

# JewishLife

WESTCHESTER COUNTY'S ONLY MONTHLY JEWISH NEWSPAPER

[www.westchesterjewishlife.com](http://www.westchesterjewishlife.com)

## Youth Mental Health First Aid: Learn to Be a First Responder

BY BRENDA R. HAAS, LMSW, ED.M

Many people have enrolled in a CPR-first aid course, as a responsible citizen or as part of a job requirement. In fact, if a young person gets hurt at camp or school, it is common knowledge to offer a Band Aid or apply pressure to a bleeding wound. However, if this same youth was experiencing a panic attack, would as many adults know what steps to take?

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHEA) – the CPR for mental health – teaches adults the unique warning signs and risk factors of various mental health issues common among adolescents. The research-proven training offers a five-step action plan to support an adolescent, ages 12 to 18, experiencing a mental health concern or crisis; adults become aware first responders, who offer critical help until professional help is sought or avail-

able. The interactive program is designed for non-mental health professionals who work with and care for youth including school staff, youth directors, coaches, parents, clergy and camp personnel.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a national initiative dedicated to increasing awareness and education, and to breaking through the inherent stigma attached to children's mental health needs, treatment and other supportive services. Unfortunately, as research indicates, stigma creates a significant barrier to families attaining effective mental health care for their children. The National Institute for Mental Health reports that one out of five children in the U.S. suffers from a mental health disorder but only 20 percent are identified, and receive proper treatment or other services. The facts are staggering, among them that suicide is the second leading

cause of death in youth ages 15-24. Still, for many, it continues to be more widely acceptable to get treatment for illnesses other than those involving mental health.

YMHEA provides a critical opportunity for adults to receive accurate information and a greatly need chance for productive community conversations about mental illness and emotional wellness. Over the past three years, WJCS has presented multiple YMHEA trainings to the general public, and to the Jewish community at sites including UJA- Federation, Solomon Schechter, Shames JCC and synagogues. The testimonials and feedback have been extraordinary. Elisha Andron, Director of Student Services, Solomon Schechter Westchester, explains:

"I can't begin to express how impressed we were with the YMHEA training. At Schechter Westchester, students have relationships with

all the adults in the building, not just their teachers, deans, principals, and psychologists. Therefore, we feel that it's vital for all staff (administrators, teachers, coaches, support staff, bus drivers, food service professionals) to become trained to identify the earliest warning signs, so that we can foster confidence to support youth during a mental health crisis. Our school health has increased significantly because of this invaluable training."

Current research shows that many emotional and behavioral issues in youth can be mitigated if they are identified and addressed early in childhood and adolescence. Together, let's all partner, as first responders, to acknowledge, prioritize and talk about our children's mental health needs.

For more information, contact WJCS at 761-0600, ext. 318 or [bhaas@ujcs.com](mailto:bhaas@ujcs.com)