

Teen Mental Health First Aid programme

French implementation: Premiers secours en Santé Mentale (PSSM) - Ados

Aims and Objectives

The Teen Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) programme aims to improve mental health literacy among adolescents and strengthen peer support capacities. It equips young people to recognize signs of psychological distress, provide initial support to peers, and encourage help-seeking, promoting early intervention and reducing mental health stigma.

Implementation highlights

- **School-based age-adapted delivery:** The programme is delivered through structured training sessions adapted to different age groups and implemented primarily in schools, with potential application in youth organisations, sports clubs, and community settings.
- **Peer support action plan:** Adolescents learn a simplified framework to identify warning signs, engage in conversation, listen actively, encourage help-seeking from trusted adults, and remain supportive friends.
- **Focus on early support and referral:** The programme promotes early identification of distress and emphasizes guiding peers towards appropriate adult or professional support rather than diagnosis or treatment.

At a glance



Univ. Prevention
Promotion



Target audience

- Adolescents 12-15 and 15-18+



Delivery settings

Schools, youth organizations, sports clubs, community programs



Objectives

- Improve mental health literacy among youth
- Strengthen peer support capacities



Costs

The estimated implementation costs vary between 5.000 and 10.000 euros, according to the size of the school, and cover a three-year deployment period.



Professionals involved:

- trained instructors from PSSM France
- teachers and school staff
- school health professionals
- trained adult mental health first aiders



Leading organization:

PSSM France Association



Countries

France; adaptation of MHFA Teen, also implemented in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta

How this practice be implemented?

PSSM is a country-specific implementation of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) (2,3). Key conditions for successful implementation include:

- Investing in rigorous adaptation, including visual media (videos) developed in-country
- Connecting with MHFA International
- Building evaluation in from the start
- Securing sustainable funding

Additional success factors are currently being evaluated by PSSM France as the programme is in its pilot phase.

Get started

- Visit the [PSSM website](#)
- Visit the [teen MHFA website](#)
- Read about the teen MHFA [programme evaluation](#)
- Mental First Aiders guidelines ([carnets de secouristes](#))
- Podcast "[Le Lien](#)" et "[Apprendre à aider](#)"



Key takeaways

- +500 adolescents reached
- Four French regions covered
- 26 trainers trained

Supporting policies

National multisectoral strategy for the development of psychosocial skills (*Connaissances psychosociales, CPS*) among children and young people: This 15-year national policy framework, involving six French ministries, aims to support the systematic implementation of psychosocial skills interventions to improve mental wellbeing and prevent a wide range of health and social problems among children and adolescents. The implementation of PSSM Ados is aligned with this national policy.

- *Projets Territoriaux en Santé Mentale*: regional policies about mental health that explicitly mention PSSM

What makes this a good practice?

key features

- Evidence-based MHFA model
- Empowers youth to recognize early signs of distress
- Adaptation of a globally scalable programme implemented in multiple countries

Impact: does it work?

Effectiveness

Teen MHFA programmes improve mental health literacy, increase help-seeking behaviours, and reduce stigma among adolescents (2). Results from the French pilot phase conducted on a panel of 18 classes and 506 students showed that 71% of students reported feeling more confident in helping a peer experiencing mental distress and 76% reported that the skills learned would be useful in the future (5).

Efficiency

The programme uses short structured sessions integrated into school schedules and a train-the-trainer model that enables scalable implementation. An analysis on costs and benefits is not available yet.

Evidence base

PSSM France's teen programmes are grounded in the internationally recognised MHFA model, supported by a strong scientific evidence base including two randomised controlled trials (2,6,7). For the French context, PSSM France has embedded evaluation into its work from the outset: the pilot study conducted on a panel of 18 classes and 506 students revealed promising preliminary results (5).

Reach: who can benefit?

Equity and access

Delivered in school settings, the programme promotes broad and equitable access for adolescents from diverse backgrounds.

Transferability and scalability

The programme has been implemented in multiple countries and settings, with standardised training materials and implementation procedures supporting adaptation and replication across diverse contexts.

Integration: keeping it going and working across sectors

Sustainability

Teen MHFA programmes have identified institutional support and school-based integration as key facilitators of long-term sustainability, suggesting a supportive foundation for scale-up beyond the French pilot phase (1). This train-the-trainer model builds local capacity and supports long-term sustainability. PSSM Ados is currently financed by Agence Régionale de la Santé (ARS) in France, but long-term funding is still to be secured.

Intersectorality

The programme operates across the education and mental health sectors, and aims to support collaboration between schools, youth settings, and mental health professionals.

Engagement and innovation: listening to young people and adapting over time

Youth participation

The programme empowers adolescents to support their peers and actively participate in promoting mental wellbeing within their communities.

Intergenerational / life-course approach

PSSM Ados comes in two age-adapted versions; the programme targets adolescents while strengthening links with trained adults in their environment.

Research priorities and innovation

The programme contributes to preventive mental health interventions and empowers non-specialist actors (young people) to recognize and respond to early signs of mental distress. Additionally, it trains non-specialist workers in mental health ensuring that 10% of adults in the schools participating in PSSM Ados have been trained as mental health first aiders for youth.

References and additional tools to favour translation

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2. Hart, L. M., Morgan, A. J., Rossetto, A., Kelly, C. M., Mackinnon, A., & Jorm, A. F. (2022). Teen Mental Health First Aid: 12-month outcomes from a cluster crossover randomized controlled trial evaluation of a universal program to help adolescents better support peers with a mental health problem. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 1159.
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3. Hadlaczky, G., Hökby, S., Mkrtchian, A., Carli, V., & Wasserman, D. (2014). Mental Health First Aid is an effective public health intervention for improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour: A meta-analysis. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 26(4), 467–475.
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