Promoting and Protecting Positive Mental Health of Children and Youth

Healthy Schools Conference February 8th, 2011

Panel Topics

- Exploration of strategies and activities that promote mental health during the early years

- Overview of a *Whole School Approach* to promoting mental health and it's benefits.

- Discussion on the prevention benefits of enhancing the mental health literacy of school staff through the Mental Health First Aid Program

- Highlights from the SELF project at the Louis Riel School Division

Mental Health Promotion - The Early Years

What we know…

- "A child's development is shaped by many influences, including genetic makeup, early interactions with parents or other caregivers, socioeconomic factors, and early childhood experiences in the family, at school, and in the community."

- "Children whose physical, psychological, and emotional needs are unmet are at significant risk for developing a variety of mental health and behavioural problems."

Centre of Knowledge on Healthy Child Development, Offord Centre for Child Studies

The critical years

BUILDING PATHWAYS FOR LEARNING AND HEALTH

"Experiences in early life activate gene expression and result in the formation of critical pathways and processes. Billions of neurons in the brain must be stimulated to form sensing pathways, which influence a person's learning and behaviour, and biological processes which affect physical and mental health."

The Early Years Study 2 Putting Science Into Action, 2007.

What we know about childhood brain development

- Relationships are central to a child's successful learning and overall well-being

- Early emotional development lays the foundation for later academic performance, mental health, and the capacity to form successful relationships.

- "Excessive stress disrupts the architecture of the developing brain" National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005). *Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 3*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

WRHA Mental Health Promotion collaborative early years initiatives

- ***WRHA Population and Public Health*** – Provide ongoing training and consultation to staff (PHNs and HV) in perinatal mental health, esp. education, prevention and early intervention regarding postpartum depression which can negatively impact infants and young children

- ***Towards Flourishing*** – *Improving Mental health among New Mothers in the MB Families First Home Visiting Program* - a Public Health Agency of Canada funded 4 year project – a collaboration WRHA, Healthy Child MB and U of M, "Equipping Canadians – Mental Health Throughout the Lifespan"

- ***Tuning In to Toddlers*** – a project of the Attachment Network of MB producing a DVD for parents and parent educators focusing on promoting attachment in the toddler years. Network involves multiple agencies www.attachmentnetwork.ca

WRHA Mental Health Promotion
Early Years Initiatives

- ***Handle with Care*** – Strategies to promote the mental health of young children from 0-7 in community based child care - a collaboration with Manitoba Child Care Association, MB Gov Family Services & Housing, and MB Gov Child Care Program, The Family Centre of Winnipeg, WRHA Mental Health Promotion
  - PHAC Funded Project = adapting materials so that they can be used directly with parents and families as well as early childhood educators

- ***Reaching In Reaching Out*** – an evidence-based skills training program designed to promote resilience in young children, initially delivered to early childhood educators
  - Second Project = also adapting materials for use by parents/caregivers

Whole School Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health

Prevalence of children's mental disorders and population affected

Waddell, McEvan, Sheperd, et al, 2005

Disorder	Estimated Prevalence (%)	Age Range (years)	Estimated Pop Affected (CA)
Anxiety Disorder	6.4	5-17	338,400
ADHD	4.8	4-17	270,800
Conduct Disorder	4.2	4-17	237,000
Depressive Disorder	3.5	5-17	185,000
Substance Abuse	0.8	9-17	30,200
OCD	0.2	5-15	8900
Eating Disorder	0.1	5-15	4,500
Schizophrenia	0.1	9-13	2,100
Bipolar Disorder	<0.1	9-13	<2,100
Any Disorder	14.3	4-17	806,900

• Recent best practice research across the health and education domains assert the importance of moving beyond a problem-focused approach to embrace a more positive view of mental health.

• Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness.

