



SHARPEN MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

An evidence-based mental health literacy
education program for medical students



Medical Student Program Guide

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WHY SMHL?

Medical students experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and burnout compared to their peers (Lin et al, 2024). According to a recent meta-analysis, depression has a prevalence of 28.0% among medical students, suicidal ideation: 11.1%, anxiety: 33.8% and burnout: 44.2% (Carrard et al, 2024).

In response to the mental health challenges facing medical students, the American Medical Association has adopted policies to support the well-being of medical students during their training. These policies aim to reduce burnout and improve mental health. Medical schools are encouraged to: (i) create mental health awareness and suicide prevention programs, (ii) offer proactive intervention for at-risk students, and (iii) address mental health stigma (AMA, 2016).



Sharpen's Mental Health Literacy for medical students meets all priorities outlined by the American Medical Association and can be deployed easily through medical schools. Through the unique peer resiliency model, we are able to engage medical students deeply into conversations about mental health (Fadel et al, 2024; Husa-Farrell, 2023; Biber, 2023; Biber & Rothman, 2023).

The more than 130 peer-to-peer videos within the SMHL med student program include psychoeducational modules on topics such as:

1

Humanistic mental health literacy

2

Stigma reduction

3

Suicide prevention

4

Disordered eating prevention

5

Strategies for building resilience and social-emotional skills



Based on nearly 20 years of leading mental health literacy training in schools, the content assembled into SMHL has been created utilizing the practices outlined by recent research (Semchuck et al, 2023) requiring assessment, deep community listening and robust engagement from stakeholders (Gruber et al, 2023).

Our History

Resiliency Technologies, Inc. developed the Sharpen technology platform in 2014 after nearly 20 years leading live mental health education and prevention programs in K12 schools. The Sharpen Mental Health Literacy (SMHL) course, which is offered through the Sharpen platform, connects programming for students, educators, staff, and caregivers alike. Our program for medical students was adapted after five years of collaboration with medical schools (Fadel et al, 2024).

Our programs are designed intentionally to humanize mental health through peer stories of resilience and strength. Regardless of which audience is utilizing the Sharpen platform, we combine reading, video, reflections, and activities with multisensory integration, so everyone can learn and grow. Students can log in to the course and complete the activities at their leisure, using the Sharpen app. The SMHL course can also be integrated into existing learning management systems (LMS).

Sharpen's programming is available for all audiences, including educators, staff, students, and caregivers, because all tiers of support around our students need to be integrated with a common language and strong foundation for wellness-informed communities.

ABOUT US

Our Unique Approach

As health educators, we understand that as we take on the challenge of integrating mental health literacy into medical school coursework, we need to provide the support necessary to make it successful. We created the Sharpen system specifically to bring all of the local mental health resources, crisis lines, organizations and other support material directly to the student's fingertips. A customized version of the SMHL program for your community, can be further integrated to ensure every medical student discreetly connects with counseling services or providers in the area.

