



Seeking help for a mental health problem

This resource is a guide to taking the first steps, making empowered decisions and getting the right support for you.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

Contents

Where to start	2
How can I open up to friends and family?	5
What should I say to my GP?.....	6
What might happen when I talk to my doctor?.....	9
How can I make sense of my options?	12
How can I get actively involved in my care?.....	14
How do I make sure people listen to me?.....	16
What barriers might I face?.....	18
How could the third sector help?	22
How can I seek help through the private sector?	23
How can I help someone else seek help?.....	25
Useful contacts	30

Where to start

If you're in crisis and need urgent help, visit our webpage on [getting help in a crisis](#) for more information on emergency support options, including the following:

- If you don't feel you can keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help:
 - Go to any Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.
 - Call 999 and ask for an ambulance to take you to A&E.
 - Ask someone else to call 999 for you or take you to A&E.
- If you need urgent support but don't want to go to A&E, you could:
 - call Samaritans on freephone 116 123 – they're always open and are there to listen
 - contact your GP surgery and ask for an emergency appointment
 - contact NHS 111 (England) or NHS Direct 0845 46 47 (Wales)
 - contact your local crisis team (CRHT), if you're under their care.

If you want to help someone else, you can visit our webpage on [how to help someone else seek help](#), including how to help someone else in an emergency.

When should I seek help?

Seeking help is often the first step towards getting and staying well, but it can be hard to know how to start or where to turn to. It's common to feel unsure, and to wonder whether you should try to handle things on your own. But **it's always ok to ask for help** – even if you're not sure you are experiencing a specific [mental health problem](#).

You might want to seek help if you're:

- worrying more than usual
- finding it hard to enjoy your life
- having thoughts and feelings that are difficult to cope with, which have an impact on your day-to-day life
- interested to find more support or treatment.

Who can I turn to?

There are lots of options for support out there, although you might find some are more suitable for you, or more easily available. There's no wrong order to try things in – different things work for different people at different times.

Your doctor (GP)

For many of us, our local GP practice is the first place we go when we're unwell (known as primary care). Your doctor is there to help you with your mental health as well as your physical health.

They could:

- make a diagnosis
- offer you support and treatments (such as [talking therapies](#) and [medication](#))
- refer you to a mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist
- recommend local support options.

To find out more see our pages on:

- [talking to your GP](#)
- [what might happen at the appointment](#)
- [making sense of your options](#)
- [being actively involved](#)
- [making yourself heard](#)

“The first time I went to my GP about my depression, I was completely terrified. I had suffered in silence for 6 months, and was so ashamed that I couldn't ‘fix’ it myself.”

A trained therapist

Trained therapists and counsellors provide a range of different therapies through the NHS, for which your doctor could refer you (known as secondary care). In some cases you might be able to contact them directly.

To find out more see our page on:

- [finding a therapist](#)

Charity and third sector organisations

There are many national and local charities which offer various support services, such as:

- [helplines and listening services](#)
- information and signposting
- other services such as peer support, talking therapies, advocacy, crisis care, employment and housing support.

To find out more see our page on:

- [third sector services](#)

Student services

Higher education institutions usually have a student wellbeing centre where enrolled students can go for support.

To find out more see our pages on:

- [student mental health](#)

Workplace support

Some workplaces offer free access to support services such as talking therapies. This is called an Employee Assistance Programme.

To find out more see our pages on:

- [workplace mental health](#)

Friends, family, carers and neighbours

Sometimes it can help to talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling. They could:

- help you to find information
- discuss your options with you
- come with you to appointments
- help out with everyday tasks
- give encouragement and support.

To find out more see our page on:

- [talking to friends and family](#)

Peer support

Peer support brings together people with similar experiences. Your peers can:

- support you and listen to how you're feeling
- offer empathy and understanding
- share experiences, information, suggestions for self-care and support options.

To find out more see our pages on:

- [peer support](#)

Community support services

If your mental health problems are severe or longer lasting, your doctor can put you in touch with specialist mental health services.

These might include community mental health teams (CMHTs), social care services, residential care services, and crisis resolution and home treatment teams (CRHTs or 'crisis teams').

To find out more see our pages on:

- [support services](#)
- [community and social care rights](#)
- [crisis and home resolution teams \(CHRTs\)](#)

Seeking help isn't always easy, especially when you're not feeling well. It can take time and may not be straightforward. But it's important to remember that **you're not alone**, and that **you deserve support**. If you're finding it difficult to access these services, or you've already tried these options and aren't sure where to turn next, see our page on [facing and overcoming barriers](#).

And remember that a lot of what you do to look after yourself will be during your day-to-day life – not just healthcare appointments – so it's always worth thinking about what helps you feel better in general. (See our pages on [self-care](#) and [improving and maintaining your wellbeing](#) for ideas.)

How can I open up to friends and family?

It can sometimes be really difficult to talk about your feelings with friends or family. It's common to feel worried about upsetting people you care about, and feel nervous about what people will think, or how it might affect your relationships.

You may feel more comfortable opening up to friends or family than professionals, or you may find it easier to approach a professional (such as your doctor) first. There's no right or wrong way round. But the people closest to us can often be a valuable source of support.

