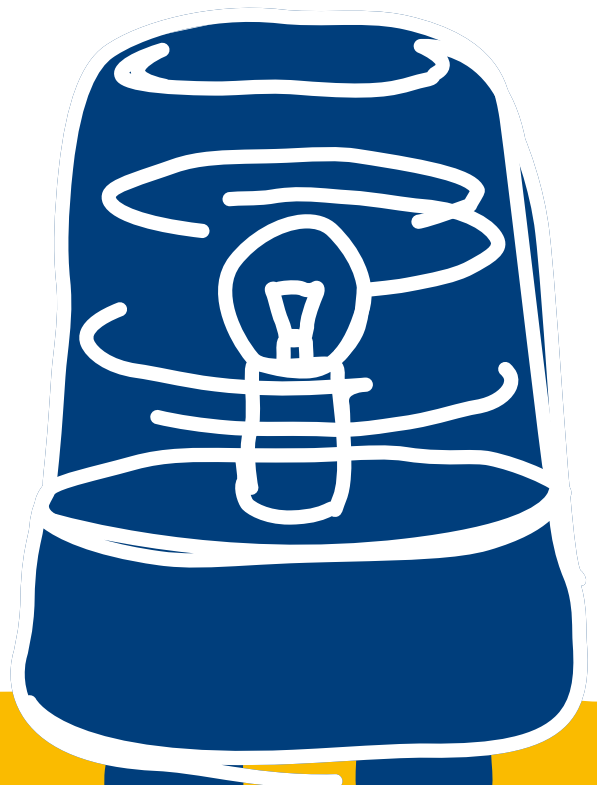


# Speaking Up, Speaking Out workshop

Participant handbook

Name: .....



# What the handbook contains

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All text in [purple](#) links you to more information or resources.

If you are reading this guide in print, you will be able to find all resources or links to those resources in the online version of this document at [mind.org.uk/bluelightSUSO](https://mind.org.uk/bluelightSUSO).

# Section 1: Setting expectations and creating a safe environment

## The workshop will be covering:

- Blue light services and mental health
- The Blue Light Champion role
- Mental health and stigma
- Reflection and storytelling
- Boundaries
- Confidentiality and safeguarding
- Looking after your wellbeing.

## We hope you will come away with the following:

- Improved understanding of the Blue Light Champion role and what it means for you.
- A basic plan of one thing you would like to do as a Blue Light Champion.
- The ability to identify ways to prepare and protect yourself if you choose to speak out about your own personal experiences of stress, anxiety, low mood or other mental health problems.
- Awareness of mental health, how to broach the issue and how to signpost individuals.
- Understanding of how to initiate a conversation about mental health, maintain boundaries and how to handle disclosure.
- Increased confidence in supporting colleagues living with or experiencing a mental health problem.
- Increased confidence in managing your own mental health as a Blue Light Champion.



# Section 2: Blue Light services and mental health

## 2.1 The Blue Light Programme and research

In 2015 Mind launched the Blue Light Programme to provide mental health support for emergency services staff and volunteers from ambulance, fire, police and search and rescue services across England and Wales.

### Why is this needed?

- We all have mental health just as we have physical health.
- We know that 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem in any given year. This includes those working within the emergency services.

Mind conducted some initial scoping research at the end of 2014, including focus groups and a survey that received over 3,500 responses. From this independent research we know if you work or volunteer for the police, search and rescue, fire or ambulance services, that you're more at risk of experiencing a mental health problem than the general population, but are less likely to access support.

We found staff and volunteers tend to give long periods of service, meaning they can experience extended exposure to high levels of stress and trauma over time. This can have profound effects on their mental health – 9 out of 10 of those we surveyed had experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point whilst working for the emergency services.

However, our research also found that:

- 7 out of 10 think their organisation does not encourage them to talk about mental health.
- Over half were not aware of the mental health support their organisation offers.
- 44% thought colleagues would be treated differently in a negative way if they disclosed a mental health problem at work.

Many of those surveyed experienced symptoms of stress and anxiety such as loss of sleep, loss of appetite and anger but were still reluctant to seek support.

**I was going to work almost crying because I was that depressed. But I loved my job and that was the frustrating thing; I couldn't tell anyone because of the stigma at work.**

Zoe, police service

**In the ambulance service, we like to have this feeling that we're bulletproof, and sometimes you can feel a bit ashamed to admit that there's something wrong with you. But we're humans, not robots, and I want people to know that they shouldn't be afraid to talk and seek help if they need it.**

Anon, ambulance service



## Resources and further information

- **Research findings:** Mind has carried out a large amount of research into the mental health of emergency services, the most effective ways to support them and the impact of our work with the emergency services so far. You can find all of that research [here](#).
- **Blue Light Stories:** Ed, Zoe, Richard, Izzy, Helen, David and Andrew have all worked in the emergency services and have all experienced mental health problems. They share their experiences [here](#).

## Notes

[illegible]

## 2.2 Mental health

Mental wellbeing describes your mental state – how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. Our mental wellbeing can change, from day to day, month to month or year to year. Mind

If you have good mental health you'll be able to:

- feel relatively confident in yourself
- feel and express a range of emotions
- feel engaged with the world around you
- live and work productively
- cope with the stresses of daily life and manage times of change and uncertainty.

Mental wellbeing is just as important as physical wellbeing, and you need to maintain both in order to stay fit and healthy.

## What can affect mental wellbeing?

We all have times when we have low mental wellbeing – when we feel sad or stressed, or find it difficult to cope.

Your mental wellbeing can be affected by work-related factors like:

- repeated exposure to traumatic events
- workload pressures
- long working hours
- lone working
- dealing with people who may be physically or verbally abusive.

Your mental wellbeing can also be affected by other things in your life, for example, if you:

- suffer some sort of loss
- experience loneliness
- have relationships problems
- are worried about money.

Sometimes, there is no clear reason why we experience a period of poor mental wellbeing.





**We all have mental health, some of us have mental health problems.**

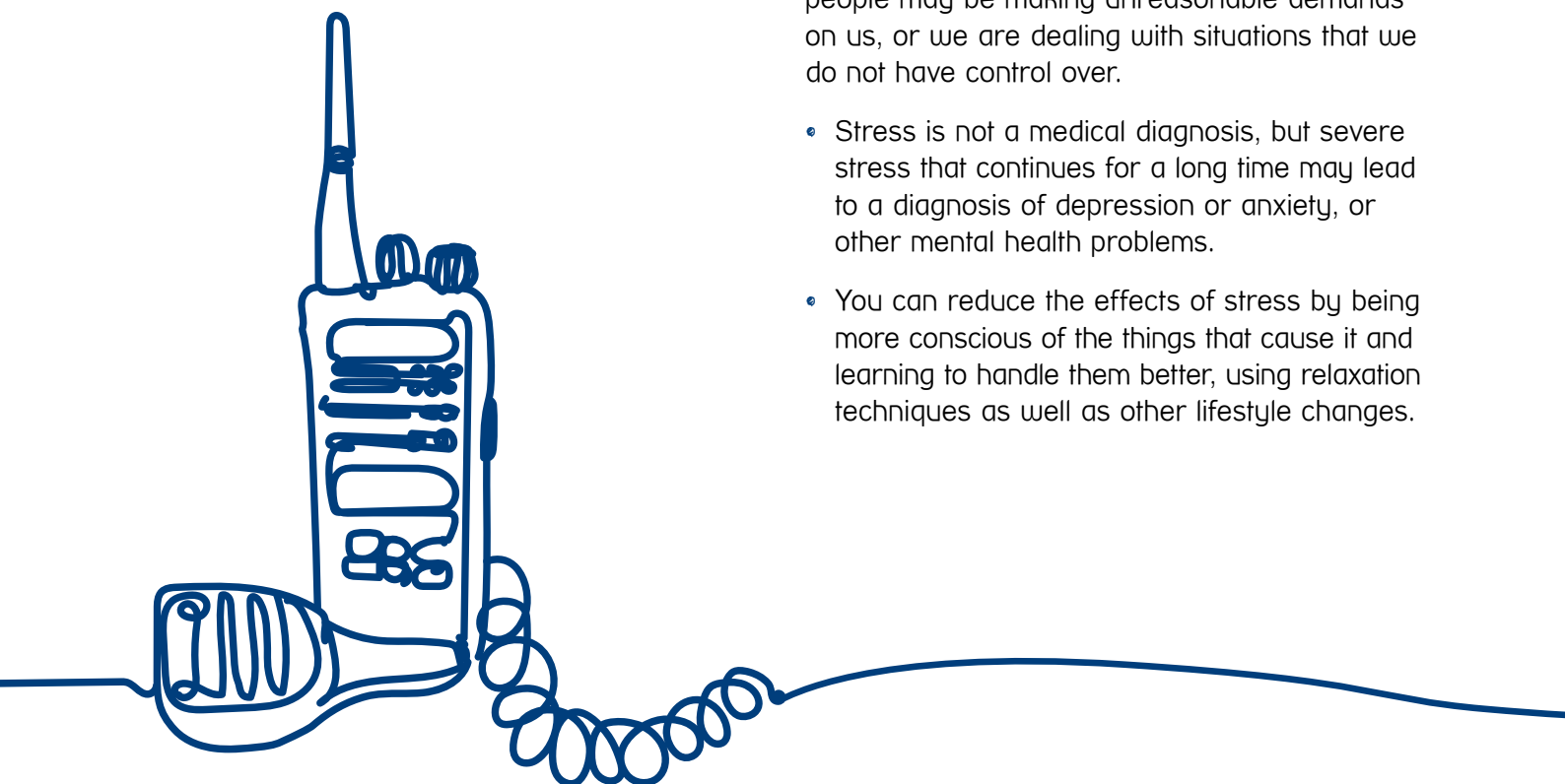
It can be helpful to think of our mental health as being experienced on a continuum, we can move up and down and it changes over time, which for some of us can be weekly or even daily. Having a mental health problem does not mean someone cannot have good mental health, and equally an individual without a mental health problem can experience poor mental health and distress. We all experience things differently.

