



**Sharpen Mental Health Literacy (SMHL), a 6-hour evidence-based course.**

This six-hour course will enable participants to identify and understand:

1. The four pillars of a mental health literacy framework (Kutcher and colleagues, 2016). The course provides participants with an overview of the protective factors for mental wellness, training on various mental health topics, history of mental health stigma, and best practices for assisting someone who is struggling.
2. Basics of mindfulness and sample “5 Minute Mindfulness” activities from the evidence-based curriculum which is rooted in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and yoga practices that have been deployed in Resilient Schools for 5+ years in South Carolina.
3. An introduction to trauma and toxic stress is created in collaboration with national researchers specializing in childhood maltreatment, this course covers topics that include adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), how trauma impacts the developing mind and nervous system, and strategies for improving resilience. Sharpen’s trauma courses were built in collaboration with over 15 child welfare agencies (Hussa-Farrell, Farrell, & Witt, 2021)
4. An introduction to suicide prevention outlining the risk /protective factors and warning signs for suicide, as told through documentary footage featuring national suicidologists. The course outlines renowned evidence-based models, such as CONNECT Postvention, Living Works programs and Sources of Strength. It also provides connection to national and local agencies, research institutions and additional training information (Bailey et al., 2017; Shannonhouse et al., 2017).
5. Introduction to disordered eating prevention - This content was created over 15 years in collaboration with interdisciplinary researchers and seeks to improve the shared protective factors for obesity and eating disorders (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2007). The course features over 25 national researchers in eating disorders, individuals with lived experiences and provides an overview of six types of eating disorders, research around weight bias, and strategies for improving body esteem.
6. Introduction to mentoring best practices. For those interested in working with youth, this course prepares participants to mentor youth in the trenches following Responsive Classroom approach and offers technical support and strategies for engaging with mentees. The course outlines the guidelines and best practices for working with mentees and reiterates the



appropriate strategies for supporting a mentee who may be struggling highlighting the shared protective factors for resilience.

The Sharpen MHL has been deployed since 2017 in multiple Sharpen settings including with over 1,600 college students, 270 medical students, 5,000 parents, 2,500 educators and over 1,500 youths ages 12 and up. Those who attend this course receive a Sharpen completion certificate and 5 hours of CE's for qualified participants.

This course will help school and community leaders, teachers and staff assess and address mental health needs of students and improve educational life outcomes by improving protective factors for mental wellbeing. Mental health literacy interventions can provide adolescents and adults with the tools they need to reduce stress, such as coping mechanisms and improved awareness surrounding mental illness (Riebschleger et al., 2019). Protective factors, such as those that 'buffer' or 'protect' one from the effects of negative life experiences, risk factors, or other life stressors, can reduce the likelihood of an adolescent developing a mental health disorder and improve resiliency (Riebschleger et al., 2019). Common protective factors may include but are not limited to, the problem-solving skills of the child/adolescent, close parental relationships, nurturing from parents and psychoeducation, etc. (Riebschleger et al., 2019).

Studies with the Sharpen Mental Health Literacy program have shown to decrease shame and stigma around mental disorders (Fadel et al, 2022) and have evolved six qualitative themes from the training effectiveness feedback including: 1) Help-Seeking, 2) Stress Management, 3) Tailored Guidance to Resources, 4) Understanding Warning Signs, 5) Body Image Awareness, and 6) Engaging with Mentees (Biber et al, 2022).

Intended audience and capacity parameters. This training is appropriate for 50 participants ages 14 and up.

### **Feedback from this course**

Relevant findings and feedback for this course are outlined below and cover three distinct populations: educators, medical students and college students.

