

Mental Health Wilderness First Aid

Next Generation Reforestation -- 5h certification course outline



Pre-Course

asynchronous work (1.5 hours) via Kajabi

- What is Mental Health? Introductory concepts including:
 - Relationship building – relationships as protective and foundational for mental health,
 - Mirror neurons – the neurology of relationship and connection
 - Mental health diagnoses (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*), strengths and limitations of the diagnostic model
 - “Wise mind” model of mental health (balancing emotional & rational strategies).
- Communication strategies:
 - Active listening tools – reflecting feelings, values, describe
 - Gentle boundaries, boundaries as choices – strategies for setting limits while preserving relationship
 - Encouraging cooperation – strategies for engaging voluntary cooperation

April 2 / 5 2025, live class via Zoom (3 hours)

- Nervous system and stress response – “Wizard Brain vs Lizard Brain”, *i.e.* sympathetic vs parasympathetic nervous system responses to stress; beneficial vs detrimental stressors; how the brain acts to protect us in response to perceived threat.
- ABCs of mental health assessment – establishing “safety & stabilization” when coming on scene
- Lizard Brain Interventions: regulation strategies for the nervous system, *and why they work.*
- Wizard Brain Interventions:
 - Psychoeducation – providing information about stress response as an evidence-based means of reducing anxiety.
 - Thought Challenging – awareness of and challenging intrusive thoughts that are untrue or unhelpful to mental health.
 - Baby Step Ladder – gradual, voluntary exposure
 - Field Support Planning – brief written plans for ongoing use in the field.

Post-course

(0.5 hour, to be completed and submitted for certification)

- Completion of brief final assignments to complete certification: 1) Field Support Plan, 2) Feedback form



Mental Health Support Skills

ABCs to assess:

Actual danger?

Physical safety (self, others, client)

Brain: Lizard or Wizard?

It's easy to miss "partial lizard brain"

medical Conditions?

Consider any medical first aid

3 Rs to respond: Relationship, Regulation, Rationality (in that order)

Take a deep breath & listen; regulate the nervous system; then give information & problem-solve.

Relationship – “The most important mental health intervention”

Good healthy relationships are protective factors for our mental health in general! Build connections, include play, listen.



Mirror neurons are brain cells that fire both when we experience something (emotion or action), **and** when we observe *someone else* experiencing that same thing. In mental health support situations and when working / living with others, our nervous systems will pick up on and mirror both anxiety and co-regulation. (Nervous system regulation is “contagious”!) Similarly, be aware of the cumulative impact of providing mental health support on your own nervous system.



Communication Tools – building relationship

Active Listening

- Reflect an underlying **feeling**
“I hear how surprising this is.” “Sounds like you’re feeling overwhelmed.”
“I imagine that’s quite frustrating!” “It can be sad when ...”
- Reflect (or honor) an underlying **value** – what’s important to the person?
“What I’m hearing overall is how much you care about your friend.”
- **Describe** the situation (**from the other person’s point of view**).
“So you heard me say that we could make it to the peak today, and you’ve been imagining the view from the top!”

Fostering Cooperation

- **Describe** the problem (simply), or describe your own perspective:
“I see the paddle tip on the ground. Carbon fibre gets wrecked by sand.”
- **Frame a “no-as-yes”:**
“~~Not until ...~~” “Yes, when ...”
- **Offer choice:** “You can wear a PFD, or stay only chest deep – or go for a walk.” (Consider framing boundaries-as-choices)

Gentle Boundaries

Where the boundary itself is firm, yet the way you present it helps preserve the relationship.

1. Acknowledge / honour the underlying **need** or feeling,
2. State the **boundary** / limitation,
3. Redirect with an **alternative** or a **choice**.

“I know how important it is to you to have your car, and how stressful it is to not have the cash to repair it right now. Although I’m not set up to lend you money, I could give you a lift for a couple of weeks if you like?”

