

Mind e-booklet
Seeking help

Seeking help

Supported by



The Mind guide to seeking help for a mental health problem

A guide to taking the first steps, making empowered decisions and getting the right support for you. Also includes information about seeking help outside the NHS, and information for friends and family on how to support someone else to seek help.

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How do I take the first steps?

Seeking help for a mental health problem can be a really important step towards getting and staying well, but it can be hard to know how to start or where to turn to.

When is it ok to seek help?

It's common to feel unsure about seeking support for your mental health, and to feel like you ought to wait until you can't handle things on your own. But it's always ok for you to seek help – even if you're not sure if you are experiencing a specific mental health problem.

Some reasons why you might choose to seek help could include:

- finding it difficult to cope with thoughts and feelings
- thoughts and feelings having an impact on your day-to-day life
- wanting to find out about available support.

(See our booklet *Understanding mental health problems* for more information about mental health.)

👂👂 *The first time I went to my GP about my depression, I was completely terrified. I had suffered in silence for 6 months, and was so ashamed that I couldn't 'fix' it myself. Thankfully my GP was lovely and really seemed to care. She prescribed an antidepressant and suggested that I contact my University counselling service, and wanted me to return regularly to monitor the medication's effects.* 👂👂

Who can I talk to?

The best way to start is normally by talking to a health care professional, such as your doctor (also known as your General Practitioner or GP).

Your GP can:

- make a diagnosis
- offer you support and treatments
- refer you to a specialist service.

How do I find a GP?

NHS Choices provides an online tool for finding GP surgeries near you (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30). Alternatively you can think about accessing health care through the private sector (see pp.19–20).

When registering with a GP surgery, you might like to think about:

- how close it is to your home or work
- if its opening times are convenient for you
- whether it offers specialist services
- looking for patient reviews on the surgery's website.

What should I say to my GP?

It can be hard to know how to talk to your doctor about your mental health – especially when you're not feeling well. But it's important to remember that there is no wrong way to tell someone how you're feeling.

Here are some things to consider:

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

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

How can I prepare?

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

Here are some suggestions:

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

What might happen when I talk to my doctor?

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

- your mood, thoughts and behaviours – sometimes by using questionnaires or forms which measure depression and anxiety
- any sleep problems or changes in appetite
- your medical history, and your family's medical history.

They might also check your physical health to rule out any physical illness. This could involve taking your blood pressure, measuring your weight and doing a blood test.

What might the outcome of my appointment be?

Your appointment might have several possible outcomes:

- **Monitoring** – your doctor might ask you to come back for another appointment before offering any treatment.
- **Diagnosis** – your doctor might give you a diagnosis, for example of depression or anxiety. This doesn't always happen after your first appointment and may only be possible after monitoring you over time or referring you to a specialist.
- **Referral** – your doctor could refer you to another service, such as a psychiatrist or community mental health team (CMHT), or for talking treatments (sometimes called psychological wellbeing services).
- **Self-referral** – your doctor could give you details of a service you can contact yourself, for example psychological wellbeing services or a CMHT.
- **Medication** – your doctor might offer to prescribe you psychiatric medication.

The outcome of your appointment will usually depend on what you say, what your doctor thinks might help and what kind of support you would like.

Will everything I tell my doctor be confidential?

In most cases: yes. Your doctor should keep whatever you tell them confidential, and ask your permission before sharing it with anyone else.

The only exception is if you tell them something which makes them believe that you might seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this situation, they will decide how to balance your right to confidentiality with the need to keep you and others safe. They could:

- Take no action, but check how you are more regularly for a period of time.
- Ask you to volunteer to go to hospital as an inpatient.
- Ask for an assessment to see if you can be made to go to hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983, even if you don't want to. This is sometimes called being sectioned (see our booklet *The Mind guide to the Mental Health Act 1983* for more information).
- Tell the police – but only if they believe there is an immediate risk.

What decisions can I have a say in?

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

You should expect to have a say in how, where and when you receive treatment, and who treats you. Remember that it takes two kinds of expertise to find the right treatment for you:

| Professional expertise on: | Your own expertise on: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• medical knowledge• different diagnoses• what might be effective treatment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• your experiences• how you feel• what you want. |

Who treats you

Having a good relationship with your GP can be a really important way of getting the right support. If you don't feel you have a good relationship with your current GP, you can:

- Ask to see a different doctor. Your GP surgery doesn't have to say yes, but if they say no then they should give you a reasonable explanation (for example, if your GP surgery is very small or other doctors aren't available on the days you need).
- Ask to talk to a different type of practitioner, like a nurse, specialist mental health worker or practice counsellor.
- Ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist.
- Self-refer to another service (in some cases). If you self-refer to a psychological wellbeing service or a CMHT, they will normally carry out another initial assessment to see if they can support you.

