



Headlines
promoting mental health in the media

Working with  mind

Managing our mental health

A guide for journalists and media professionals



WITH SUPPORT FROM



Helpful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to ‘mental health’ in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions to terms used in this guide can be found below.

Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about wellbeing we are referring to mental wellbeing.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we’re also coping with feeling restless, confused, short-tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems

These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

Burnout

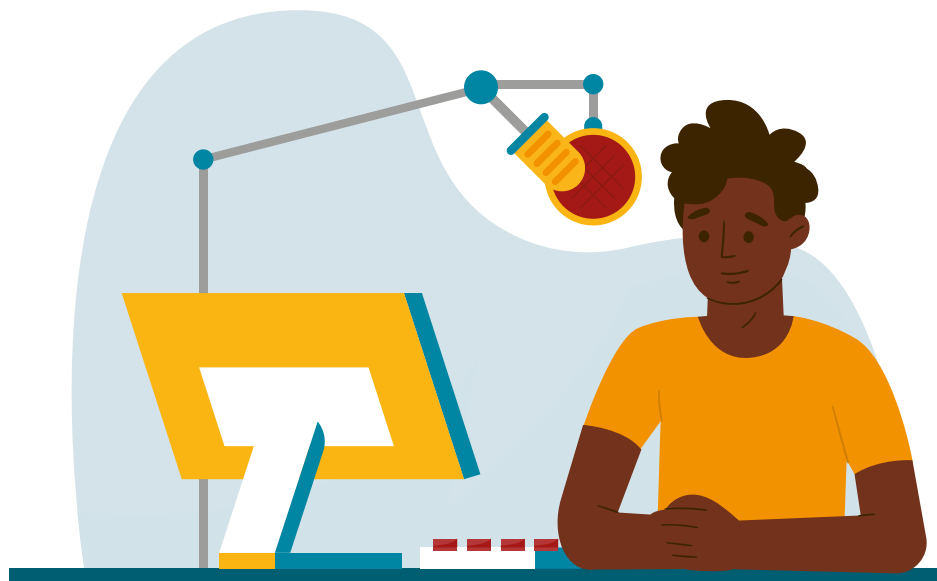
Burnout isn’t technically a diagnosis, but instead refers to a collection of symptoms. You may feel exhausted, have little motivation for your job, feel irritable or anxious and you may see a dip in your work performance.

Introduction

Going back two decades, research has shown that journalists are largely resilient. But we also know that – regardless of resilience levels – many of our colleagues are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

The past two years have been incredibly difficult for many of us working in the news media. Many of the challenges that impacted the mental health of journalists in the months and years before the global pandemic have been exacerbated by Covid.

These include financial pressures as well as job insecurity, a rise in attacks against journalists online and offline, increased workload and reduced resources, relentless breaking news, the pressure to be connected, the fresh challenge of remote working which has created isolation and a sense of disconnect for many, as well as highlighting issues around racial and social inequity, and the added stressors on journalists of reporting from their own communities during a global health crisis.



We want to work with all journalists – whether they are freelancers or newsroom leaders – to create environments where everyone feels safe to acknowledge, support and achieve good mental health at work.

We believe such levels of anxiety are unprecedented in journalism. At the same time, we know that our industry has historically struggled to address issues around mental health, and with a lack of support and structural barriers, many of our colleagues and friends have had to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

At **Headlines Network**, we want to work with all journalists – whether they are freelancers or newsroom leaders – to create environments where everyone feels safe to acknowledge, support and achieve good mental health at work.

In late 2021, we launched a pilot series of workshops for journalists across the UK at different stages of their careers. More than 120 journalists from diverse backgrounds, media and geographical regions participated in the programme.

This guide has been made possible with the support of the **Google News Initiative**. It is drawn from our recognition of the realities of the journalism industry, combined with insights from **Mind**, the leading mental health charity, and good practice tips collated during our workshop conversations with colleagues. We are grateful to all of them for supporting the creation of this work.