World Health Organization

- Defines mental health as

  "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"

Public Health Agency of Canada

Defines mental health as

"the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity"

Dual Continua of Mental Health
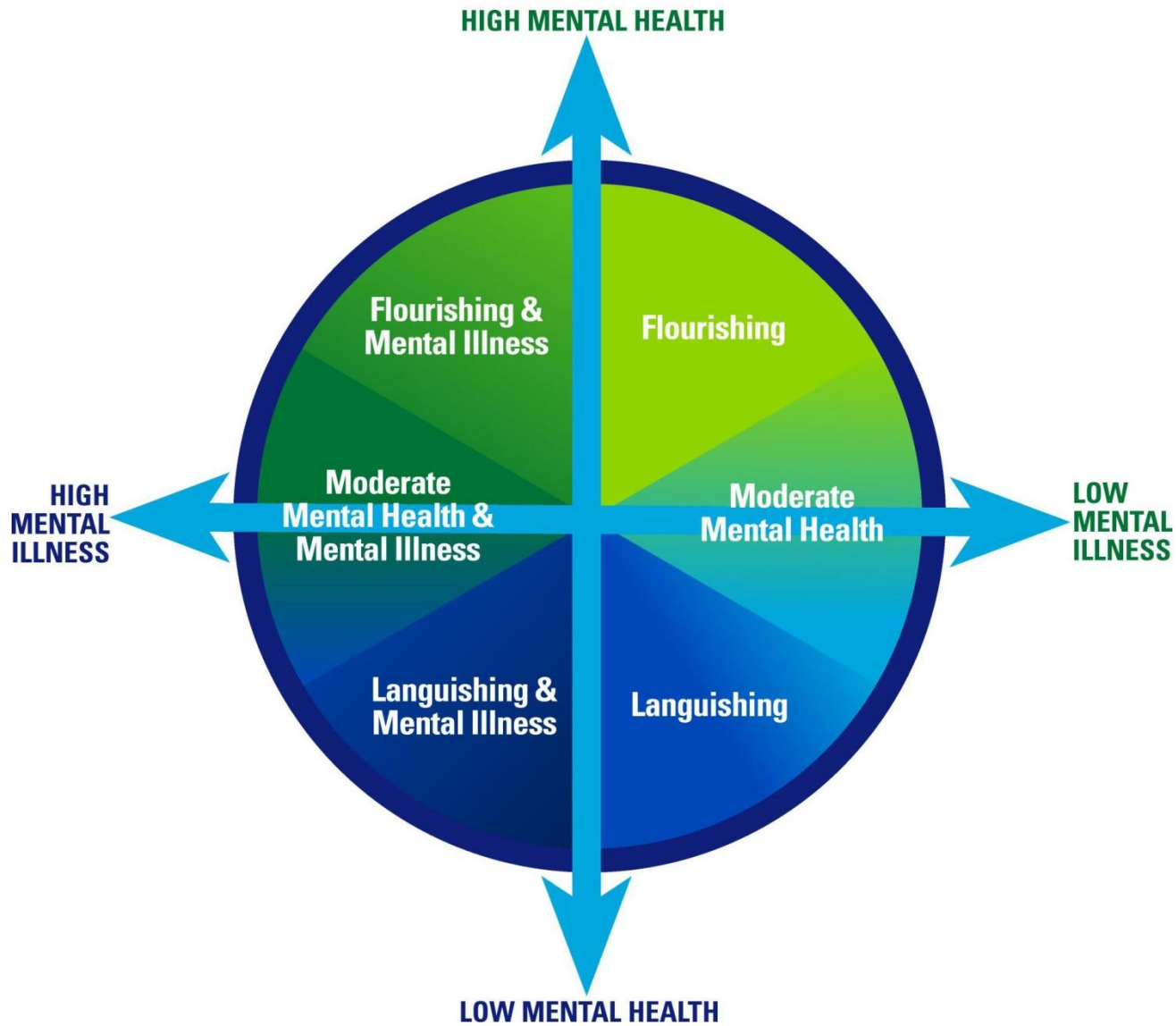
Scope of Mental Health Promotion

- MHP is targeted at promoting mental well-being for the whole population, including people who are well, those at risk and those experiencing difficulties.

- MHP refers to those activities and interventions that seek to enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors (individual, family related, social, economic and environmental in nature).

Why Focus on MHP In Schools?

- Schools are well recognized as important sites for the promotion of health and emotional well-being in young people from the early years to high school.