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

What treatment you receive

There are lots of different treatments that can help you manage your mental health, but most common are talking treatments and psychiatric medication.

Your doctor is likely to follow the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, which set out recommended treatments on the NHS for different kinds of mental health problems (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29). How effective any treatment is differs from person to person, and you might have to try different things before you find out what works for you.

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

Before prescribing medication your doctor should explain to you what the medication is for, and discuss any possible side effects and alternative treatment options. (See our booklet *Making sense of talking treatments*, and our web pages on *medication* for more information.)

Where you receive treatment

You can be involved in making sure your treatment is accessible to you.

This could include:

- asking for home visits
- choosing a service close to where you live
- deciding not to accept treatment in a service which is too far away.

There may be some limits, such as if a service only exists in certain areas, or if you live somewhere rural. But your health care team should offer you a choice whenever they can, and work with you to find a suitable location.

When you receive treatment

Talking treatments

Whatever your treatment is, you should receive it within a reasonable amount of time. However, there can be long waiting times to access talking treatments through the NHS.

- You can ask your doctor for an estimate of how long the waiting lists are.
- If you are worried that waiting for treatment is going to have a serious impact on your wellbeing, you can ask your doctor what extra support they can offer.

Medication

- You can discuss with your doctor when you will start medication and how long you will take it for.
- Your doctor should offer you regular appointments to review your medication, but you can ask for a review at any time.
- If you need to see a specialist before taking medication, you can ask your doctor for other support while you are waiting.

How can I make sure people listen to me?

Seeking help for a mental health problem can feel complicated, and you might sometimes feel like health care professionals aren't listening to how you feel. This section provides some ideas to help you feel more in control.

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

Do your own research

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

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



- Speak to other people with similar experiences. You may want to do this through an online forum, like Elefriends or HealthTalk, or by finding a support group in your area (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29).
- Search online for blogs or videos from people who've had similar experiences. (See our online booklet *How to stay safe online* for guidance on doing this safely.)

It's likely that a lot of what you do to stay well will be during your day-to-day life – not necessarily during appointments – so it's worth thinking about what helps you stay well in general. (See our booklet *How to improve and maintain your wellbeing* for more ideas).

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

Ask questions

Your doctor should always explain any treatment or referral they suggest to you. If they don't, or you don't understand what they have offered, you can ask them to explain (see p.15 for more tips).

You might also want to ask:

- Why they have chosen one form of treatment over another.
- Whether they can offer you another form of treatment.
- What the side effects or disadvantages are of any treatment you've been offered, as well as the benefits.

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

Understand the guidelines and policies

Most aspects of health care are covered by clinical guidelines and policies. These outline: which treatments are most likely to work for you; how professionals should interact with you in general; and the quality of service they should provide.

Examples include:

- NICE guidelines, which outline treatment options for different conditions (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29).
- Confidentiality and data protection policies, which outline your rights regarding any personal information your doctor holds about you, and what they must do to keep it private.
- Codes of practice for people who are members of professional bodies, for example doctors, nurses and accredited counsellors.
- Complaints procedures.

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

Find an advocate

An advocate is an independent person who is there to represent your opinion. You may find it helpful to have an advocate if you are finding it hard to let people know what you want. (See our online booklet *The Mind guide to advocacy* for more information).

Get support from family, friends and carers

Trying to access health care can feel lonely, especially if you are facing barriers to getting support. Friends, family and carers can help you feel reassured and supported by:

- discussing treatment options with you
- helping you to find information
- coming with you to appointments
- encouraging you and helping you to feel more confident about making decisions.

You may find that just talking to someone outside of your health care team helps you work out what your questions and concerns are.

““ I find it helpful to hear all the options and have some time to talk them through with my family and CPN [community psychiatric nurse]. ””

If your family and friends need ideas about how to support you, you can show them the section of this booklet called 'How can I support someone else to seek help' on p.24.

How can I make sure I understand what my doctor tells me?

