

# Membership **News**

**'The impact on mental health in my industry is huge.'**

The Crown's Josh O'Connor on swimming to stop anxiety

**Coronavirus update**

Caring for your wellbeing in this year like no other

**Coping with paranoia**

What's it like living with threatening thoughts?

**The progress you inspire**

How you changed millions of lives last year



# welcome

As I write this introduction in early April, anxiety about coronavirus is only continuing to grow. It's impossible to know what the situation will be by the time you read this, but I wanted to take this opportunity to emphasise that Mind is here for you now – and if you ever find yourself struggling. You can read our latest advice for coping at this unprecedented time on page 11, and you can always find an ever-growing collection of mental health information at [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk). We can't thank you enough for being part of Mind, and we're here to support you in any way we can. **Paul Farmer, CEO**



## This magazine is for and about members like you

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### Renew your membership

Renew your membership online at [mind.org.uk/renewal](http://mind.org.uk/renewal). Alternatively, call the Membership Team on 020 8215 2243

### Become a member today

To join a growing group of people who play a part in everything we do, please go to [mind.org.uk/membership](http://mind.org.uk/membership)

## Your experiences of...

### Yoga

Yoga is one of many complementary therapies you might find useful alongside mental health treatments offered by your doctor. But what difference can it make? We asked members for your experiences.



An Ashtanga vinyasa yoga class has become part of my weekly ritual and I find it massively helps me to stay mentally well. A mixture of stretching, moving my body and focusing on my breath helps me to really be in the moment and I leave every week feeling refreshed and calm. I find with yoga you really concentrate on the movements you are making and on your breath. It's meditative and releases your body from all sorts of tensions you might not even realise you have. I would recommend it to anyone! **Sarah**



I have experienced depression and anxiety for around 20 years and yoga has been one of the most useful tools in my armoury to manage, well, my life really! My perception was that it was 'airy-fairy' and a lot of wiggling your fingers and toes, but I tried a class and was well and truly hooked. Within two years of beginning regular yoga practice – including breath work and mindfulness – I was able to withdraw from my medication that I had been taking for over 12 years\*. There were, of course, other factors but yoga has been a defining theme and is the first thing I reach for when I am feeling out of sorts. **Lucy**

### An introduction to yoga

Yoga involves spiritual and physical practices designed to increase self-awareness. These include posture work, breathing exercises, meditation, sounds and visualisation. There are many different types of yoga, and lots of studies suggest yoga can be helpful in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. It's also a great option because you can practice yoga at home using books, DVDs and free online resources. It's a good idea to do a few classes with an instructor first, though, because doing the poses incorrectly can cause injury.

Thank you to all of you who shared your experiences – we're sorry we can't feature you all.

\*You should always seek support from a doctor when coming off medication.



## Meet a member

# The art of recovery

Severe depression and anxiety led Mind member Andy to leave a successful career as a head teacher and begin a new search for meaning in life. Fifteen years on, he's a successful artist – and feels more contented now than he has in years.

Anyone looking to understand depression and anxiety should pay a visit to Doncaster Corn Exchange, a grand Victorian building in the heart of the town, now home to a bustling market. Long-time Mind member Andy Hollinghurst has a gallery there, and to one side you'll find his recovery wall. It shows the paintings he created at different stages of his journey through clinical depression and anxiety.

Andy painted consistently during the eight years it took him to recover from what he calls a massive breakdown. While he didn't realise it at the time, many aspects of the paintings – from the colour choices to the way landscapes are shown – closely reflect the changes in his mental state. "If I shuffled the paintings up and asked you to put them in chronological order, I think you'd be able to do that," he smiles.

The wall attracts a lot of attention from visitors, and Andy proudly displays leaflets from Mind alongside it. "The wall provides an opportunity to share my story," he says. "People will often ask what it's all about and I'll talk to them, and for some people that might give them the confidence to talk about their experiences too."

### A reluctant teacher

Andy had always wanted to be an artist. He was even offered a place at art college when he was 18, but instead began a career in teaching. "I always had a very practical head on my shoulders," he says. "I lost my father at 14, so from 14 onwards I was far too sensible. My mum said I wouldn't make any money out of art, and I sort of drifted into teaching."

Despite this hesitant start, Andy progressed fast. He was a deputy head at 29 and a head teacher by the time he was 40. But the pressures of the job gradually became harder and harder to manage.

"If you can imagine trying to deal with the stresses and strains of a job as a head teacher without knowing I had quite acute anxiety," he says, "it just became impossible. I would try and do everything, prepare for everything, constantly protect myself from things going wrong. Eventually my anxiety turned into clinical depression, and I broke down completely."

### Beginning again

After six painful months with few signs of improvement, Andy felt increasingly certain that he wouldn't be able to return to teaching. At that point he applied for an ill-health pension: an experience that has given him great sympathy with anyone who struggles to access benefits due to their mental health.

"I just had to climb through hoop after hoop," says Andy, who had just bought a house and felt huge pressure to support his family. "Eventually I ended up paying to see a consultant psychologist who said I was so traumatised I could never go back to teaching. After a lot of effort and stress, I did manage to get the pension. At that point I started thinking more about what role I could offer in life going forward."

### Finding Time to Change

It was an article by Mind Ambassador Alastair Campbell that sent Andy's life in a new direction. The former Labour Party strategist had written a piece about Time to Change, the anti-stigma campaign we run with Rethink Mental Illness. After reading it, Andy successfully applied to become a Time to Change involvement worker.

"That was a massive thing for me to do," he says. "I suddenly found myself speaking about my experiences at conferences, surrounded by other people with mental health problems who had so much strength and courage. It helped me feel stronger too."