## Stress versus good pressure

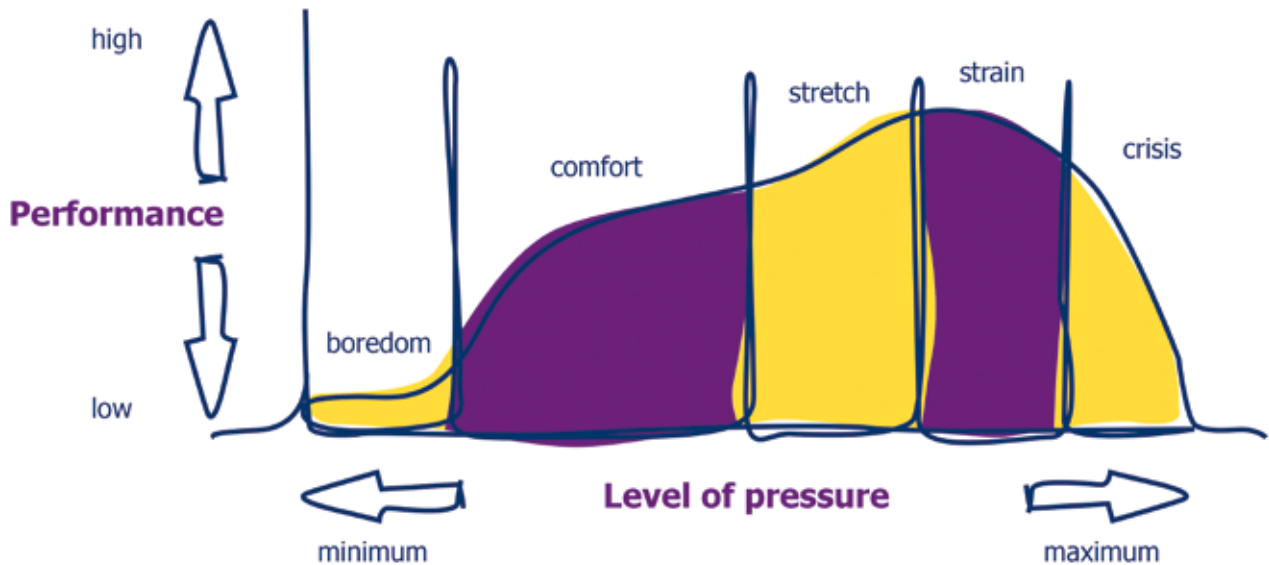
Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.

We all sometimes talk about stress, and feeling stressed – usually when we feel we have too much to do and too much on our minds. Other people may be making unreasonable demands on us, or we are dealing with situations that we do not have control over.

- 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.
- You can reduce the effects of stress by being more conscious of the things that cause it and learning to handle them better, using relaxation techniques as well as other lifestyle changes.



Stress versus good pressure diagram: this shows the effects of pressure on performance.



As 'strain' fatigue sets in, judgement can become poor and decision-making more difficult. At 'crisis', exhaustion can set in, serious health problems can occur and potentially crisis point will be reached.

## Resources and further information

### Service-specific information booklets

- How to manage your mental wellbeing.
- How to manage stress and anxiety.
- Seeking help for a mental health problem.
- Supporting a colleague with a mental health problem.
- For family and friends – how to support someone's mental wellbeing.

These are all available to view online [here](#).

### Webinars

A suite of webinars has been developed for the Blue Light Programme. Aimed specifically at emergency services staff and volunteers, these online films cover a range of topics, including:

- mental health awareness: aimed at everyone working across blue light services
- managing mental health in the workplace: supporting line management roles to consider personnel and their mental wellbeing, how to spot the signs of mental health problems and how to communicate with and support colleagues
- looking after your mental health: raising awareness amongst blue light personnel about how work impacts on mental health and sharing tips on how to manage mental wellbeing.

The webinars feature staff and volunteers from across the services who reflect their own experiences and share some tips. They can be viewed [here](#).



## 2.3 Stigma

### What is stigma?

Stigma is defined as the perception that a certain attribute makes a person unacceptably different from others, leading to prejudice and discrimination against them. Stigma isolates, prevents people seeking help and stops people living the lives they want to.

The attitudes of others can stop people with mental health problems getting the help and support they need. Too many people with mental health problems are made to feel isolated, ashamed and worthless.

A key message to get across that will challenge this stigma is that someone everyone knows is, right now, experiencing a mental health problem. Mental health problems affect one in four of us every year, so it's likely that at least one of your colleagues, friends and family are dealing with a mental health problem.

As a Champion, you are working to create a workplace where mental health problems are not hidden in shame and secrecy. You can help to ensure your colleagues are not afraid to speak out about their problems, or be left wondering where they can turn for help.

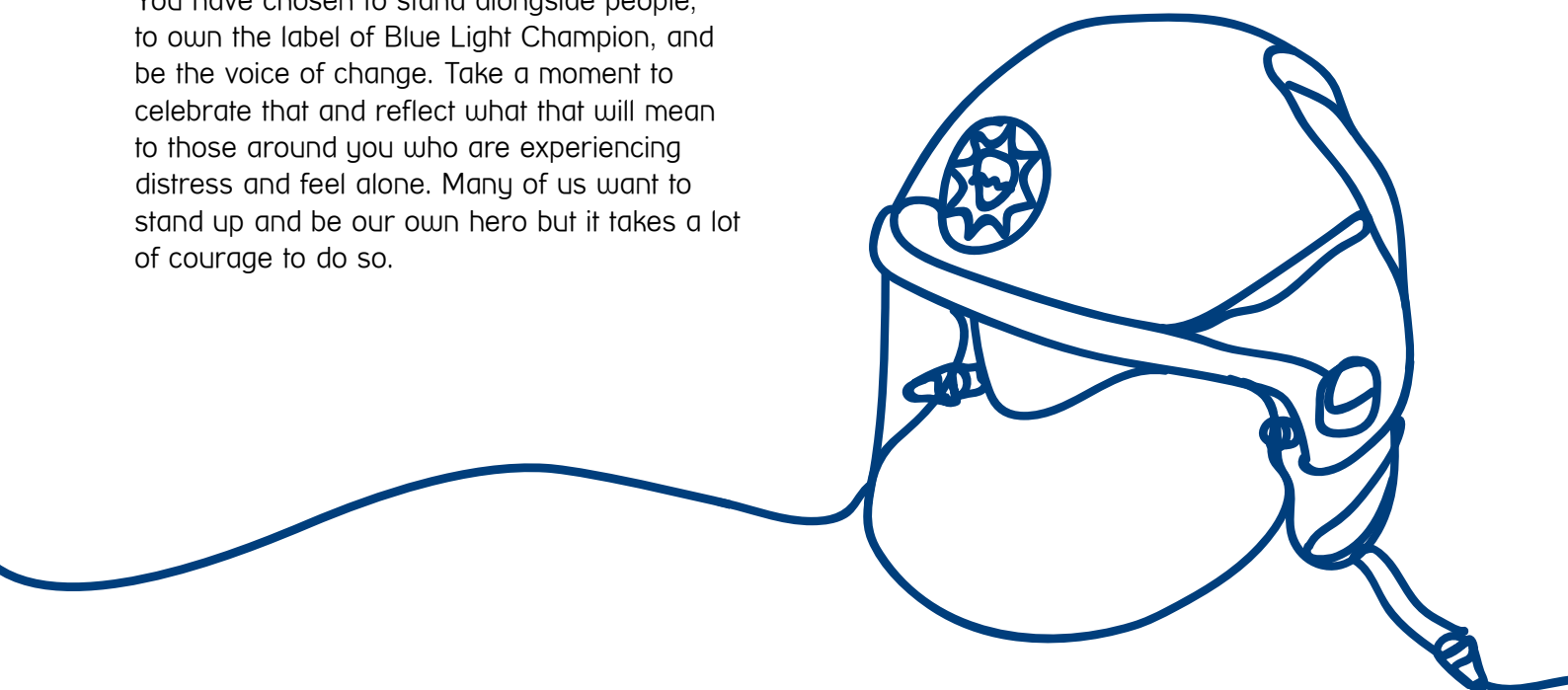
You have chosen to stand alongside people, to own the label of Blue Light Champion, and be the voice of change. Take a moment to celebrate that and reflect what that will mean to those around you who are experiencing distress and feel alone. Many of us want to stand up and be our own hero but it takes a lot of courage to do so.

**Everyone's attitude makes a difference.  
Your attitude makes a difference.**

From Mind's independent research of 3,627 Blue Light personnel in January 2015, 71% of emergency services personnel think that their organisation does not encourage them to talk about mental health – this is much higher than the general workforce population (45%). 44% thought colleagues would be treated differently (in a negative way) if they disclosed a mental health problem at work. This answer was the same if respondents had personal experience of mental health problems or not.

**Too many people with mental health problems are made to feel isolated, ashamed and worthless.**

The attitudes of others stop people experiencing mental health problems getting the help and support they need. Without support, people with mental health problems can lose their job, friends, family, or home.



## What does stigma feel like?

**Key message:** Nearly 9 out of 10 people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination have a negative effect on their lives. Stigma can be a major barrier preventing individuals from asking for support.

**Activity:** This activity is designed to help an audience you are speaking to learn what it feels like to experience stigma.

Thinking about these three different scenarios, how open do you feel you could be if you had a mental health problem? This exercise could help to demonstrate the fear of stigma and discrimination those of us with mental health problems sometimes face.

### 1. You are at a family wedding.

- The speeches have just finished and you are chatting with extended family (grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins) that you have not seen for a while.
- The conversation moves onto your current health and one of your family members asks how you have been.
- Remain standing if you feel you are able to be open about your mental health problem and talk to them about some of the difficulties you have recently had. Sit down if you decide to brush it off and just say "I'm fine".

