



**MENTAL
HEALTH
FIRST AID**
Australia

Creating mentally
healthy workplaces.

BEING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE ROLE

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WELCOME

Congratulations on completing your course and becoming an accredited Mental Health First Aider.

You are now part of a community of over 1 million Australians and over 4 million people worldwide trained to recognise mental ill health and help people find the support they need to stay well.

Together, we strive to achieve our vision of a community where everyone has the first aid skills to support people with mental health problems.

This document outlines what it is to be a Mental Health First Aider, what support you will need from your employer in your workplace and how MHFA Australia can support you.

Thank you for becoming part of our community.

MHFA Australia

“

Extremely glad I did the course, my knowledge has definitely grown in mental health in general but also how to be a first aid officer in mental health. Very helpful when working in the field but also in everyday life.

”

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID **ACTION PLAN**

Approach the person, assess and assist with any crisis

Listen and communicate non-judgementally

Give support and information

Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help

Encourage other supports

THE ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS

As an accredited Mental Health First Aider, you can:

- Understand the important factors affecting mental health
- Identify the signs and symptoms for a range of mental health problems
- Use the ALGEE Action Plan to provide Mental Health First Aid to someone experiencing a mental health problem or crisis
- Listen non-judgementally and hold supportive conversations about mental health problems
- Guide a person towards seeking appropriate professional help and other supports, as your role as a Mental Health First Aider does not replace the need for ongoing support
- Support a mentally healthy workplace and understand how Mental Health First Aid fits in the workplace.

It's important to remember that MHFA courses do not teach people to be therapists or counsellors and do not teach people how to diagnose mental illness or provide ongoing support.

Your role is to act as a point of contact and reassurance for a person who may be experiencing a mental health problem or emotional distress. Maintaining appropriate boundaries is a key part of successfully providing Mental Health First Aid and keeping yourself safe and well.



YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Mental Health First Aiders can have a profound and positive impact on their communities. Carrying out your role responsibly involves the following:

- ✓ Keeping yourself safe and well – for more information refer to your MHFA course manual.
- ✓ Communicating any concerns about the mental health and well-being of anyone in your workplace, for example to an appropriate manager.
- ✓ Following your workplace's policies and procedures on how MHFA training is implemented in your organisation.
- ✓ Upholding your role as a Mental Health First Aider alongside your other responsibilities.
- ✓ Establishing appropriate boundaries between yourself and colleagues you may be supporting.
- ✓ Refreshing your MHFA skills and accreditation every three years.



ENGAGING WITH YOUR EMPLOYER

Being a Mental Health First Aider makes you an important part of an organisation's health and well-being strategy, but promoting positive mental health is not just down to you.

To perform your role effectively and safely at work, MHFA training should be one part of a whole organisation approach. You need the full support of your employer, which should include an effective strategy, policies and procedures, and clear communication of your role and how you will be supported.

✓ Discuss policies

Discuss with your employer what organisational policies and procedures you should follow and refer to in your role as a Mental Health First Aider.

✓ Find out about referral pathways

Find out from your employer what the referral pathways are for mental health support and how best to support a colleague, either internally or externally. Your workplace may have its own support available for employees, such as an Occupational Health and Safety or Employee Assistance Programme.

Your MHFA Australia course manual also contains details of reputable national services that can be approached for support. If in doubt on where to refer someone or how to deal with a crisis, refer to the guidance in your manual.

✓ Ask how your role will be communicated

Ask your employer how they will let colleagues know you are a Mental Health First Aider and how to contact you. Organisations use a variety of ways to let staff know how they can talk to a Mental Health First Aider, and what kinds of thing a Mental Health First Aider can support them with. Some examples include putting up posters around the workplace, putting a list on an intranet hub, or giving out first aider lanyards or badges.

✓ Your role within the whole organisation

Training up Mental Health First Aiders is only one part of an effective approach to fostering a mentally healthy organisation so it's a good idea to find out how your role fits in. Ask your employer what steps they are taking to adopt a whole of organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.

PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID REMOTELY

Providing Mental Health First Aid in the workplace or in the community can be challenging. Offering support to remotely working individuals, can add some additional challenges.

Here are some tips that you may find helpful in your role as a Mental Health First Aider in the workplace or community:

LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

If you are not regularly interacting with someone face to face, you may need to be more active in noticing the signs. Get to know those remote workers and individuals and check in with them regularly.

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

Promote your role as a Mental Health First Aider in your email signature or by sharing a digital poster so remote workers and individuals know who you are. Apply the same principles to video and phone calls as you would to conversations in person – set time aside, minimize distractions, and give the person your full focus and attention. At the beginning of the conversation, talk with the person about what you will do if the call drops out or you encounter some other technical problems.