There were still difficult times. After relapsing into a deep depression, he began seeing a counsellor at Doncaster Mind who he credits with playing a vital role in his recovery. "Once you're aware of things like intrusive thoughts, cycles of depression and the reasons you panic, you can begin to deal with them," he says.

As time went on, Andy became more open about his mental health. He was one of our Voices of Mind ahead of the 2015 General Election, calling on politicians to prioritise mental health. After years spent struggling to understand what had happened to him, he slowly began to accept his experiences and see the value they offered to others.



### Becoming an artist

Even when he was teaching, Andy had always painted. It's been a consistent thread throughout his life, but it was at this point he began taking it more seriously – and a visit to Doncaster art fair reshaped his future. "I asked the person organising it how you got involved, and she mentioned that Doncaster market was looking for artists." Andy set up a stall in late 2018. A year and a half later, he's still there.

"It's an absolute privilege," he says. "I'm finally doing

what I wanted to do when I was 18! I've still got anxiety. I still over-analyse things. But I've not had depression for a long time."

For Andy, art is critical for wellbeing. It's a way to switch off from difficult thoughts and create a sense of calm. "What happens when you paint," he says, "is you can express your emotions in a visual way. You also can't think about anything else, because you're so absorbed in it, and you get a great sense of fulfilment too. I'm glad to say I've not been unhappy for a very long time."



# Mind News

You're at the heart of everything we do

## Extra time for On Your Side



Mind and the English Football League (EFL) have announced a two-year extension to our On Your Side partnership. This groundbreaking collaboration began in 2018 to increase awareness of mental health in football and raise funds to help deliver life-changing support.

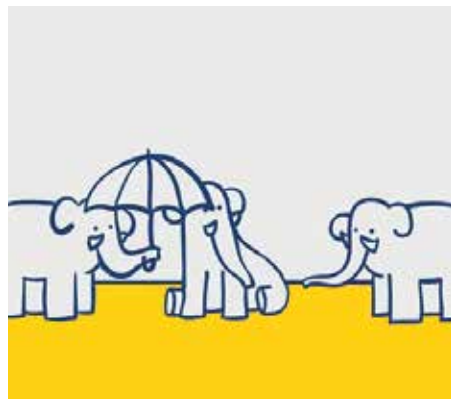
As our CEO Paul Farmer said, we're delighted that this partnership will now continue until 2022. "Working with the EFL and its 71 clubs over the past two seasons has given us a brilliant

opportunity to bring about real change at not only community and club level but also nationally.

"We're looking forward to continuing this vital work, with ambitious plans to reach more people who feel they have nowhere to turn and to ensure that whoever a fan supports, Mind is here to support them."

To find out more about On Your Side, visit [mind.org.uk/onyourside](http://mind.org.uk/onyourside)

## Elefriends is becoming Side by Side



In the next few months we're launching Side by Side, our new online peer support community. Like our current community Elefriends, which we set up in 2012, Side by Side will give people a safe place to listen, share and be heard online.

The new Side by Side site has been developed in collaboration with Elefriends' members and will include better support for those of us who use it. Elefriends will be closing in the

## Members shape our new strategy

Members like you are at the heart of everything we do. So when we began to develop Mind's strategy for 2021-24, we wanted to make sure you were involved from the very beginning.

After we asked for applications in your membership enews, seven members were chosen to join our Strategy Advisory Board. A huge thank you to everyone who applied.

These members are already helping us to decide which issues to focus on to keep transforming mental health across England and Wales in the coming years. The advisory board met on a videoconference for the first time in early April, and members shared their thoughts on issues including how Mind should tackle stigma, push for policy change, offer therapeutic support and help people to access mental health services and stay well. They are now creating a survey with us to ask people with experience of mental health problems what we should prioritise. We'll keep you updated on how the strategy is developing in future magazines.

coming months, but only when we're totally happy that Side by Side is working as our community wants it to. We know how valuable it is to connect with people who understand, and we'll make sure Side by Side gives you the best possible opportunity to do just that.

To see a preview of the new site, head to [sidebyside.mind.org.uk](http://sidebyside.mind.org.uk). And visit [mind.org.uk/elefriends](http://mind.org.uk/elefriends) for the latest updates on Side by Side.

# Behind the headlines

Our take on the latest mental health stories

## Mental Health Act amended due to coronavirus

### What happened?

The government announced a range of temporary changes to the Mental Health Act as part of its response to the coronavirus pandemic. This included reducing the number of doctors required to detain people under the Act and extending and suspending time limits on how long you can be detained for in some situations.

### What we said...

"The Government's emergency coronavirus laws include measures that could severely impact the rights of people with mental health problems detained for hospital treatment," our Head of Policy and Campaigns, Vicki Nash, said.

"We recognise that these steps might

be necessary to enable the health system to operate with extreme staff shortages, but this cannot be at the expense of safeguarding some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

"The last thing we want to see is people left languishing in hospital without regular reviews of why they're there or proper representation and advice, particularly amidst such high demand on hospital beds.

"This announcement also comes at a time when a long-overdue White Paper was expected to address pre-existing injustices in the way people are sectioned and treated in hospital. At the earliest possible opportunity the Government must act to change mental health laws to

strengthen people's rights in the long-term. We will closely follow the introduction and effects of these measures and make sure that the voices, rights and choices of people with mental health problems are not forgotten."



