



May 2020 Enhance Webinar: Mental Health First Aid and Addressing COVID-19

Presented by Tramaine El-Amin, Assistant Vice President Strategic Partnerships, Mental Health First Aid

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many struggles of people around the country and the world. One of the struggles is and continues to be mental health. In a world where all aspects of life are so uncertain, mental health tends to deteriorate. For the end of Mental Health Awareness month, Dairy Girl Network hosted Mental Health First Aid to talk about mental health as it relates to COVID-19.

Ann Chapman started out the presentation by introducing what Mental Health First Aid and The National Council of Behavioral Health are. The National Council for Behavioral Health is a 50-year-old organization that provides support, representation and policy advocacy for 3,000 Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse providers across America. They are committed to getting access to care to people across the US.

Mental Health First Aid is a program by the National Council of Behavioral Health that teaches individuals to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health struggles. Their hope is that by knowing these signs you can have an action plan to help support friends, loved ones and other members of your community.

Tramaine El-Amin, the keynote speaker of this webinar, has been with Strategic Partnerships at the National Council for Behavioral Health for 8 years and has helped to grow the Mental Health First Aid Program. She's trained 2.5 million people across the United States in this program.

Rural Mental Health in the US

Tramaine El-Amin started out the call by outlining some learning objectives and getting an idea of where everyone was coming from in the agriculture industry. She talked about how stress is a normal part of the agriculture industry and how COVID-19 has increased that impact and shared some statistics:

- More than 6.5M people in rural communities experienced a mental health condition in 2016
- 1.3M people in rural community have thoughts of suicide every year

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- Mental health professionals are more likely to work in urban areas causing a shortage in rural communities
- Mental Health Disorder rates are the same in rural and urban communities
- 80-90% of behavioral health providers are in urban communities
- In rural communities the suicide rate is 3.5 times higher than in urban areas

Stigma is also a huge problem for people living with mental health disorders.

Technology can be one solution to those who have limited access. We're seeing a shift in telemedicine due to COVID-19 giving more people access to resources. Family farms aren't the same as they were before and there is still constant change in these communities.

El-Amin talked a bit about what agriculture communities are already doing to help. Since 2008, Mental Health First Aid has trained 244 instructors with rural designation and has taught 15,000 First Aider courses with a rural focus.

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid was introduced in 2008. Traimaine El-Amin discussed how we usually only notice the signs of a tragedy in hindsight. Mental Health First Aid trains people to see those signs before tragedy happens. She emphasized the point is not to train people to become therapists, but to train people to provide support until professional help can step in just like a traditional First Aid course. It is meant to be implemented until professional help is given or until the problem resolves. They have various versions of their course teaching adults, youth, teens and more. They are expanding into rural and agriculture programs moving forward.

In the course they provide:

Risk Factors and Warning Signs

Tramaine El-Amin walked through some of the curriculum that Mental Health First Aid offers including risk factors and warning signs of a mental health crisis. Signs include something we may see when engaging with another person and symptoms are something the person may feel.

Signs

- Weight change
- Withdrawal from others
- Irritability

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- Changes in self-care/appearance
- Personality change
- Tearfulness
- Indecisiveness/confusion
- Increased alcohol/drug use
- Dramatic change in mood
- Self-criticism

Symptoms

- Sadness/anxiety
- Low energy
- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite change
- Headaches
- Need for more of a substance
- Physical Withdrawal
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Thoughts of death and suicide

Tramaine El-Amin says if you see someone exhibiting any of these signs or symptoms you can help by encouraging the person to: tell others, identify sources of support, take care of themselves, using coping strategies, spend time in a safe place, and seeking help from a trained professional.

Information

Mental Health First Aid provides information on anxiety, depression, trauma, substance abuse, non-suicidal self injury, disorders where psychosis may occur, disruptive behavioral disorders and eating disorders.

5- Step Action Plan

- Asses for risk of suicide of harm
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies

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Resources

Mental Health First Aid, the Current Work Environment, and COVID-19

Tramaine El-Amin talked about how anxiety is a normal response to large events like COVID-19 and she outlined some current stressors in the COVID-19 epidemic environment including:

- Isolation from others
- Constant feeling of doom
- Worries about job
- Anticipation about the future
- Working all the time
- Lack of socialization with older relatives
- Constant multitasking/ role merging
- Lack of control

She emphasized how important it is to take care of yourself so you don't experience burnout and outlined ways we can take care of ourselves and others in our communities:

- Exercise/stay active
- Set boundaries
- Light a candle
- Reduce caffeine intake
- Write it down
- Chew gum
- Spend virtual time with loved ones
- Laugh
- Learn to say no
- Avoid procrastination
- Take a yoga class
- Practice mindfulness
- Cuddle
- Listen to soothing music
- Deep breathing
- Spend time with a pet
- Meditation
- Peer support groups
- Self-help books

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In groups she encourages people to connect through creative and team building techniques such as: sharing photos, watching a show and talking about it, hosting a virtual happy-hour/coffee, or other ways of connecting virtually.

Important Resources

In an emergency or crisis if you or someone you know tried to hurt themselves call 911

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255 (TALK)

Crisis Textline: Text "MHFA" to 741741

Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ Youth): 1-866-488-7386 OR text "START" to 678678

DGN COVID-19 Resource Hub

COVID-19 Farm Resources | Center for Dairy Excellence

Resources for Farmers Affected by COVID-19 | Farm Aid

Coronavirus and USDA Assistance for Farmers | Farmers.gov

More resources including local hotlines can be found at www.thenationalcouncil.org

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