- Schools have already implemented a range of programs, policies and practices to address the needs of their students

- There is also growing community awareness of the wide range of health issues affecting young people and the long-term effects when these issues are not addressed.

Mental Health Promotion in Schools

"There is ample evidence that school based programs in elementary, middle and high schools can influence positive mental health and reduce risk factors and emotional and behavioural problems through socio-emotional learning and ecological interventions". (WHO, 2004)

Rational for Whole School Approach

" …schools can easily fall into the trap of using a 'smorgasbord' approach , with individual teachers picking and choosing from different initiatives, projects and materials in a way that is confusing for students and which will almost certainly be replaces by the next fashionable issue that comes along" (Weare, 2000)
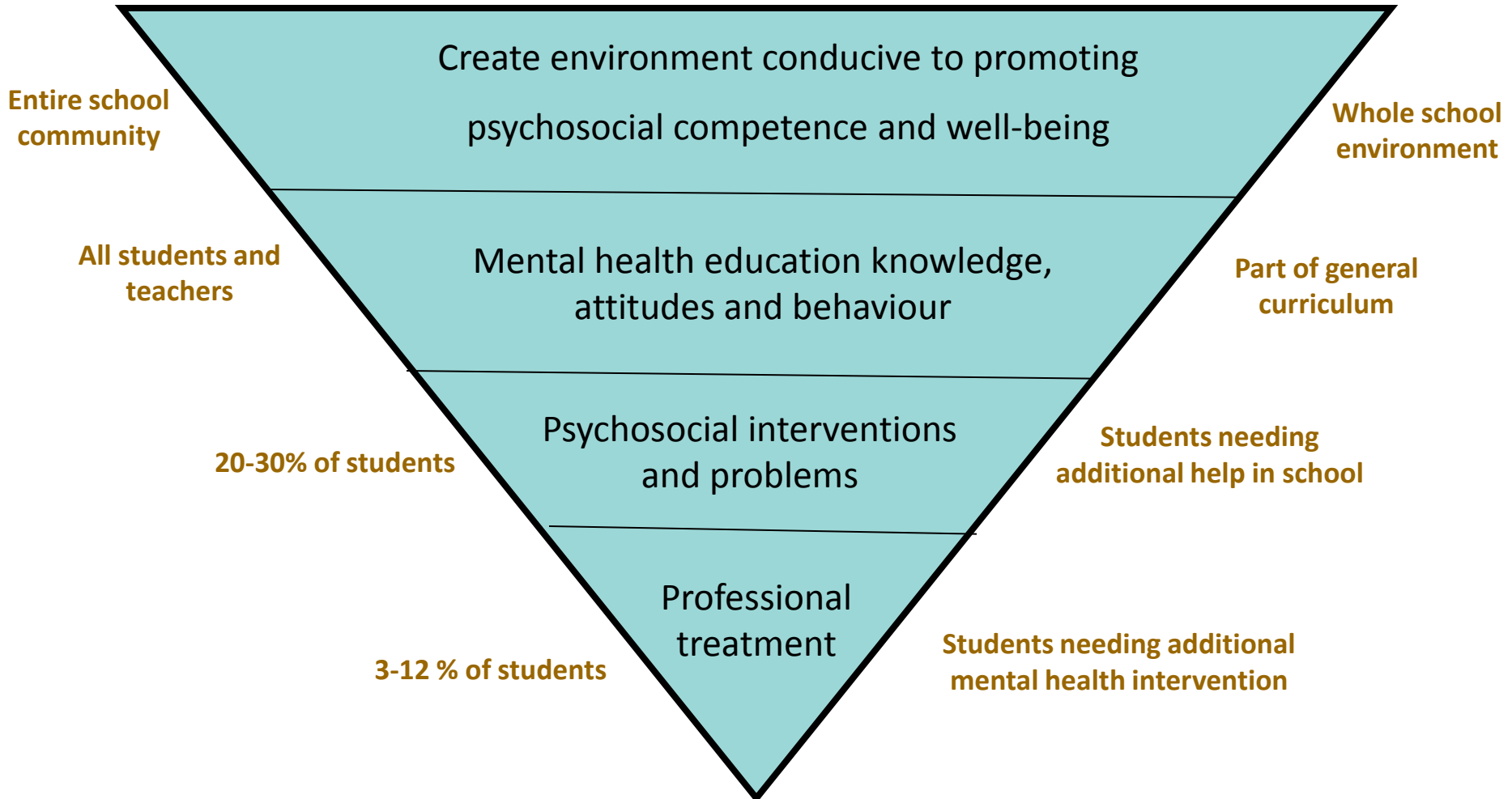
Key Assumption

