

Mental Health Wilderness First Aid Course Outline

Course Description

While traditional first aid focuses on physical health, mental wellness challenges are just as frequent in the wilderness as cuts and broken bones. Developed by clinical counsellors and wilderness professionals, this interactive and wickedly empowering evidence-based workshop trains students to recognize, assess, and intervene to support clients experiencing a range of mental health conditions in the field. Mental health conditions of focus include anxiety, panic attacks, trauma, depression and mood disorders, grief and loss, psychosis, self-injury, and suicidal ideation. Learners are provided with an orientation to mental health and neurological activation, assessment tools, connection to outside resources, and eight different supportive intervention strategies for field use or for evacuations.

This course has been originally designed for those having a professional, but not therapeutic, duty to others in wilderness settings. However, it is adapted to those working in urban settings as well, and will be of value to anyone who may encounter mental health concerns; in recreational, personal, or Good Samaritan contexts.

Instructor

Donetta Faye Cooper (Daye Cooper)

- M.A. Counselling
- Canadian Certified Counsellor (C.C.C.), Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
- Clinical Counsellor working in child, youth, and adult mental health
- Level Three Guide and Executive Director, Sea Kayak Guides Alliance of B.C.
- 15 years / 1500 days of experience as a professional wilderness guide.

Prerequisites

- No specific academic prerequisites. A working knowledge of English is required.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, the learner will be able to:

- Identify a range of mental health conditions and explain the basics of nervous system activation.
- Use a simple step-by-step structure to assess and intervene.
- Assess risk and the importance of differentiating field-manageable mental health symptoms from other conditions.
- “Hold the Space”: demonstrate interpersonal skills for supporting mental well-being.
- Utilize eight specific interventions to support mental health symptoms in the field.
- Access external support resources for themselves and their clients.

Course Topics / Content

- Introductions
 - Ice breakers, road map, group guidelines
 - Scenarios, experience, and tools we already have
- What is mental health?
 - Neurological, physiological, and diagnostic perspectives
 - Glimpse at evidence-based treatments available
- Nature-based supports:
 - Glimpse at research on the mental health benefits of self-care & outdoor activity
- MHWFA Steps:
 1. **“Hold the Space”** skills: Grounding, listening, reflecting
 2. **Primary Survey:** Lizard brain
 - a. Primary risk and activation assessment
 - b. Lizard brain interventions (grounding)
 3. **Secondary Survey:** Wizard brain
 - a. Secondary history and detailed assessment
 - b. Wizard brain interventions (planning)
 4. **External Resources**
- MHWFA Focus Conditions: anxiety, trauma, panic, depression, grief, psychosis, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.
- Scenarios / Roleplays
- Course Feedback

Resources & Materials

- MHWFA Key Concepts and Interventions laminated pocket guide
- Activity handouts
- Certificate of completion
- An optional, illustrated course manual is available for purchase for \$30.

Logistics

- This is a 12-hour course, not including breaks. Most open-enrollment courses are structured as one short evening session plus two full day sessions, with bio and reflection breaks included. Courses are mostly indoors with some outdoor scenarios.
- Please come rested and bring a notebook, pen or pencil, clothing and footwear suitable for outdoor scenarios, and a personal tea mug.
- Exploration of mental health topics can be challenging or triggering for learners. Self-care is emphasized during this course. You are encouraged to let the instructor know ahead of time if you anticipate some of the course material might be personally challenging. You are also encouraged to practice self-care throughout the course and take a personal break when you need to.
- Cost for 2019 is \$195. A 25% discount is available for students, community volunteers, SKGABC guides and low-income. This includes herbal tea and workshop materials.