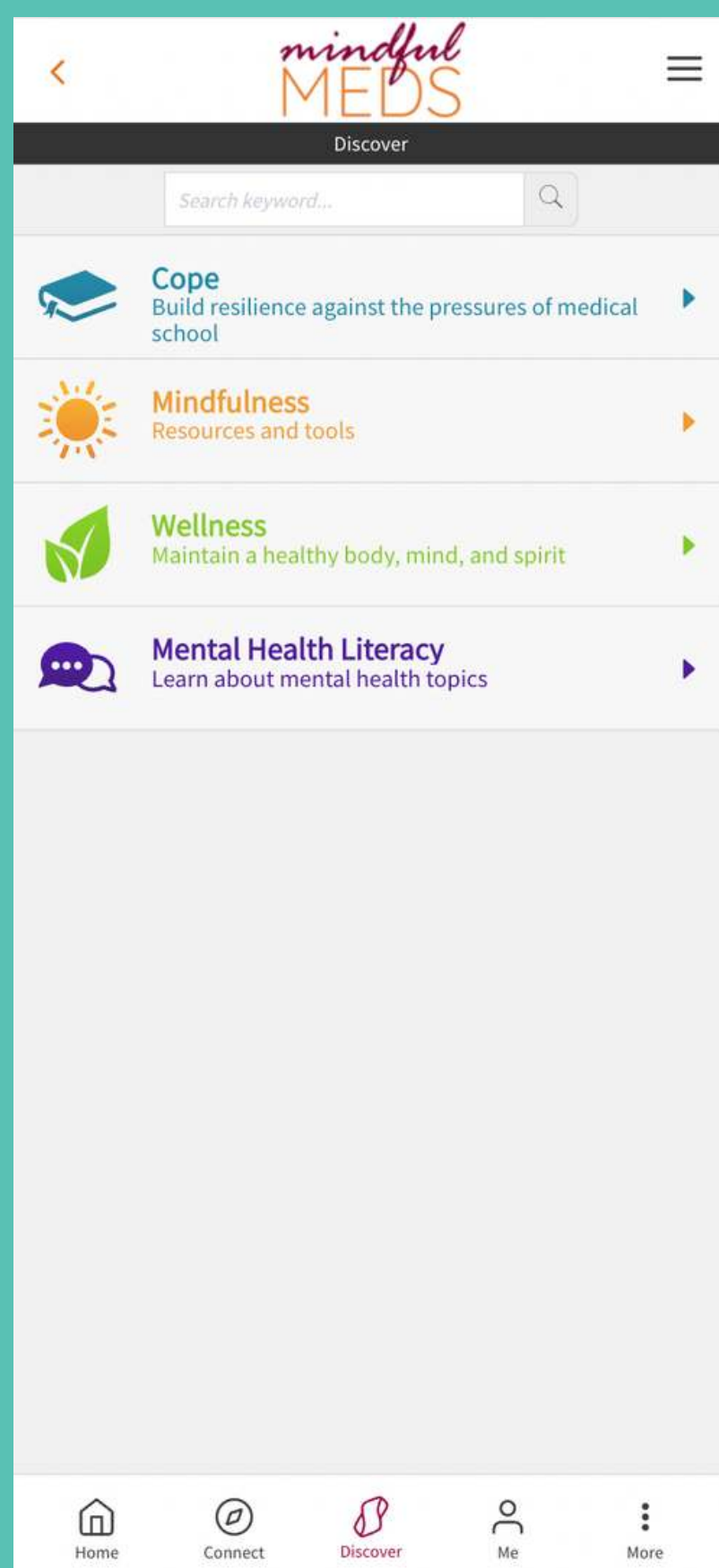
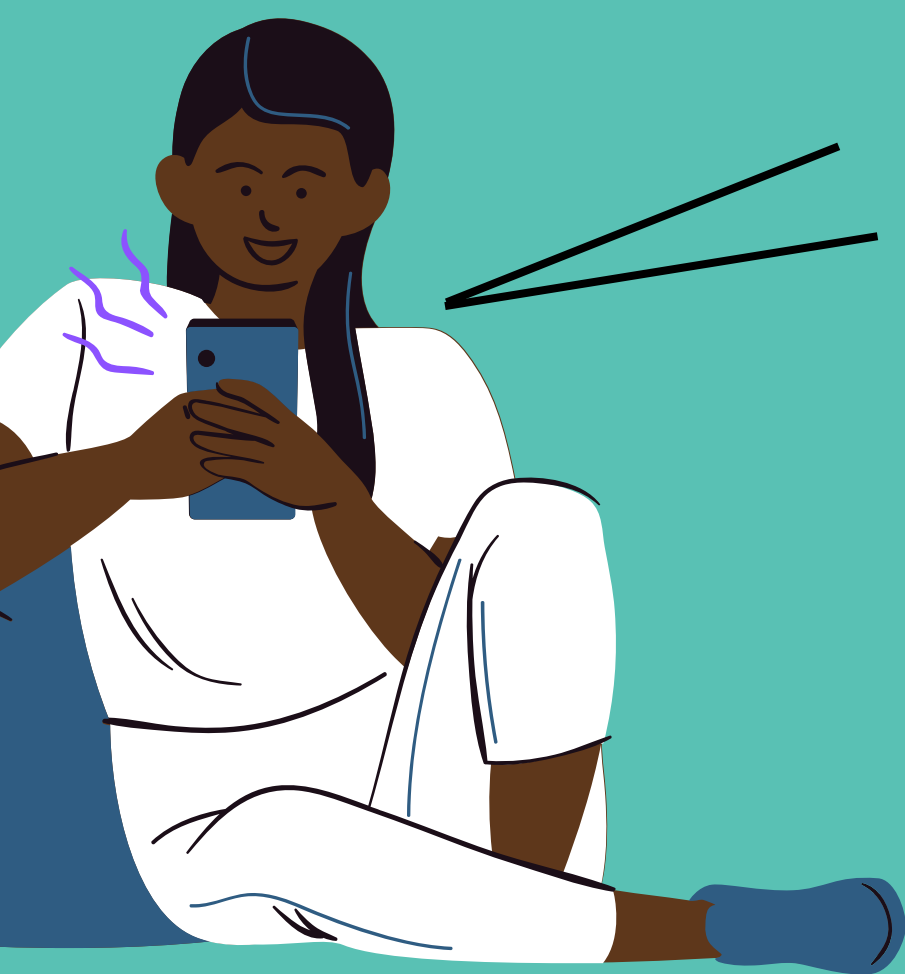
We provide everything you need to easily integrate the content in a way that meets the needs of your schedule and enables you to continually reinforce it through activities both inside and outside the Sharpen app.