### 2. You are on a first date.

- Everything is going well, you have just finished your starters and waiting for the main course to be served.
- You've decided that you would quite like to see your date again as things seem to be going so well.
- The conversation moves onto mental health and you discuss a TV programme that has recently been on about this.
- Remain standing if you feel you are able to be open about your mental health problem and let the other person know about your experience and connection to the programme.
- Sit down if you say nothing at all.

### 3. You have just applied for a new job at a new organisation.

- It's your dream job and you were very excited to hear you have been shortlisted for interview.
- In the interview the discussion moves on to ask about the gap in your CV where you had to take time out from work due to your mental health problem.
- Stay standing if you feel you are able to be open about your mental health problem and explain to the panel your gap in employment.
- Sit down if you decide to make up another reason.

### Discussion questions:

- What does each scenario make you think about?
- Why are some things harder to talk about than others?
- What do you think would happen if you did talk about your mental health?

## Resources

## Activities for your workplace

Are you looking for materials to challenge misconceptions about mental health and provoke discussion? Time to Change have got a variety of quizzes, exercises and resources for you to use [here](#).

## Notes

[illegible]

## Section 3: Being a Blue Light Champion

### 3.1 What do Blue Light Champions do?

A Blue Light Champion is an employee or volunteer in the emergency services who takes action to change the way we all think and act about mental health.

You are part of a growing movement of people in the emergency services changing how we all think and act about mental health problems.

Being a Blue Light Champion	
Is	Is not

**The main role of the Champions is to have a conversation about mental health every day at work, and then to signpost people elsewhere.** Becky, police service

## A great Blue Light Champion is

- passionate about finding ways to positively and constructively challenge mental health stigma and promote wellbeing at work
- motivated to improve your colleagues understanding of and attitudes towards mental health.

It is really important as a Champion to keep in mind what the role is about: raising awareness of mental health, challenging stigma that exists about mental health problems and signposting to support.

As a Champion, you may want to use any skills you may have gained from training such as MHFA (Mental Health First Aid), but you are acting in the capacity of a Champion, not as a counsellor or as a mental health first aider. It is important to separate your professional role and your role as a Champion. For example you may be a trained counsellor or mental health professional, however as a Champion your role is to listen and signpost, not to make a professional judgement.

We've put together a list of suggested activities to kick-start your thinking. Every activity, no matter how big or small, contributes to the central goal of challenging mental health stigma.

### If you've got a few minutes

- **Information sharing:** Distribute leaflets, posters and other materials developed through the Blue Light Programme. For example, promote the Blue Light Infoline and how it can support your colleagues, their families and friends.
- **Staff intranet:** Request that the Blue Light Programme's activities and resources are advertised on your intranet pages. You could also ask that more is done to highlight the support available within your organisation to staff and volunteers, so that it is easy to access.
- **Social media:** Ask your organisation to promote the Blue Light Programme on their Twitter account, tweet including @MindBlueLight or using #mybluelight or start a blog. Remember, if you choose to use social media to promote the Blue Light Programme and highlight anti-stigma messaging on a personal account, please ensure you consult and are mindful of your employer's policy on social media, seeking guidance and permission where necessary.



### If you've got a few hours

- **Speaking up:** If you have your own personal experience of a mental health problem you may wish to speak about these to an audience of your colleagues, or blog or write about them. Please note there is absolutely no pressure to do so. If you don't have personal experience of mental health problems, you can find opportunities to talk to colleagues about the importance of challenging mental health stigma and promoting wellbeing.
- **Training days and inductions:** Speak to new recruits about the importance of wellbeing and mental health during staff inductions. Flag the support that's available to them in their new workplace so that they know yours is a working environment where it's okay to talk about mental health.
- **Family and friends:** Think about how you could reach the family and friends of emergency service staff and volunteers with anti-stigma messages around mental health and details of the support available to them. For example, you could run outreach activities or host a Blue Light Programme information stall at a family or community fun day.

### If you've got longer

- **Be a point of contact:** Look into setting up a network of peers who can signpost people to mental health support, wellbeing resources, and be an additional point of contact for staff and volunteers who might need to talk.
- **Champion networks:** Share experiences, challenges and suggestions with other Blue Light Champions by building a network across local emergency services. You might find that you want to do activities together with other Blue Light Champions in your workplace or local area.
- **Events:** Get a platform at workplace events to raise the profile of mental health and wellbeing, perhaps with a table-top stand or speaking slot. Or take the lead in organising wellbeing events, using our [Blue Light Programme resources](#) to start colleagues talking about mental health.



## Champions action plan: to help you plan what you'd like to do

What do you want to do?

What would you like to achieve?

Have you made any assumptions?

Support: What support do you need, from your organisation, colleagues, or fellow Champions?

Your wellbeing: How will you look after your own mental health?

Plan: How will you promote your activity? What resources can you use?  
How will you make it as accessible as possible?



**Evaluate: How will you know if your activity has been successful?**

**What happens next? How can you build on this activity?**

**You might want to note some examples of what other Champions are doing:**

- blogs and short films about mental health
- speaking to new recruits
- creating monthly wellbeing newsletters (and putting them on toilet doors)
- supporting Champions in other organisations to get senior buy-in
- setting up networks
- co-producing policies on mental health
- recruiting new Champions: creating posters and adverts
- getting their choir involved.

## Resources

- **Blue Light Champion role description:** What you do as a Blue Light Champion is completely up to you, and we encourage you to get creative. This document explains more about the role and things you might want to do as a Champion.
- **Things to consider document:** This document is all about things you might want to think about when you become a Champion, including if you decide to share your personal experience of mental health problems, thinking about your own mental health and getting organisational support.



## 3.2 Key messages

As a Blue Light Champion, starting conversations about mental health is key to raising awareness and changing the way people think about it.

### Tips for talking

- Talk about why you became a Blue Light Champion.
- Start with a fact, for example: one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem in any given year. Anyone can experience a mental health problem.
- Ask someone how they are doing, and take time to listen and engage with their response.
- If you have your own personal experience of mental health problems, and if it feels right for you, and you know how much of your story you want to share, you can talk about this personal experience with your colleagues or team.
- Talk about what helps you maintain wellbeing, relax or de-stress. Ask your colleagues what helps them.
- Use news stories related to mental health to start a discussion.
- Share some of the Blue Light Programme's findings from our survey of more than 3,000 emergency services staff and volunteers, which show:
  - Almost 9 out of 10 respondents have experienced stress, low mood or poor mental health at some point whilst working for the emergency services.
  - 8 out of 10 respondents think colleagues would be more comfortable talking about physical health than mental health.
  - Half of respondents are not aware of the mental health support their organisation offers.
- Think about what you want to say and when. You don't need to be an expert to talk about mental health, but you might find it helpful to think about what you want to say in advance. It might help to say it out loud or to a friend first. This will help you hear how it sounds and notice how it makes you feel. Also think through where and when you may want to start a conversation. For example, if you want to ask a colleague how they are feeling, make sure you have time to listen to the response and are not likely to be interrupted.
- Less can be more. Our mental health is as much a part of us as our physical health, but the stigma surrounding mental health can make it hard for some people to talk about it. Keeping it bite-sized and asking open questions can help you make headway.
- Give them time. Your colleague may simply not wish to engage with the subject straight away, or they might initially react in a negative or dismissive way. Give them time and this may change, even if it's not right away. And take opportunities to talk when these present themselves. If someone asks you about mental health or the Blue Light Programme, take the opportunity to have an open conversation.
- Have some information ready. Sometimes people want to find out more in their own time – why not have some of our materials to hand? The person you are talking to might have lots of questions and want more information.
- You may get different reactions. These could be positive or negative and may be hard to predict. Think about how you will keep to your boundaries. What parts of your story do you want to share and what do you not want to share? Have information to hand in case a colleague has questions. Your colleague may join in at first, but then become uncomfortable and change the topic – if this happens don't be disheartened. It's still helpful that the first step has taken place.



- Courage is contagious. Often, once the subject of mental health is out in the open, people want to talk. Your first conversation could prompt many more.

### Finding the words

Finding the 'right' language to describe emergency services staff and volunteers' experiences of mental health problems will always be difficult. There is no one term or set of terms that everyone will agree on.

Some people reject any form of label, and some don't see their experiences as an illness or a problem at all. Conversely, some people find their experience best understood in terms of illness, and find a medical diagnosis a useful way of talking about, and getting support for what they are going through. There are many people with personal experience of mental health problems who have diverse points of view. It's not your role as a Blue Light Champion to decide which of these points of view is 'right', or to tell anyone what language they should use to talk about their own experiences.

It is up to you to choose language that you feel comfortable with and feel is appropriate. What we do ask is that you are mindful of the language you use and think about how those around you may feel about it.

**On a personal level, being a Blue Light Champion has helped me, too. I feel it is a lot easier talking about my illness, and I have found that by doing so my supervisors and managers have a better understanding about me and my illness.** Helen, police service

## We're all human. We all have mental health. Talking about it makes a big difference.

As a Blue Light Champion you will be challenging the stigma around mental health in the workplace. Here are some key messages to support you in doing this.

### Key messages about mental health:

- We're all human and we all have mental health.
- Mental health is just as important as physical health.
- Mental health problems are common and can be treated.
- It helps to talk about mental health, but it can take courage. Just asking 'how are you?' – and taking time to listen properly to the response – can make an enormous difference.
- We all need support sometimes.
- Look out for signs of unmanageable stress in you and a colleague: what could you do to take care of yourself?
- The effects of dealing with stressful situations every day can build up over time. Through their role individuals can be constantly exposed to traumatic situations, either in person or through their support for colleagues, where they need to 'stay strong' for others. This can include moving on to the next situation without knowing what happens after their involvement is over.