- Children's and youth's social contexts and networks provide important resources and influences that have the capacity to contribute to and enhance their psychological well-being.

(Losier & Morrison, 2007; Sheridan,Warnes, Coan, Schemm & Clarke, 2004)

Comprehensive School Mental Health Program

Who is involved

Level of intervention

Entire school community

Create environment conducive to promoting psychosocial competence and well-being

Whole school environment

All students and teachers

Mental health education knowledge, attitudes and behaviour

Part of general curriculum

20-30% of students

Psychosocial interventions and problems

Students needing additional help in school

3-12 % of students

Professional treatment

Students needing additional mental health intervention

Adapted from World Health Organization, 1994

Positive Youth Development

- Ecological, asset or strength-based approaches promote healthy development through supportive community environments and connection (Bradshaw, Brown & Hamilton, 2008)

- Focus on building relationships with caring adults that support engagement in challenging actives in which youth are active participants rather than solely receiving services or supports (Hamiltion, Hamilton & Pittman, 2004; Bradshaw, Brown & Hamiltion, 2008; Damon, Bronk & Menon, 2004)

Protective and Risk Factors

School Context

Protective Factors
- Sense of belonging
- Positive school climate
- Pro-social peer group
- Emphasis on responsibility and helpfulness
- Opportunities for success
- Norms against violence

Risk Factors
Bullying Peer rejection
Poor Attachment to school
Inadequate behavior management
Negative influence of peer group
School failure

Individual Factors

Protective Factors
School achievement
Problem solving skills
Social skills
Good coping style
Positive self related cognitions
Values

Risk Factors
Poor social skills
Low self esteem
Alienation
Impulsivity

Social, Emotional Learning (SEL)

- SEL is the process through which children and youth develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to:
  - Identify and manage their emotions
  - Set and pursue positive goals
  - Communicate caring and concern for others
  - Initiate and sustain positive relationships
  - Deal with interpersonal concerns and challenges effectively

Resiliency

- The ability of people to successfully adapt and develop positive well-being in the face of chronic stress and adversity. This ability is highly influenced by protective and supportive elements in the wider social environment

Buffers are more powerful than risks. The more risks a child faces the more buffers are needed.

Diversity

- In recent years, researchers have underscored the connection between culture, student learning and classroom communication

(Lee, mearkart & Okagawa-Reg, 2002; Nieto, 2002)

Strength-Based Perspectives

- The emergence of positive psychology has contributed to increased focus on the identification, exploration and use of strengths in children and youth to foster positive mental health outcomes

- Problems are reframed as learning opportunities

- Resolution of challenges results in the development of positive strengths and resilience

(Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2005; Sternberg, 2000; Laursen, 2003; GermAnn, 2009)

Collaboration Between WRHA and School Divisions

- Create a process and framework to address the increased pressure educators' face in responding to the mental health and emotional needs of students.

- Strengthen opportunities to enhance social, emotional learning within school context.

Generic Principles of Effective Mental Health Promotion Programs in Schools

- Adopting the whole school approach
- Adopting a social competence approach
- Theory-based interventions
- Interventions over the multiple years
- High-quality implementation
- Evaluation
- Sustainability

Barry, M. & Jenkins, R. (2007). *Implementing Mental Health Promotion.* Elsevier Limited, China

Appreciative Inquiry

- A process to determine and explore future possibilities by focusing on positive aspects of people, organizations and systems including the potential for meaningful and valuable change growth and adaptability.