Whenever you feel ready, these tips might help you start the conversation:

- **Find a method of communication that feels right for you.** This might be a face-to-face conversation, or you might find it easier to talk on the phone or write down how you feel in a letter.
- **Find a suitable time and place.** There may not be a 'good' time, but it can help if you're somewhere quiet and comfortable, and are unlikely to be disturbed for a while.
- **Practice what you want to say.** You could do this in your head or make some notes. Phrases such as "I've not been feeling like myself lately" or "I'm finding it hard to cope at the moment" might provide a starting point.

- **Offer them relevant information and examples.** If you've found a useful description in a book or online, or seen someone on television or in a film saying something that feels right to you, you could use this to help explain what you're experiencing.
- **Be honest and open.** It can sometimes feel uncomfortable sharing something so personal, but explaining how your feelings are affecting your life may help others to understand.
- **Suggest things they could do to help.** This might just be listening and offering emotional support – or there may be practical help you need (see examples in our page on [helping someone else seek help](#)).
- **Don't expect too much from one conversation.** Understanding mental health problems can take time, and some people may be shocked or react badly at first. It's important to give them some time to process what you've told them. But if possible, plan to come back to the conversation with them again, to give you more opportunities to explain what you're going through.

For more information about talking to your friends about your mental health, visit the [Mental Health Foundation website](#).

The Time to Change website also has some [videos of people sharing their experiences about opening up](#).

What should I say to my GP?

We believe that everyone deserves the right mental health support from their GP practice. To find out more about Mind's work in this area, see our [Find the Words campaign](#).

It's not always easy to start a conversation about your personal feelings with your GP – someone you may hardly know. And it can be especially hard when you're not feeling well. But it's usually the first step towards working out what kind of treatment and support might help you.

Here are some things to consider:

- **Be honest and open.**
- **Focus on how you feel**, rather than what diagnosis you might meet.
- Try to explain how you've been feeling **over the past few months or weeks**, and anything that has changed.
- **Use words and descriptions that feel natural to you** – you don't have to say specific things to get help.
- **Try not to worry that your problem is too small** or unimportant – everyone deserves help and your doctor is there to support you.

“Being as open and honest as possible, even though extremely difficult, is what has assisted me.”

How can I prepare for an appointment?

GP appointments are usually very short, and if you're feeling nervous you might forget to say things you think are important. Being prepared can help you get the most out of your appointment. Here are some suggestions:

- **Write down what you want to say in advance**, and take your notes in with you.
- **Give yourself enough time to get to your appointment**, so that you don't feel rushed or stressed.
- **If you're feeling nervous, let your doctor know.**
- **Think about taking someone with you** to support you, like a close friend or family member.
- If you've talked to your family or friends about how you feel, **practise what you might say to your GP** with them.
- **Highlight or print out any information** you've found that helps you explain how you're feeling.
- **Think about the outcome that you want from your appointment** (such as access to therapy).
- If you have a few things to talk about, you can **ask for a longer appointment** (you'll need to do this when you're booking it in).

You can download our leaflet to help you talk to your GP from our [Find the Words page](#).

How do I find and register with a GP?

Everyone in England and Wales has the right to register with a GP and use their services. You don't need to provide a fixed address or show ID. If you live in England you can use the [NHS online 'service search' tool](#) for finding GP surgeries near you. If you live in Wales, you can find your nearest surgery by visiting the [NHS Direct website](#). When registering with a GP surgery, you might like to think about:

- how close it is to your home or work
- if its opening times are convenient for you
- whether the doctors have any specialist training in mental health
- looking for patient reviews on the surgery's website.

NHS Choices has a [detailed guide on registering with a GP](#), including information on how to register if you are:

- homeless or away from home
- visiting or living in the UK temporarily

- a former armed forces member.

What might happen when I talk to my doctor?

What happens at the appointment?

In your appointment your doctor will probably **make an initial assessment** by asking questions about:

- your mood, thoughts and behaviours – sometimes by using questionnaires or forms which measure depression and anxiety
- your lifestyle and any recent events in your life that might be affecting your wellbeing
- any sleep problems or changes in appetite
- your medical history, and your family's medical history.

They might also **check your physical health** to rule out any physical illness. This could involve:

- taking your blood pressure
- measuring your weight
- doing some blood tests.

What might the outcome of my appointment be?

The outcome of your appointment will usually depend on:

- what you say
- what your doctor thinks might help
- what kind of support you would like.

For example, your doctor might suggest one or more of the following options:

- **Monitoring** – your doctor might ask you to come back for another appointment before offering any treatment.
- **Diagnosis** – your doctor might give you a diagnosis, for example of [depression](#) or [anxiety](#). This doesn't always happen after your first appointment and may only be possible after monitoring you over time or referring you to a specialist.
- **Lifestyle changes** – your doctor may suggest that making small changes to your exercise, eating and sleep habits may help you to manage your symptoms.