## Notes

[illegible]

## Section 4: Thinking about sharing your story

We often don't take the time to reflect on what has happened in our lives and how we felt about it, how we got through situations, what helped and what didn't.

This next exercise is to help you reflect on your own experiences of stress, anxiety, low mood or other mental health problems so you can start to think about whether you might like to share any of your story as a Blue Light Champion. It allows you to express non-judgementally to yourself about your experience.

- The exercise will take 15 minutes.
- The exercise will involve reading statements in the reflection exercise on the next page and writing, drawing or thinking about what comes to you. One way of doing this is to keep writing, even if it's "I think this is stupid, when is the tea break?" or if you prefer to write just a few words and stop do that – it's all about what works best for you.
- It is completely voluntary to take part, please listen to yourself. If anyone doesn't want to continue with the exercise then please stop. Equally you may feel more comfortable doing it in your own time, or in a place that feels right for you.
- The questions are phrased in the past tense, although you may connect with things you experience now or on an ongoing basis.
- This piece of writing won't be shared. It's just for you and may prove to give you some useful insight into your experiences. Some of you may wish to share this in the future and that is entirely your choice. If you'd rather not write in your handbook please ask your facilitator for a separate copy.



# Personal reflection

What motivated you to come along today?

Think about a difficult time you've experienced. This could be your experience of a mental health problem, a life event such as a bereavement, a relationship breakdown or a challenging time at home or work.

Did you tell anyone how you were feeling? What was their reaction?



What concerns did you have about sharing how you felt?

What helped you the most at that time?

Since this experience what do you do differently to look after yourself and those around you?

## End of reflection

If you found the exercise brought out any surprises or are feeling like you'd like to chat more about it grab one of your facilitators to talk things through.





## 4.2 Your story is a gift

Stories are important. Stories get people to understand the real impact and see things from a different perspective. Stories give people courage to seek help and speak out. Stories create an environment for change.

Most importantly your story is your own, it is a gift, and it's your gift. So it's your place to keep it precious and give it only when you feel comfortable, to those who deserve to hear it.

**I found the reflection exercise very powerful... Initially I felt like a bit of a fraud for not sharing my personal experiences but I have realised it's my decision to make.**

Previous workshop participant

No one should feel under any pressure to publicly tell their story. It belongs to you and it's a very personal decision whether you choose to share it as part of your role as a Blue Light Champion.

As we change and grow so do our stories. Yours may evolve but it will always be yours to own and for you to share how you wish.

Everybody has a story to tell. Sharing your own experience of stress, anxiety, low mood or other mental health problems can be a powerful weapon in smashing stereotypes. If you have your own personal experience of mental health problems there is absolutely no requirement to share your story as a Champion. We recognise this is a big and very personal decision. Please don't force yourself out of your comfort zone just because you think you should.

**"Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness."** Brené Brown, research professor, University of Houston

Sharing your story is a vulnerable choice.

## Considering sharing your story? What happens next?

Think about what you would feel comfortable sharing, and the impact this will have on you and those around you.

When we say comfortable, it's about knowing or feeling something is the right decision for you.

- Initially, tell someone you trust.
- Consider making a 'timeline' of things you would be happy to share with others and those parts of your stories that are just for you. You can find a timeline to get you started on page 25 of your workbook.
- Remember you are in control of how much you disclose. How much of your story are you willing to share? You can create your own boundaries, and only share information that you wish to.
- The timing has to be right for you. Think about how you'll stay well whilst sharing your story.
- Think about how you might feel sharing your personal experience of mental health problems at work. If you are disclosing to your employer, consider waiting until you feel comfortable.
- Think about the impact of sharing your story on yourself and those around you – it may be helpful to tell your family, friends or partner that you are thinking about sharing your experiences and get their thoughts. If you have not told anyone before you might want to think about someone in your life you would feel most comfortable to talk to.



If any colleagues, friends and family are not currently aware of your experience of mental health problems, it is likely they will find out once you share your story.

Telling your story can be rewarding, liberating and promote confidence and a discovery of yourself. Sharing the gift of your story may offer someone else hope.

Most importantly sharing your story is a very personal decision and is not right for everyone. Own your story and only share it if you are comfortable doing so.

Timeline

Happy to share



Just for me

## 4.3 Preparing to Speak Out

### Five questions to ask yourself before telling your story

**1. Why are you telling this story?**

What do you hope to accomplish? Will your story inspire a colleague? Or maybe give a compelling reason for implementing a specific policy recommendation within your organisation?

**2. What do you feel comfortable sharing?**

Think carefully and decide what personal information you feel comfortable sharing with your colleagues about your own mental health experiences, and whether it is helpful to disclose this information in certain situations.

**3. What more could your workplace do to support mental problems?**

Based on your experience, how do you think positive change around mental health can be achieved within your organisation? What have you seen that is done well and what needs improvement?

**4. Who needs to hear your story?**

Who do you think needs to be involved in making changes within your workplace? Will your story reach them? If not, how can you make it reach them? How can others help?

**5. In your experience, did someone help you in a memorable way?**

Can their actions be copied, or improved upon, to help create cultural change within your organisation? It could be worth highlighting this in your own story.



## 12 steps for speaking up successfully

1. **Be prepared:** Think about the different reactions, positive and negative, that the person might have so you're prepared. The person will be thinking about their perception of mental health problems, you as a person and how the two fit together.
2. **Choose an appropriate time:** Choose a time and place when you feel comfortable and ready to talk.
3. **Be ready for lots of questions, or none:** The person you are talking to might have lots of questions or need further information to help them understand. Don't worry about this, you're the expert on your own experience and feelings. However, they might feel uncomfortable and try to move the conversation on – if this happens it's still helpful that the first step has been taken.
4. **An initial reaction might not last:** The person might initially react in a way that's not helpful – maybe changing the subject, using clichés rather than listening. But give them time.
5. **Have some information ready:** Sometimes people find it easier to find out more in their own time – why not have some Blue Light Programme materials ready to hand them?
6. **Keep it authentic:** We know that sometimes people are afraid to talk about mental health because they feel they don't know what to say or how to help. So keeping the conversation true to you and how you communicate best will help make you and your audience feel relaxed.
7. **Take opportunities to talk:** If someone asks you about your mental health, don't shy away, be yourself and answer honestly.
8. **Courage is contagious:** Often once mental health is out in the open people want to talk. Don't be surprised if your honesty encourages other people to talk about their own experiences.
9. **Manage your expectations:** It might not go how you'd planned, or you might not get to make all your points before your time runs out. Focus on what went well and reflect on what you've learned from the experience.
10. **Be honest about where you're at:** We are all at a different stage in our journey. Try to be honest about where you're at in your recovery and the difficulty or setbacks you've experienced.
11. **Use prompts if you need them:** Don't be self-conscious about using cards. They tell your audience that you care enough about them to prepare in advance (even if your 'audience' is only one person!).
12. **Ask your audience questions:** "Everyone has dark days whether they have a mental health problems or not. What helps you in your dark days?" People love the opportunity to analyse themselves and to engage personally, so try giving them the opportunity to do so.

## Managing your experience when Speaking Out

This could be speaking at events, writing a blog, talking in a team meeting or on film etc.

- Prepare an outline of what to include about your personal experience.
- Be clear about the key messages of the Blue Light Programme – these can be found online and in the [Champions toolkit](#).
- Know your strengths as a communicator – is this public speaking, one on one, the written word, painting etc.
- Identify ways you can best prepare and protect yourself. Looking after your wellbeing is the most important thing.
- Consider presentation tools – if you are speaking this may be a presentation, TED-style talk (5–18 minutes, you can find out more [here](#)) or using an object like a firefighter's helmet. Think about what your audience will connect with.
- Give information about where to find resources, further information and how to access support.
- You are not expected to be an expert, but you might want to educate yourself about mental health and be ready for questions.
- Practise beforehand by role-playing what you will say. This might include thinking of phrases you feel comfortable using to explain difficult experiences and feelings.

**Since I have spoken out, other colleagues including senior officers have told me how they went through that 20 years ago or whatever it was. It's comforting to know that I'm not the only one, that people do get through it and progress.**

Richard, fire service



## Resources

- **The little book of storytelling** from Time to Change. This booklet has been created by working with many of you who are reading this to make sure that, together, we can help you to share your stories to inspire minds and change hearts. Enjoy reading stories and finding new stories, and remember that you have an amazing story to tell.

## Notes

[illegible]

## Section 5: Managing conversations

**“This kind of sensitive, active listening is exceedingly rare in our lives. We think we listen, but rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces of change that I know.”** Carl Rogers, psychologist – 1902–1987

This quote is helpful in thinking about active listening – often we listen to respond and not to hear. Yet, just being present and focused on the person speaking is often enough to make them feel supported and heard.

As we talked about before it's important to remember your role is to listen and signpost, not to be a counsellor or a mental health professional.

It is as simple as actively listening to the person and giving them your undivided attention, not listening for anything in particular or thinking about what you are going to say next.

### Managing conversations about mental wellbeing

As a Blue Light Champion, you may find colleagues start to share their experience of mental health problems with you. This may be new to you or you might have lots of experience of managing sensitive conversations.

The suggestions that follow are based on what we've learned can work well. Communication is a very personal thing, so use what feels right for you based on your experience of managing sensitive conversations.

Remember, each conversation will be different.

Think about the individual situation and person. One person may simply want to tell you their story, whereas someone else may be telling you as a first step to seeking support. Exploring why your colleague is starting the conversation will help to shape how you manage it.