Vicki Nash, our Head of Policy and Campaigns

## Government announces coronavirus mental health support

### What happened?

As the potential mental health impact of the coronavirus lockdown became clear, the UK Government issued a range of guidance on looking after wellbeing during the pandemic. It covered maintaining contact with friends and family, keeping a regular routine, sleeping well and focusing on a hobby or learning something new. It also announced £5m of funding to help charities support people's mental health, which will be administered by Mind.

### What we said...

Paul Farmer, our CEO, commented: "We are facing one of the toughest

ever times for our mental wellbeing as a nation. It is absolutely vital that people pull together and do all they can to look after themselves and their loved ones, when we are all facing a huge amount of change and uncertainty.

"Charities like Mind have a role to play in helping people cope not only with the initial emergency but also with how this will affect us well into the future. Whether we have an existing mental health problem or not, we are all going to need extra help to deal with the consequences of this unprecedented set of circumstances."



Paul Farmer, our CEO

For more on the latest stories, head to [mind.org.uk/news](http://mind.org.uk/news)

# Lives are changing, thanks to you

Members like you make amazing progress possible every day – guiding our work, funding life-changing support and sharing your experiences to build pressure on politicians for better mental health services. Last year, with your help, we reached more people in more ways than ever before. Here's a taste of the difference we made together in these highlights from our 2018/19 annual review.

We responded to over

118,000  
people



seeking answers and advice  
from our helplines

Our local Mind services supported



396,000 people

We reached nearly

20,000  
young  
people

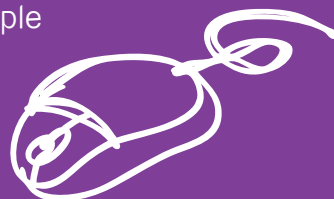


through our new work to improve  
mental health in schools

Our mental health  
information was accessed nearly

16 million times,

helping more people  
than ever get  
support when  
they needed  
it most



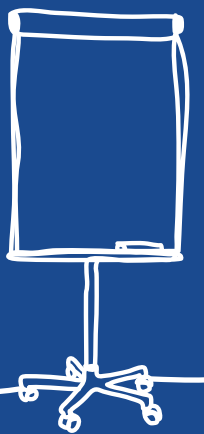
Over  
124,000  
people

took part in peer support with Mind,  
benefitting from the understanding  
and experiences of others

Working with  
employers, we  
supported over

775,000

people to have  
better mental  
health at work



Over  
40,000  
people

with mental health problems worked  
with us to make sure our services met  
the needs of the people who use them

Over  
5,000  
people

got help from local Mind  
staff in 91 GP surgeries



Read our full  
2018/19 annual  
review

To find out more about the  
change you made possible  
– from the members who  
helped choose our new  
chairman to the campaigners  
who told politicians the truth  
about Universal Credit and  
benefit sanctions – head to  
[mind.org.uk/annualreview](https://mind.org.uk/annualreview)



**'I felt we really contributed in a  
meaningful way.'**

Andy (left) was one of seven Mind members who  
helped to choose our new chairman in 2018.



## Coping with trauma

As many of us try and come to terms with the impact of coronavirus, we look at how stressful, frightening or distressing events can affect mental health.

Traumatic events can happen at any age and can cause long-lasting harm. Everyone has a different reaction to trauma, so you might notice any effects quickly, or a long time afterwards.

### How can trauma affect people?

Common effects of trauma can include flashbacks, panic attacks, dissociation, hyperarousal, sleep problems, grief, self-harm, suicidal feelings and alcohol and substance misuse.

People who go through trauma also sometimes feel as if they are to blame, leading to strong feelings of shame or guilt, even though the traumatic experience wasn't their fault. Effects can continue long after the trauma is over and might affect your mind and body, including how you think, feel and behave.

### Which treatments could help?

Everyone responds to trauma differently and the treatment you are offered will depend on your own unique needs, symptoms and diagnosis (if you have one).

Some common treatments include talking therapies (often trauma-focused), arts and creative therapies,

medication and crisis services.

What helps varies from person to person and can change over time, so keeping an open mind and exploring different options can be useful.

### How can I help myself?

Coping with the effects of trauma can feel difficult or exhausting but it could help to get to know your triggers, try to confide in somebody and experiment with relaxation techniques or peer support. Looking after your physical health, including your diet and taking exercise, can help too.

For more information on trauma, visit [mind.org.uk/trauma](https://www.mind.org.uk/trauma)

## Your questions answered

**Q** I have experienced trauma but find it really hard accessing effective support. How can I get the help I need?

**A** Seeking help following trauma can be difficult and you might sometimes face barriers to getting the support you need and deserve. You may find it difficult talking about what happened – sometimes to multiple different people – and the professionals you talk to may not always understand trauma and how it affects you. But there are some things that might help if you seek support in the future.

It might help to write things down if you find it hard talking. This can let people know what happened and how you feel at that moment. Try to think about what will help you and ask

professionals whether they can provide the type of support you want or where you can find it. What you tell people about your experiences, when you tell them and how you do it is up to you.

And remember you're not alone. Getting support and encouragement from people who have been through something similar can also be really helpful.

Got an issue or question about mental health? To contact Mind's Infoline, call 0300 123 3393, text 86463\* or email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

Lines are open 9am-6pm Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays)



### Mind's info team



Annie Crabtree  
Information Officer



Stephen Buckley  
Head of Information

\*Texts are charged at your standard message rate.

## Four-page focus

# Coronavirus and wellbeing

It's impossible to know what the situation will be when this magazine reaches you, but we do know that coronavirus and its impact are causing stress and worry for lots of people. If there's one message we want members like you to hear from Mind at this time, it's that we are here for you. If you have a mental health problem, this situation might be impacting how you're coping with day-to-day life, but there are lots of things you can try that might help. Here's our latest advice on how to look after your wellbeing while staying at home or self-isolating – along with plenty of extra tips from members.

