An Evidence-Informed Curriculum to Support Student Mental Health and Wellness
Choosing A Prevention Program: Where Do We Begin?

Within today's higher education environment, mental health is an issue that has quickly risen to the forefront. Recent research from the World Health Organization\(^1\) found that 35% of incoming college students worldwide have a diagnosed mental health condition. This mirrors EVERFI's own findings which suggest that 28% of incoming college students have experienced a depressive episode at least once in the past year, and 42% have, at one time or another, felt so depressed that it was difficult to function (EVERFI survey data, 2018). Additionally, 14% of students report that they have seriously considered attempting suicide, and nearly 1 in 10 has made a plan for ending their life.

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When it comes to help-seeking, EVERFI data indicates that students are most likely to reach out to a friend (45%) or parent (24%) when experiencing stress or emotional challenges. Only 3% indicated that they would reach out to a counselor, while 5% would not reach out to anyone at all. As institutions of higher education seek to educate the whole student, they must also explore ways in which they can provide skills training to students to foster mental well-being and encourage seeking support.

It is critical to approach this challenge with an awareness from all perspectives: validating and supporting the experiences of those who are impacted by mental health challenges, enhancing the skills and health-promoting behaviors of those who seek to build or maintain positive mental health, and empowering those who have an opportunity to support a friend or peer who may be struggling. But how should schools and organizations go about choosing an effective mental health education program?

The best approaches are grounded in evidence that has been validated by existing research on effective prevention practice. Such an approach utilizes relevant behavior change theories and frameworks to guide program design and implementation, blending established research with innovative approaches for maximizing engagement and impact.

\(^1\) https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/abn-abn0000362.pdf
Everfi’s Approach
To Mental Health Education

Mental Well-being for Students, co-developed with The Jed Foundation, was built to offer a population-level solution to what is often viewed as an individual issue. Through a public health lens, Mental Well-being for Students provides students with opportunities to explore their own mental health, identify challenges that they may face, and develop concrete strategies for managing those challenges. Additionally, it aims to increase their awareness of resources and empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and language necessary to identify and support a peer who may be struggling. Bystander intervention strategies are incorporated to help students recognize the signs of mental health distress among peers and build self-efficacy to assist someone who may be struggling with such issues.

This offering was developed in collaboration with leading professionals and researchers in the field of mental health. The course curriculum is informed by the same evidence-based strategies and public health theories and frameworks incorporated in the development of EVERFI’s AlcoholEdu for College program, the most widely-used and proven-effective alcohol and other drug prevention program in the country.

Interactive content is designed to provide an inclusive experience that recognizes the unique needs and experiences of today’s diverse population of learners. Data from course surveys and assessments measure knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes, and can help to identify focus areas to inform ongoing education and prevention strategies.
Subject Matter Experts
And Course Contributors

Developed in Partnership with
The JED Foundation
As part of our shared mission to promote student safety, emotional health and wellness EVERFI and The Jed Foundation have partnered to co-develop Mental Well-being for Students.

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Behavioral Outcomes

Knowledge is power, but when it comes to mental health education, knowledge is only part of the equation. Mental Well-being for Students is designed to also achieve several key behavioral outcomes for students. These behavioral outcomes and related content are segmented to address the unique needs and experiences of students.

- **Students WITH existing mental health challenges**
  - Will take actions to support positive mental health.
  - Will more often seek support.

- **Students WITHOUT existing mental health challenges**
  - Will take actions to build and maintain a positive state of mental health.
  - Will seek support if challenges arise.

- **ALL STUDENTS**
  - Will support someone experiencing mental health challenges.
Each of these behavioral outcomes is supported by a set of learning objectives. The learning objectives are linked to individual-level factors that influence behavior, which can be grouped into seven categories derived from three seminal behavior change theories: the Health Belief Model, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Social Cognitive Theory. This approach, called Intervention Mapping, is critical for ensuring that course content aligns with individual determinants of behavior to drive impact.

**Individual Determinants of Behavior:**

**Knowledge:** Especially important points of knowledge include understanding key concepts related to mental health, recognizing symptoms and warning signs, and being aware of campus and community support resources.

**Attitudes:** Positive or negative sentiment about engaging in a new behavior are driven by supportive or non-supportive beliefs (e.g., “My mental health is worth prioritizing”).

**Perceived Outcomes:** In general, people will be more likely to engage in new behaviors that provide more benefits than costs. Potential benefits of a behavior are more motivating when they are viewed as highly valuable and likely to occur. For example, a person will be more likely to set up a counseling appointment if they believe that it will make a positive impact on their well-being, their social life, or their academic performance.

