



Ohio 4-H Camping Program

Mental Health First Aid

Competencies covered in this lesson:

- 4) Health, Wellness, and Risk Management

Intended Audience:

- Camp Counselors

Lesson Objectives:

Participants will:

- Learn basic action steps for assisting a camper in mental health crisis.
- Practice applying the mental health first aid action steps.

Time: 60 minutes

BACKGROUND

We all know that camp has plenty of risks and an injury can happen anytime and anywhere. That is why many counselors and staff are trained in first aid, CPR, and other safety protocols. Preparation is key to handling emergency situations as best as possible. You know what to do if a camper is choking or bleeding, but do you know what to do if a camper is having a mental health crisis?

A Mental Health Crisis can take many forms; anxiety attack, self-harm, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts or actions. A mental health crisis can happen to anyone, even if they haven't been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Knowing how to assist someone in crisis is important for keeping them and those around them safe.

The National Council for Behavioral Health offers certification classes in Mental Health First Aid. They provide 5 action steps to helping others:

1. Assess the risk of suicide or harm
2. Listen nonjudgmentally
3. Give reassurance and information
4. Encourage appropriate professional help
5. Encourage self-help and support strategies

In the camp setting, you will most likely focus on the first three action items.

- **ASSESS** the risk of harm to the camper or others. Remove other campers from the situation if possible.
- **LISTEN** nonjudgmentally. Start a conversation with the camper, if possible, to talk about what is going on. Try starting with a casual invitation "Let's talk. You don't seem like you're enjoying camp. What's going on?"
- **GIVE** reassurance. Tell the camper that you care about them and want them to have a good camp experience. If the situation is truly a crisis, seek assistance from an adult staff member. "Because I care about you, I think we should talk to an adult staff member about this."

NEVER use the word promise with a camper. It may be tempting to make promises (I won't tell, we will fix this), but that only opens the door for breaking the camper's trust.



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Equipment and supplies:

- Mental Health First Aid Scenarios Resource
- Mental Health First Aid Scenario Cards

Do Ahead:

- Review lesson.
- Gather supplies.

Sources:

- Youth.gov (n.d) Retrieved from <http://youth.gov>
- SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017, September 13). Retrieved from <http://samha.gov>
- Mental Health First Aid USA. (2013, October 10). Retrieved from <http://mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (n.d) Retrieved from <http://nami.org>

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WHAT TO DO**Activity**

Using the Mental Health First Aid Scenarios cards, counselors will practice applying the steps to help a camper.

- Divide into 5 groups (or more if using each scenario more than once)
- Give each group 1 scenario card
- Each group will take turns acting out their scenario, including how to help the camper. Roles should include campers, counselors, and adults.
- The whole group will discuss after each skit how the steps were applied and what else might be helpful in that situation.
- The facilitator should use the supplemental information on the Mental Health First Aid Scenarios resource page to guide discussion.

TALK IT OVER**Reflect:**

- What are some ways that you can start a conversation about mental health with a camper?
- Which step of the Mental Health First Aid action steps will be the most challenging? Why?
- Do you feel prepared to help a camper who is having a mental health crisis? Why or why not?

Apply:

- Use the skills gained to assist at a club meeting, camp, or school if a situation arises where Mental Health First Aid would be beneficial.
- Start a conversation with other officers and teen leaders in your club about how to provide support to others in mental health crisis.