

Four-Part Training Series

Changing Life Trajectories from Illness to Wellness and Advancing Student Success

Overview

This four-part session training is part of early detection, prevention, and intervention initiative to promote youth mental wellbeing and career pathways in mental and behavioral health. The aim of this training is to help participants: (1) identify mental health risk factors and needs of the student population; (2) acquire the knowledge to recognize and appropriately respond to students who may be exposed to adverse experiences such as trauma; (3) create a school system that provides educators and students accessible community and on-campus resources to address student's mental health needs; and (4) promote multiple education, training, and career pathways that maximize options and opportunities for students interested in the mental and behavioral health fields.

For this training, participants will use a vignette and their personal experiences relevant to the topics of the training that will aid in projecting a life trajectory of illness and then mitigating using appropriate strategies and protective factors to change the life trajectory to one of well-being. These trainings can be delivered in both in-person and/or virtual. While better results can be achieved with the trainings delivered in-person, virtual trainings can be equally effective.

Session 1: Recognizing the social determinants of health (risk factors) – 1.5 hours

Pre-session homework. The participants will be provided with a short vignette to read prior to session 1. Directions will be provided on the vignette handout. The participants will also write their brief story using the **My Story Worksheet**. By focusing on something challenging that the participants faced and overcame can help identify them to start thinking about their social determinants or risk factors. Directions will be provided on the **My Story Worksheet**.

Youth exposed to accumulated risk factors (or social determinants), have a 75% probability of developing a severe mental health disorder by age 24. Detecting early warning signs of trauma and other risk factors associated with mental health in middle and high school students can improve their social-emotional learning, including individual and social awareness, empathy for others, self-management, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making skills. Early and accurate identification of exposure to social and economic, and environmental determinants associated with stressors and adverse experiences in youths is key to the prevention and early intervention of severe and disabling mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, traumas, and other mental/behavioral health disorders.

Putting into practice. The participants will practice identifying the determinants of health, and categorize them into social and economic factors, physical environmental factors, and individual characteristics and behavior. For the third category, which may not necessarily be a risk, identify individual characteristics and behaviors. Finally, participants will practice identifying five risk factors per category for the vignette and their own.

Session 2: Discovering personal and cultural strengths or core values (protective factors) – 1.5 hours

Pre-session homework. The participants will complete the **Connections Worksheet** consisting of names of different people (e.g., friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers, students, etc.) that they feel connected to. Directions will be provided on the worksheet handout.

This session will lead the participants in a small group activity to capture individual’s core values that guide their personal and professional life. Participants will be asked to reflect on five things that are most important to living their life. The participants will engage in a discussion on how these core values function as strengths that promote their culture, language, and life experiences as assets/strengths. The participants will be asked to reflect on their core values as protective factors that can help them reduce the impact of risk factors. Directions will be provided on the **Identify the Risk Factors Worksheet**.

Putting into practice. The participants will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their core values, by completing the **Me Pie Worksheet** activity. This activity will help participants recognize that each person is “in process” and made up of many parts (i.e., pie slices) and roles that each play in different social settings (e.g., home, community, school, etc.). The participants will recognize that they engage in many activities that strengthen their roles in life.

Next, using the participant’s completed **Connections Worksheet**, participants will reflect and create a story around their connections or relationships. The participants will address this question, “How is feeling a sense of connectedness important when facing challenges or adversities?”.

Session 3: The risk and protective factors framework: Putting it all together – 1.5 hours

Pre-session homework. The participants will be asked to organize a 2-minute story highlighting their core values and describe how these individual qualities translate into protective factors or personal strengths (i.e., resilience) that people use to overcome life challenges.

In this session, storytelling will be reintroduced as a strategy to connect with others with similar experiences. Stories is also a way to share one’s culture that highlight risk and protective factors (core values) and lived/life experiences. Through storytelling and sharing life experiences, people enhance their self-efficacy and resilience. Engaging in conversations about mental health, led by peers with real-life experiences, can be an effective intervention and help participants to see themselves as agents of change in helping to destigmatize mental health inside their school, communities, and households. The participants will share their stories (2 minutes each).

Putting into practice. Using the **Risk and Protective Factors Framework Worksheet**, participants will start by transferring their five self-identified risk factors from their prior discussions, and my story and identifying risk factors worksheets. The participants will be reminded that a risk factor is something that can increase the chances of developing a disabling illness. The participants will then write their five core values on the right column of the risk and protective factors worksheet. Finally, participants will translate their five core values into five protective factors, or positive aspects associated with their personal strengths and assets that help them overcome challenges and reduce the likelihood of negative health outcomes. The participants will create and write their five protective factors on the middle column of the worksheet (see exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Example of three columns of the risk and protective factors framework



Session 4: Team presentations: Changing a life trajectory from illness to wellness – 1.5 hours

Pre-session homework. Work in teams of three to prepare a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation to be delivered in the final session. Directions will be provided on the presentation template handout.

As a final product, each team will prepare and give a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation to the rest of the group on their child life trajectory, highlighting all the risk factors evident in the first five stages of lifespan development (0 to 24 years of age) and leading to a potential mental health disorder. Specifically, ask participants to discuss the symptoms present by age 10, acute mental health issues by age 14, and severe mental illness by age 24.

The presentation to the group on a child's life trajectory, will highlight individual and/or collective core values and protective factors relevant to a child. Specifically, describe how each of the selected core values and protective factors was applied at each of the five stages (ages 0 to 24) of development. Ask participants to create a narrative on how the selected protective factors helped the child decrease the impact of the risk factors. Finally, describe how the protective factors changed the course of a mental health disorder, and describe how the young adult is now thriving at age 24.

Ongoing Post-Training, Technical Assistance, and Evaluation

To ensure that strategies and practices are relevant and achieve the desired outcomes for those they serve, the school teams of educators will be provided with the guidance and support to be successful. All training sessions are customized and aligned to the specific needs or interests identified by the school's administration, team of educators, and community stakeholders. The timeframe and duration of technical assistance and coaching will be determined in collaboration with each school team of educators.

The goal is to work closely with the school partner to co-design a detailed workplan that consists of goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and evaluation that meets the training and technical assistance needs and expectations. Training and technical assistance are delivered either in-person or virtual.

School teams will receive technical assistance and coaching during their strategic planning activities to tailor a workplan that includes students' mental wellness, college and career readiness, community college career-specific certification, and curriculum that leads to positive evidence-based outcomes consistent with student wellbeing. Success of the training will be evident when teams of educators implement a workplan that meets the needs of their school community and engages the learning environment, classroom experiences, relationships, and supports that all students need to thrive in school, college, and the workplace.

The evaluation component will also be a collaborative effort working with teams of educators to ensure that the data collection includes meaningful and relevant indicators that measure academic/school engagement (e.g., attendance, course grades, grade point average); wellbeing (student agency, sense of belonging and connectedness, strategies for dealing with stress); and workforce development and career readiness. All data collection and analysis will be grounded in community-participatory research and aligned to the school's professional development efforts.