## Here are some tips for managing these conversations

- Find a quiet place with an informal atmosphere, perhaps in a café or over a coffee – this shouldn't feel like a formal interview.
- Actively listen to the person, by giving them your undivided attention. Try to leave any questions or comments you may have until the person has finished so you don't interrupt them. Once a person knows they are being given the space and time to talk, they will.
- Use positive body language, and encourage the person to continue with small verbal comments like 'I see' or 'what happened next?'. This will let them know that you are paying attention to what they are saying and actively listening to them.
- Check your understanding by paraphrasing what the person has said back to them.
- Reflect actual words they have used back to them, as this can encourage them to open up more. For example, a good reflection to 'I just feel so alone' could be 'alone?'.
- Respond by using empathetic statements such as: "I appreciate this must be difficult for you..."
- Avoid clichés. Comments like 'Pull yourself together' or 'You're just having a bad day' are not helpful.
- Dispel any myths. Mental health problems are more common than people think and can affect anyone at any time.
- Try to avoid asking too many questions, especially questions that only require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, or that begin with the word 'why'. Ask open questions to invite a more detailed response:
  - How are you feeling?
  - How do you look after yourself?
  - What support do you have in place?
- Reassure them that it is positive that they want to talk about their experience, what's happening with them, or that they are looking for support (if this is the case).
- Is the individual aware of sources of support? Signpost to further information and support. It may be helpful to ask the person: "What would you like to happen in this situation?" This will help to empower and encourage them to take the course of action that seems right to them. Be clear about what you can do, as well as what you can't.
- The important thing is to listen, rather than give advice – the individual needs to be able to act for themselves. Signpost the individual to sources of support, rather than telling them what you think is best. We'll talk more about this in the next section on managing boundaries.

Sometimes when someone takes the courage to talk to you it may not be possible for you to give them the time they need there and then. You will be the best judge of this. Remember to always show you recognise that they have taken a positive step by speaking to you, explain why you cannot talk now and arrange a better time to have the conversation.

Conversations can trigger painful memories – listening to others' experiences that are close to your own may trigger thoughts about your experience of mental health problems or traumatic events you have encountered. Think about how you might look after your own wellbeing as a Champion and remember your health comes first. If you do not feel able to continue the role for any reason, you can stop at any time.





## Top tip

If someone is highly emotional, give them time to settle. It can be a bit disconcerting at first to watch a friend or colleague being in the throes of emotional distress. Stay calm, sit quietly and use expressions like:

- Whatever it is, we can beat it.
- You aren't on your own, I'm here with you.
- Take your time, only talk when you feel ready. If you don't want to talk that's okay too.

If someone is in urgent need of help always signpost immediately to support. You may want to help them by going to the Mind website and clicking on the yellow tab at the top which says, 'I need urgent help'.

Alternatively you can call the Samaritans 116 123 (UK) – lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

## Closing conversations about mental health

- Sometimes conversations will come to a natural end. However if this does not happen give the person a gentle indication that the conversation needs to come to an end. You could say something like: "It's been good to talk, we've covered a lot and we will have to wrap up soon because I have a meeting." Or whatever you feel is appropriate.
- Summarise your conversation and anything you have both agreed to do. For example: "You have told me that you are going to speak to your GP about how you are feeling, and I will text you by the end of the day with the details of how to access counselling sessions through our Employee Assistance Programme."
- Ask practical questions such as 'Is there going to be someone there when you get home?' or 'Is there a friend you can go and see?'
- Remember offering a 'listening ear' and showing your acceptance, warmth and regard will go a long way to help someone. It may not be possible to get a clear idea of the next steps the person will take as a result of talking to you.
- Ending the conversation by inviting them to take some time to reflect on what has been discussed and to consider what they may want to do going forward could be the best way to bring the conversation to a close, especially if you feel that there is nothing more you can say at that time.
- If you feel it would be helpful, and you are able to commit to giving more of your time in this way, you may want to arrange another time to meet up and talk.

## Resources

- Brené Brown's video on **empathy**. You may also want to check out her TED talks on **The power of vulnerability** and **Listening to shame**.

## Notes

[illegible]

## Section 6: Setting and maintaining boundaries

Boundaries need to be there to keep people safe. Simply put they are what you are and are not ok with. Having boundaries can help clarify your role as a Champion and the relationship you will have with colleagues. It's important to be aware of your organisation's policies and guidelines.

**Boundaries: you may want to add in what the group said for each of the boundaries in the activity**

Role boundaries

Organisational boundaries

Personal boundaries



## 6.1 Establishing and maintaining boundaries

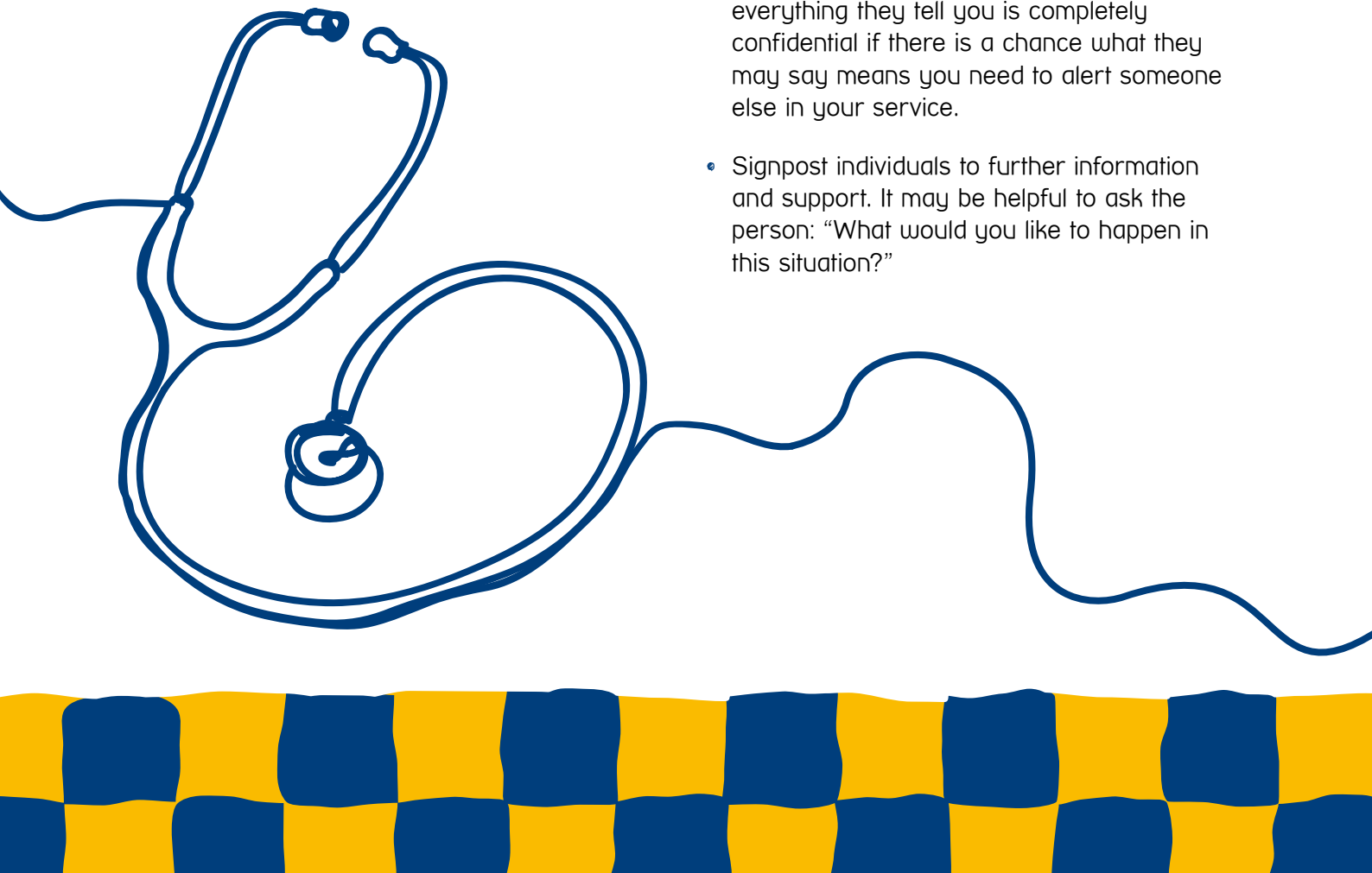
Being clear about what you can and cannot offer as a Blue Light Champion will help you enjoy the role and manage other people's expectations.

These are some suggestions of things for you to consider but is not an exhaustive list or a guide to be followed.

Remember, the Blue Light Champion role is not a 'pastoral' role. It's important others don't see you as a counsellor and that you don't feel that you have to go beyond your abilities and role to provide ongoing emotional support to someone because of your role as a Blue Light Champion.

### Be clear

- Explain your role and its limits to colleagues so you can manage people's expectations. Be clear about the activities you will be doing as part of your role. For example, you could say "My role as a Blue Light Champion is to share information that promotes awareness of how to keep yourself mentally well."
- Communicate the reasons for the boundary. If someone is asking for direct advice or help beyond your role, you could say: "Sorry, I am not the best person to advise you on that and do not have the knowledge, skills or experience to help you with this. I am not a mental health professional and stepping outside of my abilities as a Champion might be unhelpful to you. But I can suggest other sources of help and support you may wish to access." The explanation shows that you understand and believe in the reasons for the boundary.
- Don't make promises you may not be able to stick to. For example don't tell someone everything they tell you is completely confidential if there is a chance what they may say means you need to alert someone else in your service.
- Signpost individuals to further information and support. It may be helpful to ask the person: "What would you like to happen in this situation?"



## Identifying when boundaries are not working

Be mindful of your own wellbeing and take the time to notice any changes that could indicate that you need to take on a little less. Reflecting on your role regularly can help you to identify whether you are taking on too much.

- If you feel others are not respecting or are unclear on your boundaries, speak to them. Own your statement by starting with 'I' and going on to describe what you think or feel. For example, you could say: "I don't feel comfortable continuing this conversation until we're both clear about what my role is in supporting you." By using 'I' in this way, you take ownership of the statement, which is both powerful and demonstrates that you personally care about the outcome.
- Be kind to yourself if you get it wrong. Identify what happened and how you can do it differently the next time.
- Talk to someone. Just as you may want to encourage conversations about mental health with your colleagues and for them to chat about how they are feeling, make sure you also take time to have these conversations yourself.

