

**Mental Health Personal  
Protective Equipment (MH-PPE)  
for School Personnel**

**Willam Fogel, Ph.D, LMHC, LSP**

**Kimberly Bressemer, M.A., CAGS,  
LEP, LSP**

# MH-PPE - for School Personnel

**Materials needed:** one piece of 11 x 8.5 paper (either Blank or Vertically lined), Pen/Pencil

**Step 1** - Fold it in half vertically so that you have a small booklet that measures 8.5 x 5.5 with a front cover, 2 inside pages, and back cover

**Step 2** - On the front cover write the following:

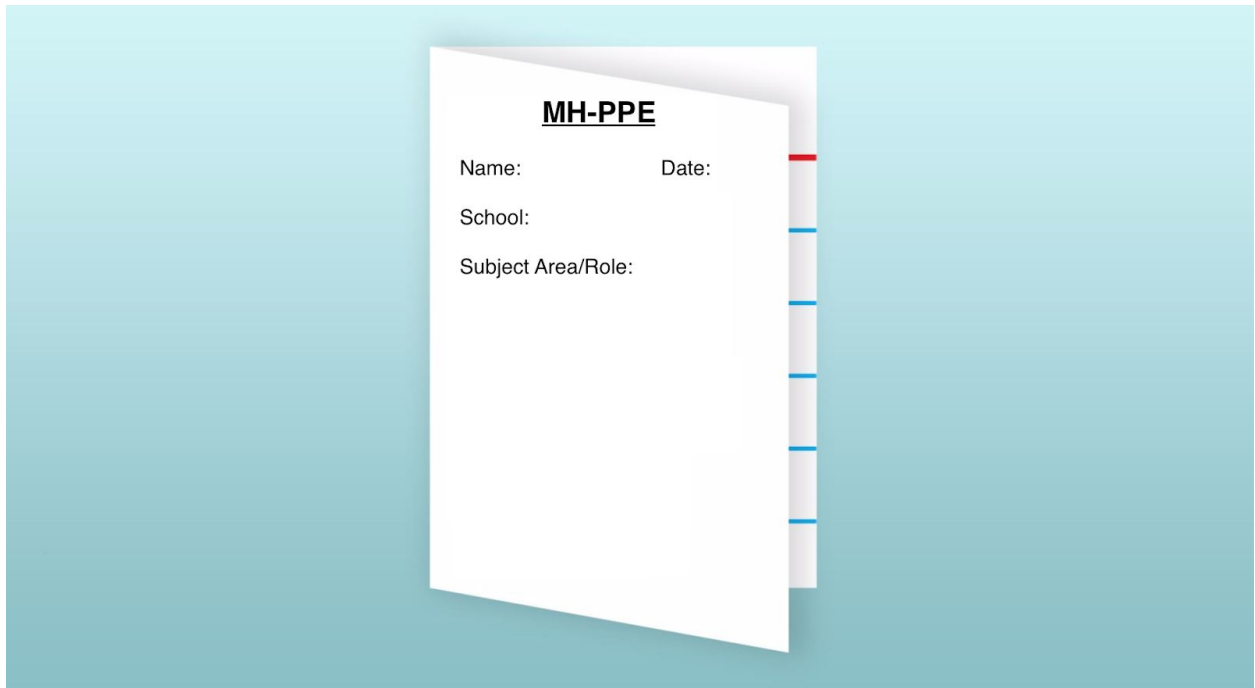
**Mental Health - PPE**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**School:**

**Subject Area/Role:**



Next - Fill them in with your information.

# MH-PPE - for School Personnel

**Step 3** - Write down the headings:

**Personal Support**  
**Community Support**

**MH-PPE Buddy** (at the bottom):

**MH-PPE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Area/Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Support: \_\_\_\_\_

Community Support: \_\_\_\_\_

MH-PPE Buddy: \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Support** - write down the name of personal support (*mentor, friend, colleague*):

**Community Support** - write down the following numbers:

National Disaster Relief Line - **1-800-621-3362**  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - **1-800-273-8255**  
Crisis Text Line: **741-741**  
Employee Assistance Program:

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Why would we want you to write down these numbers? For others? **Yes!** For you? **Definitely!**

Everyone can experience trauma, in many different ways. It is critical to care for yourself first, before you reach out to someone else, especially now. Just like on an airplane when the oxygen masks are released from above our heads place it on yourself first - then those you care for. You probably already do and will continue to support others who are experiencing adversity (students, colleagues, family members). Hearing these stories can put you at risk too. This is called **Compassion Fatigue**:

*A cumulative detrimental effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events can include the following: insomnia, substance abuse, inability to focus, memory impairment, anxiety, depression, isolation, and chronic fatigue.*

It is okay if you are thinking "why would I write that down? I would never use that..." many people think the same way. It can be part of the stigma related to trauma/mental health. Consider this; if you were having a heart attack would you refuse to call for help? The body does not know the difference between physical pain and mental pain. Both are something we create. To think about it a different way, why would you recommend something to somebody else that you wouldn't use?