What makes Sharpen unique is our foundation in public health science and adherence to primary prevention (universal support). Each module in the SMHL course serves as a "toolkit" for improving mental and emotional wellness. By making the mental wellness toolkit user-friendly, applicable to medical students through peer stories of resilience and strength, and through rigorous interviews with neuroscientists, clinicians and researchers who make learning about mental health easy to understand and apply, we provide a common, non-judgmental language for communities to engage in productive conversations about mental health and understand how to make more mindful choices.



MHL VS SMHL

Medical students found the experience valuable, accessed mental health screeners embedded within the Sharpen app, utilized Sharpen to seek help, and engaged with Sharpen to learn more about mental health. There was also a decrease in mental health stigma observed during the course of the study (Fadel et al, 2024).



The Four Pillars of Mental Health Literacy

Comprehensive mental health literacy programs include four core concepts:

1. Understanding how to foster and maintain positive mental health
2. Understanding mental health disorders and their treatments
3. Understanding how to seek help effectively
4. Understanding stigma and stigma reduction strategies

Sharpen MHL goes further

Enlisting various stakeholders to help with mental health stigma and suicide prevention, including school staff, may promote social interest, or feelings of belongingness and care for the school social system (Whisenhunt et al., 2022). The Sharpen MHL, which provides a five-hour course of vetted, best-practice asynchronous content that can be adjusted with local, peer focused stories and topic areas that are uncovered via strategic listening sessions.

Trauma-informed

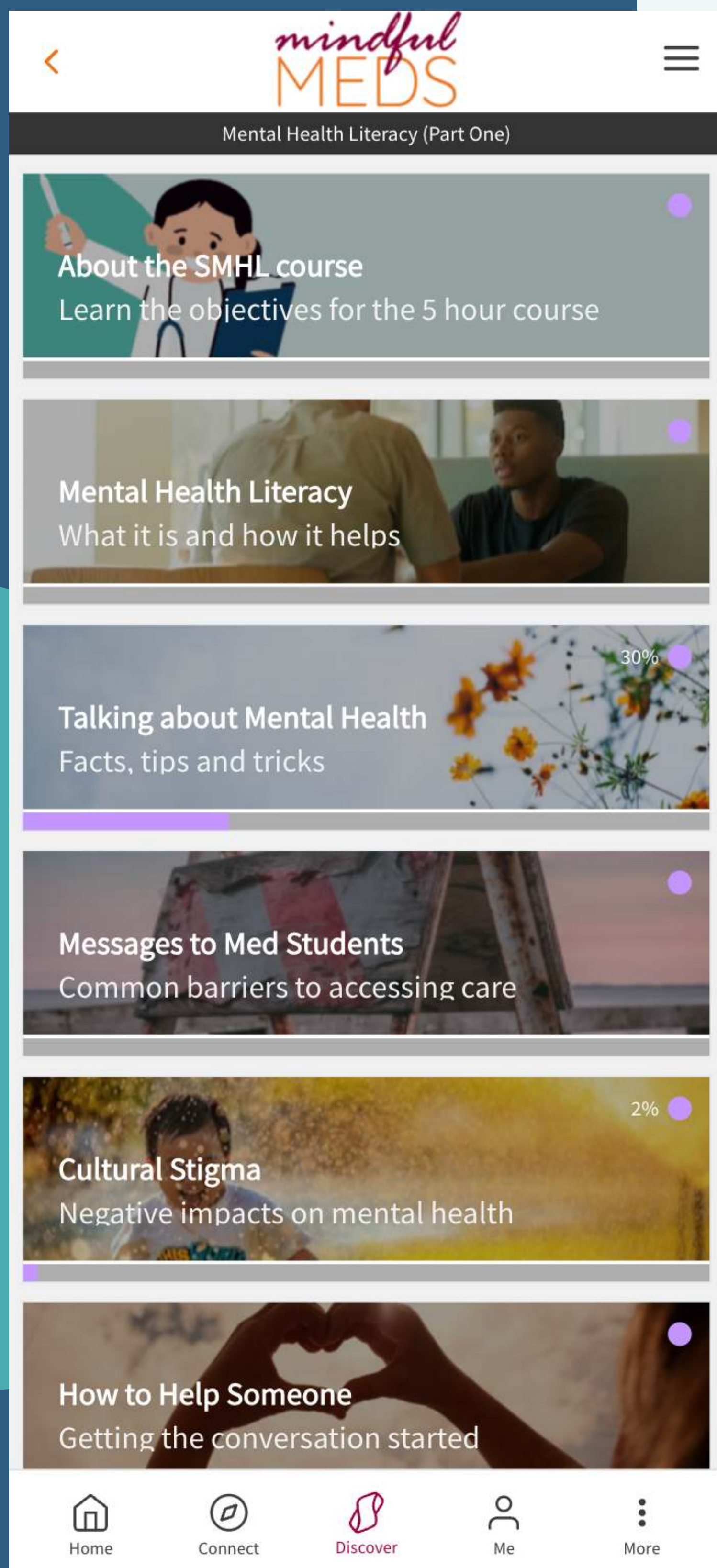
The 20 years of research informing the SMHL program has impressed upon the Sharpen leadership team that mental health literacy training must be presented in a trauma-informed manner. Our program incorporates training on adverse childhood experiences, suicide prevention and strength-based techniques to help a friend or classmate who may be struggling.

