

The role of the Mental Health First Aid instructor



Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an internationally recognised training course, designed to teach people how to spot the signs and symptoms of mental ill health and provide help on a first aid basis. In the same way as learning physical first aid, MHFA teaches people how to recognise those crucial warning signs of mental ill health and feel confident to guide someone to appropriate support. Embedding MHFA training within any organisation or community also encourages people to talk more freely about mental health, reducing stigma and creating a more positive culture.

MHFA Instructor Training programme

The MHFA Instructor Training programme teaches people how to deliver MHFA courses to others. The programme is delivered by a highly qualified and experienced MHFA England national trainer who will mentor attendees throughout. Part of this mentoring process will include teaching the instructor-in-training to be aware of the psychological and emotional needs of others and enable them to support a person who might be experiencing mental and emotional distress. The focus is on learning how to promote emotional wellbeing and the factors that help safeguard and protect wellbeing in the workplace.

Outcomes and benefits

There are lots of benefits to qualifying to become an MHFA instructor, with the aim of delivering MHFA courses within your own organisation. Your knowledge of the organisation you work for, and the people you work with, will be invaluable when delivering courses internally. You will also be able to book and deliver courses to suit the needs of your organisation. Other benefits include:

- MHFA England is the only organisation in the country licensed to run MHFA Instructor Training programmes and is part of a global network of 24 countries
- MHFA instructors will be helping to achieve the goal of training one in ten of England's population in MHFA skills
- Teaching others to be Mental Health First Aiders is both professionally and personally rewarding
- Once trained to be able to deliver the MHFA Two Day course there are lots of opportunities to upskill in other MHFA courses, including tailored workplace courses and ones specific to different sectors such as Youth MHFA or Higher Education MHFA

The role

The role of an MHFA instructor in the workplace is to train other employees in Mental Health First Aid. These employees will then have the skills and confidence to provide support for someone who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. This could range from having an initial conversation through to supporting the person to get appropriate professional help.

At no time does the MHFA instructor role (or anyone trained in MHFA skills) supersede company policy: first and foremost they are all employees of the company.

Programme structure

The Instructor Training programme takes place over seven days and is usually spread out over six weeks. This allows learners to become familiar with the material and reflect on their learning. The days are organised as follows:

Days one–two: Experience the MHFA Two Day course as delivered by our highly experienced national trainers.

Day three: Hear from a variety of speakers from a mental health related background. These sessions could include discussions with people who have experienced mental health issues, a carer of someone with mental health issues, or someone from a medical background.

Days four–five: Learners deliver a session on a relevant topic followed by a one to one feedback session with their mentor.

Days six–seven: Learners deliver a section of the MHFA course, gain peer to peer feedback and have another one to one session with their mentor.

Learners will be expected to do approximately 20 hours of their own study outside of the seven days, including time spent on preparing delivery materials for days four–five and six–seven. They will have one year of one to one support from their mentor while they get up and running as an MHFA instructor.

Following the seven days training, instructors are required to co-deliver two MHFA courses within a year to become an approved instructor. Instructors are only authorised to solo deliver courses once approved.

Considerations

Just as a company has policies and procedures in place covering what employees need to do if you suspect someone is at risk (for example, where the first step is always to escalate for advice and support), we advise putting together a policy document to outline your organisation's approach to MHFA.

Who should become an MHFA instructor in the workplace?

It is essential that individuals put forward to train as MHFA instructors are passionate about increasing mental health awareness in the workplace and in their communities, and about bringing parity of esteem to mental and physical health

Ongoing requirements for MHFA instructors

Once instructors are qualified, they will need to do the following each year to remain an instructor:

- Deliver a minimum of two courses
- Ensure everyone who attends their courses receives a manual and workbook which can be purchased from MHFA England
- Renew their annual membership at a fee of £69 (as of April 2017)
- Attend one continuing professional development event per membership year

MHFA instructors agree to the following code of conduct:

- Deliver the course in the format provided
- Follow the training content presented in the MHFA England materials for safety and consultancy
- Send all participant evaluation and contact forms to MHFA England central team within two weeks of delivery of courses
- Demonstrate effective organisation and planning for all MHFA courses. Adequate time and resources must be given to properly plan and prepare clearly for all courses so that the course runs as high quality, safe and effective training
- Immediately inform MHFA England of any issues that may potentially be harmful to the safety, quality, or reputation of any MHFA products or MHFA England
- Be responsible for maintaining their own mental health and maintaining safe and responsible behaviour
- Look after their own mental and physical health and not deliver MHFA courses if they are unwell
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate

- Demonstrate an ability to relate well to other staff
- Comply with any reasonable instructions given by the employer to allow it to comply with duties
- Cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure relating to health and safety in the workplace

Supporting your MHFA instructors

Employers who decide to train members of staff to become MHFA instructors must provide appropriate support structures to enable them to plan, prepare and deliver the courses. It is very important that the delivery of mental health training is considered to be a component of the individual's role at work and that sufficient time and resource is built into their workplan.

Things to consider when creating a support plan for MHFA instructors include:

- Ensuring that the MHFA instructor's line manager is aware of how much time they will be required to spend planning and delivering courses
- Setting a clear plan and achievable targets around the delivery of courses, such as agreeing to deliver a set number of courses within the first year of qualifying
- Providing appropriate training and support as required. MHFA England offers CPD events to expand the instructor's portfolio and to ensure they meet the annual registration requirements
- Creating clear communication across teams, departments and organisations about the courses being delivered (dates, time, venue) to support MHFA instructors with the roll out of training
- Providing an appropriate space for all MHFA instructors to network, share practice and develop peer support. This might be a physical space or an online hub – whichever works best within your organisation
- Agreeing the funding and time required for each MHFA instructor to maintain their MHFA England registration and accreditation

Measuring impact

We recommend identifying some KPIs to ensure you can measure the impact and outcomes of your investment in MHFA. These could be a mix of anecdotal evidence and data, for example:

- Number of people accessing EAP or other organisational assistance programmes of support
- Rate of sickness absence and return to work - ideally tracked both before and after MHFA training has been introduced
- Staff surveys and evaluations following MHFA training sessions

- Percentage of people trained who have applied what they learned on the MHFA course
- Percentage of managers feeling more confident speaking to employees about mental health in the workplace
- Percentage increase in employees who would feel comfortable speaking to their line manager about mental health
- Number of critical incident forms filled out by trained Mental Health First Aiders

Strategic approach

MHFA training is most effective when integrated as part of a strategic approach to wellbeing. You might consider how you can:

- Position mental health as a boardroom issue, on a par with physical health
- Promote and communicate wellbeing as a key driver for productivity and maximising performance
- Make employee wellbeing a core part of line manager job responsibilities and provide appropriate time, resource and training so they can support the staff they manage
- Recruit, promote and support line managers with excellent interpersonal skills
- Support line managers to maintain their own wellbeing
- Develop and promote clear referral or assistance pathways so managers can take appropriate action to support employees