## Practical advice for staying at home

### Eat well and stay hydrated

You might find your appetite changes if your daily routine has changed, but eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can help your mood and energy levels. Drinking water regularly is important too – it might help to set an alarm or use an app to remind you to stay hydrated. And if you are self-isolating, you could ask someone to leave food at your doorstep or try to use online delivery services.

### Keep taking your medication

If you take medication to help your mental health, you might be able to order repeat prescriptions by phone or online. You could try downloading the free NHS app to see if your surgery is listed (though not all are yet). Pharmacies also often deliver medication or will give it to someone else to collect for you – you can find more information at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) or by calling NHS 111 or NHS Direct Wales. And be careful about buying medication online – you should only buy from registered pharmacies.

### Continue accessing treatment and support if possible

You might be able to speak to your counsellor, therapist or support worker by phone, text or online. And if you're struggling because of the lack of face-to-face support, ask your therapist if there is anything they can do to help.

### Take care of your environment

You might find it helps to keep your home clean and tidy – and cleaning your house, doing laundry and washing yourself are also important ways to stop germs spreading. But people feel differently about how tidy they want their home to be, so if you live with others try to discuss what each person needs to feel comfortable. It could help to decide together how you'll use different spaces.

Your energy costs will also probably rise if you're at home more than usual, so try to think about how to manage your energy use or cover higher bills. You could also ask your energy provider about any support they offer.

Feeling anxious?  
Just breathe.

Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, with your shoulders relaxed and a hand on your stomach. Count to four as you breathe in and four as you breathe out.

Continues over →



### Find ways to work at home

If you are able to work from home, it's important to ask your employer about any home working policies they have. You can also ask for help with setting things up at home, like any technology you might need.

If you are also looking after children while you work, your employer may be able to help you balance your job and childcare. Your children's school might also have digital resources available for you to use, or you could

encourage your children to select books, podcasts, games or puzzles they can use to stay active and creative.

And now might be a good time to be more lenient about social media and mobile phone time. Your children will be used to spending time with others and might find it difficult to be removed from this.

### Contact your Local Authority about care needs

If you use care services, you should let your Local Authority know if you have to self-isolate. Make it clear if you still need any support – your Local Authority should have plans in place to help.

And if you provide care to someone you don't live with and you need to self-isolate, you should contact your Local Authority then too. The Carers UK website ([carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)) also has detailed advice on caring for others.

## Taking care of your mental health and wellbeing

### Hand washing and anxiety

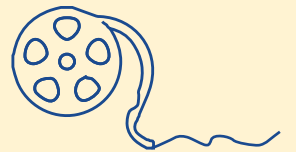
Some mental health problems can cause difficult feelings or behaviours to do with washing or hygiene. If you are feeling stressed or anxious about this, it can help to:

- Avoid re-reading the advice on hand washing
- Let people know you are struggling and ask them not to remind you to wash your hands
- Set limits, like washing your hands for 20 seconds
- Plan something to do after washing your hands
- Use breathing exercises to feel more in control.

### Connect with people

There are all kind of ways to stay in touch with people you'd normally see in person – video calls, phone calls,

instant messaging, text and email. And if you're worried about running out of things to talk about because conversations feel different, you could always plan to watch a film or read a book separately and then discuss it.



Peer support communities – like our own Elefriends ([Elefriends.org.uk](http://Elefriends.org.uk)) – can also give you a chance to share your experiences and hear from others. That can be very useful if you are feeling anxious, as can speaking to someone you trust about your worries. And if you are concerned about loneliness, you could try putting extra pictures up of people you care about or listening to a chatty radio station or podcast.

Continues over

### Advice from Mind members

A simple grounding technique is noticing five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. Rather than getting stuck in your head, see if you can drop your awareness to your body.

Kerry

Be grateful every evening for three things in your life. Limit your listening or watching of news to just once a day. Contact one different person each day to check they are OK. Get crafty. Learn something new. And dance and sing as if no one is watching.

Sue and Jim Smith

Frame the question differently. Don't think: I can't do these things anymore. Rather think: I can't do them how I normally would, but how can I still do them?

Alice

Keep in touch with people who care. Pick up that phone, make a call. I assure you love and support from loved ones can flow down the line.

Pipps

I would say try and vary parts of your routines each day. So, for example, if you are going out for a daily walk, try a different route each time.

Rosamond

Give yourself a break – if you have an unproductive or bad day just hold tight and start fresh tomorrow. We all react and cope differently in times like this. There's no right or wrong.

Zoe

If you don't have any sort of outside space, open a window. If there's a window that lets a lot of sunlight in, sit or lay there with a book, imagine you're on a beautiful beach and spend time reading.

Joanne

Take a deep breath in and think the word 'All'. Hold your breath briefly and think the word 'Is'. Exhale slowly and think the word 'Well'. By repeating 'All is Well' over and over again, you are anchoring your mind into believing just that.

Shalini

Avoid sharing negative content and watching too much news: most of what we learn from the news is out of our control. Update yourself on what's essential and don't binge on news.

Nigel

If you usually work with others but are now at home, you could try online fitness classes, regular video meetings, drinks and chats, or sending round inspirational quotes.

Liz

Use all of your senses to savour some good positive things. For example use perfumes or aftershaves and enjoy their smell, or feel the smoothness of materials. And be a child again: catch up with things that used to be fun when you were young.

David

Make window art – trees, rainbows, stars, moons, suns – and attach them to the inside of your window so they can be seen from outside. It's about connection, care and kindness. We are stronger together.

