



## **Mental Health America of Franklin County**

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# **Prevention Fact Sheet**

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In the field of mental health, prevention is the first step in a continuum: It begins with encouraging healthy development and building resilience, and it ends in providing treatment and rehabilitation services when necessary. Prevention efforts can enhance healthy development in all stages of life, ranging from early childhood through older adulthood.

### **Effective Intervention Programs**

Preventive services are provided to people of all ages through programs that are designed to intervene in a deliberate and positive way to counteract harmful circumstances before they can cause disorder or disability. These programs, or interventions, can also help mitigate other negative circumstances associated with mental disorders.

Years of research demonstrate that programs designed to prevent a particular negative outcome, or promote positive mental health, can be very successful. Most prevention programs target specific risk factors which may increase an individual's chances of developing a mental disorder.

Examples of effective prevention programs include parenting education programs, school-based social competency programs, and programs for persons experiencing stressful life circumstances, such as parental divorce or recent unemployment.

### **Defining Prevention**

There are three basic categories of prevention programs – universal, selective and indicated.

*Universal prevention programs* target the general public or a whole population that has no known risk factors. For example, schools that teach all young children problem-solving skills may be engaged in universal prevention.

*Selective prevention interventions* are targeted to individuals or a segment of the population whose risk of developing a mental disorder is significantly higher than average. An example of a selective prevention program is an intervention that enhances the job seeking and coping skills of adults who have recently been unemployed.

*Indicated prevention programs* target high-risk individuals, without a diagnosis, who have minimal but detectable signs or symptoms foreshadowing mental disorders or biological markers indicating predisposition. The Primary Mental Health Project, a popular and successful intervention, is an example of indicated prevention. Primary grade children who are experiencing early school adjustment problems are involved in small groups. The project features liaison between school and families; crisis intervention; and intervention for specific, targetable problems using social problem solving and self-control skills, peer teaching, and group programs.

## The Mental Health Intervention Spectrum

There are many universal, selective and indicated preventive interventions. The Mental Health America has identified five core components that are universal in effective preventive interventions. These programs are:

- Theory-Driven
- Evidenced-Based
- Accessible
- Comprehensive
- Holistic

## Defining Terms

Other terms that are used often in the field of mental health prevention are health promotion, early identification, risk factors, and protective factors.

**Health promotion** efforts are directed towards wellness, encouraging healthy behaviors, improving the quality of life and raising the general level of mental health in a population.

**Early identification** and treatment are essential mental health services, but if treatment is needed, the disability has not been prevented.

**Risk factors** are circumstances that make a particular population at greater risk for development of a disorder. Risk factors may be biological or social characteristics, or a combination of the two.

**Protective factors** are circumstances that enhance resilience in an individual or population, and may mediate the effects of risk factors.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).