- **Referral** – your doctor could refer you to another service, such as [talking therapies](#) (sometimes called psychological wellbeing services).
- **Self-referral** – your doctor could give you details of a service you can contact yourself, for example psychological wellbeing services or a community mental health team (CMHT).
- **Medication** – your doctor might offer to prescribe you [psychiatric medication](#). If they do this they should clearly explain what it's for and explain any possible risks and benefits, so you can make an informed choice about whether or not you want to take it.

If you drive, you might have to tell the [Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency \(DVLA\)](#) if you're diagnosed with a mental health problem. (For more information on your right to drive, including when and how to contact the DVLA, see our legal pages on [fitness to drive](#).)

Will everything I tell my doctor be confidential?

In most cases: **yes**. Your doctor should keep whatever you tell them confidential, and ask your permission before sharing it with anyone else. However, they may need to make an exception if they believe that you're at risk of seriously harming yourself, or someone else. In this case they should still try to tell you first so you know what's going on.

Depending on how big they think the risk is, they could:

- **Not tell anyone**, but ask to see you again soon to check how you are, and keep seeing you regularly.
- **Not tell anyone themselves, but ask you to tell other people yourself**. For example, they could ask you to volunteer to go to hospital as an inpatient (called being a [voluntary patient](#)).
- **Tell another health or social care professional**, such as a psychiatrist or social worker, and ask for an [assessment](#) to see if you can be made to go to hospital under a section of the [Mental Health Act](#) (often called being sectioned). The decision to section someone is very serious and can only be taken jointly by a team of approved mental health professionals (AMHPs). (See our legal pages on [sectioning](#) for more information about when it may be legal to section you, and what your rights are.)
- **Tell the police** – but this would only happen if they believe there is a very immediate, serious risk of danger.

If you care for children and are worried about what might happen if you tell your doctor how you're feeling, our pages on [parenting with a mental health problem](#) provide more information.

If you're under 18, [Childline's information on visiting your doctor](#) may answer some more questions you might have about confidentiality.

What's in my medical records, and who can see them?

Whenever you use an NHS service in England, a record is created for you. These records contain details about the care you've received. One of these is called your Summary Care Record (SCR), which lists key medical information about you, such as allergies, medication and bad reactions. You can also ask your doctor to add extra details into your SCR, such as your crisis care plan (if you have one).

Certain healthcare professionals can then access your SCR electronically in different places, such as in your doctor's office and in hospital (with your permission). This can help them provide better care – especially in an emergency.

There are data protection laws in the UK to ensure your health records are kept confidential and secure. You also have a legal right to access [personal information](#) held about you by an organisation, including GPs and hospitals.

To find out more, see:

- Our legal pages on [personal information](#) (explains your rights regarding your personal information, and how to access your medical records).
- NHS Choices information on [your health and care records](#).
- NHS Choices information on ['Can I access someone else's medical records?'](#)

What if I don't want a diagnosis?

Receiving a diagnosis can be a positive experience. You might feel relieved that you can put a name to what you're experiencing, and it can help you and your doctor discuss what kind of treatment might work best for you. However, not everyone feels this way. You might have complicated feelings about what a diagnosis would mean for you – or you might come to disagree with it entirely. It's important to remember that a diagnosis doesn't have to shape your entire life, and may come to be a relatively minor part of your identity.

(See our [introduction to mental health problems](#) for more information on diagnosis, stigma around mental health problems, and recovery.)

How can I make sense of my options?

Your doctor is supposed to help you give **informed consent** to any treatment they offer before treating you. This means that:

- **You understand what you're agreeing to** (or saying no to), including the benefits, the risks, and what other options you have.
- **You're agreeing (or refusing) freely and willingly**, meaning you don't feel pressured or rushed into something by other people (including doctors and family members).

- **You're mentally capable of making your own decision**, which is legally called 'having capacity'. (For information what this means see our legal page on [capacity](#)).

Your doctor should help you by:

- Explaining the pros and cons of different options in a clear and balanced way.
- Providing written information for you to read (in print or online).
- Giving you enough time to make a decision you're happy with.
- Giving you the opportunity to actively say 'yes' or 'no'.
- Answering any questions you ask honestly, and showing respect for your decisions.

What can I do if I don't understand my doctor?

Unfortunately, not all doctors find it easy to make themselves clear at first. If you're still confused about your options after talking to your doctor, you can:

- **Tell them so.** They might not realise you don't understand.
- Keep asking them to **give you more information**, and explain what it means.
- Ask for information **in a different format**. (If you have a learning disability, ask for Easy Read format).
- **Ask another healthcare professional** to explain. (Pharmacists can help if you're confused about medication.)
- **Discuss your thoughts** with friends and family. You may find that just talking to someone outside of your healthcare team helps you work out what your questions and concerns are.
- If English isn't your first language, you can:
 - **ask for a translation** of any written information
 - **ask your doctor to provide an interpreter** for your appointment
 - ask someone who can interpret to come with you to your appointment.
- **Speak to someone with similar experiences** (sometimes called [peer support](#)).
- **Contact an advocate** (see our pages on [advocacy](#)).
- **Contact [Mind's Infoline](#)** for information and support.

The kinds of treatment and support you want to try may change over time, and it's common to feel unsure. Remember: **it's OK to change your mind.**

What questions could I ask my doctor?