Lesley

### We are here to support you

For more information about how to look after yourself and others at this difficult time, visit [mind.org.uk/coronavirus](http://mind.org.uk/coronavirus)



## Decide on your routine

Try to keep things as normal as possible. Get up and go to bed at your usual time. Follow your usual routines. Plan how you'll spend your time and pin your plan up on the wall. If you aren't happy with your usual routine, it can also be a good time to do things differently, for example going to bed earlier. And if you live with others, try to agree a household routine and give each other space.



## Try to keep active

Building physical activity into your day can make a big difference to how you feel. There are all kinds of options for staying active at home, including dancing, cleaning, going up and down stairs, online workouts and sitting less.

## Think sunlight, fresh air and nature

It is possible to get the positive effects of nature while staying indoors. You could try opening the windows, arranging a comfortable place to sit with a view of trees or the sky, looking at photos of your favourite natural places, listening to natural sounds like birdsong or ocean waves, or decorating your living space with natural materials. You might be able to buy seeds, flowers or plants for online delivery too.

## Relax, be creative and spend your time well

There are lots of ways to unwind, take notice of the present and use your creative side. You could try drawing, painting, collage, DIY, colouring, mindfulness, playing an instrument, singing, listening to music, writing, yoga or meditation. Or why not have a spring clean, clear out your inbox or write letters or emails to friends and family?

## Keep your brain stimulated

Try to set time aside in your routine for keeping your brain occupied. Read books, magazines and articles. Listen to podcasts, watch films and do puzzles. Some libraries now have apps so members can borrow ebooks, audiobooks and magazines too.



## Take care with news and information

It's important to stay connected with current events, but stick to trusted sources such as the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) coronavirus webpages and the [icc.gig.cymru](https://www.icc.gig.cymru) NHS site for Welsh language information. If the news is making you anxious or confused, think about switching off or limiting what you look at.

## If you're feeling anxious

It might help to plan a safe space in your home that you can go to if you have panic attacks or flashbacks. Finding ways to distract yourself can help too. Breathing exercises, games and puzzles can all be useful.

## If you're feeling claustrophobic or trapped

Open the windows and let in fresh air. Spend time sitting on your doorstep or in the garden if you have one. Try looking at the sky to give yourself a sense of space. And regularly change the rooms you spend time in.

Found this article helpful?  
Want to do more to help others?



Donate to our mental health emergency appeal at [mind.org.uk/donate](https://www.mind.org.uk/donate)



## Getting support for work, benefits and housing

It's right that the Government has pledged to invest in supporting those affected by coronavirus – and those at risk – by investing in Statutory Sick Pay and speeding up the process of receiving benefits for some people who cannot work.

The UK Government website ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) and the Welsh Government website ([gov.wales](https://www.gov.wales)) have up-to-date information for employees and employers, as well as guidance on Statutory Sick Pay, Universal Credit and changes to Job Centre appointments and assessments for health and disability-related benefits.

If you are worried about how coronavirus could affect your housing situation, you may be able to get help at Shelter's English and Welsh websites ([shelter.org.uk](https://www.shelter.org.uk) and [sheltercymru.org.uk](https://www.sheltercymru.org.uk)).

And Citizens Advice offers free, confidential information about your rights, benefits, money and work on 03444 111 444.

## Advice to protect your rights

# Veganism and mental health

**A recent employment tribunal ruled that vegans can be protected from discrimination under the Equality Act. What might this mean for vegans using mental health services?**

## What does the law say?

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone because of their religion or philosophical belief. At a recent tribunal, the panel decided one person's ethical veganism did qualify as a belief system, because it affected a range of areas of his life – not just his diet. Based on that, the tribunal ruled that this person's veganism did qualify for protection under the Equality Act.

Employment tribunal decisions don't have to be followed by other courts or tribunals, so this case doesn't set a legal precedent. It could give an indication, though, of how other courts might see the legal protection of veganism.

## Veganism and mental health services

So how could this affect you if you're a vegan who uses mental health services? It's a complex situation. It's unlikely that you will be protected if you simply follow a vegan diet. Something more is required for veganism to qualify as a philosophical belief and be protected under the Equality Act. In the recent tribunal, the claimant's veganism impacted on

everything from his choice of clothing to the people he dated.

If your veganism does qualify for protection, however, then not offering you vegan options for food or medication (some medicines are derived from animal products) could be classed as discrimination or a breach of your human rights. However, it will not be discrimination or a human rights breach if the medical provider shows that there are legitimate and justifiable (probably therapeutic) reasons for giving you the particular food option or medication.

We'll be keeping a close eye on any future cases to see how this situation develops.

## Your questions answered

**Q** I am a 23-year-old vegan about to have inpatient treatment in an eating disorder unit and I'm worried that my meal plan will include non-vegan food. What are my rights?

**A** Your eating disorder team should, when they assess you, attempt to understand your veganism on an individual basis. For example they may wish to consider whether you were vegan before you developed an eating disorder, how your veganism fits in with other rules you may have about food and whether veganism is part of a wider belief system for you. This is because there is some evidence that ethical and vegan food choices are actually linked to eating disorders for some people. It is important for your team to

understand whether this is the case with you.

If your veganism is part of a belief system, it could be protected under equalities and human rights legislation. Not offering you a vegan food plan could therefore be unlawful discrimination or a breach of your human rights. However, if your team can show that offering you a non-vegan meal plan is reasonably necessary for health-improving or even life-saving reasons, then this will not be unlawful.