Managing our mental health

If you've taken a flight before, you'll have heard the safety advice to put on your own oxygen mask before helping someone else. Mental health begins with the letters, ME. And yet so often we put others' needs above our own.

What is self-care?

Self-care refers to the things we can do to look after our own mental health. Knowing and practising the steps we can take to support our mental wellbeing can help us feel better, sleep better and have better working relationships with the people around us.

However, self-care doesn't look the same for everyone.

It may be different for journalists who are running large organisations, those working in small newsrooms, people who form part of a cross-functional team in a busy setting or those who are freelancers.

What works for you may also be different to what works for a colleague or a family member, and may be as much related to your personal circumstances as your professional one. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, so you'll need to experiment and learn what suits you best in terms of supporting your mental wellbeing.

But we know that self-care isn't a priority in journalism. The pandemic has changed our working patterns, with many of us working longer hours and, as a result, the boundaries between our professional and personal lives have blurred. When we feel hyper-connected online but physically disconnected from our work colleagues and cultures, it's even more important that we take intentional steps to connect with others and prioritise our mental health.

Practising self-care activities helps us find time for ourselves, and recharge after stressful or busy periods.

Plan for self-care

Self-care is vital for protecting your mental health – so it's helpful to make it a part of your schedule. Often the times when you feel you don't 'deserve' it or can't make time for self-care are when you need it most.

Self-care doesn't have to be expensive or complicated.

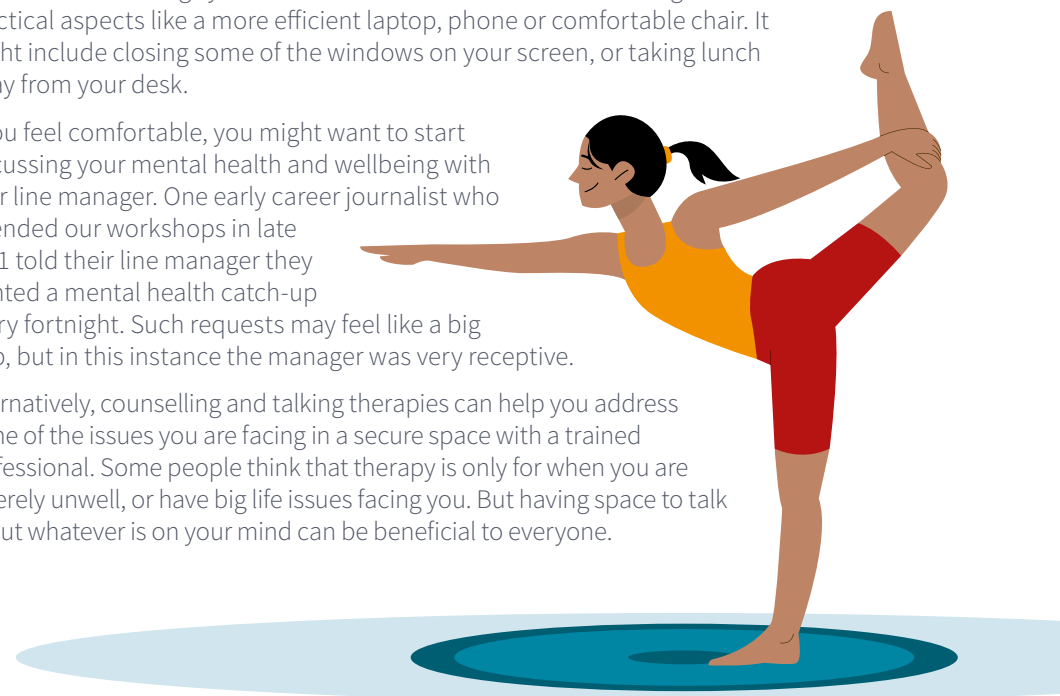
Start with something simple. You can choose not to look at your phone or work emails for a few minutes and build up from there. You can limit the platforms you communicate on and establish breaks away from your phone or desk.