Peer resiliency focus

SMHL program draws on a library of hundreds of documentary films that feature medical students sharing stories of resilience and strength. Other versions of SMHL has shown to be an effective way to train peer facilitators (for example college student mentors) who then lead protective, strength-based resiliency trainings for younger students (Biber & Rothman, 2022). SMHL has also been implemented as a parent resiliency toolkit for foster families (Biber, 2023).

SMHL IN FOUR PARTS

Part One:



Part One provides 49 documentary style films within 6 modules. In the first module, the mental health literacy framework, mental wellness, and common mental health disorders (ADHD, Depression, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, PTSD) are outlined along with an overview of risk / protective factors and the Sharpen Logic Model.

In the **Talking About Mental Health** module, 9 peer focused videos reflect on their experience with mental health. It includes fact and tip activity sheets on managing intense emotions, understanding feelings, thoughts, and mindfulness.

Messages to Med Students contains 13 videos featuring researchers, clinicians, and experts from medical school discussing how stigma impacts mental health and those seeking mental health treatment.

Cultural Stigma contains 7 videos featuring young adults and clinicians discussing an array of cultural beliefs that impact health.

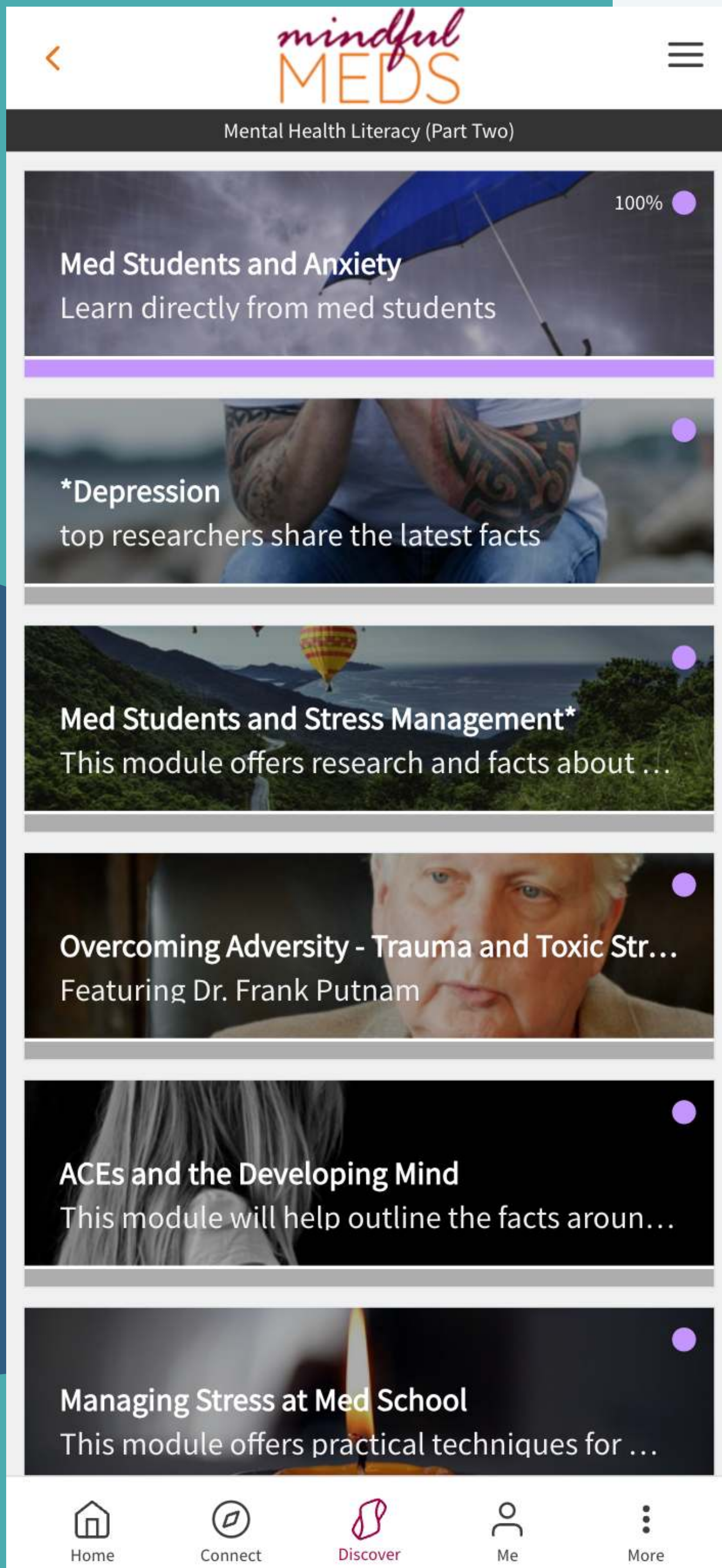
In the **How to Help Someone** module, 3 expert videos discuss tips for starting a conversation about mental health, sample phrases that can help, and ways to build protection for mental health.

In the **What is Therapy Like** module, 12 expert videos outline why someone should go to counseling, finding the right therapist, what therapy is like, and confidentiality of therapy. Experts also offer tips on if someone is struggling and a walkthrough of cognitive behavioral therapy exercises.

In the **Mindfulness Based Treatments** module, 5 expert videos discuss why starting the mindfulness exercises now rather than later is preferable for treatment, the types of mindfulness techniques that a counselor teaches their patients, and how the timeframe for treatment can look different for everyone.

FOUR PARTS

SMHL part two



Part Two provides 25 documentary style films within 6 modules. In the **Med Students and Anxiety** module, 3 expert videos explain what anxiety feels like, how anxiety is a normal part of our human existence, common anxiety symptoms, and when you should get help for anxiety.

In the **Depression** module, 4 expert videos discuss the types of depressive disorders, risk factors, protective factors, and the various treatments for depression. 1 peer focused video discusses their experience with depression and loss.

In the **Med Students and Stress Management** module, 5 expert and med student videos explain the common mental disorders seen in med students, ways to cope with stress, and insights on when you should seek help for stress.