Want to discuss a legal issue? Contact Mind's Legal Line on 0300 466 6463 or email [legal@mind.org.uk](mailto:legal@mind.org.uk)

Lines are open 9am-6pm Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays)



## Mind's legal team



Alice Livermore  
Lawyer



Stephen Heath  
Lawyer



## What's on your mind... Josh O'Connor



Photo: Matt Holguak

As well as spending the past year filming worldwide Netflix hit *The Crown*, Josh O'Connor has been swimming in some of the UK and Ireland's most remote – and coldest – waters to raise money for Mind. He explains how his own mental health struggles inspired the challenge, and winces at the memory of a Christmas Day swim he won't forget in a hurry.

There was a moment early last year when Josh O'Connor felt an overwhelming compulsion to head to the sea. "I had two weeks off for the first time in two years," says the actor, who is best known for his role as Prince Charles in recent series of *The Crown*. "As I'm sure many people do who go from having a very busy work schedule to having a bit of time off, I was finding it difficult to adjust and difficult on my mental health. My instinct in that moment was to get in the car, go to a place on the coast that's very special to me and just run into the ocean.

"It was a ridiculous idea, it was so cold outside, but it just seemed to make sense. I was freezing but I found it hugely healing. There's a lot of science behind why cold water swimming is good for you, because it releases endorphins, but also I think generally it's that action of putting the focus back onto your body. Just as meditation does and deep breathing does, it makes you feel more in your body, and helps generally with anxiety and feelings like that. When those difficult aspects of mental health build up and bubble up, you need to find ways to manage those things, and for me I think cold water swimming has been really important."

### A 30th birthday challenge

The uplifting impact of that swim gave Josh the idea for a much bigger challenge. For the past year, he's been seizing every opportunity between filming to complete 30 outdoor swims around the UK and Ireland in his 30th birthday year. With 24 swims done, he has already raised almost £4,000 for Mind in the process.

"Mind is a charity that does so much good work," Josh says, "and I feel I've been surrounded in recent years by friends and family who have gone through mental health problems. I feel immensely proud to have friends who have fought mental health problems and come through the other end. In recent years I've had to fight with my own stuff for the first time, and this was my way of acknowledging the courage of my friends and family and of myself, I guess. I wanted the challenge to feel more like a big celebration."

### Watery wonders

Josh's swimming challenge was inspired by his mum, who completed 60 wild swims in her 60th year. The pair recently swam together in Scotland. "It's embarrassing," he laughs. "She strips off and gets in seemingly with no breathing techniques or anything, and I'm hyperventilating and splashing around everywhere. I look pathetic most of the time!"

The challenge has seen Josh travel the length and breadth of the UK and Ireland. The highlight so far was a visit to remote Sandwood Bay on the far north-west coast of Scotland, a place as close to Iceland as it is to France.

"My aunt and uncle spend a lot of time in Scotland and said they would triple their donation if I swam at a beach called Sandwood Bay. I was actually told very strictly by my aunt not to tell too many people about it," he adds, "and now I'm telling you!"

"Anyway, I parked in a little village eight miles away, which is as close as you could get to the bay. I walked with my rucksack, my tent, my sleeping bag and my stove, and there were two lochs on the walk so I swam in both of those. Then I got to this beautiful stretch of sandy beach. I hadn't seen a single human being on the eight-mile walk and there wasn't a single footprint on this beach. I camped there, which was terrifying and invigorating and all the things you might imagine, then in the morning I swam in the sea and the loch there. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life."

### Frozen festivities

That idyllic scene makes an interesting contrast with Josh's rather less tranquil dip in the lido at Cheltenham, his hometown, on Christmas Day. "That was the only swim I've done not in natural water like a lake, sea or river," he says. "It was absolutely freezing. It's not heated, and they had literally put the water in the day before.

"It was disastrous. I remember getting in and making these kind of guttural noises: noises people have never heard the like of before. The water burned. My body felt so much pain. That was the only one so far I did not enjoy!"

As well as raising money for Mind's work, Josh hopes the challenge will help to break through stigma about mental health, especially among actors. "I'm trying to talk about mental health much more because I think it's only natural that the impact on mental health in my industry is huge and profound," he says. "I'm a natural hermit and I enjoy my own space and like being alone, but suddenly you go from being anonymous to being recognised, and I think talking about that has been helpful to me.

"I feel very grateful and very privileged to be in the position I am in," he adds, "but I've spent the majority of my career, when I've talked about my own struggles or mental health, feeling I have to preface that with: 'I realise I'm so lucky'. Now I try to own how I'm feeling, rather than prefacing it in that way, because there's no reason to feel shame about who you are or how you're feeling. Shame is not good, full stop."



You can follow Josh's epic swimming journey on Instagram @joshwaterlogged



## A day in the life

# Hannah Parnes, educational psychologist

In her role as an educational psychologist for the London borough of Islington, Hannah Parnes supports children, teachers and families at eight local schools. She takes us through a varied day helping children and young people achieve their potential.



 9am

My first appointment today is at a primary school, where I'm meeting with one child's parents and his teacher. I work with a range of schools – nursery, primary and secondary. That includes mainstream schools and other specialist settings, for example our pupil referral unit, which is for young people who have been excluded or have struggled in mainstream schools.

As an educational psychologist, I help schools think about how children learn and develop. If schools have got concerns about a particular child's learning or if they have broader concerns about how they operate as a school – for instance how they approach certain behaviours – I can help them to think about those things.

Today's meeting is to talk about a child who is in nursery. He has autism and emotional needs related to that: he gets very anxious if things don't happen as he anticipates. Our approach is based on solution-focused psychology, which looks at an individual's current circumstances and the goals they would like to achieve, rather than focusing only on problems.