You can also carve out calendar time when you're not in meetings. This may seem like a difficult thing to do at the start, but with practice, it can become a manageable effort – and pay dividends.

Think about the things you need to feel better at work too. This might include practical aspects like a more efficient laptop, phone or comfortable chair. It might include closing some of the windows on your screen, or taking lunch away from your desk.

If you feel comfortable, you might want to start discussing your mental health and wellbeing with your line manager. One early career journalist who attended our workshops in late 2021 told their line manager they wanted a mental health catch-up every fortnight. Such requests may feel like a big leap, but in this instance the manager was very receptive.

Alternatively, counselling and talking therapies can help you address some of the issues you are facing in a secure space with a trained professional. Some people think that therapy is only for when you are severely unwell, or have big life issues facing you. But having space to talk about whatever is on your mind can be beneficial to everyone.



Relax and reduce stress

Find ways to relax

If there's something that helps you relax, try to make time for it in your day. For example, this could be making time to read, attending a class, listening to music or stepping away from your computer to cook a meal. If you are struggling to relax, you may find it beneficial to visit Mind's [pages on relaxation](#) for tips and exercises you can try at home and at work.

Take a break if you need to

If you're feeling overwhelmed by a stressful situation, try to take a break. There may be an inclination to keep working on a news story, particularly if there is an upcoming deadline. A change of scene can do wonders, both to help you to relax and relieve feelings of anxiety, but also to allow you to come back to work after a few minutes with a fresh perspective and frequently more energy and motivation.

Do something you enjoy

Journalism is a fast-paced industry and it may feel like you don't have time for other activities. But finding something outside of journalism that you enjoy can positively impact your mental health. And it doesn't need to be anything major. Try starting with something small, like spending time outside in nature, reading, practising something creative such as doodling, drawing or journaling.

Give yourself some tech-free time

If you find that being on your phone or computer a lot is making you feel more busy and stressed, try to take a break. This could be for just a few minutes at the start, building up to an hour or two – or something more regular such as downing your 'tech tools' at a certain time each day. If you find this difficult, try putting your phone in another room or setting an alarm to time yourself.



It's about finding your own mental pause button that works for you.



Try mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment and our physical senses, using techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga. It's been shown to help people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings. This means that instead of being overwhelmed by your feelings, it becomes easier to manage them.

One of our journalism colleagues told us they stare at a candle flame for 20 seconds to reset themselves and slow their breathing. Another sips a warm or fizzy drink, holding it in their mouth for five seconds while focusing on the sensation the bubbles or the warmth makes on their tongue.

It's about finding your own mental pause button that works for you.

You can find an example of a breathing exercise below and find more information about mindfulness on [Mind's website](#).

Focus on: Breathing

Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer. It takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

Our breathing window exercise was specifically developed for people working in high-pressure and time-poor environments.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.

Position your feet square on the ground, a hips' width apart.

Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

Repeat the cycle four to five times.

Give yourself a moment to reflect on how more relaxed you feel.

Stretch and gather your thoughts before returning to work.





Focus on: Boundaries

Creating boundaries between our work and home lives can help us let go at the end of a work-day, relax, recharge and enjoy our home life free from or with reduced work pressures.

A clear signal at the end of the day can be beneficial to setting this boundary between what is work and what is your own 'personal time'. If working in the office, this boundary might be your commute or if you're now working from home, going for a walk or a run. In essence, creating a bridge between the beginning and end of the working day – wherever you are located – is important.

Many journalists are required to be accessible outside of working hours, whether that is by email or through digital platforms such as Teams or Slack. However, it is still important to manage your notifications on any personal or professional devices to protect your personal time.

Have a discussion with your team about preferred ways to communicate and times when you are available. This will help set and sustain boundaries, and is really important for working in hybrid environments.

