

# Mental Health First Aid – #where'syourheadat?

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Emma Sell, Practice Manager of BDBF explores how mental health first aid training works and what to expect from it.

I first heard about the existence of mental health first aid training when attending a breakfast seminar on mental health. I had no idea it was available, let alone that there were so many courses across the country.

## **Mental health first aid courses**

There are three courses available: a half-day awareness session; a day course to become a mental health champion; and an in-depth 2-day mental health first aid qualification. I attended the 2-day course, which enables you to spot the signs and triggers of mental ill health, give you the confidence to step in and offer help and support, and familiarises you with the resources available to help. Throughout all of this, you also learn the invaluable concept of non-judgmental listening, which is far more difficult than it sounds.

The training groups are small – no more than 16 – but there were just 8 of us, with two instructors. Initially, I thought the group was going to be too intimate, especially given the subject matter we were going to be discussing, but it was the perfect size to enable good interaction and everyone felt listened to. Of course, everyone is there for the same reason – because they want to help other people feel good about themselves; this meant that even when we were talking about the darkest of subjects, the atmosphere was still positive.

## **Self care and self awareness about mental health**

There is no skirting around any aspect of mental ill health, and the depth of understanding was eye opening – and I thought I knew a bit about it already. As we learnt early on, you cannot predict whether a particular subject will trigger a reaction in you, so it's important to set "ground rules" so you know you're safe to talk through any real life situations, and know that you can get up and leave if it becomes upsetting. It was good to share experiences with others as, while the statistics tell you that 1 in 4 of us will suffer a mental health issue, those are only reported issues. It doesn't account for those who live with or regularly witness mental ill health incidents, and the effect it can and does have on the people around sufferers. The course reiterates the need for self care and self awareness when trying to help

others.

## **Training to spot the early symptoms**

The training really brought home to me how vast an area mental [ill] health is, and after a solid two days' learning I still feel like there's so much more to know. However, this training isn't designed to turn you into a counsellor; it is exactly what it says: first aid. I now feel confident about offering to help someone who is visibly struggling, and how to guide them to the relevant qualified people to find them the care and support they may need.

In some ways it was a life changing course for me, but the most important thing is that it becomes life changing for others as a result.

## **#Where'sYourHeadAt?**

According to law (the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981), employers must make sure they provide adequate and appropriate first aid equipment, facilities, and numbers of qualified first aiders in the workplace; however, this only applies to physical first aid. There is currently no legal requirement for employers to provide mental health first aid in the workplace. The #wheresyourheadat campaign is petitioning to make it compulsory for employers to provide mental health first aiders, and you can add your name to the petition at [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) or [wheresyourheadat.org](http://wheresyourheadat.org) to help ensure the matter is discussed in Parliament

Even if employers are reluctant to proactively manage their staff's wellbeing, with latest reports showing that mental ill health costs employers £34.96 billion a year – £1,300 per employee in the UK workforce – can your company afford not to invest in employees' mental health?

For more information on training and resources, visit:

[www.mhfaengland.org](http://www.mhfaengland.org)

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