It's a consultative approach, so I meet with the parents and teacher to talk together about what's going well and what they might want support

with. My focus is on helping people to come up with solutions, so they feel empowered to make changes to the system around the child. This can have a huge impact on learning.

**Seeing children  
change and become  
more confident over  
time is really, really  
rewarding.**

The child we're talking about today struggles to communicate with language, so we talk about routes and interventions that could help with that. We talk about how to make the environment more predictable too, to help with his anxiety about change and the unexpected. We also agree that I'll come back in a few weeks to do a play-based assessment with the child, where we'll play together to help get a stronger sense of his strengths and needs. It's a useful way of finding further ways for parents and teachers to support the child at school and at home.

 10:30am

Next I travel to the pupil referral unit to meet a 13-year-old girl who is looked after in care and has been excluded from mainstream school. I'm here to get her views on how things are for her and to understand her experience of school. What we call the pupil voice is so important: we're always looking for ways to understand young people's experiences, to help their parents, carers and teachers support them better.

It's a completely informal session. Often young people find it difficult to express their experiences by talking, so today we use a drawing

technique based in personal construct psychology, which looks at how people see the world, including themselves and how they feel they are seen by others.

I ask the student to draw the best school they could ever imagine and the worst school they could ever imagine. It's a way to get people thinking about environmental and emotional issues. In the worst school picture, she draws a chaotic, unpredictable and noisy environment, with teachers who are really strict and don't understand her. From there we are able to start talking about relationships and changes the school could make that might help her to feel more comfortable.

 2pm

After grabbing a quick sandwich, I head to a primary school where I've been working with the staff to help improve practice across the whole school related to adverse childhood experiences. That can mean things like experiencing ongoing domestic violence or sustained trauma, such as coming from a war torn country. Only a small number of children will experience these things, but we know they are more likely to experience difficulties at school, for example being excluded, and that children who are excluded have poorer outcomes as adults.

I've been working with this school for nearly two years, helping teachers understand behaviours that can be related to adverse experiences. If you live in a family where emotions are never talked about, for example, you don't develop that emotional vocabulary, and that's when you might behave in ways that can seem extreme to other people when you're feeling distressed or misunderstood.

So we look at things like using emotional language in the classroom to normalise that, and at how staff can support kids who are feeling emotional and upset.

We've also looked at giving staff permission to let each other know if they need support themselves. Teaching is a really difficult job, and teachers can't be expected to perform at their best if they don't feel they can be honest about their experiences, so we've looked at processes to help with that too. The feedback has been really positive throughout the project.

 4pm

I end the day at a peer supervision session, where I meet with four other educational psychologists. We discuss everything from individuals we are concerned about to managing our workload. Like everyone in the public sector, we're incredibly busy; there's always lots and lots of need out there. Having this chance to empathise, share thinking and find solutions is really important.

I love working with children and seeing the kind of hope that comes with doing that. Working with schools and families, we can make a really big difference. Seeing children change and become more confident over time is really, really rewarding.

### Hannah's qualifications

"I worked with young offenders for years after getting a psychology degree when I was 21. Then quite recently I retrained and did a three-year doctorate in professional educational, child and adolescent psychology."

Want to suggest a job in mental healthcare you'd like to know more about?  
Work in mental health and want to share your story? Email [membership@mind.org.uk](mailto:membership@mind.org.uk) and we'll be in touch.



The power of local Minds

Breaking the stigma of hearing voices

At its four hearing voices groups in Taunton, Frome, Bridgwater and Wells, Mind in Somerset helps people to feel less alone, less isolated and more able to cope. As Marc Lewis explains, the impact on people’s lives can be profound.



“A lot of people who hear voices or see visions really don’t like to admit it or to talk about it,” says Marc Lewis, who runs Mind in Somerset’s four hearing voices groups across the county. “If they do talk about it, they often find people don’t understand or don’t really listen to what they are saying. When people come to our groups, it can be their first opportunity to feel understood, feel listened to and feel that they are with people who are on their level. The impact of that can be transformational.”

There are many reasons why you might hear voices. They can be a symptom of mental health problems including psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder or severe depression. They can also be related to everything from lack of sleep to bereavement to taking recreational drugs. Research has suggested that around 10% of people hear voices at some point in their life but, despite it being a relatively common issue, Marc hears again and again just how isolating hearing voices can be.

“I think there’s been a lot of good work done in raising awareness of mental health problems like depression, stress and anxiety,” he says. “But I don’t think awareness of hearing voices or seeing visions has increased at the same time. So many people come to our groups saying they haven’t been able to get the support and understanding they need from their community. In our groups, they can very quickly feel connected to other people in a way they haven’t done for years.”

Peer support in action

Mind in Somerset set up its first hearing voices group in Taunton, with funding from the Somerset Partnership NHS. It then started running three more existing groups across the county. “One of the psychologists at the



Somerset Partnership NHS had recognised that while there was clinical and medical support for people who hear voices, there was a gap in support that focused on the social aspects of people’s experiences, which can actually be a lot more meaningful,” Marc says.

“Often people might come to a group for the first time and you can see they are a bit nervous, so they sit there quietly at first. But then sometimes even within the first hour you just see this look of recognition on their face. They might say: ‘I’ve had that, that’s exactly what I go through, I can’t believe other people have that experience.’”

The aim of the groups is to offer a safe, inclusive and understanding place where people can share and talk openly about their experiences, free from fear of stigma or discrimination. Marc co-facilitates the groups either with a volunteer or a Mind in Somerset colleague, but his intention is always to let the people who join the sessions guide their direction.

