

Advocacy Toolkit

FIRST EDITION - JANUARY 2024



About the toolkit

Primary goal

The primary goal of this toolkit is to empower anyone interested in bringing Mental Health Literacy (MHL) Education to their community to advocate with competence and confidence.

How it works

While advocacy can be challenging, we wanted to make the experience as straightforward as possible for advocates. To do this, we realize we need to provide answers to three critical questions:

- What is MHL?
- Why should I care about MHL?
- How do I bring MHL Education to my community?

Who this toolkit is for

- Educators
- Parents/caregivers
- Youth-serving professionals
- Faith leaders
- Policy professionals
- Community organizers
- Healthcare professionals
- Anyone who wants to help!

Notes about this first edition

This PDF serves as a framework and proof of concept for an ongoing and consistently updated toolkit. As we grow, we will add additional resources and improve the experience. This includes utilizing a more functional and adaptable format, in all likelihood, an online platform.

As is apparent in our name, we welcome collaboration and feedback. This is especially true if you believe we have missed a critical element or believe you can provide resources to improve the effectiveness of this work.

You can always contact us directly at info@themhlc.org





Explaining MHL

There is a lot of confusion about what MHL is specifically, so we always suggest that any conversation begins by explaining the four core components of MHL Education:

1. Understanding how to foster and maintain positive mental health.
2. Understanding common mental health disorders, signs & symptoms, and treatments.
3. Understanding how to seek help effectively.
4. Understanding stigma and strategies for stigma reduction.



Sometimes, people confuse the terms SEL and MHL. When we explain the four components of MHL Education first, we help clarify that they are complementary... a bit like math and science. They work together and sometimes overlap, but they are not the same.

What is MHL?

“There is a difference between identifying and empathizing with the feelings of sadness -and- recognizing the symptoms of depression and knowing how and when to seek help.”

- Andrew Baxter
MSW, RSW



What is MHL?

MHL in school settings

MHL is Tier 1 (Universal) Programming in the MTSS Framework. Without digging too deep into the acronym and system, this basically means that all students and staff should get this type of education.

Making MHL accessible for educators

Unlike math, science, reading, etc., most educators have not been taught about mental health literacy. This makes it seem confusing and inaccessible for them to teach. However, this is precisely within their skillset if they are properly supported.

- MHL education requires professional learning but not clinical expertise.
- It should be culturally and developmentally appropriate.
- It needs consistent reinforcement.

MHL is also complementary to social-emotional learning, suicide prevention, and trauma-informed practice. Together, they can be powerful.

What is MHL?

Resources to guide you

Short Videos:

These short videos are a good place to start to further your own understanding or to share with others looking to understand more about MHL.

- MHL Explained (by mentalhealthliteracy.org): www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7N14HeNro8
- About the MHLC: www.youtube.com/watch?v=818bBbLFcOO

Follow our LinkedIn Posts:

Find and Follow us on LinkedIn [www.linkedin.com/company/the-mhlc]. Reshare our posts or repost with thoughts. When sharing social media posts, be sure to use the following hashtags to improve visibility. #themhlc #mentalhealthliteracycollaborative #mentalhealthliteracy #schoolmentalhealth

Here are some text prompts to get you started:

- The MHLC is helping bring mental health literacy education to communities.
- We can't treat our way out of this crisis. Our youth and communities deserve MHL.
- Mental health literacy education is an upstream solution to addressing the youth mental health crisis.

What is MHL?

Why should I care about MHL?

MHL evolved from health literacy

According to Kutcher et al., 2016, health literacy “is considered fundamental to improving a person’s health outcome, decreasing health inequities in populations, and enhancing the operation of health systems and the development of health policy. Thus, it is now recognized as necessary to improve health outcomes at both the individual and population levels.”

