

UD Cooperative Extension Puts the ‘Social’ in Social-Emotional Well-being in Mental Health Programs

RELEVANCE

Four years after the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns about mental well-being remain high. (Panchal et al., 2023).



RESPONSE

UD Cooperative Extension is in its **second year** of offering several **group-style** programs to support the development of **mental health coping skills**.

Offer: competitive group play, storytelling, communication and empathy-building activities, and social-emotional-directed activities

Mind Matters
6-week program
Overcome adversity, build resiliency, explore emotions, share experiences

A-RESCUE
Assess, Reassure, Empathize, Safety, Compassion-Connect, Use De-escalation, Encourage Self-Awareness,

Resilience X
6-week program
Individuals learn skills on developing resiliency, create friendships, support systems, and social skills.

Wits Workout
Brain health program for people in the 55+ community. A friendly competition while socializing and learning together.

RESULTS

These findings are **positive indications** that mental health resources, education, and skills can help **support mental wellness** and equip program participants with skills to provide mental health support.

Participants in these programs demonstrated improved knowledge and skills in:

- 74%** Recognizing the signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis
- 86%** Strategies and techniques in self-regulation
- 86%** How to provide mental health support
- 86%** Developing resilience
- 82%** Developed/increased social interactions



Post-program evaluations

- Participants showed an increase in their:
- Confidence to talk about mental health challenges
 - Confidence in providing mental health help
 - Confidence in their ability to interact appropriately with others in social settings



RELEVANCE

Four years after the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns about mental well-being remain high. (Panchal et al., 2023). Symptoms of anxiety and depression manifest as social isolation and loneliness (McColl & Nescott, 2022). Mental health conditions have been found to reduce social interaction, leading to feeling disconnected from others (GOV.UK, 2022). Research shows that socialization has a positive impact on mental health by reducing feelings of depression, isolation, and anxiety while simultaneously boosting happiness and reducing feelings of stress (Hubbard, 2023).

RESPONSE

UD Cooperative Extension is in its second year of offering several group-style programs to support the development of mental health coping skills. These programs provide opportunities for competitive group play, storytelling, communication and empathy-building activities, and social-emotional-directed activities.

- Mind Matters is a 6-week program where participants learn skills to overcome adversity and build resiliency. It includes activities that require participants to explore their emotions and share their experiences with those emotions. This program was piloted at Dover High School for students in grades 9-12.
- In the summer of 2024, the New Castle County 4-H Camp Counselors in Training and 4-H Leadership team participated in the 2.5-hour A-RESCUE training course. A-RESCUE stands for Assess & Approach, Reassure, Empathize, Safety & Strengths-based Approach, Compassionate Connect, Use De-escalation techniques, Encourage Self-Awareness, Self-Help and Professional Help. A-RESCUE is an early intervention course teaching individuals skills to recognize a mental health crisis among their peers. The program teaches them how to provide mental health support.
- The 6-week informal group-styled Resilience X program piloted at the YWCA in Wilmington allowed participants to share stories to build community, healthy friendships, support systems, learning from peers, and social skills.

Wits Workout, a brain health program for people in the 55+ community, was launched in both New Castle and Kent County. This program allows participants to compete while socializing and learning. Activities encourage both large and small group work, and one-on-one partnerships.

RESULTS

Participants in these programs demonstrated improved knowledge and learned skills in:

- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis (74%)
- Strategies and techniques in self-regulation (86%)
- How to provide mental health support (86%)
- Developing resilience (86%)
- Developed/increased social interactions (82%)

Post-program evaluations and knowledge checks support these findings. Based on post-program evaluations, end-of-chapter knowledge checks, and scenario reenactments, participants showed an increase in their:

- Confidence to talk about mental health challenges
- Confidence in providing mental health help
- Confidence in their ability to interact appropriately with others in social settings

These findings are positive indications that mental health resources, education, and skills can help support mental wellness and equip program participants with skills to provide mental health support.

PUBLIC VALUE STATEMENT

Delaware has individuals suffering from mental health challenges who are encountering barriers to resources and support. UD Cooperative Extension has hired an extension agent who focuses specifically in the area of mental health and wellness. Individuals who have participated in mental health programming have demonstrated an increase in knowledge, confidence and skills around mental well-being.