



# How MHFA and Support Circle work together

## Overview

Most organisations invest in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). Support Circle is not a replacement for MHFA and it is not a rebadged version of it. They do different jobs and they work best when they're used together.

You don't need MHFA in place to start with Support Circle.

Support Circle stands on its own as a way to make mental health safer, more visible and easier to talk about day to day.

If you already have MHFA, Support Circle helps it work better. If you don't, Support Circle is a strong and safe place to start.

## Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

**Purpose:** respond when someone is struggling or in crisis. MHFA delivers training designed to bridge the gap between early signs of mental distress and access to appropriate professional support. It equips people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to recognise when someone may be struggling, to respond appropriately and to encourage further help where needed.

## What MHFA delivers

**ALGEE Action Plan:** A structured five-step framework to guide response: Approach and assess, Listen non-judgmentally, Give reassurance and information, Encourage professional help, Encourage other supports.

**Mental health literacy:** Awareness of signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, psychosis, eating disorders and substance misuse.

**Crisis skills:** Confidence to step in during high-risk situations such as suicidal ideation, panic attacks or acute distress.#

**Non-judgmental listening:** Practical listening and empathy skills that reduce stigma and make it easier for people to speak up.

**Confidence and permission to act:** Helping non-specialists feel able to intervene appropriately rather than avoid difficult conversations.

## Resources available once trained

- Mental Health First Aider support app®: digital tools including 24/7 text support via services such as shout, conversation logging and access to national service directories.
- Membership support: access to the association of mental health first aiders UK including webinars, newsletters and ongoing learning.
- Learning materials: course manuals, workbooks and toolkits for reference.

## What MHFA is not designed to provide

MHFA is highly effective for early response and crisis support. It is not designed to provide long-term or systemic support:

- No clinical authority: MHFA are not therapists, counsellors or diagnosticians
- No ongoing treatment or case management
- Limited influence over long waiting lists or systemic barriers
- No built-in supervision model for emotional load and vicarious trauma.
- No internal infrastructure such as time, space, policies or leadership behaviour.
- Not culture change: it does not shift everyday norms, workload or psychological safety.

**In short:** MHFA is essential when something is wrong. It is not designed to stop things getting that far in the first place.



LIFE FIRST THEN WORK

### Support Circle

**Purpose:** Create the conditions that reduce risk and make early support normal.

Support Circle is a preventative, cultural, everyday system that helps teams notice pressure earlier, talk about it sooner and connect people into existing support before problems escalate. It is not clinical. It is not crisis support. It is how you build a workplace where people don't have to reach breaking point to be taken seriously.

### What Support Circle does

- Builds psychological safety before problems escalate
- Normalises early, everyday conversations about pressure and strain
- Makes mental health a shared responsibility, not a specialist role
- Creates safe, visible pathways into existing support
- Strengthens trust and connection at team level
- Reduces isolation and hidden struggle
- Surfaces risk early while it's still manageable
- Creates more trusted, accessible touchpoints that make it easier to reach support

### Why they work better together

- Support Circle does not replace MHFA. It makes it work better.
- People speak up earlier, not only in crisis
- We catch things earlier instead of firefighting later
- Fewer issues turn into burnout, absence or exit
- Support is used earlier and more appropriately
- MHFA, EAP and HR are engaged sooner and more effectively

### The simple way to think about it

Support Circle is the lighthouse and the people tending it – visible, approachable and there to guide and support before boats get lost, run aground or hit the rocks.

MHFA is the rescue boat – called on when someone is already in trouble.

External or clinical support is the harbour and shipyard – where real repairs and recovery happen.

They are all part of a healthier system, all serve a different purpose and you need all three.

Support Circle and MHFA work together to spot risk early and make the environment safer for everyone.