## **MH-PPE Buddy**

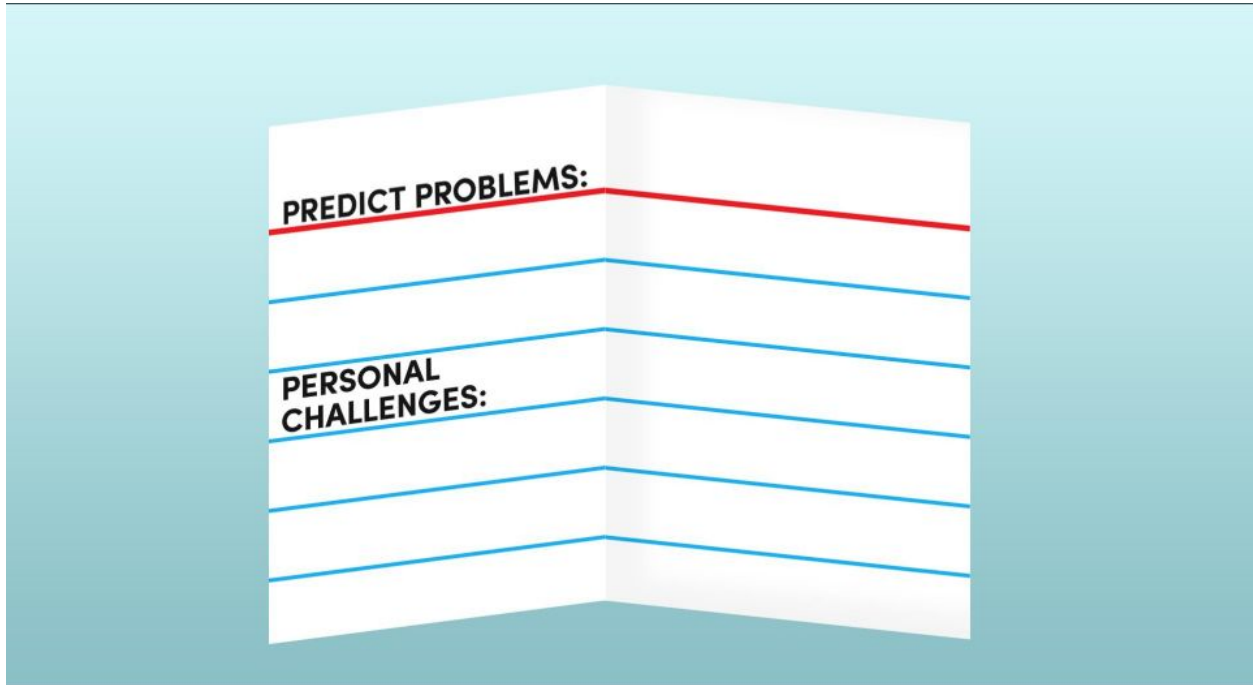
The next step is to identify someone (e.g. at work, at home, in school, etc) you will share your MH-PPE plan. Similarly they will share their plan with you. This will be your MH-PPE buddy. Just as when we put on safety equipment it is important to have someone else check you, with the MH-PPE it is essential to have someone available to ensure that we are safe. Sharing the plan will help reinforce the need to use it. You and your buddy can remind each other. It just may save a life.

Write the **name** of your MH-PPE Buddy

# MH-PPE - for School Personnel

**Step 4** - Open to the next page on inside left-hand panel write:

**Predict Problems** at the top and **Personal Challenges** in the middle of the page



## **Predict Problems**

Think about the current situations you find yourself in at school, and predict or notice problems that you are having. Make sure you describe the problem in an objective way. Something you can point to and anyone could say, “I see that too.” Under the **Predict Problems** heading, write down a **predicted problem**. (Later on, you can go back and write more).