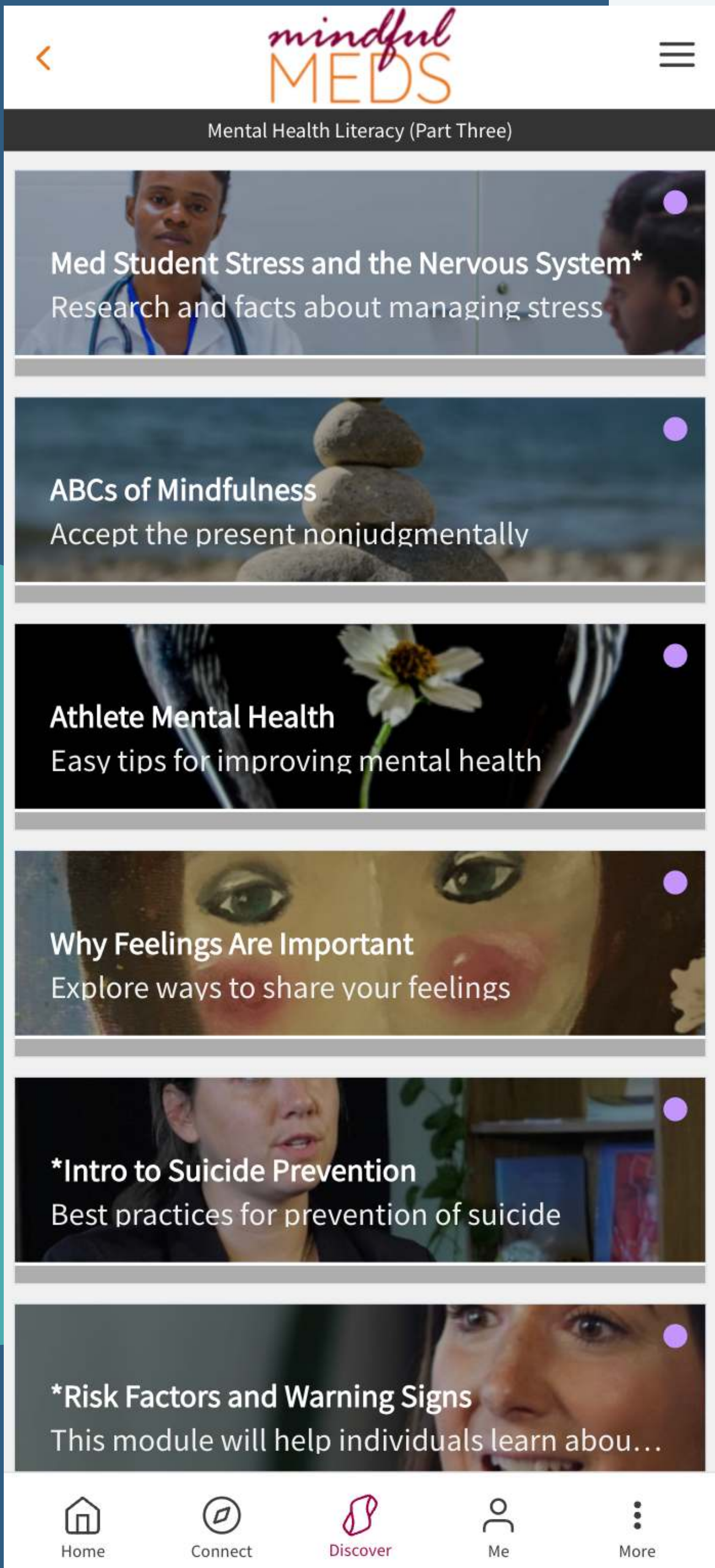
In the **Overcoming Adversity** module, Frank W. Putnam discusses in 2 videos, how violence/abuse can influence the overexposure of cortisol and its physiological effects.

In the **ACEs and the Developing Mind** module, 3 expert videos discuss childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences that have long-term effects on children. 2 videos with a foster parent discuss their experience becoming a foster parent and strategies for helping those children with childhood trauma.

In the **Managing Stress at Med School** module, 6 videos introduce "5 Minute Mindfulness" exercises for managing stress.

FOUR PARTS

SMHL part three



Part Three provides 35 documentary style films within 6 modules. In the **Med Student Stress and the Nervous System** module, 7 expert videos explain the impact stress has on our body systems, how media influences our body esteem, and ways to manage stress. One educational video explains how to take inventory of your stress and identify high versus low stressors to make stress more manageable.

In the **ABCs of Mindfulness** module, 3 educational videos outline mindfulness techniques in practice and information on the research behind mindfulness. It discusses the ways mindfulness works as medicine and steps to practice each of the many mindfulness techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation and walking meditation.

In the **Athlete Mental Health** module, 9 peer and coach focused videos explore why mental health matters, personal experiences with their mental health, common stressors, and ways to improve your mental well being. It also includes 1 educational video on positive self-talk.