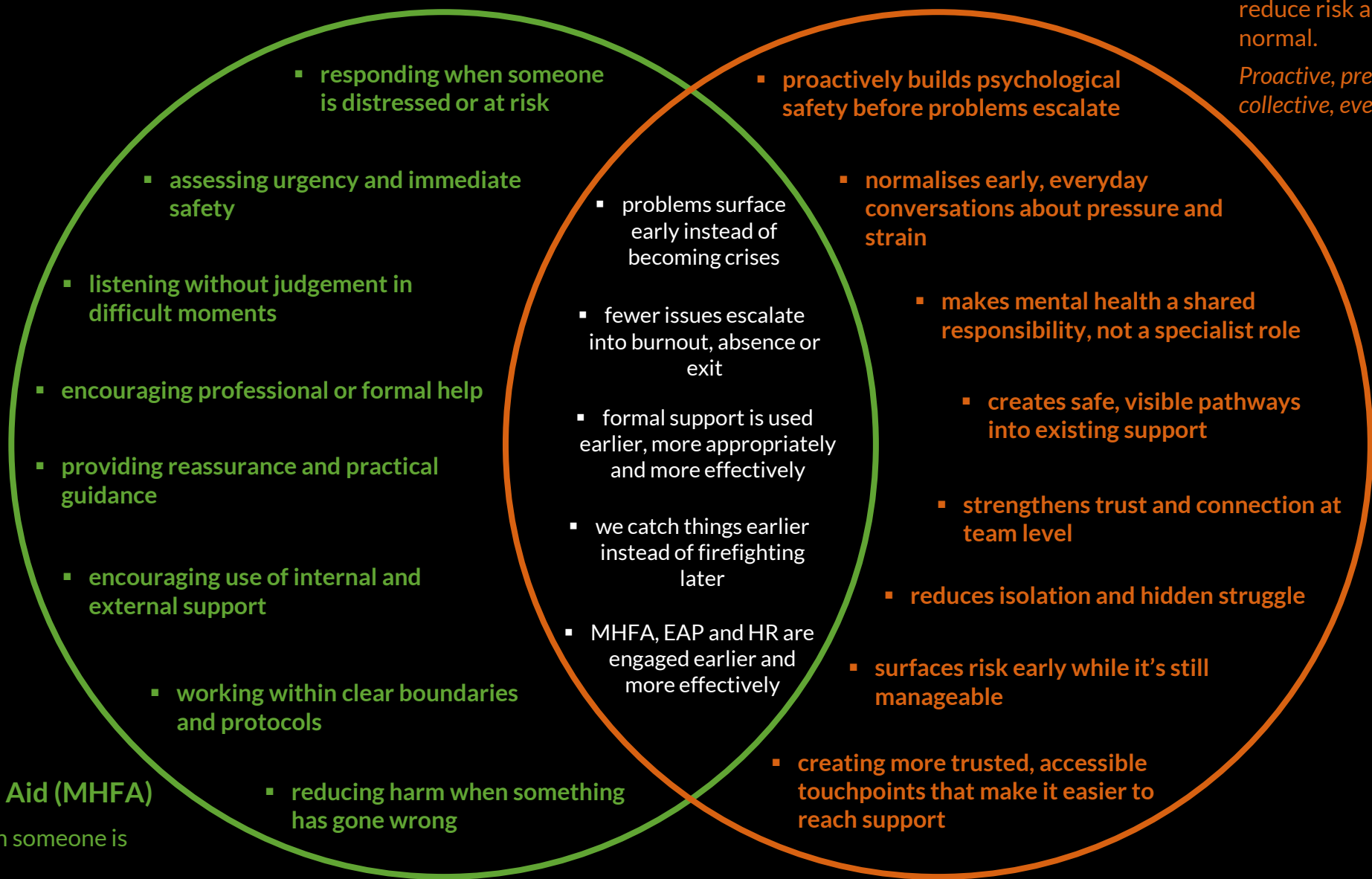
If you're not sure where to start, focus on making your culture more trusting, open and safer for people to speak. Build from there.



### Support Circle

Purpose: Create the conditions that reduce risk and make early support normal.

*Proactive, preventative, cultural, collective, everyday*



### Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Purpose: Respond when someone is struggling or in crisis.

*Reactive, individual, incident-based, safety-focused*

- responding when someone is distressed or at risk
- assessing urgency and immediate safety
- listening without judgement in difficult moments
- encouraging professional or formal help
- providing reassurance and practical guidance
- encouraging use of internal and external support
- working within clear boundaries and protocols
- reducing harm when something has gone wrong

- proactively builds psychological safety before problems escalate
- normalises early, everyday conversations about pressure and strain
- makes mental health a shared responsibility, not a specialist role
- creates safe, visible pathways into existing support
- strengthens trust and connection at team level
- reduces isolation and hidden struggle
- surfaces risk early while it's still manageable
- creating more trusted, accessible touchpoints that make it easier to reach support

- problems surface early instead of becoming crises
- fewer issues escalate into burnout, absence or exit
- formal support is used earlier, more appropriately and more effectively
- we catch things earlier instead of firefighting later
- MHFA, EAP and HR are engaged earlier and more effectively