“Connection is the correction!” -- Jane Middleton-Moz



5h Introductory certification – Mental Health Wilderness First Aid

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Regulation – things that can help when we're in Lizard Brain



Movement or activity, especially Rhythmic, repetitive, relational activity

Ideas: walking, running, "shake it out," paddling, music, drumming, planting, routine, dance, sports, beading, carving, quilting, recitation, tapping, games, tossing a ball.

Rhythm regulates the brain.

"Talking to Lizard through behaviour"

Ideas: breathing techniques, offering food / water / tea, warmth, cold water (on face or brief dunk), tapping certain pressure points.

All simple ways to encourage the "rest & digest" (parasympathetic, opposite of fight/flight/freeze) nervous system to activate.



Directing attention

Ideas: mindfulness practices, meditation, body scan, 54321 (tune in to the senses), find all the colours of the rainbow, distracting activity (math, games), remind self of something.

Other: smudging, prayer, spiritual practices.

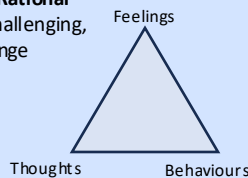
Rationality – things that can help once we're in Wizard Brain



Psychoeducation -- "Can I tell you a bit about how the brain works under stress?"

Just having basic knowledge of our nervous system helps reduce anxiety and trauma responses:

- **Our brains are our good friends, and are always doing the best they can to support us.**
- "Lizard Brain" (limbic system/hindbrain) is *unconscious*, and in charge of survival. It scans for threat, and runs our autonomic nervous system (the automatic body).
- "Wizard Brain" (prefrontal cortex) is *conscious*, and rational. It controls decision-making and logic.
- When the Lizard detects a threat, it activates *fight / flight / freeze* mode to protect us. The Wizard therefore shuts down – it gets harder to think / communicate.
- The Lizard & the Wizard are both our friends, but they don't speak the same language. Sometimes, the Lizard gives us a threat signal and activates *fight / flight / freeze* mode, even when there is no actual threat.
- "Can I train my Lizard?" Yes. Feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are all interconnected. **Regulation** techniques help our emotions in the moment, however **Rational** options (thought challenging, exposure) help change stress patterns and build resilience over time.



Thought Challenging – when thoughts are not helpful

Step 1: Identify an unhelpful or negative thought pattern:

What story am I telling myself about this? Examples of cognitive distortions: Emotional Reasoning, Black & White Thinking, Negative Filtering, Mind-Reading, Catastrophizing, Victimization, Bandwagoning.

Step 2: **Challenge** it: *Is this story true? Is it helpful to me to think like this? How likely is this? Is there another possibility or some nuance?*

• **Healthy Alternative Thought (HAT)s** 🧠 :

"I am anxious" > 🧠 "I am courageous."

"What if something happens" > 🧠 "I know how to ask for help."

"This is impossible" > 🧠 "I can do difficult things."

"This is hopeless" > 🧠 "Focus on the people who are helping."

"I can't believe..." > 🧠 "I can't control that, but I can focus on..."

Baby Step Ladder – Gradual, voluntary exposure

Avoiding sources of anxiety & stress response can actually make mental health worse, not better, in the long run. Overprotecting can cause just as many problems as overexposure. Where reasonable, encourage people (and yourself) to *encounter* challenges, and sources of anxiety rather than *avoid*. Break things down in to **gradual, voluntary** steps. Retrain the brain by **pairing exposure with practice regulating**, rather than pairing avoidance with feeling relief.