Evidence Base MHP Activities

Programs fit into one of the following categories;

- Effective – evidence based programs
- Unevaluated programs
- Ineffective evidence based programs

Phase One: Capacity Building

- Establishing a common language – increase mental health literacy
- Focused visits – identifying priority needs
- Environmental scan – current mental health promotion activities at a local school level
- Strengthen school team
- Develop action plan

School Site Visits

- Focused school interviews with student services and administrator
- Pre set questions regarding each school's individual needs
- Interviews examined protective factors, risk factors, challenges, strengths, issues and priorities
- Provides information to compile a summary of protective and risk factors

School Mental Health Promotion Framework
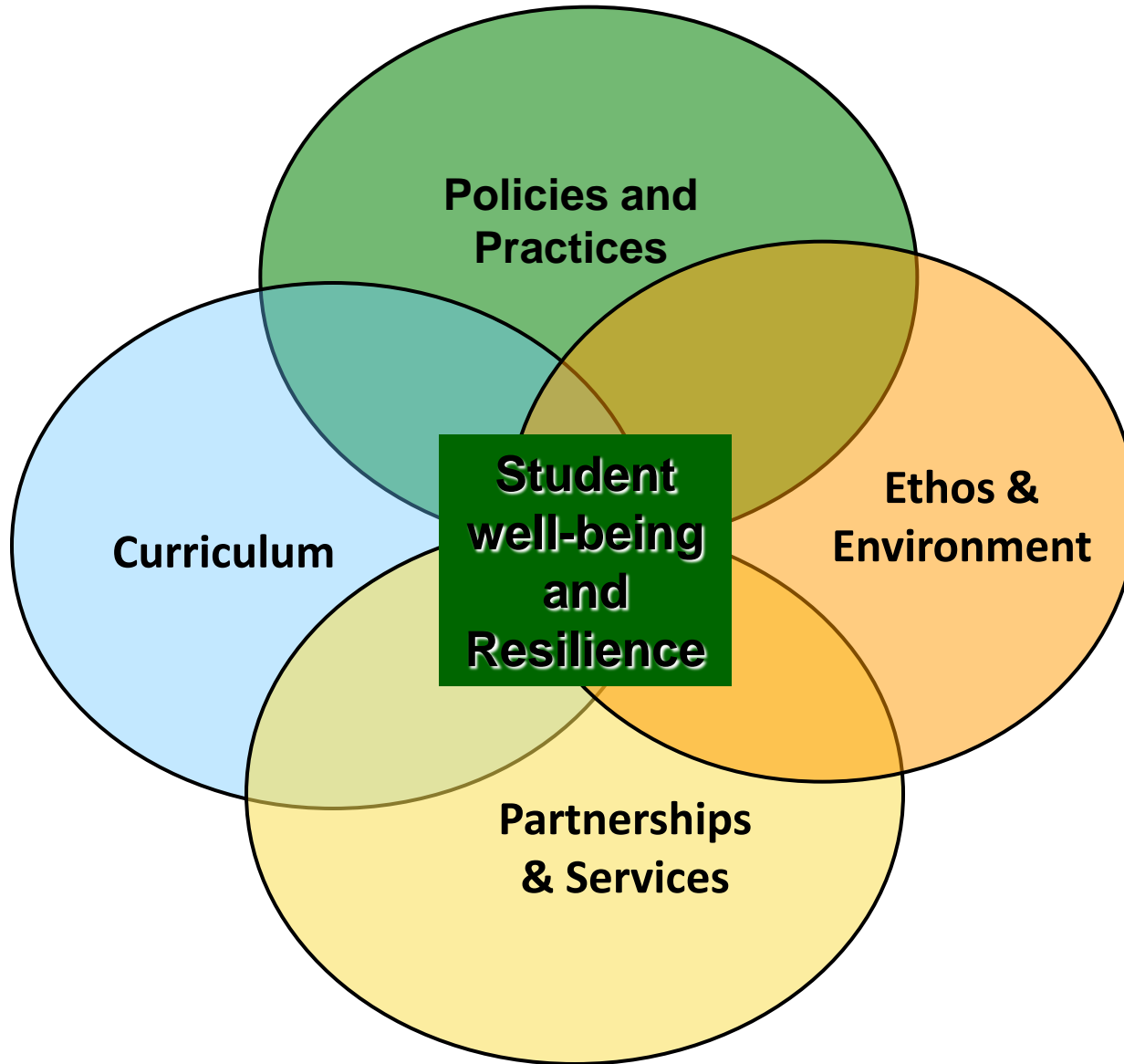
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Mental Health Literacy:
Supporting Caring Responsive Communities