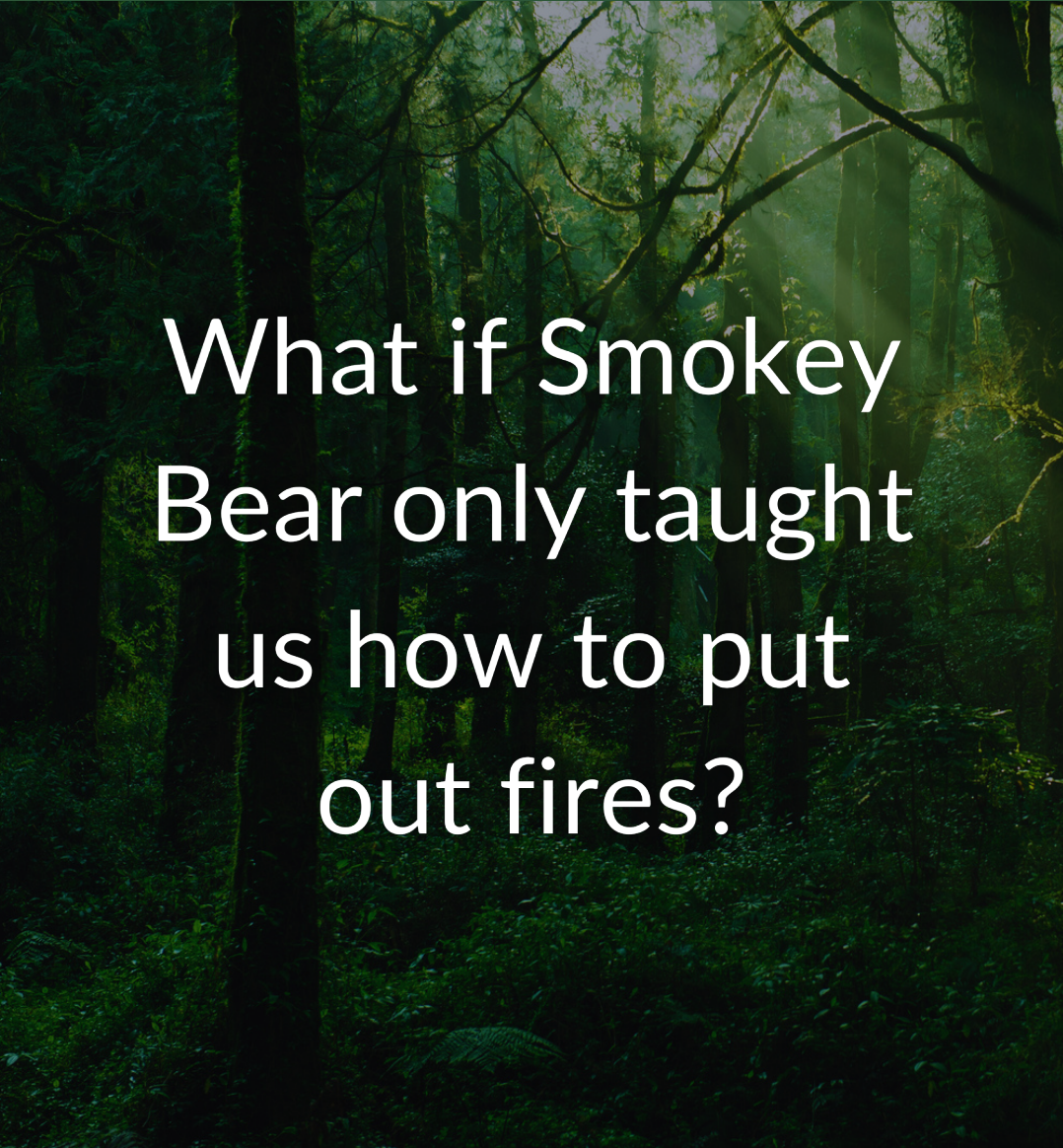
The following CDC article can also be helpful:

- CDC - [Understanding Health Literacy](#)

Through this lens, it is reasonable to expect that MHL can help improve individual and community mental health outcomes.



Why should I care about MHL?



What if Smokey
Bear only taught
us how to put
out fires?

Being proactive

The US Surgeon General has identified our nation's escalating youth mental health crisis as "the crisis of our time."