Connect with others

Connecting with others can help us have a greater sense of belonging and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. It can also provide a support system to draw upon when we are finding times tough and enable us to support others when they need us.

The network effect

Journalism thrives on connection and networking. There are now scores of societies, clubs and online networks for journalists to join. As well as offering job and training opportunities, many serve as safe spaces to offer comfort and emotional support. Many online journalism communities now exist for journalists from underrepresented or vulnerable backgrounds. Such networks have offered much-needed support for journalists, particularly during lockdown or times when they were working from home or remotely. Finding the journalism community for you may only be an internet search away but we have also listed some in the 'Signposting to support' section below.

Talk to someone you trust

Opening up to a trusted colleague can help you feel heard and supported. This may not always be your line manager or a newsroom leader. Does your journalism workplace have colleagues who are trained Mental Health First Aiders? Or perhaps there is someone who is responsible for the wellbeing agenda in your workplace?

Try peer support

If you're finding things hard, talking to people who have similar feelings or experiences can help. This could be face to face at a peer support group, or through an online community like Mind's [Side by Side](#). You can also visit Mind's pages on [peer support](#) to find out more.

Volunteer

Using your time to help others can give you a sense of purpose, help you meet people and boost your self-esteem. See the [Do It](#) website for volunteering opportunities.



Look after your physical health

Looking after our physical health can help us maintain our mental health. Taking part in physical activity and being mindful of what we eat and drink can help us manage busy periods and difficult times.

Keep hydrated

Changing our routine, work schedule and travel can all affect when we drink or what fluids we drink, so it's important to be mindful and ensure we're keeping ourselves hydrated with the right liquids throughout the day. There's more information on the [NHS website](#).

Think about your diet

There is a plethora of advice about how eating or avoiding certain foods can affect our mental health. Not all of this is backed by strong evidence. We do know that eating regular meals and a healthy, balanced diet can help our mood and energy levels. The NHS has helpful information on [how to maintain a balanced diet](#). If you or a colleague have a difficult relationship with food or body image, the following practical advice on [eating problems](#) may help.



Try to avoid drugs and alcohol

It may feel like a cliché, but many journalists do revert to things like alcohol and drugs. It may be tempting to use them to temporarily overcome difficult periods. But in the long run they can make us feel worse. See Mind's pages on [recreational drugs and alcohol](#) to find out more.

Keep active

Try to build physical activity into your daily routine, if possible. It doesn't have to be anything big, like running a marathon. If you aren't used to being active, start off small and try to find something you enjoy.

Mind's pages on [physical activity and your mental health](#) have ideas for most ages and abilities, including things you can do at home. The NHS also has a page of [sitting exercises](#) that you could try.

Top tips to improve your physical activity:

Start small. Try a short walk or join a fun class. Often the hardest thing is lacing up your shoes and heading out the door.

Be kind to yourself. Anything more than we normally would do is a step in the right direction. There may be days when you have setbacks, but this doesn't mean you can't still pause, reset and restart.

Build it into your daily routine. Maybe take the stairs rather than the lift. Get off the bus or train a stop earlier and walk the rest of your journey.

Find someone else to share it with. It's often helpful to exercise with someone else or to at least share your plans to do so with someone. This accountability can help and having someone else can help motivate you.

Celebrate your achievements. Give yourself a reward whenever you've done well.

The importance of sleep

Establish a routine

Try and establish a routine around bedtime, to help set a regular sleeping pattern.