### Key tip

You are not alone, and you can ask for help if you need it. Get in touch with the confidential **Blue Light Infoline**, or speak to other Blue Light Champions if you have a situation you are unsure how to deal with.

## Sharing your story

Part of the role of a Blue Light Champion is encouraging more open discussion of mental health in the workplace. As a result, you may find that colleagues tell you about their own thoughts, feelings, experiences and concerns, as part of seeking support around their own mental health.

- Think carefully and decide what personal information you feel comfortable sharing with your colleagues about your own mental health experiences, and whether it is helpful to disclose this information in certain situations. For example if someone tells you they think they may have PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and you have had a similar experience, it may be useful for you to explain how you sought help and what worked for you. However, it may not be helpful to talk at length and in detail about the sensitive details of your own story. While you may have experienced something similar, the circumstances and feelings will not be exactly the same and may be overwhelming for the other person. A good question to ask yourself is – how will this person benefit from hearing about my own experience?
- Remember if you have your own personal experience of mental health problems there is absolutely no requirement to share your story as a Blue Light Champion. We recognise this is a big and very personal decision.



## 6.2 Safeguarding

According to the Care Quality Commission, “Safeguarding means protecting people’s health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.”<sup>1</sup> It’s important that you set clear expectations as a Champion. Take time to find out what the safeguarding policy is within your organisation and who to contact if you think someone is at risk.

### Limits to confidentiality

The capacity to keep what people tell you confidential is an essential part of the role. However, there may be occasions when you need to break this confidentiality. It is important that the individual is aware of this from the start so they are clear and do not feel their trust has been broken. If this happens, you need to tell the person that you are going to speak to someone else about what they have told you. Examples of where you might need to break confidentiality could include:

- self-harm, suicidal intent
- violence, abuse
- criminal activity.

Don’t forget the **Blue Light Infoline** – for yourself or for someone you are supporting.

### If someone discloses thoughts about harming themselves or others to you

In your role as a Blue Light Champion, there is a possibility that your colleagues may disclose thoughts about harming themselves or others to you. Before you start your role as a Blue Light Champion, it is important that you find out what policies and guidance your employer has in place in case this happens.

It might be useful to discuss this possibility with HR or occupational health so that you clearly understand your organisation’s policies and guidance before your Blue Light Champion role starts. This will help you feel prepared and understand how to respond effectively and within your organisation’s guidelines.

As a Blue Light Champion you are first and foremost an employee or volunteer of your organisation. So, if an individual discloses thoughts of harming themselves or others it’s helpful to understand they are not telling you as an individual, they are telling your organisation.

Every organisation has a duty of care to all its employees and volunteers to provide them with information and support. If you are unsure about a situation, speak to your manager, a member of HR or another member of staff who supports you.

We encourage you to think carefully about how you’ll look after your own wellbeing as a Blue Light Champion and how you can make sure you have appropriate support in place. We’d encourage you to make a plan for looking after yourself – consider a Wellness Action Plan (WAP). The WAP is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland’s Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

The WAPs are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should you be experiencing one. You can find a copy of the WAP on page 39 of this workbook. Please note that more guidance on using the WAP for employees and managers can be found [here](#).

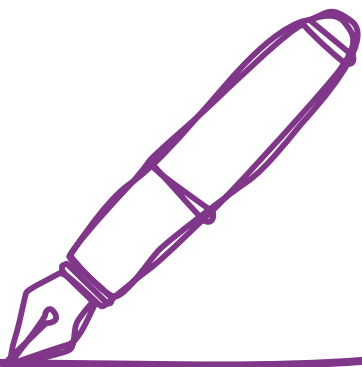
1. [cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/how-we-do-our-job/safeguarding-people](https://www.cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/how-we-do-our-job/safeguarding-people)



- **Wellness Action Plan (WAP):** an easy, practical way of helping you to support your own mental health at work.

## Notes

[illegible]



## Wellness Action Plan template

**A WAP reminds us what we need to do to stay well at work and details what our line managers can do to better support us.**

It also helps us develop an awareness of our working style, stress triggers and responses, and enables us to communicate these to our manager. The information in this form will be held confidentially and regularly reviewed by you and your manager together. You only need to provide information that you are comfortable sharing and that relates to your role and workplace.

This form is not a legal document but it can help you and your manager to agree, together, how to practically support you in your role and address any health needs.

It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that data gathered in this form will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone without the permission of the member of staff. Certain circumstances may require confidentiality to be broken – refer to further guidance [here](#) for more information on this.

Below you will find a WAP template. You may wish to take a look at the [full guide](#) on using it before getting started.

### 1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?

For example taking an adequate lunch break away from your desk, getting some exercise before or after work or in your lunchbreak, light and space in the office, opportunities to get to know colleagues.



## 2. What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work?

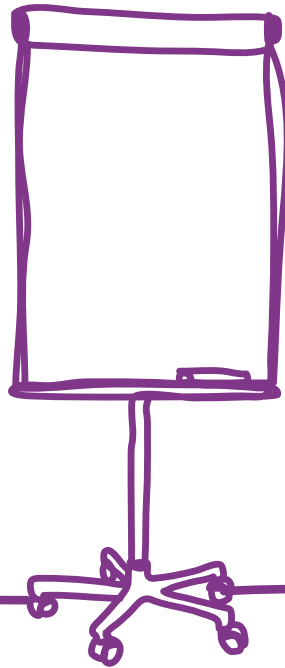
For example regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working patterns, explaining wider organisational developments.

## 3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you?

For example conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan.

## 4. How might experiencing poor mental health impact on your work?

For example you may find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise work tasks, have difficulty with concentration, drowsiness, confusion, headaches.



**5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to experience poor mental health?**

For example changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues.

**6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or help you to manage the impact?**

For example extra catch-up time with your manager, guidance on prioritising workload, flexible working patterns, reasonable adjustments.

### 7. Are there elements of your individual working style or temperament that it is worth your manager being aware of?

For example a preference for more face-to-face or more email contact, a need for quiet reflection time prior to meetings or creative tasks, negotiation on deadlines before they are set, having access to a mentor for questions you might not want to bother your manager about, having a written plan of work in place which can be reviewed and amended regularly, clear deadlines if you have a tendency to overwork a task or a tendency to have particularly high or low energy in the morning or in the afternoon.

### 8. If we notice early warning signs that you are experiencing poor mental health, what should we do?

For example talk to you discreetly about it, or contact someone that you have asked to be contacted.

9. What steps can you take if you start to experience poor mental health at work? Is there anything we need to do to facilitate them?

For example you might like to take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, or ask your line manager for support.

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Employee signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Line manager signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date to be reviewed \_\_\_\_\_

# Section 7: Dealing with difficult situations and signposting

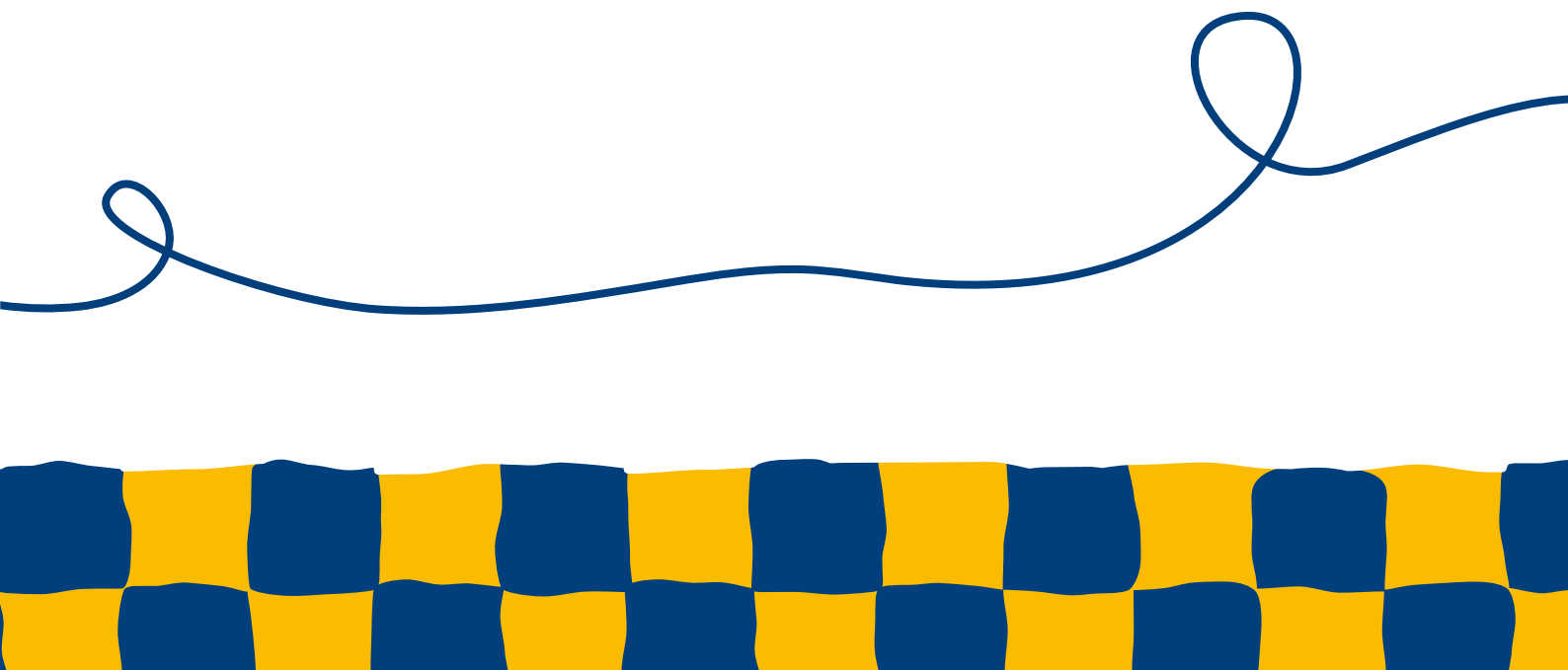
## Knowing when to signpost elsewhere

If someone needs help or advice that you are not qualified or able to provide, it's important to signpost them to support. You may find it helpful to have information available about both internal and external sources of help in your area.

