



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Mental Health Awareness

Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

1. Explain what mental health is and the importance of mental health for whole-body well-being
2. Teach practical techniques for managing stress, building resilience, and promoting positive mental health, such as mindfulness, exercise, and healthy relationships
3. Provide information on available resources, including mental health professionals, support groups, and crisis hotlines

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Mental health affects every aspect of our lives. It affects how we think and feel, work and connect with others, and cope with stress. Yet, mental health is misunderstood, stigmatized, or overlooked. This lesson will help learners to build awareness, reduce stigma, and equip them with the tools to care for their mental well-being and support others.

Lesson:

Welcome

- Icebreaker: "One Word Check-In" - Everyone shares one word describing how they feel today (*everyone writes word on sticky notes and puts on poster board*)
- Brief overview of the objectives of the lesson

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act. It helps us handle stress, work, build relationships, and enjoy life. Good mental health doesn't always mean feeling happy—it means coping with ups and downs and managing daily life.

Mental health is a fundamental human right. It's just as important as physical health and affects how we make decisions, connect with others, and shape our world. It also plays a significant role in the well-being of our families and communities.

Mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness. Everyone's mental health is different and can change over time. It exists on a spectrum, from feeling well and balanced to feeling overwhelmed or in crisis.

Mental health conditions include things like depression, anxiety, trauma-related issues, and other challenges that can cause distress or make it hard to function. These may require support, treatment, or extra care, just like any physical health condition.

Discussion Prompt to encourage participant interaction:

"How do you define mental health in your own words?"

Practical Techniques for Managing Stress & Promoting Mental Health

We can care for mental health daily, just like our physical health. For our physical health, we try to eat well, exercise, and take vitamins or nutritional supplements to feel our best. For our mental health, practicing similar healthy habits can help us feel more balanced, cope better with stress, and bounce back from challenges.

Discussion Prompt to encourage participant interaction:

"What's one thing you do that helps you feel better on a stressful day?"

Let participants share a few ideas before introducing the techniques below.

1) Mindfulness & Breathing Techniques

What It Is: Mindfulness means being present in the moment without judgment. It helps reduce anxiety and calm the mind. Benefits: Reduces stress, improves focus, and makes you feel more grounded.

Start Suggested Activity #1

2) Physical Activity & Movement

Why It Helps: Moving your body releases chemicals in the brain (like endorphins) that boost mood and reduce stress. An important tip: "Start small. Consistency is more important than intensity." Examples include: Walking or

stretching for 10–15 minutes daily, dancing, biking, or yoga. Even household chores can count! Anything to get you moving is significant!

Start Suggested Activity #2

3) Healthy Relationships & Social Support

Why It Matters: Having supportive people around us is one of the strongest protective factors for mental health. You can strengthen your relationships by making time for meaningful conversations, setting healthy boundaries, asking for help when needed and offering it when you can to those you care about.

Start Suggested Activity #3 (if time allows)

Discussion Prompt to encourage participant interaction:

"Which of these strategies do you already use? Which one would you like to try more regularly?" Let participants share out loud or write on sticky notes

Ending Message before starting the next section of the lesson:

Incorporating these techniques into your daily life can help lower stress and anxiety, improve focus, mood and energy levels, clear your mind and manage strong emotions. You don't have to do everything at once. Even small steps can make a big difference over time. Taking care of your mental health is not selfish—it's necessary for your well-being.

How to Support Others & Access Help

Understanding mental health and stress management techniques is essential for improving mental health. But it is also important to know where and how to find outside mental health support, whether for yourself, a friend, or a loved one.

Discussion Prompt to encourage participant interaction:

*"If someone you cared about said they were struggling with their mental health, would you know where to guide them for help?"
Let a few participants respond, then transition into the content.*

Mental Health Professionals are trained experts who can diagnose, treat, and support mental health conditions. You don't need a "diagnosis" to see a therapist—anyone can benefit from talking to one. Some professionals who can help are;

- **Therapists & Counselors** – Offer talk therapy, coping strategies, and emotional support.
- **Psychiatrists** – Medical doctors who can prescribe medications and provide treatment plans.
- **Psychologists** – Focus on mental health assessment, therapy, and behavior support.
- **Primary Care Providers** – Often the first step, they can offer referrals.

Support Groups are safe, welcoming spaces to share experiences and find encouragement from others facing similar challenges. Support groups can be in-person or virtual. Groups are often peer-led for conditions like depression, anxiety, grief, trauma, and substance use, in which those struggling can learn from others who have dealt with similar issues.

Crisis Support & Hotlines are essential to get immediate help for people in crisis or if an individual needs to talk to someone immediately.

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** – Call or text **988** (24/7, confidential)
- **Crisis Text Line** – Text **HOME** to **741741**
- **SAMHSA National Helpline** – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for substance use or mental health treatment
- **NAMI HelpLine** – 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

Pass out this Handout.

- Printable Resource Guides by SC Regions (Upstate, Pee Dee, Northern, Midlands, Lowcountry) <https://namisc.org/resources/local-and-national-resources/>

Lesson Conclusion:

Taking small steps, like practicing mindfulness, moving your body, and connecting with others, can lower stress, improve focus, and help you feel more emotionally balanced. You don't need to do everything at once; start small and build from there. Caring for your mental health is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Ending Activity for Entire Lesson:

Ask participants to reflect and write "One thing I learned..." or "One thing I will do differently..." on sticky notes or reflection cards to take home or display on the poster board.

Suggested Materials:

- Printed copies of NAMI Resource Guides (print the one for your region) <https://namisc.org/resources/local-and-national-resources/>
- Colorful sticky notes or flashcards (to take notes or answer prompts if uncomfortable speaking up in front of the group)
- Colorful pens
- Poster board (to display sticky notes from ice breaker and closing activity)
- Copies of the handout

Suggested Activities:

1) Mindfulness Activities (essential to do)

- Simple Breathing Exercise: "Take a slow breath in for 4 seconds... hold for 4... breathe out for 4... hold for 4." Repeat 3–4 times.
- Body Scan: Gently bring attention to different body parts, noticing how they feel.

2) Exercise Activity: (essential to do)

- Pick a popular song to play aloud for the group and encourage people to get up and move/dance

3) Healthy Relationships & Social Support: (optional to do)

- Ask participants to write down 2–3 people they trust and can reach out to if they feel low. Encourage them to reach out to those people the next day to talk and explain what they learn in this lesson.

Lesson Summary:

Participants learned what mental health is and its importance. They knew and practiced stress management techniques they or a loved one can use daily. Participants received information on mental health resources and a handout of local resources from their community.

Lesson References:

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Mental health - causes, symptoms, treatment & help. SAMHSA. (2024, November 8). <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health>

World Health Organization. (2022, June 17). *Mental health*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

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