- Surgeon General Priorities - [Youth Mental Health Advisory](#)

Education has traditionally responded to the needs of society and offers an affordable, scalable, and proactive way of solving large-scale societal issues.

"We can't treat our way out of this crisis."

~Erin L. Wick, MBA, SUDP
Education Leader & MHLC Advisor

Why should I care about MHL?

Decades of research and adaptation

There is a growing body of research both within the US and internationally... so much that you can get lost in it for days. However, the following publication is a great place to start.

- [Mental Health Literacy: Past, Present, and Future](#) (Kutcher, Wei, Coniglio)

Resources to guide your learning

Recent Publications:

While there have been hundreds of articles written about the youth mental health crisis, these recent publications struck us as particularly enlightening.

- NAMI- [Poll of Teen Mental Health from Teens Themselves](#)
- CDC - [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report 2011-2021](#)

Recent Guidance:

- CDC - [Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools: An Action Guide for School and District Leaders](#)

Why should I care about MHL?

Teen Mental Health | from Teens Themselves



*Data & image
courtesy of NAMI*

Teens want schools to play a big role in their mental health,
and they trust the information they get there,
and are open to receiving information at school

2 in 3

More than 2 in 3 agree schools should teach about what mental health is, including where and how to seek treatment

56%

56% say their school thinks that mental health matters

How do I bring MHL Education to my community?

Explaining the problem and solution

Some people will recognize the value of MHL Education immediately, but others will need more information (and data) to help them understand why it should be a focus within their community. Engaging in these conversations can feel daunting, but you're not alone!

In addition to the research and resources on the following pages, we're putting together an MHL Talking Points document that will be available for download in the coming months (mid-2024).



How do I bring MHL Education to my community?

Connecting the dots

Now that you have the resources you need to answer “What is MHL?” and “Why should I care?” you can confidently take the next steps.

1. Identify decision-makers in your community.
2. Connect with them to explain what you know about MHL.
3. Provide them with resources to take their next step.

(more on that in this section!)

Finding vetted content

Most people working in schools did not learn about MHL in school. As such, a common roadblock to the implementation of MHL in schools is finding evidence-based, appropriate content. Understandably, people are hesitant or unsure of how to evaluate content. We need to help people feel confident before we expect them to embrace it.

A great way to start is through our partner, Chad’s Legacy Project. Working with the University of Washington School Mental Health Assessment, Research, and Training (SMART) Center, they have vetted a growing list of trusted content on MHL.

- www.MentalHealthInstruction.org

How do I bring MHL Education to my community?

Being sensitive about the conversation

Mental health has historically been a stigmatized topic, so people may have limited experience and may feel uncomfortable. They also may have experienced traumatic events or have underlying mental health concerns personally or with loved ones. Recognizing that people come to this conversation with many different experiences can help you navigate these topics. The following document includes helpful strategies and an inclusive language guide.

- NAMI - [How to talk about mental health guide](#)

Understanding local and state legislation

Many local education agencies and state governments have mandated mental health education. For local education agencies, the best step is to contact your board of education; for state agencies, inseparable's Hopeful Futures Campaign provides a great resource.

- [Hopeful Futures Campaign](#)

(in the top right corner of the screen, you can select your state from the drop-down menu and find relevant info)

**How do I
bring MHL
Education
to my
community?**

*“There comes a point
where we need to stop
just pulling people out
of the river. We need
to go upstream and
find out why they are
falling in.”*

- Desmond Tutu

Launch report

We recently published our Launch Report, which informed many of the aspects of this toolkit. You may find the data interesting in your advocacy journey!

Link: [MHLC Launch Report](#)

Padlet link

You can find a consistently updated list of resources, from research to thought leadership, on several related topics.

Link: [MHLC Padlet](#)



Coming soon

We are currently developing a few additional resources:

- Social Media Kit - To guide people in posting about MHL.
- Talking Points Page - A document with salient points to use when meeting with people.

Thank You!

*We look forward to your continued collaboration
in 2024 and beyond!*

Contact Us: info@themhlc.org • Visit Us: www.TheMHLC.org