You might want to ask:

- Why have they have chosen one form of treatment over another?
- How do they think it will help you?
- What are the possible side effects or disadvantages of the treatment you've been offered? How likely are they to happen?
- Are there any other options to choose from? (Your doctor may not always be able to offer exactly what you'd like, but they should always explain the reasons.)

You might want to prepare some questions before your appointment, but you can ask questions before, during and after treatment.

(See our page on [what to know before taking medication](#) for more ideas.)

Could I ever be given a treatment I haven't agreed to?

Usually no. But there are some very specific circumstances in which you might not have a choice about your treatment. These include:

- **If you're in hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act** (often called being sectioned). In this case your doctor should give you information and listen to your opinion, but they might legally be able to treat you against your wishes. (See our legal pages on [sectioning](#) for more information.)
- **If you're under a community treatment order (CTO)** – you may be given a CTO when you leave hospital after being sectioned. (See our legal pages on [CTOs](#) for more information.)
- **If you 'lack mental capacity'** – this is a legal term meaning you aren't currently considered able to understand information or make decisions (see our legal page on [capacity](#) for more information.)

See our legal pages on [agreeing to treatment](#) for more information about your legal rights to agree or refuse a treatment.

How can I get actively involved in my care?

Making decisions about your treatment should be a conversation, involving both you and your healthcare professionals. This is sometimes called **shared decision making**.

Remember that it takes two kinds of expertise to find the right treatment for you:

Professional expertise on:

- medical knowledge
- different diagnoses
- what might be effective treatment.

Your own expertise on:

- your experiences
- how you feel
- what you want.

Can I choose my GP practice, doctor or nurse?

Having a good relationship with your GP can be a really important way of getting the right support. If you're not making progress with your current GP, you can:

- **Ask the receptionist to make you an appointment with a different doctor.** They don't have to say yes, but if they say no then they should give you a reasonable explanation (for example, if your GP surgery is very small or other doctors aren't available on the days you need).
- **Ask to talk to a different type of practitioner**, like a nurse, specialist mental health worker or practice counsellor.
- **Ask your doctor to refer you to a mental health specialist.**
- **Move to a different GP surgery** if there is one in your local area, although you will have to register with them and this could delay seeing someone.
- **Self-refer to another service without your GP** (in some cases). If you live in England you can use the '[Find psychological therapy \(IAPT\) services' tool](#) on the NHS Choices website to find out if there's a self-referral service near you. You may also be able to access therapy without a referral through [third sector services](#).

(See our page on [talking to your GP](#) for tips on getting the most from a GP appointment.)

"My practice nurse was great as a go-between with the GP, who then knew how to handle my appointments and where to suggest we go to for help."

Can I choose my treatment?

When deciding what treatment to offer you, your doctor is likely to follow the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\) guidelines](#). These set out recommendations for different kinds of conditions based on evidence for what helps.

The most common treatments recommended for mental health problems are [talking therapies](#) and [psychiatric medication](#). But treatments work differently from person to

person, and it's not always possible to predict what will suit you best. You might have to try different things to find out what works for you. So it's important to keep talking to your doctor about how you're feeling, and letting them know what you want. (See our pages on [talking to your GP](#), [understanding your options](#) and [making yourself heard](#) for tips.)

"I was involved in choices about my medication. We agreed on a particular antipsychotic because of my issues around weight... and the change happened because of me! That made me feel in charge of my own care."

Can I choose a time and place that suits me?

Whatever treatment you're offered, your healthcare provider should aim to deliver it within a reasonable amount of time and in a reasonable location. You can:

- choose the service closest to where you live, or refuse a service if it's too far away
- ask for home visits (if you find it hard to leave your home)
- ask for an estimate of how long the waiting lists are for suitable therapies (you might decide on a particular treatment because it is available more quickly).

If you're offered medication you can:

- discuss when you will start, how long you will take it and when you will come off it
- ask for a medication review at any time
- ask your doctor for other support while you are waiting (if you need to see a specialist first).

However, **there are likely to be limits to when and where you receive treatment**. Some services only exist in certain areas. And unfortunately, there can be long waiting times to access [talking therapies](#) through the NHS.

(See our page on [facing and overcoming barriers](#) for information on what you can do if the treatment you want isn't available.)

How do I make sure people listen to me?

Seeking help for a mental health problem can feel complicated, and you might sometimes feel like healthcare professionals aren't listening to how you feel. This page covers the following ideas to help you feel more in control and empowered:

- [do your own research](#)
- [understand the guidelines and policies](#)
- [find an advocate](#)

"I feel, as a patient, I am the expert on me. So I know more than anyone else what is going on in my head, and I know what I need."

Do your own research

Although your doctor should give you the information you need to make informed decisions, you can also do your own research. This might help you find other options that you can suggest or ask about. For example, you can:

- **Look for information that is trustworthy and reliable.** One way to do this is to look for information that has the [Information Standard](#) quality mark, which looks like this:



- **Speak to other people with similar experiences** and ask what they found helpful. You may want to do this through an online forum, such as [Elefriends](#) or [HealthTalk](#), or by finding a peer support group (See our information on [finding peer support](#) or ring the [Mind's Infoline](#) who can help you work out what's available in your area).
- **Search online for blogs or videos** from people who've had similar experiences. If you'd like some help doing this safely, see our pages on staying safe online.