PREPARE FOR THE CONVERSATION

Preparing your conversation over the phone or through videoconferencing may require a bit more work and communication to ensure that the conversation is conducted in a private manner. If you are not home alone, you may need to move to a more private area and ask the person you are speaking to do the same. Early in the conversation, ask them to tell you if the conversation becomes too distressing. You may need to work out ahead of time how they will do this, e.g. they may simply need to tell you they need a break or they may tell you they want to change topics.

LISTENING AND COMMUNICATING NON-JUDGEMENTALLY

Rely more heavily on your verbal skills to show you are listening and to convey empathy and acceptance. Ask questions that show that you genuinely care and want clarification about what they are saying. Listen not only to what the person says, but how they say it by paying attention to their tone of voice. Be patient, particularly when the person may not be communicating well, may be repetitive or may be speaking less clearly than usual.

SUPPORT FOR THE REMOTE WORKER

Make it clear that you are there to support the person remotely as a Mental Health First Aider. Let the person know what support services are available to them.

SELF-CARE

Offer some self-care tips that the person can do from home. Going for a walk, meditating, eating healthy, getting enough sleep, drinking plenty of water and being mindful and being kind can be done from almost anywhere. Find out if there is anything they have done in the past that has been helpful and encourage them to do this again.

IF THE PERSON BECOMES HIGHLY DISTRESSED OR IS IN CRISIS

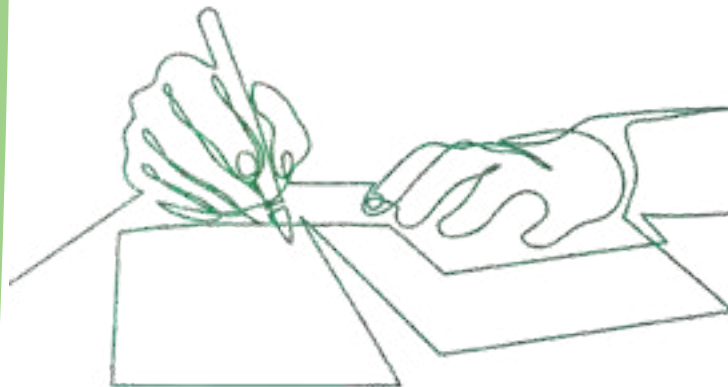
If a conversation becomes too distressing for the person and they feel they need to end the conversation, seek permission to check in with them at a later time. If the person becomes highly distressed, try to find out where they are. If there is a risk of harm to themselves or others, you may need to contact emergency services. Try to have another device available, e.g. if using video calls, have your phone close by so that you can easily contact emergency services if you need to. Before ending the call, try to put a safety plan in place, e.g. they will contact Lifeline if things get too difficult, or they will call a friend or family member to have a chat. Be prepared with contacts for tele-health services that are available to the person (e.g. GP), and crisis lines, such as Suicide Call Back Service, and Lifeline.

SUPPORT FOR YOU

Being a Mental Health First Aider is a rewarding role but it can also be a challenging one. It's important that you communicate with your employer to understand what support is available to you.

It would be useful for you to find out:

- Who you should contact if you need support or are concerned about any aspect of your role.
- If there is a peer support system such as a Mental Health First Aider network where you can meet regularly with others to discuss your role and share ideas.
- Whether you will have the opportunity to renew your skills on an MHFA Refresher course after three years.



Mental Health First Aiders are encouraged to take a MHFA Refresher course if it has been up to three years since they first completed their training. Speak with your employer about attending a Refresher course and how regularly they would like you to refresh your skills.

This half day course will enable you to:

- Keep your awareness of mental health supports current.
- Work through complex mental health first aid interactions.
- Practice mental health first aid skills in a safe environment.

HOW MHFA AUSTRALIA CAN SUPPORT YOU

1. Useful Resources

Mental Health First Aid Australia has free digital resources just for workplaces!

Go to <https://mhfa.com.au> or contact workplaces@mhfa.com.au

2. Keep up to date with our latest news and updates.

3. Join our Friends of MHFA Newsletter!

4. Check out MHFA merchandise that can help you in your role as a Mental Health First Aider!

<https://mhfa.com.au/shop>

5. Keep in touch with MHFA Australia

Keep up to date with the latest mental health news and campaigns.

Social media



@MHFA_Australia

to share with us your stories and for news from the MHFA community



@mentalhealthfirstaid

Join our Facebook group **AccreditedMHFAiders** to connect with other MHFAiders, support each other, share experiences, challenges and to ask questions that will enable you to continue your own personal MHFAider journey.



[linkedin.com/company/mental-health-first-aid-australia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mental-health-first-aid-australia)

Website

Explore our website **mhfa.com.au** for:

- Free downloadable posters for Mental Health First Aiders in the workplace
- Information about our Skilled Workplace Program which recognises workplaces for their commitment to Mental Health First Aid. Apply free of charge online at **mhfa.com.au/skilledworkplace**