

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

4-H youth and volunteers learn about mental health and wellness

AT A GLANCE

4-H youth, staff and volunteers in Idaho learn about how to manage stress, how to help someone who is experiencing a mental health challenge and build an understanding of the importance of self-care.

The Situation

In 2021, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry declared youth mental health as a national emergency. Additionally, the U.S. Surgeon General reported that “far too many young people are struggling with their mental health, and unable to get the support they need.” In 2022, 36.2% of youth reported symptoms of anxiety and 15.8% felt like nothing could cheer them up. The U.S. Surgeon General also states that “we all have a role to play in supporting youth mental health.” In his advisory, he discusses how community, policy and environment can affect the mental health of youth today.

Idaho consistently ranks among states with the highest suicide rates and includes more young adults who are impacted by those high rates. This impact could mean they themselves suffer with mental health challenges, or they know a friend or family member who suffers. Data from 2022 shows that three out of every five students have felt hopeless in the last two weeks, and eleven percent of students have attempted suicide in the last year.



4-H teens participating in training.

Our Response

The University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program is one of the largest youth-serving organizations in Idaho. As such, it is uniquely suited to provide education on managing mental health for both youth and adults. UI Extension educators developed a 4-H curriculum to address many of the mental health issues youth face today. This curriculum also seeks to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health illnesses and issues. The curriculum includes interactive activities, PowerPoints and research to teach youth and adults about mental health. Organized into three modules, the curriculum is designed to teach applicable mental health awareness/education and skills.

The first module focuses on stress management and coping. This module has information on how to work through four different types of coping skills to improve stress levels. The second module walks through scenarios a person may face with friends and family members who are struggling with their mental health. It provides opportunities to practice talking about mental health, answering questions and concerns on mental health and connecting those who are struggling to local support services. The third module discusses support, self-care, and understanding emotions. The goal of the curriculum is to build confidence in being able to manage one's own mental health as well as being able to support others who are struggling with their mental health.

Program Outcomes

Multiple groups of youth and adults have learned about mental health from this curriculum over the last year and a half. These groups include new and returning 4-H volunteers, parents and guardians, 4-H camp counselors, 4-H STAC leaders, 4-H staff, teachers, HOPE squad leaders and health coalition leaders.

Overall survey results show the following numbers after participating in this curriculum.

- 60% strongly agree that they know the difference between stress and mental health, the other 40% somewhat agreed.
- 80% strongly agree that they know at least two skills they can use to manage stress, the other 20% somewhat agreed.
- 73% strongly or somewhat agree that they feel confident discussing mental health with their peers.
- 53.3% strongly agree and 46.6% somewhat agree that they know where to get help if they or

someone they know are struggling with managing stress and mental health.

- 93% of participants strongly or somewhat agree that they know how to provide continued support to someone struggling with their mental health.

Additional feedback from participants included that many of the adults found the curriculum to be very useful and hoped for additional future resources. Youth shared real life stories and experiences with several mentioning they are glad that these topics are being addressed.

These learning outcomes directly address the high rates of youth who are struggling with their mental health by taking steps to implement behavioral changes associated with the knowledge gained. The behavioral changes include being able to talk about stress and mental health, answer questions and concerns with informed decisions, and connect others to appropriate help. It also means that youth cannot only help others who are struggling but are able to implement their own stress management and self-care strategies when they face a mental health challenge.

The Future

UI Extension educators plan to publish the curriculum for use by 4-H staff and volunteers across the state. Additional plans include creating teams of youth who can provide curriculum training to their peers, building a greater impact across the state. We also plan to expand the evaluation to include behavioral intent, or the intent to use the information learned to support those around them who are struggling as well as follow-up on how/if the information has been used by participants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Tasha Howard, FCS Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Canyon County • 208-459-6003 • thoward@uidaho.edu

Paige Wray, 4-H Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Bonneville County • 208-529-1390 • pwrap@uidaho.edu

Bridget Morrisroe-Miller, FCS Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Ada County • 208-287-5900 • bridgeta@uidaho.edu

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