Avoid screens

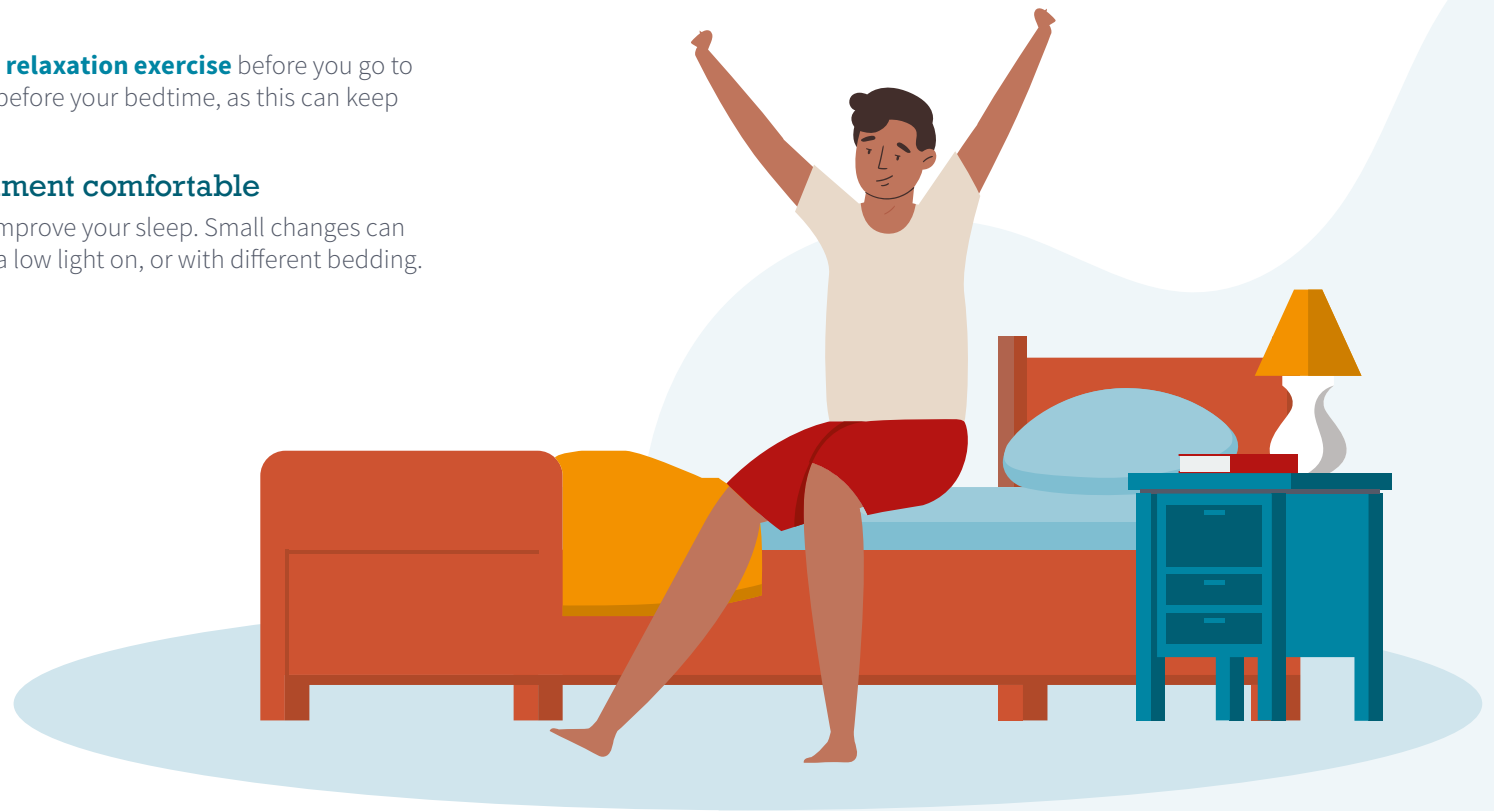
Give yourself some tech-free time before sleep, and avoid bright screens that can affect your sleep.

Try to wind down before bed

Do a relaxing activity, like having a bath, or try a **relaxation exercise** before you go to sleep. It may also help to avoid having caffeine before your bedtime, as this can keep you awake.

Try to make your sleeping environment comfortable

A comfortable sleeping environment can help improve your sleep. Small changes can help. For example, you might sleep better with a low light on, or with different bedding.