Below are the post-test survey findings from 144 educators across the state of South Carolina who participated in this training in 2018 who agreed with the following statements:



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- 1. After today's training, I am more confident in my ability to refer students to appropriate mental health/addiction resources in our community: **93%**
- 2. After today's training, I am more confident in my ability to identify students who may be suffering from a mental health disorder or addiction: **89%**
- 3. As a result of today's training, I am more likely to approach a student who I suspect may be suffering from a mental health disorder to help get the conversation started: **91%**
- 4. After today's training, I am more aware of the connection between trauma and mental health disorders: **93%**
- 5. As a result of today's training, I am more likely to bring mindfulness and other prevention programs into my school to build resilience in students: **94%**

Hussa-Farrell et al, 2018

Testimonials from 2018 educator trainings include:

“We the school districts need to make this information more available to not only teachers and staff, but to our families and communities. Many times, we don't know about these types of resources in the state.”

“This would be so beneficial for every educator to attend to build confidence in their understanding about various mental health topics that are impacting South Carolina schools.”

Hussa-Farrell et al, 2018

Between 2020 and 2021 a longitudinal study was conducted on 215 medical students in South Carolina with the contents of the SMHL program. Fadel and colleagues:

“... saw a significant decrease in the perception of mental health stigma associated with utilizing mental health resources. Stigma is a common barrier to accessing mental health support and treatment when needed for medical students in particular. ... We hoped that rolling out a mental health and wellness tool for all students with the public support of faculty and administration



would both normalize and promote mental wellness. Survey results showed that we met this goal.”

Fadel et al, 2022

A recent study of ten college students conducted by Dr. Duke Biber and colleagues in the spring of 2022 found:

“Participants discussed how the training prepared them in aiding mentees in help-seeking and identifying appropriate resources. This is consistent with previous university- and adolescent-based mental health literacy training programs that significantly improved help-seeking attitudes (Clough et al., 2020; Liddle et al., 2019). “

“Participants also indicated how the training enabled personal and others-oriented stress management, which supports a mental health literacy training program that reduced stress in medical students (Kurki et al., 2021). “

“Another theme was understanding suicide warning signs as a result of the mental health literacy training program. Various mental health literacy programs, both face-to-face and online, have been found to promote protective factors of mental illness and suicidality (Lindow et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2018).”

“Furthermore, participants described how the training educated them on body image awareness regarding body acceptance, as well as when to refer regarding eating disorders. Given inadequate mental health literacy in college females regarding such topics, it is necessary to continually train undergraduates about these warning signs (Diamond et al., 2022; Nishida-Hikiji et al., 2019).”

Biber et al, 2022



### **About Sharpen**

Sharpen® is an evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health platform that has shown to improve mental health outcomes through the provision of technology that delivers individually-focused, award-winning, and community-driven content (Hussa-Farrell et al, 2021). Sharpen focuses on improving shared protective factors of both individuals and communities by increasing resiliency, mental health literacy, and productivity of users (Hussa-Farrell et al, 2021). Sharpen and its library of over 100 award-winning courses has been used for over five years as professional development training tools for licensed clinicians, educators and peer mentors and has shown to improve suicide prevention best practices (Karydi et al, 2017-2021), improve confidence and competence in assisting an individual or student who may be struggling (Anderson et al, 2017; Patrizi et al, 2019; Fadel et al 2020), decreasing shame and stigma around mental health topics (Fadel et al 2020), improving mental health literacy for school professionals and educators (Anderson et al, 2017), pediatricians (Haddad et al, 2015), and medical students (Fadel et al, 2020). Most notably, the Sharpen system was used to train elementary educators how to lead mindfulness interventions for children ages four to seven in Title 1 schools. The program not only improved health outcomes, but academic outcomes including increased literacy and decreased disciplinary action (Bauer et al, 2019; Parker et al, 2021). Sharpen contains the award-winning peer resiliency program, *Flourish*: a disordered eating prevention program designed and led at Spartanburg Day School in South Carolina, created in collaboration with pediatricians and licensed mental health professionals. The program ran over the course of five years, with over 15 students each year who were trained on the curriculum and then went to mentor elementary aged children in building protective factors such as improving body esteem, mindfulness, social emotional learning and mindfulness based stress reduction (Hussa Farrell 2015-2020).