

How would you respond?

- This is a Mental Health Literacy (MHL) professional learning exercise. The purpose is to become familiar with MHL topics and learning objectives, while utilizing social emotional learning (SEL) skills to strengthen classroom environments conducive to positive mental well-being.
- This exercise is not meant to provide therapy or ask you to become experts, it is simply using the MHL components to inform students of what they can do to respond to mental health challenges.
- You will see below MHL components and learning objectives chart. Please also follow the link to the adopted [SEL Standards and Benchmarks](#). With MHL being closely connected to SEL, it only makes sense to use these skills as you navigate mental health topics.
- The activity:
 - After reviewing the MHL chart and SEL standards, read through the following vignette sheet, detailing various moments a student is having difficulty with mental health challenges, whether themselves or a friend.
 - As you review the sheet, practice a mental health lens by recognizing your role and how to respond.

Mental Health Competence —Student can identify mental health effects on the brain and behaviors, protective and risk factors, and various mental health challenges.	Mental Health Stigma — Student can recognize the various forms of mental health stigma, understand its impacts, and develop strategies to challenge stigma and promote acceptance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Define mental health concepts, their impact on daily life and relationships, and the importance of early identification to address challenges and disorders effectively. ❖ Demonstrate how to differentiate between risk and protective factors, analyze their influence on mental health, and identify personal factors while exploring strategies to strengthen resilience. ❖ Demonstrate the use of coping strategies, build resilience through supportive practices and healthy routines, and recognize the value of accessing resources for mental health support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Define mental health stigma and its types, recognize examples in various contexts, and analyze its impact on individuals and help-seeking behaviors. ❖ Demonstrate how to examine societal and cultural influences on stigma, its role in discrimination and isolation, and the importance of empathy in fostering understanding and reducing stigma. ❖ Demonstrate and develop strategies to challenge biases, practice supportive responses, and advocate for inclusive language and behaviors to create a stigma-free environment.
Mental Health Promotion — Student can identify strategies to foster and maintain positive mental health through daily actions and community connection.	Mental Health Advocacy and Seeking Help — Student can learn how to advocate for mental health awareness and access, and practice strategies for recognizing when and how to seek help for themselves and others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Define mental health promotion, its purpose, and its connection to physical health, while exploring how cultural and community ties to support well-being. ❖ Practice self-awareness, emotion regulation, and coping skills while establishing healthy routines and exploring therapeutic strategies for mental well-being. ❖ Promote mental health awareness through peer and community support, plan activities to encourage understanding, and set goals for personal mental well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Promote mental health advocacy by reducing stigma, identifying community-based efforts, and using empathy and supportive behaviors to foster understanding. ❖ Identify signs of mental health challenges, evaluate when intervention is necessary, and practice calm, nonjudgmental approaches to supporting others. ❖ Learn how to access mental health resources, navigate the process of seeking care, and practice self-advocacy by communicating personal needs effectively.

Mental Health Challenges Vignettes:

ADHD & Trouble Focusing:

Jordan is a bright and energetic student, but lately, they have been struggling to stay on task during class. They frequently lose track of instructions, forget to turn in assignments, and seem easily distracted by noises or movements in the room. Today, Jordan expressed frustration, saying, "I just can't focus no matter how hard I try."

How can you, as an educator, respond to Jordan in a supportive way and help them stay engaged in class?

Low Mood & Behavioral Change:

Mia usually greets you with a smile and participates in class discussions, but today, she walked in with her hood up, avoided eye contact, and didn't respond to her classmates. When asked if everything is okay, she shrugged and muttered, "I'm just tired." Throughout the lesson, she remained withdrawn and didn't engage as she normally would.

How can you approach Mia in a way that expresses care and encourages open communication?

Concern for an Anxious Friend:

Alex approaches you after class and says, "I'm really worried about my friend Taylor. They've been having a lot of anxiety and told me they just couldn't come to class today. I don't know what to do to help them." Alex seems genuinely concerned and unsure of how to support their friend.

How can you guide Alex in a way that empowers them while also ensuring Taylor receives the support they need?

Noticeable Signs:

Mark, a twelfth-grade student, has been missing class more frequently over the past month. When he does attend, he seems withdrawn, keeps his hood up, and avoids interacting with both teachers and classmates. His once-diligent approach to schoolwork

has faded, and his grades are slipping. A few peers have mentioned that he "just doesn't seem like himself anymore."

What steps can an educator take to check in with Mark and connect him to the support he may need?

Limited Engagement:

Maria is a tenth-grade student who rarely speaks in class. She sits in the back, avoids group discussions, and does not volunteer answers. Her grades have never been strong, and she often turns in incomplete work or misses assignments altogether. Recently, she has become even more withdrawn—she no longer makes eye contact, and when called on, she simply shrugs or gives very brief responses.

How can an educator support Maria and encourage her engagement in the classroom or school services?

Relationship Trouble:

Eli is a ninth-grade student who often reacts with frustration when things don't go his way. He sometimes makes sarcastic or harsh comments toward classmates and has a reputation for being "difficult" to work with in group activities. When he feels challenged or called out, he raises his voice and may even walk out of class. Despite this, there are moments when he engages positively, especially when discussing topics he enjoys.

How can an educator support Eli in managing his emotions and building healthier relationships with his peers?

Grief & Loss:

Abby, an eleventh-grade student, lingers after class one day and quietly tells you that her grandmother, who helped raise her, recently passed away. She says she hasn't told many people because she doesn't want to make a big deal out of it, but she admits she's struggling to focus in class and feels emotionally exhausted.

What steps can an educator take to support Abby through this difficult time while respecting her need for privacy?