**Personal Norms:** People are more likely to engage in new behaviors that are consistent with their personal values or with their self-image, such as making a decision to seek help because they believe that they are deserving of feeling well.

**Social Norms:** People are greatly influenced by the perceived expectations or support of others in terms of approval or disapproval of a particular behavior. Perceptions of social norms are highly prone to error: students tend to overestimate the extent to which their peers endorse negative behaviors (for example, the degree to which a peer would judge someone for seeking treatment) and underestimate the extent of endorsement of positive behaviors, (for example, showing support for someone who chooses to seek treatment). Correcting these misperceptions has been shown to positively influence behaviors.

**Behavioral Skills:** People are more successful in changing their behavior if they have self-assessment and self-management skills. Certain behaviors may require more specific skills, such as knowing how to intervene when another student may be exhibiting signs of suicidal ideation.

**Perceived Behavioral Control:** People are more likely to engage in behaviors when they believe they are capable of doing so at particular times and places, and when they can call upon learned strategies to overcome possible barriers. This can include a student feeling like additional resources are available if a situation becomes too difficult for them to intervene.
Mapping Learning Objectives To Behavioral Outcomes

Developers of Mental Well-being for Students have created a set of learning objectives for each of the behavioral outcomes, delineated by three distinct learner personas: students currently experiencing mental health challenges, students not currently experiencing mental health challenges, and all students.

Below is one example of how learning objectives are mapped to behavioral outcomes throughout the course.

**Behavioral Outcome**
Students experiencing mental health challenges will more often seek support

**Learning Objectives**

**Knowledge**
- Identify signs that professional help may be warranted.
- Understand barriers to help-seeking.
- Know where to go to find support.

**Attitudes & Beliefs**
- Agree: My mental health is worth prioritizing.
- Agree: I am worthy of feeling good.
- Agree: Mental health is as important as physical health.

**Perceived Outcomes**
- Agree: Seeking support can help me feel better.
- Agree: Seeking support is a positive use of my time.

**Social Norms**
- Agree: My peers think that it is sensible to discuss mental health concerns.
- Agree: My peers would seek support with mental health challenges if they needed it.
- Agree: My peers would support me if they were aware that I was seeking help/support.
Personal Norms

- Agree: It is helpful and sensible to discuss mental health concerns.
- Agree: I would seek support with mental health challenges if I needed it.

Behavioral Skills

- Demonstrate an awareness of resources.
- Demonstrate an ability to ask for or accept help.

Perceived Behavioral Control

- Agree: I know where to find the resources necessary to support my mental health
- Agree: Help is available

The Impact of An Evidence-Informed Approach

Mental Well-being for Students applies a holistic, positive perspective on the topic of mental health, framing content in a way that is designed to be accessible and approachable for all learners and focusing on key objectives and behavioral outcomes that take the learner on a journey from education to action.

Mental Well-being for Students applies a holistic, positive perspective on the topic of mental health

Through a curriculum grounded in behavior change theory and the incorporation of evidence-based practices, this online course is intended to empower all students to recognize how to best support their own mental health, seek out help when appropriate, and contribute to a culture of care and support. It provides the motivation that ALL students have an active role to play in promoting mental wellness for themselves and for those in their communities.

Institutions of higher education can use the data from course surveys and assessments to better understand the scope of the issue and the impact that the deployment of this course has had. Course survey data can be used to identify the needs and strengths of students and tailor programs, outreach, and skill-based training appropriately, maximizing the impact on the collective mental wellness of their communities.

Last year, EVERFI applied a similar theoretical framework approach to a course designed for students in grades 8-10, Mental Wellness Basics. Early data insights from Mental Wellness Basics indicate that it is, indeed, having a positive impact on the mental health of students.
After taking the course, students reported being able to better recognize when and how to use coping skills, as well as an increase in knowledge of specific techniques. Additionally, 25% more students reported that they would seek help for a mental health concern without hesitation, and 19% more reported that they felt more confident in knowing how to support someone in need.

ABOUT EVERFI

EVERFI supports college and university leaders in fostering safe, healthy, and inclusive campuses. Designed to reinforce healthy decisions and promote positive attitudes and behaviors, EVERFI solutions create impact and meet key compliance requirements for students, faculty and staff. With deep expertise in public health, sexual violence, substance abuse prevention, wellness and mental health, diversity and inclusion, our team is committed to helping its 1,500+ partners make breakthrough progress in their efforts to create safer, healthier communities.

To Learn More About Everfi’s Prevention Courses, Please Visit www.everfi.com
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