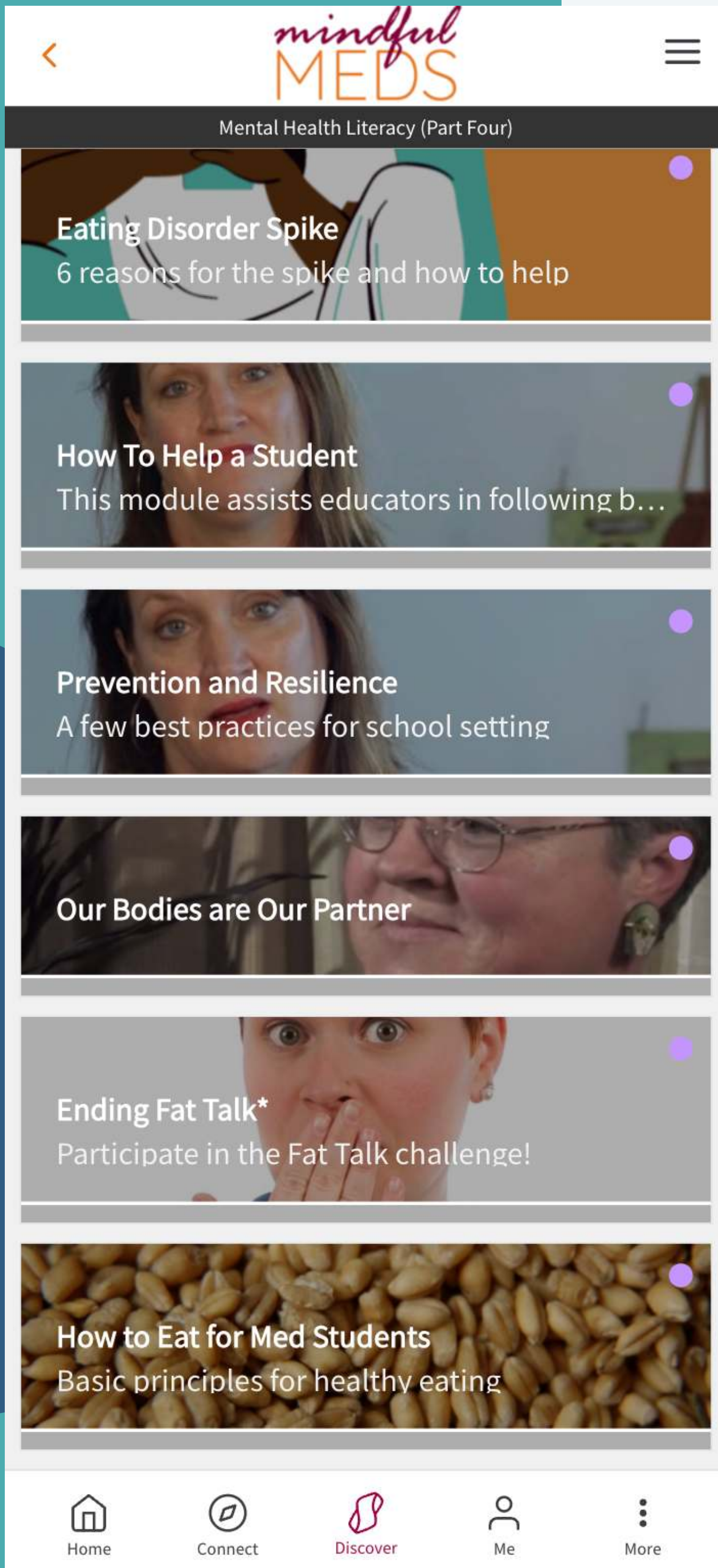
In the **Why Feelings Are Important** module, 1 expert video discusses challenging emotions and how those unpleasant feelings help in our confidence, emotional strength, and resilience. It also introduces the feelings rainbow and a chart of feelings that can help us identify what we feel. There is one educational video on feeling regulation.

In the **Intro to Suicide Prevention** module, 2 educational videos outline the three elements of effective suicide prevention: strategic planning, keys to success, and comprehensive approach. 4 expert videos discuss Living Works Curricula such as safeTALK or ASIST for leaders to receive training on comprehensive approaches to suicide prevention.

In the **Risk Factors and Warning Signs** module, 3 expert videos outline the risk factors for suicide and how professionals would initiate a conversation with someone they suspect is having thoughts of suicide. A veteran with PTSD and his wife share their experience getting through the husband's thoughts of suicide after the veteran returned home. Additionally, the module introduces the warning signs for suicide and what to do if someone you know is talking about suicide.

FOUR PARTS

SMHL part four



Part Four provides 22 documentary style films within 8 modules. In the **Facts About Anorexia and Other Eating Disorders** module, 2 expert videos explain the types of eating disorders and how they can coexist with other psychiatric disorders. 1 video shares the personal story and journey of an individual who realized they had an eating disorder.

The **Eating Disorder Spike** module outlines the 6 factors that have been adding to the increase in eating disorders since the pandemic began and ways to get the conversation started.