“I take a very active listening approach and try and get the conversation flowing then let people take it over,” he says. “Empowering people to feel confident to discuss what they want to discuss is more meaningful than me leading the conversations.”

Learning ways to cope

Within the groups, discussions will often turn to ways to manage voices effectively and feel more in control. “Different tools and techniques work for different people,” Marc says. “For some people telling the voices to go away does work. For others distractions are more useful. Some people choose to ignore the voices they don’t like and really focus on the ones saying positive things. And there’s also a good technique where people agree to pay voices attention only at a certain time.

“Again though,” he adds, “the real value is in people sharing how these techniques have worked for them and might work for others. And it’s also important to say hearing voices can be positive. For some people it can add a richness to their experience, for others it’s a burden that they struggle with.”

Marc has seen people go from being totally isolated to meeting up with others from the group and joining in with local community projects. The role has also given him a new level of insight into what it really means to live with voices and visions.

“Every day I feel more and more inspired by our members,” he says. “They’ve got a hell of a lot of strength. When you meet people who are hearing voices all the time but are still getting on with their lives, still working, still bringing up a family, still doing the things people do, I think that’s extremely inspiring. It’s something to be in awe of.”



Local Minds offer a huge variety of groups, mental health support and activities. They are always delighted to hear from Mind members, so whether you’re interested in finding support, meeting like-minded people or volunteering, why not give them a call? Find your local Mind at [mind.org.uk/local](http://mind.org.uk/local)





## Your experiences of...

# Paranoia

What's it like to live with overwhelming thoughts that make you feel you are under threat? Mind member Leanne remembers a time when paranoia left her unable to leave the house.

I was about 17 when I started thinking my neighbours were talking about me. I had had anxiety since I was 12, but this was different. I started to hear my neighbours' voices in my head, and I used to feel they were completely against me. I felt scared, quite isolated and just very upset by it. It was irrational but terrifying.

I remember quite vividly running into the street thinking I was dying, because the voices were telling me there was a lack of oxygen in the house. It got to the point where I wouldn't go outside, I was just trying to hide away from everything. I had this constant stream of paranoid thoughts. I really did think the whole world was against me. I had a terrible fear of death too.

For me I think there were two main triggers. I had lost my granddad and that was very traumatic because I was very close to him. My mum used to say that when we lost my granddad she lost a part of me. And when I was at school I got bullied too, and that in itself can make you feel paranoid. It makes you think people are talking about you all the time.

As the paranoia and voices got worse, I ended up having to go into hospital. I was there for three months. I felt out of control. I struggled to tell the difference between the voices and reality, and the paranoia had become very

strong. I didn't think at the time I would ever get out of there.

I did get through it though. I was given medication that helped, but it wasn't just that. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) helped me look at my paranoid thoughts differently. But I began to help myself as well, gradually taking small steps like learning to drive and going back to college. I started to feel that I could get on with my life. I went to an adult community college and got my English GCSE when I was 23. I was given the learner of the year award there because of the obstacles I'd been through.

I do still struggle sometimes, but I try and talk to my mum if I'm with her or I distract myself by going into a shop or somewhere busy. It's all about keeping my mind occupied. I listen to music and use breathing techniques if I start to feel paranoid, and I have these two characters I use too – peg and neg, a wooden peg and an egg timer. Peg is for when I'm feeling positive and neg is when I'm feeling negative. It sounds strange but these two objects really help me reflect on how I feel that day.

Today, I feel alive for the first time in years. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. I'm proof that you can get through this.

### What is paranoia?

Paranoia is thinking and feeling you are under threat, even though there is no (or little) evidence that you are. Everyone experiences paranoia differently, but common paranoid thoughts include thinking people are talking about you, thinking you are being watched, thinking you are at risk of being harmed or killed, thinking people are trying to upset you or make you look bad, and thinking you are being controlled or that your thoughts are being interfered with.

### What causes it?

No one knows what causes paranoia, but researchers have identified several factors that could make you more likely to experience it. These include:

- Having confusing or unsettling experiences or feelings
- Being anxious and worried or having low self-esteem
- Tending to come to conclusions quickly and believing things strongly
- Being isolated
- Experiencing trauma.

Difficult life experiences, mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, physical illnesses, a lack of sleep, the effects of drugs and alcohol, the place where you live and your genetics could all also cause paranoia.

I used to feel my neighbours were completely against me. I felt scared, isolated and upset. It was irrational but terrifying.

### How is it treated?

Talking treatments can help you understand your experiences and develop coping strategies to deal with them. These include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), psychodynamic therapy, counselling and family (or systemic) therapy. Arts therapies and medication can also help to reduce paranoid thoughts, and new research is even investigating whether virtual reality can be combined with cognitive therapy to help you cope with situations that create fear.

We'd like to thank Leanne for sharing her experience. For more information about paranoia, head to [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)





## We're here for you

Stressed about coronavirus?  
Looking for ideas to help your  
mental health? Need to chat to  
someone who understands?  
Whatever is on your mind at  
this difficult time, we're here  
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- For advice on looking after your wellbeing, head to [mind.org.uk/coronavirus](https://mind.org.uk/coronavirus)
- For information about treatment options and where to get help near you, contact the Mind Infoline on 0300 123 3393, by text on 86463 or by emailing [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)
- If you need a safe place to listen, share and be heard, join our Elefriends online community at [elefriends.org.uk](https://elefriends.org.uk)

Thank you so much for  
your continued support at this  
uncertain time. If you ever  
need us, we're here.