"In the past six years I have had counselling, a brief attempt at CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy] and routine meetings with mental health doctors, but the thing I have found most helpful is open online forums full of people like me."

Understand the guidelines and policies

Most aspects of healthcare are covered by clinical guidelines and policies, which outline:

- which treatments are most likely to work for you
- how your healthcare professionals should interact with you in general
- the quality of service they should provide.

Examples of these documents include:

- **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines**, which outline evidence-based treatment options for different conditions. (Find out more on the [NICE website](#).)

- **Confidentiality and data protection policies**, which outline [your rights regarding any personal information](#) your doctor holds about you, and what they must do to keep it private.
- **Codes of practice** for people who are members of professional bodies, for example doctors, nurses and accredited counsellors.
- **Complaints procedures**.

These should be accessible and easy to find using a web search, but you can also ask your doctor or healthcare provider to show them to you.

Find an advocate

An advocate is an independent person who is there to represent your opinion and help make your voice heard. This can be extremely helpful if you are finding it hard to let healthcare professionals know what you want, or you're [facing barriers to getting support](#).

An advocate can:

- come with you to appointments
- help you ask questions and assert your wishes
- support you if you want to make a complaint or appeal any decisions.

A friend, family member or carer might be willing to act as your advocate informally. Or you could consider professional advocacy services. (See our pages on [advocacy](#) for more information, including how to find an advocate.)

“My parents and sister were my speakers for me. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for them and their strength and fighting attitude to get me help.”

What barriers might I face?

Seeking help for a mental health problem can be difficult, and you might sometimes face barriers to getting the treatment you need and deserve. This section covers:

- What if my doctor won't offer me the treatment I want?
- What if the treatment I need isn't available?
- What if I've tried everything and nothing works?
- What if I'm unhappy with how professionals are treating me?

What if my doctor won't offer me the treatment I want?

Sometimes your doctor might not offer you a particular treatment, even when it is available. Possible reasons for this might be:

- **They think it's unlikely to help you.**

- **They think it could be harmful to you** – for example, if you have had previous problems with addiction your doctor might choose not to offer you potentially addictive medication, such as certain tranquillisers.
- **They've overlooked it** – sometimes doctors aren't aware of all local services, or don't remember to let you know that you can use them.

If your doctor won't offer you a particular treatment you can always ask them for an explanation, and ask if there is an alternative that they can suggest.

Can I ask for a second opinion?

You can ask for a second opinion from another GP or psychiatrist and, where possible, your doctor should allow this. They will normally need to make the referral and explain your reasons.

However, you do not have a legal right to a second opinion, so your doctor could refuse. It's harder to get a second opinion from a psychiatrist than a GP because there are fewer of them practising.

"I've found that [my] care has varied widely, and the primary issue I have encountered absolutely everywhere is the lack of signposting to the care options available."

What if the treatment I need isn't available?

Unfortunately, not all treatments are equally available across the country. And even in places where the service you need exists, there can often be very long waiting times to access treatment through the NHS. You can ask your doctor for a different kind of treatment, but this won't always be possible because of cost or availability.

We understand how frustrating and upsetting this can be. You might be able to find an alternative option to explore in our page on [where to start](#), and our section on [what if I've tried everything?](#) might offer more ideas you could try. It's not an option for everyone, but some people consider treatment through the [private sector](#).

Campaigning for change

Mind is campaigning to make sure that everyone has access to crisis care and talking treatments when they need them. [Find out more about what we're doing](#), and see how you can [campaign with us](#).

What if I've tried everything and nothing works?

If you've already explored all the options your doctor has offered, and you haven't found the help you're looking for yet, it can feel like you've tried everything and nothing works. Unfortunately finding the help you need can sometimes be really difficult, and can take time.

But it's important to remember that you're not alone, and that you deserve support.

- **Keep trying – don't give up.** If you've had bad experiences with the people and professionals you've spoken to so far, you could give them another chance – or try again with someone new. (See our pages on [being actively involved](#) and [making yourself heard](#) more tips.)

- **Develop your coping techniques.** Planning positive ways look after yourself while you're on waiting lists can help you cope. (See our page on [self-care for mental health problems](#) for tips.)
- **Talk to people who understand.** Getting support and encouragement from people who've been in a similar situation can be really valuable, even if they can't change what you're going through. (See our pages on [peer support](#) for more information.)
- **Explore any alternatives.** Our information pages on [treatments and therapies](#) could give you more options to discuss with your doctor. There may be something you haven't tried yet that could be helpful.
- **Find an advocate.** An advocate can help you express your views and wishes, and help you access the help and support you deserve (see our pages on [advocacy](#) for more information).
- **Know your rights.** Our [legal pages](#) explain your rights in a range of situations. If you're being treated unfairly by healthcare professionals, [you can complain](#).
- **Talk to Mind.** We're here for you. [Our Infoline](#) can help you explore all your options for support near you, and we have [local Mind branches throughout England and Wales](#) who provide a range of services you may be able to access.