Field Support Plan

Name _____
Feelings I struggle with & when _____

Regulation strategies
coping techniques

Rational strategies
thought challenging, courage, solutions

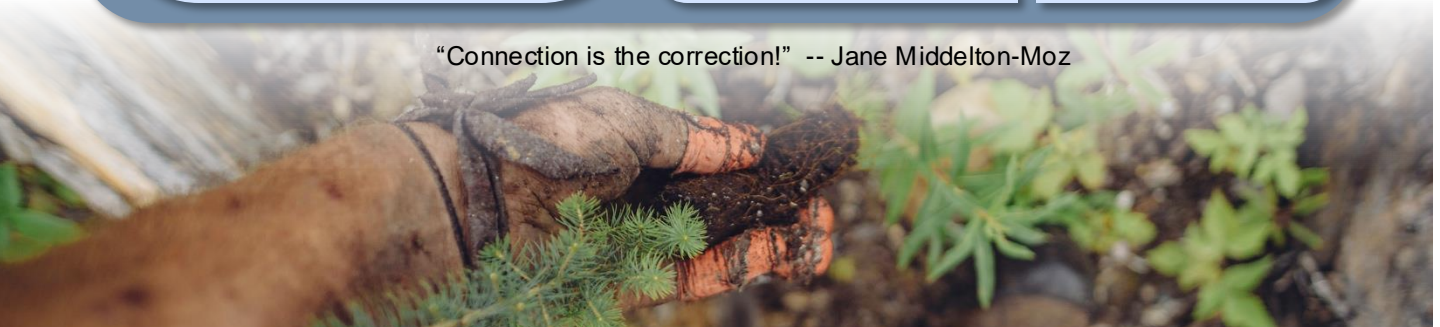
Self-care plan

Social supports / connections

Professional resource

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"Connection is the correction!" -- Jane Middleton-Moz



Field Support Plan

A field support plan is a document to help both a mental health first aider and a client to be more aware, more able to proactively manage, and more able to respond to mental health challenges and stressors in the field. It is written from the client's perspective ("I"). Questions may be modified to best suit the client and the context. Both the client and the person supporting, if any, should keep a copy of the plan and refer to it.

This is a plan for (name):

Date:

Supporter name if any:

Awareness

Some of the **difficult feelings** associated with my stress response include:

→ **Warning signs / scenarios** (e.g. when and where am I likely to experience difficult feelings?):

→ Where do these feelings show up in my **body**?:

→ **When I feel this way, my tendency is to:**

Healthy Responses

Lizard Brain Interventions

Healthy emotional regulation strategies in the moment

e.g. *breathing, movement, mindfulness, distraction, tapping, cultural, etc?*

Wizard Brain Interventions

Healthy rational strategies: Are there any **negative thought spirals** or **cognitive distortions**? If so, what can I remind myself of (healthy alternative thought 🧙)?

Other problem-solving strategy: *Babystep ladder? SMART goal? Other?*

Self-Care

Specific ways I will practice **good self-care**

(e.g. nutrition, hydration, exercise/movement, sleep, boundaries, screens/media, prayer, meditation, other practices):

People here in the field I can talk to:

Optional: **how to get their attention** (e.g. a code phrase):

Resources

Professionals / agencies / other supports (when I go home or in the medium to long term):

→ 24/7 mental health / crisis chat line:

→ Local therapist or counselling agency:

→ Other (e.g. positive family / social / community / spiritual / cultural / recreational connections – *connection is the correction!*):



**Mental Health Wilderness First Aid course – 5 hours, Next Generation Reforestation
Kajabi & Zoom – March-April 2025
Instructor: Daye Hagel, admin support Kevin Hawker**



Please comment to tell us what was valuable and to help improve our program!

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the training valuable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt uncomfortable at some point during the training.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This course helped me be more prepared to offer mental health first aid.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I gained valuable skills from this course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The course was interesting & engaging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The facilitator created a supportive environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would recommend this training to someone else.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. What were the **most valuable** topics or skills we covered in this whole course?

2. What felt **disorganized or could be improved**?

3. What would you have liked **more time for**?

4. Please **estimate how many hours you spent on homework** outside of the live class (*this helps us assess how many credit hours the course should be worth in future*):
 Kajabi (pre-course online material): Final assignment:

5. Any comments on the Kajabi online pre-course platform experience specifically?

Thank you!