Being prepared with this information means you can direct your colleagues to support while maintaining boundaries and ensuring you do not take on too much. Examples include:

- your Employee Assistance Programme or occupational health
- information available from unions and other membership bodies
- disability support groups
- details of external organisations that offer mental health support, such as your local Mind
- how to access counselling or therapy in your local area
- local and national helplines
- chaplains.

You may want to use our [Signposting to support](#) document to help you do this.



Please note that the contact information listed below is correct at the time of publication.

<b>Mind Blue Light Infoline</b> 0300 303 5999 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, local rates) text: 84999 <a href="mailto:bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk">bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk</a> <a href="https://mind.org.uk/bluelight">mind.org.uk/bluelight</a>	Confidential Infoline for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.  Our team can look for details of help and support in your area.
<b>Be Mindful</b> <a href="https://bemindful.co.uk">bemindful.co.uk</a>	Information, and details of local mindfulness courses and therapists.
<b>Bereavement Advice Centre</b> 0800 634 9494 <a href="https://bereavementadvice.org">bereavementadvice.org</a>	Support for people who have been bereaved.
<b>Blue Lamp Foundation</b> 0871 2345 999 <a href="https://bluelamp-foundation.org">bluelamp-foundation.org</a>	Financial aid to emergency service workers injured in the course of duty.
<b>British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)</b> 0161 705 4304 <a href="https://babcp.com">babcp.com</a>	Lists accredited therapists.
<b>British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)</b> 01455 883 300 <a href="https://itsgoodtotalk.org.uk">itsgoodtotalk.org.uk</a>	Practitioners in your area.
<b>Citizens Advice</b> 03444 111 444 (England); 0344 477 2020 (Wales) <a href="https://citizensadvice.org.uk">citizensadvice.org.uk</a>	Confidential advice on a range of issues.
<b>Cruse Bereavement Care</b> 0844 477 9400 (national helpline) <a href="mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk">helpline@cruse.org.uk</a> <a href="https://cruse.org.uk">cruse.org.uk</a>	Bereavement charity offering online, telephone and face-to-face support.
<b>Direct.gov.uk</b> <a href="https://direct.gov.uk/en/employment">direct.gov.uk/en/employment</a>	Information about employment rights and services, and career advice.
<b>Samaritans</b> Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling, FK8 2SA 24-hour helpline: 116 123 <a href="mailto:jo@samaritans.org">jo@samaritans.org</a> <a href="https://samaritans.org">samaritans.org</a>	Emotional support for anyone in distress.
<b>United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)</b> 020 7014 9955 <a href="https://psychotherapy.org.uk">psychotherapy.org.uk</a>	List of registered practitioners.

<b>LINC</b> 020 7921 5200 (available 24 hours) <a href="https://www.lasunison.com/linc">lasunison.com/linc</a>	A peer support network for the London Ambulance Service, promoting physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of any member of staff.
<b>The Ambulance Services Charity (TASC)</b> 0800 1032999 (support line) <a href="https://theasc.org.uk">theasc.org.uk</a>	Provides support to current and retired ambulance services personnel, their families and dependents.

## Fire

<b>Big White Wall</b> <a href="https://bigwhitewall.com">bigwhitewall.com</a>	Online community and forum overseen by trained advisers.
<b>The Fire Fighters Charity</b> 0800 389 8820 <a href="mailto:info@firefighterscharity.org.uk">info@firefighterscharity.org.uk</a> <a href="https://firefighterscharity.org.uk">firefighterscharity.org.uk</a>	The Fire Fighters Charity provides services that enhance quality of life for serving and retired firefighters, fire personnel and their families.
<b>Women in the Fire Service UK</b> 01366 381 237 <a href="https://nwfs.net">nwfs.net</a>	Voluntary organisation aimed at supporting women in the fire service and promoting gender equality.

## Police

<b>Disabled Police Association</b> <a href="https://disabledpolice.info">disabledpolice.info</a>	Promotes equality of opportunity for disabled people working within the extended police family.
<b>Flint House Police Rehabilitation Centre</b> 01491 874499 <a href="https://flinthouse.co.uk">flinthouse.co.uk</a>	Provides individually planned, intensive, rehabilitation services for sick and injured, serving and retired police officers.
<b>National Association of Muslim Police</b> <a href="https://nampuk.org">nampuk.org</a>	National organisation that aims to support Muslim officers and staff.
<b>Police Treatment Centres</b> <a href="mailto:enquiries@thepolicetreatmentcentres.org">enquiries@thepolicetreatmentcentres.org</a> <a href="https://thepolicetreatmentcentres.org">thepolicetreatmentcentres.org</a>	Treatment centres where serving and retired police officers can receive rest, recuperation and treatment following an illness or injury.
<b>SafeHORIZON UK</b> <a href="https://safehorizon.co.uk">safehorizon.co.uk</a>	Support and advocacy services for police officers and their families affected by psychological injury, stress and mental ill health.

## Notes

This image shows a full page of a document template. It consists of approximately 20 horizontal blue dashed lines spaced evenly across the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. The lines are thin and light blue, set against a plain white background. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.



## Section 8: Looking after your wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is just as important as physical wellbeing, and maintaining both is an important part of staying fit and healthy. Whether you have a mental health problem or not, there may be times or situations in your life that are more difficult than others.

It's important to try to find things that work for you. You may wish to acknowledge that looking after your wellbeing can be difficult, especially with the pressure of job roles and personal lives. Nonetheless our health is the most important thing, and so it's vital that we try to find things that help us stay well.

### Top tip

You may want to create a 'self-care menu' of your favourite self-care activities. This might be a breathing exercise or spending time with a good friend, anything that helps you look after yourself.

Then you can try something off the menu daily, or however often you feel able to. You might want to put the list up somewhere you'll see as a reminder.

- **Talk about the way you feel.** As a Champion you may find lots of people coming to you to talk, so make sure you have someone to talk to: another Champion, your line manager, or a friend. This is especially important if you are facing a difficult time. At first this may be hard because, when you're going through a difficult time in your life, your immediate response might be to keep your feelings to yourself rather than share them with others. However, the best thing you can do to build resilience is to talk to someone about the way you feel. Your colleagues, friends or family may be able to offer you practical help or advice and give you another perspective on what is causing your problems. Even if they can't help, often just talking something through and feeling that there is someone to listen and understand you can make you feel much better.
- **Identify your triggers.** This can help you work out what affects your mental wellbeing and recognise changes in your mood that would be difficult to spot otherwise. For example, you may realise that seeing a certain person has an effect on your mood. Knowing what affects your moods can help you take steps to avoid these situations or mitigate against the negative impact a certain situation may have on you.



- **Doing something you enjoy can help you stay well.** Make time to do things you like, whether it's cooking, seeing your friends or DIY. Some people find that doing something creative, such as drama, drawing or sewing, helps them to express themselves positively and deal with any difficult emotions in a positive way.
- **Learning something new,** or taking up a new hobby, can also boost your confidence and occupies your mind in a positive and active way. If you want to try a new hobby, think about what you are good at, or things that you have always wanted to try. You can find information about volunteering organisations and local groups, clubs or classes at your local library, in local newspapers or magazines, or online.
- **Relax.** It is important to make time for yourself and relax. In order to look after others you need to first care for yourself. Self-care is not self-indulgent, it's essential. Do something you like, or even just take a five-minute break to look out of the window. Learning a relaxation technique, such as yoga, meditation or mindfulness (find out more at [bemindful.co.uk](http://bemindful.co.uk)) can also help you relax and reduce stress levels.

Think about things you can do if you start to feel overwhelmed. There may be things you know have worked in the past, you know have worked for friends or things to try from our information on what you can do when you're feeling overwhelmed.

Most of all be kind to yourself. We are all human and we are all different. Try not to compare yourself to other people and be realistic – you don't have to be perfect.

## The five ways to wellbeing

The following steps have been researched and developed by the [New Economics Foundation](http://NewEconomicsFoundation.org).

### Connect

There is strong evidence that indicates that feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world. It's clear that social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and acting as a buffer against mental health problems for people of all ages.

#### Examples of doing something to connect:

- Talk to someone instead of sending an email.
- Speak to someone new.
- Ask how someone's weekend was and really listen when they tell you.

### Be active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups. Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting wellbeing. But it doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good – slower-paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise.

#### Examples of being active:

- Take the stairs not the lift.
- Do some 'easy exercise', like stretching, before you leave for work in the morning.
- Walk to someone's desk instead of calling or emailing.



## Take notice

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can strengthen and broaden awareness. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing and savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities.

Heightened awareness also enhances your self-understanding and allows you to make positive choices based on your own values and motivations. Take some time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you.

### Examples of 'taking notice':

- Have a 'clear the clutter' day.
- Take notice of how your colleagues are feeling or acting.
- Take a different route on your journey to or from work.
- Visit a new place for lunch.

## Learning

Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the opportunity to engage in work or educational activities particularly helps to lift older people out of depression. The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning in particular, has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

Why not learn something new today? Here are a few more ideas:

- Find out something about your colleagues.
- Sign up for a class.
- Read the news or a book.
- Set up a book club.
- Do a crossword or Sudoku.
- Research something you've always wondered about.
- Learn a new word.

## Give

Participation in social and community life has attracted a lot of attention in the field of wellbeing research. Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy. Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing.

### Examples of 'give':

- Do something nice for a friend or neighbour.
- Volunteer your time.