“Getting help can feel like a mammoth task at the beginning and it’s very easy to feel disheartened if the outcome isn’t what you’d hoped for. But there is always somewhere else you can get help and the majority of people working and volunteering in mental health do genuinely care about helping you get the support you need for your recovery.”

What if I'm unhappy with how professionals are treating me?

Unfortunately, some people can have very negative experiences with the healthcare system. Our [legal pages](#) offer lots of information about your legal rights, and what you can do to make sure your rights are being respected.

In some situations you might feel so unhappy with how you've been treated that you want to make a formal complaint about it. This might happen if you feel that:

- you've been treated unfairly by your doctor or another healthcare professional
- your doctor or healthcare provider has made a mistake or failed to provide proper care (this is sometimes called [clinical negligence](#))
- you haven't been offered a service you should have been.

How do I make a complaint?

You can make a complaint by:

- raising your concern directly with your healthcare professional (they should tell you about their complaints procedure if you ask for it)
- using the NHS complaints process, which you can read on the [NHS Choices website](#)
- complaining directly to the General Medical Council (GMC) on the [GMC website](#).

How could the third sector help?

Although the NHS is the largest provider of healthcare in the UK, there are often other support options to help you cope with a mental health problem. These include various community and third sector (charity) organisations such as:

- [local Minds](#)
- counselling centres
- community organisations
- university counselling services (if you are a student).

These kinds of services are **normally free or low cost**, and can offer a range of support, such as:

- [talking therapies](#)
- [peer support](#) (support groups)
- [advocacy](#)
- [arts therapies](#)
- [complementary and alternative therapies](#)
- advice services
- online services, such as forums or live chat.

However, they are not likely to:

- give you a diagnosis
- provide medical services, such as psychiatry
- prescribe [medication](#).

How do I find these kind of services?

These kind of services aren't always easy to find, so it's worth asking around.

- **Doing an internet search** could be a good place to start. You could use a search engine, or try using the [Hub of Hope website](#) which has been set up by Chasing the Stigma (a mental health charity) to help you find local services near you.
- **Your local library or community centre** may know about groups running near you.
- **[Your GP or practice nurse](#)** might recommend local organisations you could contact.

- [Mind's Infoline](#) might also be able to help you find services in your area.
- If you are a student, your **student services department** can let you know if your university or college provides any free counselling services.

You can often self-refer to these services, and you may also be referred by your GP.

How can I seek help through the private sector?

Although it's not an option for many people because of the financial cost, you might feel it's the right choice for you to see a private nurse, doctor, psychiatrist or therapist – either alongside NHS support, or instead of it. This section covers:

- [Why might I decide to go private?](#)
- [How do I access private healthcare or therapy?](#)
- [How do I pay for private healthcare?](#)

Why might I decide to go private?

Some common reasons for considering seeking help through the private sector might be:

- You're not receiving the support you want from your NHS GP.
- You want a second (or third) opinion, and your NHS GP isn't able to provide it.
- You want to access support more quickly, for example if there is a long waiting list for [talking therapies](#) on the NHS in your area.
- You're looking for a specialist treatment or more choice of treatments and providers.
- You want more intensive support, or support over a longer period of time.
- You want access to treatment that isn't available through the NHS.
- You want to attend a private hospital or clinic.

Online healthcare services

Some private companies may provide an online service where you can talk to a registered GP or therapist over video chat, or ask questions via a text messaging service. This is an option you could consider if you find it difficult to attend appointments in person. It may also be less expensive than other private healthcare options.

How do I access private healthcare or therapy?

Private GPs, nurses or clinics

You can:

- ask your NHS GP to refer you or make a suggestion
- search online for a private healthcare provider and contact them directly
- use an online listing service, such as [Patient.co.uk's search facility](#).

Check their qualifications

All doctors (including GPs and psychiatrists) and all nurses (including community psychiatric nurses (CPNs)) must be **properly qualified and registered** to be legally allowed to practice. You can check that they are registered by searching:

- Doctors – the General Medical Council's [List of Registered Medical Practitioners](#).
- Nurses – the [Nursing and Midwifery Council register](#).

You can also ask them directly to show you their qualifications.

"I tried going through the NHS but counselling wasn't available out of work hours, which just wasn't viable for me. I did some research on local therapists in my area, sent a few emails regarding fees and availability, and picked the best fit for me."

Private counsellors or therapists

There are a number of different organisations who can help you find a therapist such as the [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#). Any therapist you find through this website will have signed up to the BACP's ethical framework, which means they must:

- behave in a professional and safe way towards you
- explain their responsibilities regarding confidentiality
- tell you their complaints procedure if you ask for it.

(See our page on [finding a therapist](#) for more information.)

How do I pay for private healthcare?

Private healthcare can be expensive, so you may need to think carefully about how – or if – you will be able to afford it. Private therapy costs will usually depend on:

- what the therapist charges
- how many sessions you go for
- how often you go.

Some private therapists offer a sliding scale of payment depending on your circumstances.