In the **How to Help A Student (or Friend)** module, 3 videos from Sharpen Minds discuss best practices on helping a student. It reviews the three red flags to spot disordered eating and emphasizes leaders' role in understanding that what you see on the surface may not be the only thing someone is struggling with. The module teaches how to build resiliency in these students and the best practices before getting the conversation started with a student.

In the **Prevention and Resilience** module, 4 videos connect previous modules in the course and information on the Sharpen Logic Model, which aims to improve overall health and social, emotional well-being. It targets prevention and builds resilience through evidence-based dietetics models and stress management and mindfulness.

In the **Our Bodies are Our Partner** module, 3 expert videos share how to look at your body as your partner, rather than an enemy and how commenting on an individual's body size can be damaging to the individual. It also discusses how the word Fat is primarily feminine in our culture. 1 video introduces an individual's experience realizing she had been living in her head and ignoring the signs from her body.

In the **Ending Fat Talk** module, 1 video provides facts and statistics of how fat talk affects women in our society and ways to end fat talk toward yourself or others.

In the **How to Eat for Med Students** module, 6 expert videos discuss the tips and strategies of a nutritional plan to nourish your body, such as eating protein with carbohydrates and adding in a heart healthy fat. It also provides lists of lean proteins and unrefined carbohydrates to add to your nutritional game plan.

The **What is Mindful Eating** module discusses how the food we eat affects our mental health, food sources of inflammation, and key vitamins and minerals that can improve our health and brain function. Additionally, it discusses 10 ways to practice mindful eating.

SAMPLE MODULE

Each module within the SMHL course contains:

1. Peer videos highlighting stories of resilience and strength to humanize mental health and provide context (Hinshaw, 2023)
2. Connection to recent research and fact sheets
3. Resources for support and immediate help
4. Connection to local organizations and treatment



Course | Additional Resources

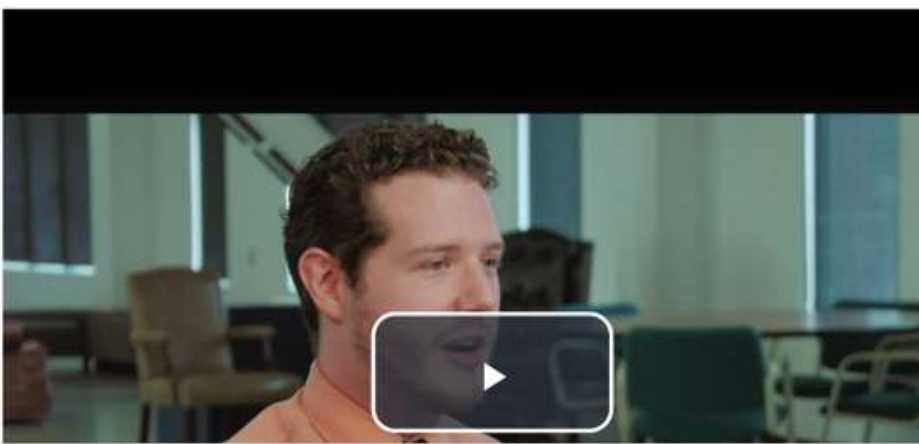
Table of Contents

1. Time Management
2. Parasympathetic Nervous System
3. Stress Inventory Technique
4. Stress and Body Esteem

Welcome to our training on Stress Management, part of our Resiliency trainings that focus on one or more of the shared protective factors that have shown to improve overall health.

▲ Time Management

Medical students and physicians share strategies for improving time management and decreasing stress and burnout at medical school.




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Course | Additional Resources

According to the 2014 Burden of Stress in America report by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, close to half of those polled reported they had a stressful event or experience within the past year and more than a quarter reported having a great deal of stress in the past month. The most commonly reported effect on health was poor emotional well-being (63%).


NPR / RWJF (2014). The Burden of Stress in America. Harvard School of Public Health.

▲ Parasympathetic Nervous System




Stephen Hinshaw, Ph.D.,
Vice-Chair of Psychology, U.C. Berkeley

▲ Stress Inventory Technique




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Course | Additional Resources



▲ Li discusses coping with mental health

In the below clip, Li discusses strategies for coping with mental health challenges.



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“If we can understand and empathize with mental illness and humanize it, that’s getting close to the magic bullet for reducing stigma.”

Stephen Hinshaw, PhD
Sharpen Scientific Advisor

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