Mental Health Literacy Programs
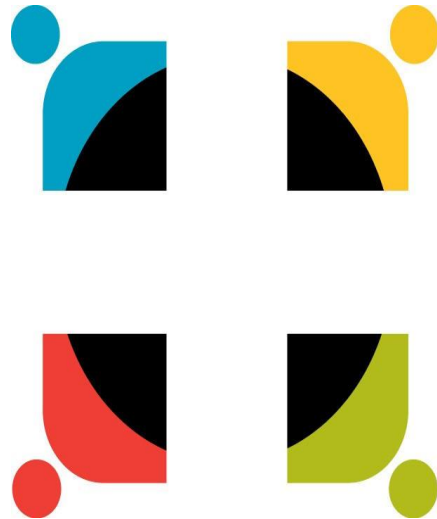
- The help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.

- First aid is given until treatment is received or crisis is resolved

- Based on the model of medical first aid

- Universal and Selective, Evidence- based, Whole School and Youth at Risk

Origins of MHFA

Developed in 2001 in Australia by Professors Betty Kitchener and Anthony Jorm

Centre for Mental Health Research, Australian National University

Since 2005, sponsored by the ORYGEN Research Centre

University of Melbourne

Australian Evaluation

Thoroughly evaluated using **randomized controlled trials** and **qualitative study** showing:

- ✓ Improves knowledge of mental disorders
- ✓ Reduces stigma,
- ✓ Increases the amount of help provided to others

Mental Health First Aid Review, March 2005

About MHFA Canada

- Basic or Adults Interacting with Youth version
- Flexible delivery format
- Interactive
- Practical
- For anyone

Curriculum is Evidence Informed and a National Evaluation is in process

Mental Health Problems

Basic:

- Substance Related Disorders
- Mood Disorders
- Anxiety Disorders
- Psychosis

Youth:

Also covers Self Injury and Eating Disorders

MHFA Training includes…

- What is Mental Health and Mental Illness
- Signs and Symptoms of Common Mental Health Problems and Crisis Situations
- Basic 5-actions model to provide First Aid
- Info about Interventions and Treatments
- How to Guide Someone towards Professional Help and Resources

The Five Basic Actions

- **A**ssess the risk of suicide or harm

- **L**isten non-judgmentally

- **G**ive reassurance and information

- **E**ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help

- **E**ncourage other Supports

MHFA in Manitoba

- MHFA chosen because it is evidence informed and evaluated
- Strong focus on mental health literacy for all citizens of Manitoba
- Second province in Canada to have Instructors
- Involved in content review/revisions
- First Contract Trainer

MHFA in Manitoba

Currently 85 MHFA Canada Instructors:

Number of Instructors who can teach:

Basic Course 51

Adults Interacting with Youth Course 49

Manitoba Impact

 # of School Divisions **with Instructors**

Winnipeg (LRSD, Pembina Trails)

Other Regions (Frontier)

Additional School Divisions who have had staff attend training:

St. James SD , RETSD, Rolling River, Fort La Bosse

School feedback

" Very important review for us to deliver the mental health curriculum with confidence"

LRSD Educator ,2009

" This is essential training and needed before the SOS pilot, thank you"

St James /Assinboia Educator,2010

" There are some students who I will check in with as a result of this training, all school staff need this"

Pembina Trails Counsellor, 2010

Base Level Knowledge

- To support educators responsible for delivering mental health or suicide prevention related curriculum

   * SOS Project –Signs of Suicide –MHFA for adults who Interact with youth provided as part of pilot rollout

   * Faculty of Education -University of Winnipeg

MHFA as a Prevention Strategy

MHFA focuses on prevention and early intervention, and increasing mental health literacy of all Manitobans

Part of an Overall Mental Health Promotion strategy in schools

www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca