



Mental health matters

It's 11:30 a.m. and two coworkers sit down to lunch. One confesses he is going through a divorce and is struggling to cope. After strategic questions and lots of listening, his coworker suspects he may be suffering from depression. She reassures him that it's common to have these feelings during major life changes and encourages him to spend time with supportive friends and seek professional help.

She isn't a mental health professional, but the support she offered her coworker was based on what she learned in **Mental Health First Aid**. CPR and first aid courses are commonplace, but guidance on how to help a loved one, coworker or friend experiencing anxiety, depression or substance abuse issues is in short supply.

The eight-hour Mental Health First Aid course, offered by Purdue Extension Educators throughout Indiana, fills that void. Participants learn to identify signs of crisis, what they should and shouldn't say, and where to point someone for help.

The course is helpful for anyone — law enforcement, healthcare providers and professionals, school personnel, faith-based leaders, farmers, veterinarians and concerned family members and friends.

Linda Hiatt, for example, lives on a farm near Muncie with her husband. Her father was a farmer. She knows the pressures. "With everything like it is now, prices, weather, lending institutions — many farmers suffer from depression," she says, including her own relatives.

Hiatt wants to be prepared moving forward. "I need to know what the signs are, and what I can do to be helpful."

By attending Mental Health First Aid, Hiatt learned what questions to ask to start a dialogue. Most important, she says: "Just be a good listener. Don't tell someone you know how they feel. Sympathize, tell them help is available and there is hope."



197 Hoosiers participated in Mental Health First Aid courses in 2018.