There are two main payment options:

- **Paying the healthcare provider directly.** Your healthcare provider should explain any treatment or appointment costs clearly beforehand. Some providers may have payment plans that allow you to pay in instalments.
- **Taking out private healthcare insurance.** Insurance can cover part or all of the cost of your treatment, depending on your policy. Not all policies cover psychiatric treatment or pre-existing conditions, so before taking out any policy you should check it carefully and make sure you understand what it covers. (See our pages on [insurance cover and mental health](#) for more information.)

How can I help someone else seek help?

Many people experiencing a mental health problem will speak to friends and family before they speak to a health professional, so the support you offer can be really valuable. This section covers:

- What emotional support can I offer?
- What practical support can I offer?
- What can I do if someone doesn't want my help?
- What if they believe things that seem very unusual or scary to me?
- What can I do if it's an emergency?
- How can I look after myself?

If you regularly support someone with a mental health problem you might be considered a carer. See our page on [how to cope when supporting someone else](#) for more information.

What emotional support can I offer?

If someone lets you know that they are experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings, it's common to feel like you don't know what to do or say – but you don't need any special training to show someone you care about them. Often just being there for someone and doing small things can be really valuable. For example:

- **Listen.** Simply giving someone space to talk, and listening to how they're feeling, can be really helpful in itself. If they're finding it difficult, let them know that you're there when they are ready.
- **Offer reassurance.** Seeking help can feel lonely, and sometimes scary. You can reassure someone by letting them know that they are not alone, and that you will be there to help.
- **Stay calm.** Even though it might be upsetting to hear that someone you care about is distressed, try to stay calm. This will help your friend or family member feel calmer too, and show them that they can talk to you openly without upsetting you.

- **Be patient.** You might want to know more details about their thoughts and feelings, or want them to get help immediately. But it's important to let them set the pace for seeking support themselves.
- **Try not to make assumptions.** Your perspective might be useful to your friend or family member, but try not to assume that you already know what may have caused their feelings, or what will help.
- **Keep social contact.** Part of the emotional support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could include involving your friend or family member in social events, or chatting about other parts of your lives.

"I had one friend who helped me by just listening and never judging. Without him my recovery time would have been much longer."

What practical support can I offer?

There are lots of practical things you can do to support someone who is ready to seek help. For example:

- **Look for information that might be helpful.** When someone is seeking help they may feel worried about making the right choice, or feel that they have no control over their situation. Our page on [making yourself heard](#) will give you some ideas on what research you can do, and ways you can help someone think about what might work for them.
- **Help to write down lists of questions** that the person you're supporting wants to ask their doctor, or help to put points into an order that makes sense (for example, most important point first).
- **Help to organise paperwork**, for example making sure that your friend or family member has somewhere safe to keep their notes, prescriptions and records of appointments.
- **Go to appointments with them**, if they want you to – even just being there in the waiting room can help someone feel reassured.
- **Ask them if there are any specific practical tasks you could help with**, and work on those. For example, this could include:
 - offering them a lift somewhere
 - arranging childcare for them
 - taking over a chore or household task.
- **Learn more about the problem they experience**, to help you think about other ways you could support them. Our website provides lots of information about different [types of mental health problems](#), including pages on what friends and family can do to help in each case.

What can I do if someone doesn't want my help?

If you feel that someone you care about is clearly struggling but can't or won't reach out for help, and won't accept any help you offer, it's understandable to feel frustrated, distressed and powerless. But it's important to accept that they are an individual, and that there are always limits to what you can do to support another person.

You can:

- **Be patient.** You won't always know the full story, and there may be reasons why they are finding it difficult to ask for help.
- **Offer [emotional support](#) and reassurance.** Let them know you care about them and you'll be there if they change their mind.
- **Inform them how to seek help when they're ready** (for example, you could show them our pages on [talking to your GP](#) and [what might happen at the appointment](#)).
- **[Look after yourself](#),** and make sure you don't become unwell yourself.

You can't:

- **Force someone to talk to you.** It can take time for someone to feel able to talk openly, and putting pressure on them to talk might make them feel less comfortable telling you about their experiences.
- **Force someone to get help** (if they're over 18, and it's not an [emergency situation](#)). As adults, we are all ultimately responsible for making our own decisions. This includes when – or if – we choose to seek help when we feel unwell.
- **See a doctor for someone else.** A doctor might give you general information about symptoms or diagnoses, but they won't be able to share any specific advice or details about someone else without their agreement.

What if they believe things that seem very unusual or scary to me?

If someone is experiencing reality in a very different way from people around them, they may not realise or agree that seeking help could be useful for them. They may be experiencing [psychosis](#), [mania](#), [hearing voices](#) or feeling very [paranoid](#). In this case, it can also be helpful to:

- **Focus on how their beliefs are making them feel** (for example anxious, scared, threatened or confused), as these feelings will be very real.
- **Avoid confirming or denying their beliefs.** Instead it can help to say something like "I understand that you see things that way, but it's not like that for me."