**Example:** *The number of emails I receive*

You may come up with more than one problem now and things may change over time. It's okay to start your plan with one problem or a few. You could even have several MH-PPE going (e.g. home, work)

# MH-PPE - for School Personnel

## **Personal Challenge**

The predicted problem is one that we all may face. This next part is more subjective: what are your own personal obstacles. Think about the predicted problem and write down a way that you may respond to it that is not helpful. You know yourself well, be honest, if you are really stuck, you can get some feedback from folks who know you well.

Under the **Personal Challenge** heading, write a **personal challenge** related to the predicted problem you wrote down at the top of the page.

**Example:** *I want to read/respond to each email right away (e.g. answering emails at midnight)*

Knowing personal challenges is important, particularly when you start to feel overwhelmed, and are not coping well. We know about the fight/flight/freeze response; it is a biological reaction to danger. It is a natural phenomenon that affects all people.

However, the fight/flight/freeze response is only supposed to last for a short period. Once we experience prolonged or repeated exposure to this response, with no time for rebound, things become more difficult. We, and all mammals, can experience toxic stress. Toxic stress can impact us in many ways and can have long-standing effects on us physically, mentally, psychologically,

One of the best ways to protect against toxic stress is by having a trusted adult to confide in. As we will see next, learning how to notice and recognize when we are overwhelmed can help us become more resilient.

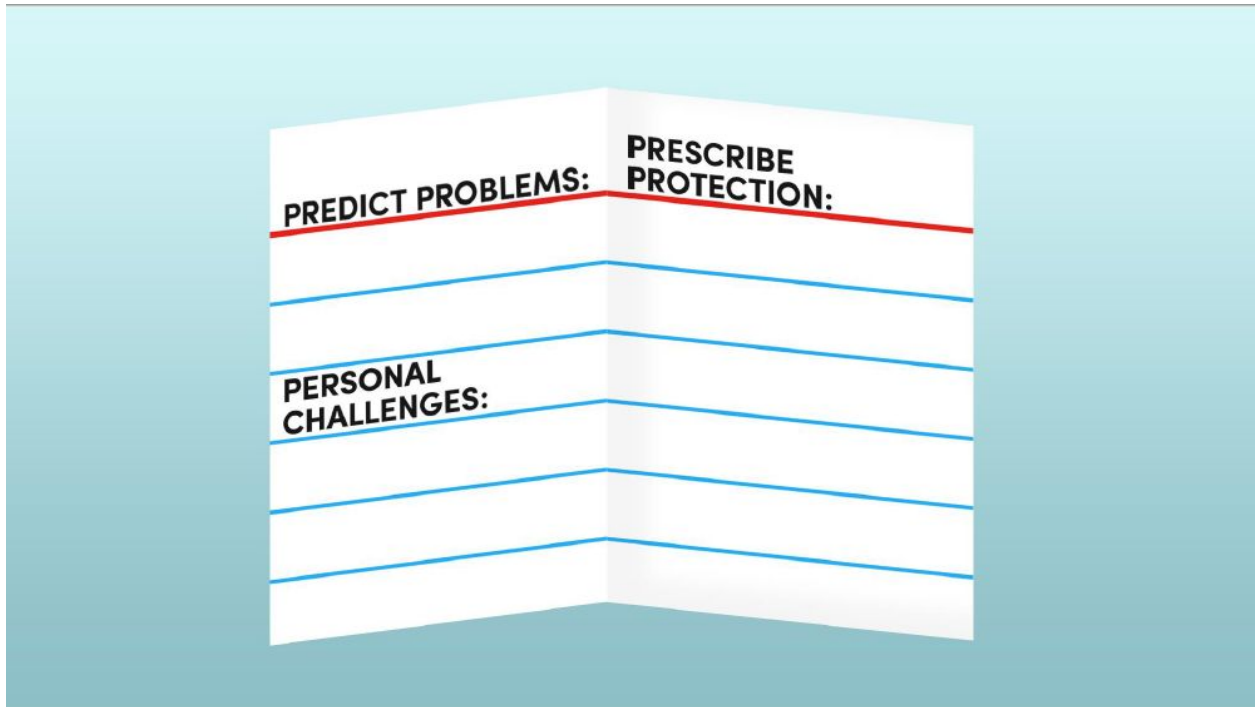
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## School-based Examples of *Predicted Problems*

