



Mental Health Wilderness First Aid

Mental Health Wilderness First Aid courses provide interactive, evidence-based training on recognizing, assessing, and supporting those who are experiencing a range of mental health conditions in remote areas. Rural communities, wilderness guides, search & rescue members, tree planters, OE instructors, and others living, working, or playing in remote areas have all benefitted from MHWFA. Students are provided with an orientation to mental health conditions and psychoeducation (how the brain works); assessment tools, connection to outside resources, and practical intervention strategies for field use.

Director: Donetta Faye (Daye) Cooper Hagel, M.A., C.C.C.

- M.A. Counselling Psychology, University of Victoria
- M.A. Anthropology, University of Toronto
- Canadian Certified Counsellor (C.C.C.), Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
- Clinical Counsellor working in remote area mental health
- Level Three Guide and former Executive Director, Sea Kayak Guides Alliance of B.C.
- 15 years / 1500 days of experience as a professional wilderness guide.



Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify a range of mental health conditions & 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 specific interventions to support mental health symptoms in the field.
- Access external support resources for themselves and their clients.



MHWFA Course Curriculum	
Basic (8h) Course	Standard (16h) Course
<p>A. Introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructors, course outline, group agreements, peer introductions <p>B. What is Mental Health?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief survey of mental health in society Pre-trip mental health form <p>C. Neurology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wizard brain & Lizard brain (prefrontal cortex & hindbrain/limbic system) Amygdalae & fear responses Sympathetic nervous system activation: fight / flight / freeze, anxiety <p>D. MHWFA Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Holding Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing) Mirror neurons Active listening skills Primary Survey - <i>safety & stabilization</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ABCs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are they in a tiger cage? Brain: wizard to lizard? medical Conditions? Lizard Brain Interventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathing Interventions Cognitive Interventions Mindfulness Interventions Physical Interventions Tapping Interventions Secondary Survey - <i>information & planning</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary Assessment Wizard Brain Interventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychoeducation (I & II) Solution-Focused Conversation Baby Step Ladder Safety Planning Connect to Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing the idea of connecting to resources What resources are available? Options in broader MH care outside of our scope of practice <p>E. Special Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panic attacks: Symptoms, urban protocol, field protocol, scenario <p>F. Final Assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose from 3 scenarios and create a one-page written safety plan for a character experiencing anxiety or panic in the field. 	<p>Everything in the Basic (8h) course, plus:</p> <p>A. Resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is resilience? Trauma-informed perspective “Double listening” <p>B. Trauma & PTSD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is trauma? - flashbacks, dissociation Trauma and the brain Past trauma (e.g. PTSD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary & Secondary Survey considerations Traumatic exposure on trip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to improve outcomes & reduce the likelihood of future PTSD <p>C. Depression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is depression? Depression and MHWFA steps Baby step ladder, resourcing, & follow-up <p>D. Grief & Loss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examining conceptions around grief & loss Holding space Inviting introductions & <i>re-membering</i> <p>E. Psychosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is psychosis? Medical conditions question & psychosis Field protocol <p>F. Self-injury</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is self-injury? Why do some people self-injure? Alternatives to self-injury Harm reduction Safety planning <p>G. Suicidal ideation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is suicidal ideation? Suicide stats & scales Noticing red flags How to ask about suicidal ideation Resourcing, debriefing, & safety planning <p>H. Final Assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose from 3 scenarios and create a two-page of notes + written safety plan for a character experiencing trauma & grief, self-injury, or suicidal ideation in the field.





Resources & Materials

- MHWFA Key Concepts waterproof pocket guide, activity handouts, & certificate of completion.
- An optional, illustrated course manual is available for purchase for \$35 plus shipping (PowerPoint slides are not made available).

Prerequisites

- Age 16+ for open-enrollment courses. A working knowledge of English is required.

Cost

- 2021 course cost is \$195 for a Basic or Upgrade course or \$375 for a Standard course (plus GST).
- A sliding scale is available for self-identified low-income earners, up to 25% off.
- Additional scholarships may be available upon request; please inquire. We value accessibility!

Logistics & protocol

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.

In-person courses

- Classes are mostly indoors with some outdoor scenarios.
- In-person classes will be conducted in accordance with appropriate current local health protocol.
- Please come rested and bring a notebook, pen or pencil, clothing and footwear suitable for outdoor scenarios, PPE as required by local protocol, and a personal tea mug.
- Participants agree to abide by local health protocols and respect other students and the learning environment. It is not necessary to come close to others during scenarios.
- All participants agree to self-monitor, and not to attend class if they develop new symptoms consistent with COVID-19. *In this case, a student may receive a credit to attend a MHWFA course within the next 12 months.*

Virtual (online) courses

- Classes are hosted over Zoom. A computer with microphone, speakers, and webcam is necessary. *Smaller screens such as smartphones are not recommended for the class.* Zoom is a user-friendly platform and you do not need much special stuff to attend – however, **you should practice the basics with a friend before your first class:** how to accept a Zoom invitation, mute yourself, switch views, etc.
- Please come rested and bring a notebook, pen or pencil, have hot drinks and snacks available.
- Please **keep your video on** throughout the course (unless you are having bandwidth issues). **Communicate with the instructor if you would like extra support or to chat privately, or are needing to leave early for any reason** – so we don't worry about you.
- **Consider bringing one or more simple physical distraction tools to the course.** Play-doh, simple colouring materials, knitting, or fidget toys are all good options. *While this may sound unusual, it is evidenced to assist the brain to process emotional material.*

