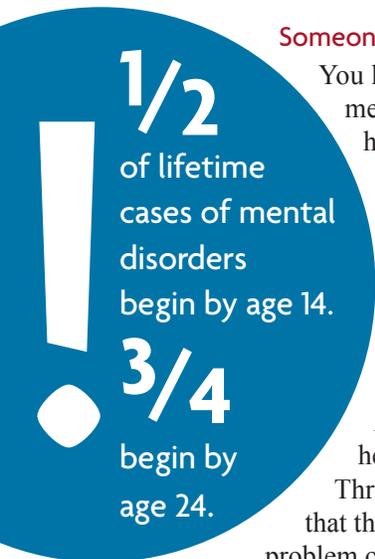
Someone you know

You likely know a friend, family member, coworker or neighbor who has experienced a mental health challenge. Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, psychosis and substance use are common in the U.S.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, approximately one in five American adults will have a mental health problem in any given year.

Throughout a person's life, it is likely that they may develop a mental health problem or have close contact with someone who has.

Many people are not confident in recognizing mental health problems, providing support, or knowing what treatments or resources are available. Likewise, many people feel too ashamed to admit they have a mental health challenge, do not know about available resources or might not even realize that they need help. You can make a difference in someone's life and play an important role by encouraging a friend, family member,



Local jails in the U.S. serve about 2 million people with serious mental illnesses each year.

Three out of four incarcerated persons also suffer from a substance use disorder.

— National Council for Behavioral Health

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis. Mental Health First Aid is an eight-hour course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. It gives you the skills needed to reach out and provide initial assistance and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

Mental Health First Aid takes the fear and hesitation out of starting conversations about mental health and substance use problems by improving understanding and providing an action plan to teach people to safely and responsibly identify and address a potential mental illness or substance use disorder.

When people are equipped with the tools needed to start a dialogue, more people can get the help they need.

Mental Health First Aiders can save lives.

— National Council for Behavioral Health

Participants gain useful skills and valuable insight regarding mental illness that can be used in a personal or professional way.

Sign up for training

Anyone can provide Mental Health First Aid — first responders, business leaders, health care workers, educators, faith community leaders and caring neighbors.

Upcoming Mental Health First Aid training is available with a cost of \$50 per person:

- **Wednesday, Jan. 25**, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Johnson County Northeast Offices, 6000 Lamar Ave., Mission.
- **Friday, March 3**, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Johnson County Sunset Building, 11811 S. Sunset Dr., Olathe.
- **Tuesday, May 9**, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Johnson County Northeast Offices, 6000 Lamar Ave., Mission.

Registration and more information is available by contacting Jenny Rodriguez at 913-715-7880 or jenny.rodriguez@jocogov.org.

Help is available

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, help is available.

Johnson County Mental Health maintains professional clinical staff on duty 24 hours a day to provide mental health emergency services. The crisis line is always available by calling 913-268-0156.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available at 800-273-TALK (8255) or by text at 741-741.

Learn more about local services, resources and supports online at jocogov.org/mentalhealth. 🌻

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