Difficulty accessing technology	Heath/loss of family members
Limited Resources	Living in a hotspot with high population density
Limited experience in distance learning	Access to community support for food, shelter, and public safety
Limited/inconsistent communications	Living in significant historical community trauma
Retrofit/reinvent lessons	Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
Finding new ways to do familiar things, like grading homework	Witness to bias and social injustice
High stakes educational decision making	Witness to systematic/systemic injustices
Inundated with emails, texts, and calls from administrators, parents, and students	Witness to magnified inequities
Colleagues feeling overwhelmed	Lack of student engagement
Health of colleagues	Students basic needs not met
Loss of colleagues	Students' limited access to technology
Parenting young children	Student and family health/loss
Juggling work and family life	Students' home environments are not able to support student need
Worsening of chronic health problems	Considerable threats to student safety
Worsening of mental health conditions.	Navigating conflictual relationships with students, parents, colleague
Financial stress	

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**Step 5** - On inside right panel write **Prescribe Protection**:



## Prescribe Protection

Write down/brainstorm up to 3 steps to take to manage the predicted challenge.

### **Example:**

- Prioritize email response
- Use scheduled send
- Set/communicate email viewing hours

One of the most effective ways to manage stress is to use mindfulness. There are many ways you can do this (e.g. Breathing Exercises, Visualization, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, 54321 Sensation, Mindfulness movement, Meditation, Yoga, journaling, etc.)

These mindfulness activities create a biological response that actually activates anti-stress chemicals, while deactivating toxic stress chemicals in the biological system (epinephrine, cortisol). Mindfulness activities help to manage physiological stress responses in the moment as well as building resilience in all of us for later



## **MH-PPE - for School Personnel**

Now, we can put something in place to help prevent/decrease our stress response. These personalized steps can be general in regard to regulating things better ( i.e. sleep, food, exercise) or more specific to the situation.

In general, we have 4 options when faced with a problem:

- 1. Try to change it for the better**
- 2. Try to feel better about it**
- 3. Try to tolerate it better**
- 4. Stay miserable**

If the only option is to stay miserable then it may be a good time to use the numbers on the front page.

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## School-based Examples of *Prescribed Protection*

Limit work to no longer than typical school day expectations

Laugh, share a private joke, watch a funny video

Limit media exposure

Drink plenty of fluids

Work in teams

Recognize and accept what you cannot change

Write in a journal

Use structured meditation or breathing techniques to relax

Talk to family, friends, and teammates about your feelings

Practice yoga

Plan for extra time to complete tasks

Use progressive muscle relaxation techniques

Maintain a healthy diet

Healthy sleep regimen

Listen to music you enjoy

Regular exercise

Avoid excessive alcohol/caffeine/sugar

Remember it is ok to say “no”

Limit exposure difficult/negative people (in person and online)

Remind yourself it is not selfish to take breaks...and take them

Reduce self-criticism

Name 3 non-distressing things around you

Make a gratitude lists

Pace yourself

Use/invent physically distancing greetings

Watch out for each other

Focus on what you did well

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**Step 6** - Turn to the back page and write down *Engage Plan*:



## **ENGAGE PLAN**

Write down the time/situation/date when you know that you need to re-check your MH-PPE plan.

**Example:** When I notice I am responding to email at/after 9:00 pm I will engage in my prescribed protection. *Note that the example above identifies an earlier time (9:00 pm) than the predicted problem (midnight).*

Engage your **prescribed protection** before your **predicted problem/personal challenge** becomes overwhelming. Just like when we intervene in a crisis, it is better to intervene early and often to de-escalate things before they become a crisis. You may not be successful the first time! This all takes practice, but the better we get at recognizing our own stress warning signs, the better we are at responding earlier and more effectively!

# MH-PPE - for School Personnel

Now that you have completed the protocol. Remember to use your MH-PPE

***When you write things down it increases the likelihood of doing things***

***When you share your plan with a Buddy this helps with***

- ***Compliance***
- ***Resilience***

This manual is inspired by the work of Captain Michael King ([SAMSHA - Regional Director](#)) who gave permission to expand upon Healthcare PPE and make it relevant to an educational environment. Elements are drawn on from the American Red Cross Psychological First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, and Professional Quality of Life Measure. A big thanks to Kayla Crowe for assistance with graphics.

## Resources

[CDC - Mental Health and Coping with Stress](#)

[Preventing Teacher Burnout during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

[Stress - Spectrum.pdf](#)

[Toxic Stress](#)

[ARC - Psychological First Aid](#)

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

[Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools](#)

[Mindful Schools](#)

[Mindful Activity List](#)

[Professional Quality of Life](#)

[Self-Care during Difficult Times](#)