Signposting to support

You may be able to access support tools that your employer offers, but you can also access support from the third-party support services available below, particularly if you work as a freelancer or are part of a smaller newsroom.

Mind Infoline

📞 **Telephone: 0300 123 3393**

Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices. The Infoline gives information on types of mental distress, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy. Mind also has a network of nearly 200 local Mind associations providing local services.



Samaritans

📞 **Telephone: 116 123**

Whatever you're going through, Samaritans are there to listen – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Samaritans offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way about whatever's getting to you. They won't judge or tell you what to do, they'll listen to you.

Shout, text support

📞 **Text: SHOUT to 85258**

Shout is a free, confidential 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. The service is anonymous and won't appear on any phone bill.

CALM helpline

📞 **Telephone: 0800 58 58 58**

The CALM helpline is there for anyone who needs to talk confidentially about a tough time they are experiencing. Calls are taken by trained staff who are there to listen, support, inform and signpost you to further information. The helpline is open from 5pm to midnight every day, 365 days a year.

Side by Side, Mind's online community

Side by Side is a supportive online community where you can feel at home talking about your mental health and connect with others who understand what you are going through. We all know what it's like to struggle sometimes, but now there's a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Whether you're feeling good right now, or having a hard time, it's a safe place to share experiences and listen to others. The community is available to all, 24/7. **Side by Side** is moderated daily from 8.30am to midnight.

There are multiple organisations which provide help and support to journalists in the UK. Please note this list is not exhaustive with many more that can be found online.

Dart Center

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is a resource body and think tank for journalists who cover violence, conflict and tragedy around the world.

Google News Initiative

The Google News Initiative works side-by-side with publishers and journalists to build a more sustainable, diverse and innovative news ecosystem. Its journalism resources page lists the best digital tools from Google and beyond.

Journalists' Charity

The UK charity offers confidential advice and support to journalists of all ages and backgrounds working across the industry. It also provides emergency support and financial assistance.

Journalism Diversity Fund

A fund administered by the NCTJ which awards bursaries to aspiring journalists from socially or ethnically diverse backgrounds who do not have the financial means to support themselves through journalism training.

Journo Resources

A non-profit start-up which creates free-to-use resources and runs practical events across the UK, as well as publishing multiple weekly advice features.

LGBTQ+ Journalism Network

A Facebook group which aims to be a supportive community and network for people who identify as LGBTQ+ and work in, or are studying, journalism in the UK.

National Union of Journalists

Works on behalf of staffers and freelancers in broadcasting, national and regional newspapers, photographers, magazine and book titles. It helps members with legal support and training, upholding the health and safety of journalists at work. The union also has active LGBTQ+ and disabled members' councils.

PressPad

An award-winning social enterprise which links young people with work experience in London with journalists who can offer a spare room.

Rory Peck Trust

An international NGO that provides direct financial and practical support to freelance journalists and their families globally.

The Society of Editors

An industry body for 400 members in national, regional and local newspapers, magazines, radio, television and digital media, media lawyers and academics in journalism education. It campaigns for freedom of speech, the public's right to know, high standards in journalism and diversity in newsrooms.

Women in Journalism

A not-for-profit organisation that helps UK women journalists be empowered in managing their careers. Runs a mentoring scheme for 100+ women each year from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds in addition to a busy events programme.

These guidelines were co-authored by Hannah Storm and John Crowley at Headlines Network and Andrew Berrie and Emma Mamo at Mind. They were designed by Mary Schrider.



Headlines comprises founder Hannah Storm and John Crowley. Over the last two decades they have led newsrooms, journalism safety charities and run news sites. Both are qualified mental health first aiders and bring knowledge and lived experience around mental wellbeing. headlines-network.com

Working with  mind

Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales (registered charity number 219830). Mind provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Mind campaigns to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. mind.org.uk

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