# Five ways to wellbeing

Ways to look after your mental health



## 1. Connect

**Spend time with your family and friends.**

Talk to them about what you've been doing and find out how their day was too.

## 2. Be active

**Do a sport or be physically active.**

Whether it's indoors or outdoors, do something you enjoy: cycle, swim, run, play, skip, act, fly a kite, dance.

## 3. Take notice

**Be aware of how you're feeling. If you're feeling sad, talk to someone you can trust. If you're tired, rest.**

Explore and be aware of what's around you. Look and listen – what can you see, hear or smell?

## 4. Learn

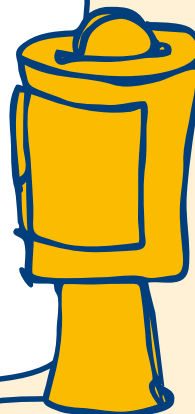
**Try something new. Find someone at home to help you make a cake. Join your school guitar group.**

Read for fun and teach yourself – set yourself a challenge you will enjoy.

## 5. Give

**Helping someone else can make you feel good. Give your time, share your skills.**

Do a good turn for someone at home, pay someone a compliment, or raise money for charity.



## Take care of your wellbeing



One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem in any given year. But our independent research shows that the estimated quarter of a million people who work and volunteer in the emergency services are even more at risk of experiencing a mental health problem than the general population due to the challenging nature of your roles.



### What can I do on a day-to-day basis to stay mentally well?

Mental wellbeing is just as important as physical wellbeing, and maintaining both is an important part of staying fit and healthy. This guide is to help you think about ways you can keep yourself well, what you can do if you are feeling overwhelmed and where you can go to find the right support for you if you need help. If you need support now or are feeling overwhelmed please turn over for more information.



#### Keep physically active

Doing regular exercise can be very effective in lifting your mood and increasing your energy levels. It doesn't have to be very strenuous or sporty to be effective – the important thing is to pick something you enjoy doing, so you're more likely to stick with it.

### Build healthy relationships with people

Building and maintaining constructive relationships with people is an important part of staying mentally well. If you spend time around positive and supportive people, you are more likely to have a better self-image, be more confident and feel able to face difficult times. In return, if you are caring and supportive to other people, you are more likely to get a positive response from them. This is particularly important if working alone is a significant part of your job.

#### Relax

It is important to make time for yourself and relax. In order to look after others you need to first care for yourself. Self-care is not self-indulgent, it's essential. Do something you like, or even just take a five-minute break to look out of the window. Learning a relaxation technique, such as yoga, meditation or mindfulness (find out more at [bemindful.co.uk](http://bemindful.co.uk)) can also help you relax and reduce stress levels.

#### Identify mood triggers

Keeping track of your moods in a mood diary can help you work out what affects your mental wellbeing and recognise changes in your mood that would be difficult to spot otherwise. For example, you may realise that seeing a certain person has an effect on your mood. Knowing what affects your moods can help you take steps to avoid these situations or mitigate against the negative impact a certain situation may have on you.

#### Diet

Explore the relationship between the food you eat and your mood. Improving your diet can help give you positive feelings, clearer thinking, more energy and calmer moods.

Think about how regularly you eat – if your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and experience low mood. You need to eat regularly to keep your sugar level steady, and choose foods that release energy slowly like protein, nuts and seeds, oats and wholegrains.

#### Are you having too much caffeine?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having too much can make you feel anxious and experience low mood, disturb your sleep, or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. Caffeine is in: tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks. You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether.



### Learn to accept yourself

One of the most important steps in maintaining mental wellbeing is to learn to accept yourself. If you value yourself, you are more likely to have positive relationships with other people and find it easier to cope with difficult times in your life.

#### Here are some tips to help you increase your self-esteem:

- Try not to compare yourself to other people.
- Acknowledge your positive qualities and things you are good at.
- Learn to identify and challenge unhelpful thinking patterns.
- Use self-help books and websites to help you change your beliefs.
- Spend time with supportive people.
- Be assertive – don't allow people to treat you with a lack of respect.
- Engage in hobbies that you enjoy.

### Sleep

There is a close relationship between sleep and mental health. If you're finding it difficult to sleep, don't try to force it – get up, go to another room, and try to relax there. Do something soothing, such as listening to music, until you're tired enough to go back to bed. If you are awake for long periods, repeat this process as many times as you need to.

[mind.org.uk/BlueLight](http://mind.org.uk/BlueLight)  
[bluelight@mind.org.uk](mailto:bluelight@mind.org.uk)

@MindBlueLight #mybluelight  
 Mind

We're a registered charity in England (no. 219838)

Funded by



Cabinet Office

Image: West Midlands Police



mind  
 for better mental health



# Need support?

## Samaritans

24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.

24-hour freephone helpline: 116 123  
Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

## The Blue Light Infoline

Confidential, independent and practical support, advice and signposting around mental health and wellbeing. The Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families, to help keep you or those you care about well for work.

The Infoline does not provide ongoing emotional support but will give you information on accessing services and help in your local area.

Our team provides information on a range of topics including:

- staying mentally healthy for work
- types of mental health problems
- how and where to get help
- medication and alternative treatments
- advocacy
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- existing emergency service support
- mental health and the law.

## The Blue Light Infoline:

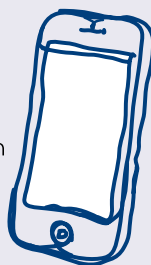
**0300 303 5999**

Lines are open 9am to 6pm,  
Monday to Friday  
(except for bank holidays)

[bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk](mailto:bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk)  
Text: 84999

## Local services

Find your **local Mind** and the services such as crisis helplines, drop-in centres, counselling and befriending they offer [here](#).



## Look after yourself during difficult times

Everyone has times when they face challenging situations and find it difficult to cope. If you are experiencing a difficult time, or are unwell, it's important to look after yourself and ask for help if you feel you need it.

# What can I do when I'm feeling overwhelmed?

## Try a breathing exercise

For example 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.

## Take a break

If it's possible, step away from what you are doing. You could read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes.

## Picture yourself somewhere you feel calm

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm. Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.

## Listen to music

Really listen to the music. Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

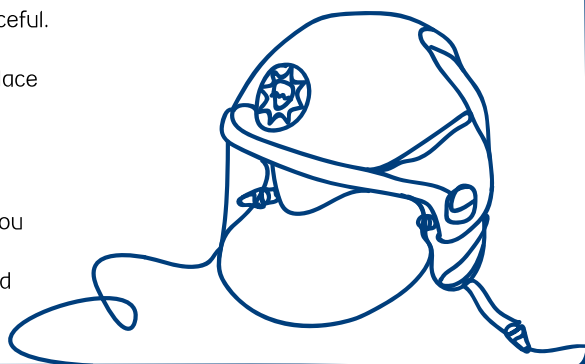
## Try a grounding exercise

To reconnect you with your surroundings. Look for and find one thing you can see, one you can touch, one you can hear, one you can smell and one you can taste.

## Stay safe

If your feelings become overwhelming, and you have suicidal thoughts or you think you may self-harm, remember that you can pick up the phone at any time of night or day and talk to the Samaritans on their 24 hour freephone helpline: 116 123.

You might also find that our information on [how to cope with suicidal feelings](#) is helpful.



## Notes


## Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue dashed lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Section 9: Next steps

### Tonight do something just for you

You may have heard the oxygen mask analogy: if you have taken a flight before you will have heard the safety instructions that you should fit your own oxygen mask before helping others. This is true in life as well. In order to help others we must first look after ourselves. There is nothing self-indulgent or selfish about looking after your wellbeing. It's vital, it helps you do everything you do.

So tonight do something just for you.

# Thank you

We hope you have enjoyed today's session. If you have any questions please speak to your facilitator.





# Glossary

## Terms used in this handbook

### Discrimination

When someone dislikes, or is prejudiced against, a certain group of people and treats people from this group unfairly. People can face discrimination because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or beliefs, or because they have a mental health problem.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment, using techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga. It has been shown to help people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, so that instead of being overwhelmed by them, it is easier to manage them.

### Resilience

The capacity to adapt and cope in the face of challenging circumstances, such as having a baby, being socially isolated or dealing with stressful workplace situations, whilst maintaining a stable mental wellbeing. Resilience can be taught and learned.

### Stereotype

When someone has a generalised or simplified idea about what people from a particular group are like, leading them to believe that people from this group are all the same. More often than not, stereotypes are negative. So when someone says all people with mental health problems are violent, this is an example of negative stereotyping. In reality people with a mental health problem are more likely to be a victim of violence themselves.<sup>1</sup>

### Stigma

When a person, group or condition has very negative or bad associations attached to it. There is a powerful stigma attached to mental health problems, which causes people to discriminate against or stereotype people with mental health problems.

### Webinar

A short informative film that can be accessed via the internet.

### Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing describes your mental state – how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. Our mental wellbeing can change, from day to day, month to month or year to year. The World Health Organisation states: “Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”.<sup>2</sup>

1. [time-to-change.org.uk/news-media/media-advisory-service/help-journalists/violence-mental-health-problems](https://time-to-change.org.uk/news-media/media-advisory-service/help-journalists/violence-mental-health-problems)

2. [who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](https://who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/)

The Speaking Up, Speaking Out workshop originally came from Time to Change. As part of the Blue Light Programme, Mind delivered the Speaking Up, Speaking Out workshop to Blue Light Champions across England and Wales.

The Blue Light Programme was set up to provide mental health support for emergency services staff and volunteers from ambulance, fire, police and search and rescue services across England and Wales.

## We're Mind, the mental health charity.

We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for advice and support.

Mind  
15-19 Broadway  
Stratford  
London E15 4BQ  
  
020 8519 2122  
[contact@mind.org.uk](mailto:contact@mind.org.uk)

[mind.org.uk/BlueLight](https://mind.org.uk/BlueLight)

 @MindBlueLight

 Mind

We're a registered charity in England (no. 219830)

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