There are a lot of misunderstandings about what it means to experience psychosis. Lots of people wrongly think that the word 'psychotic' means 'dangerous'. But it's important to remember that in reality, very few people who experience psychosis ever hurt anyone else. (See our page on [stigma and misconceptions](#) for more information.)

What can I do if it's an emergency?

There may be times when your friend or family member needs to seek help more urgently, such as if they:

- have harmed themselves and need medical attention
- are having [suicidal feelings](#), and feel they may act on them
- are putting themselves or someone else at immediate, serious risk of harm.

In this case:

- **If they are not safe by themselves right now** – as long as you feel able to do so, you should stay with them and help them call 999 for an ambulance, or help them get to A&E. They may appreciate it if you can wait with them until they can see a doctor.
- **If they can keep themselves safe for a little while** – you can get quick medical advice by calling NHS Direct on 111 (England) or 0845 46 47 (Wales), or you could help them make an [emergency GP appointment](#) to see a doctor soon. You can encourage them to call the Samaritans on 116 123 at any time of night or day to talk to someone, or try other [telephone support services](#). It may also be helpful to remove things that they could use to harm themselves, particularly if they have mentioned specific things they might use. (See our pages on [supporting someone who feels suicidal](#) for more information.)
- **If you feel personally in danger right now**, or that others are in immediate danger – you can dial 999 and ask for the police to help. You might feel worried about getting someone in trouble, but it's important to put your own safety first.

If you're not in a situation like this right now, but you're worried someone you care about may experience a mental health crisis in the future, it's a good idea to **make a crisis plan with them** to work out what steps you will take to help them in an emergency. (See our page on [planning for a crisis](#) for more information.)

How does someone get sectioned?

In exceptional circumstances it's possible to keep a person in hospital under a section of the [Mental Health Act](#) (often called being sectioned), and treat them without their agreement. The decision to section someone is very serious, and can only be taken by a team of approved mental health professionals (AMHPs).

If you feel someone is at serious, immediate risk and will not approach anyone for help, you can contact their local social services, who can decide to arrange

an [assessment](#) (you can usually find the number for social services on the local council's website).

This is a heavy responsibility, so before taking action it's important that you understand what might happen, and what your loved one's rights are. It might also be a good idea to talk this through with someone you trust.

(See our legal pages on [sectioning](#) and [agreeing to treatment](#) for more information).

How can I look after myself?

Supporting someone else can be challenging. Making sure that you look after your own wellbeing can mean that you have the energy, time and distance to help someone else. For example:

- **Take a break when you need it.** If you're feeling overwhelmed by supporting someone or it's taking up a lot of time or energy, taking some time for yourself can help you feel refreshed.
- **Talk to someone you trust** about how you're feeling. You may want to be careful about how much information you share about the person you're supporting, but talking about your own feelings to a friend can help you feel supported too.
- **Set boundaries and be realistic about what you can do.** Your support is really valuable, but it's up to your friend or family member to seek support for themselves. Remember that small, simple things can help, and that just being there for them is probably helping a lot.
- **Share your caring role with others, if you can.** It's often easier to support someone if you're not doing it alone.

For more ideas about how to keep yourself well, see our pages on [coping when supporting someone else](#), [improving and maintaining your wellbeing](#), and [managing stress](#).

Useful contacts

Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
 - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
 - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 466 6463, legal@mind
 - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

Who else could help?

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

01455 88 33 00

itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

BACP is the membership body for counsellors and therapists. They provide information on different types of therapy and you can search for a therapist by area.

C.A.L.L Mental Health Helpline

callhelpline.org.uk

24 hour free helpline: 0800 132 737

Text: 81066

Offers emotional support and mental health information for people living in Wales.

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

0800 58 58 58 (5pm-midnight)

thecalmzone.net

Listening services, information and support for men who feel down or are in crisis.

HealthTalkOnline

healthtalkonline.org

A place to share experiences and hear from other people facing health problems.

Hub of Hope

hubofhope.co.uk

A searchable online database set up by Chasing the Stigma to help you find grassroots support services near you. You can find out more from [Chasing the Stigma's website](#).

NHS 111

Call: 111

Advice in England when you need medical help fast but it's not an emergency.

NHS Choices service finder

nhs.uk/service-search

Search facility which allows you to look for a health service, including a GP, in your area.

NHS Direct Wales

0845 46 47

nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

Health advice and information service available 24 hours a day, every day for people living in Wales.

Patient.co.uk

patient.co.uk

Offers information about healthcare. Has a directory of health professionals, including information about private healthcare and professional qualifications.

Samaritans

samaritans.org

24-hour freephone helpline: 116 123

jo@samaritans.org

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.

Professional organisations

General Medical Council (GMC)

gmc-uk.org

Provides information about standards for doctors, and runs the UK medical register which doctors must be registered on to practice medicine.

Information Standard

england.nhs.uk/tis

Certification programme for all organisations who produce healthcare information for the public.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

0845 003 7780

nice.org.uk

A clinical standards body which provides evidence-based guidance on conditions and treatments for health care professionals and also for the public.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)

nmc-uk.org

Professional body which regulates and registers all nurses and midwives.

© Mind December 2017
To be revised in 2020.
References are available on request.