Your doctor has an obligation to ensure you can give informed consent to any treatment they offer. To be able to give informed consent, you must:

- Understand what your doctor tells you, and have had a chance to ask questions.
- Understand both the advantages and disadvantages of any treatment options.
- Feel that you're agreeing freely, not being forced to make a certain decision.
- Have the legal capacity to give consent and understand the consequences (see our web pages on *consent to treatment* for more information).

How can my doctor help me give informed consent?

Your doctor can help you give informed consent by:

- Providing written information for you to read – either printed or online.
- Explaining treatment options in a balanced way.
- Explaining both the possible benefits and potential risks of treatment.
- Making sure you have enough time to make a decision you are happy with.

What can I do if I still don't understand?

If you are finding it difficult to understand the information you have been given, you can:

- Keep asking your doctor to give you more information and explain what it means.
- Ask another health care professional to explain it to you – this includes pharmacists if your query is about medication.
- Ask for information in a different format, for example Easy Read.
- If English isn't your first language, you can:
 - ask for a translation of any written information your doctor gives you
 - ask your doctor to provide an interpreter for your appointment
 - ask someone who can interpret to come with you to your appointment.
- Discuss your thoughts with friends and family.
- Speak to someone with similar experiences (sometimes called peer support).
- Contact an advocate.
- Contact Mind's Infoline for information and support (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29).

When might I not get what I ask for?

There are some situations in which it might not be possible for you to get the treatment you want. You may understandably find this frustrating or upsetting, but you can always ask your doctor for an explanation, and discuss other options.

If the treatment you want isn't available

Some treatments you'd like might not be available through the NHS in your area, or there might be very long waiting lists. You can ask your doctor for a different kind of treatment, but this won't always be possible because of cost or availability.

Mind is actively campaigning to make sure that everyone has access to crisis care and talking treatments when they need them. You can find out more about what we're doing on the campaigns page on our website at mind.org.uk/news-campaigns, and see how you can get involved.

If your doctor won't offer you the treatment you want

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

- They think it's unlikely to help you.
- They think it could be harmful to you – for example, if you have had previous problems with addiction your doctor might choose not to offer you potentially addictive medication like tranquillisers.
- They've overlooked it – sometimes health care professionals aren't aware of all available services, or don't remember to let you know that you can use them.

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

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

Can I ask for a second opinion?

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

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

If your rights are restricted

There are some very specific circumstances where you may not have choice about treatment. These include:

- If you do not have mental capacity – this is where you are legally considered too unwell to make informed decisions.
- If you have been kept in hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983 (sometimes called being sectioned) – in this case your doctor should give you information and listen to your opinion, but they might legally be able to treat you without your consent.
- If you are under a community treatment order (CTO) – this means being given supervised treatment when you leave hospital after being sectioned. If you refuse to take medication, you can be taken back to hospital.

Even in these circumstances, you still have legal rights to appeal decisions, have decisions reviewed, and have support from an advocate, family member or friend.

(See our web pages on *consent to treatment and sectioning*, for more information.)

What can I do if I'm not happy with my doctor?

Getting the right help to cope with a mental health problem doesn't always happen straight away, and there may be times where you're not happy with the support you're getting. But there are steps you can take to raise concerns and access help in other ways.

Changing your doctor

The relationship you have with your doctor and their attitude towards mental health can make a difference to the care you receive. If you're not making progress with your current GP, you can:

- ask the receptionist to make you an appointment with a different GP
- move to a different GP surgery, although you will have to register and this could delay seeing someone
- consider seeking help through the private sector (see pp.19–21).

👏👏 *It's really hard when you're feeling low but changing GPs was one of the best things I've ever done, and that effort has been so worth it as the GP I have now is really good and has helped me so much. I guess what I'm trying to say is just keep trying until you get the help you need and deserve.* 👏👏

Making a complaint about treatment

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

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

How do I make a complaint?

You can make a complaint by:

- raising your concern directly with your health care professional (they should tell you about their complaints procedure if you ask for it)
- using the NHS complaints process, which you can read on the NHS Choices website (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30)
- complaining directly to the General Medical Council (GMC) on the GMC website (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29).

If you need help to raise a complaint, you can:

- ask family and friends to help you draft any letters or emails, or ask them to write on your behalf
- ask an advocate to help you
- contact a Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – you can find your local PALS through the NHS Choices service finder (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30).



How can I seek help through the private sector?

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

Why might I decide to go private?

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

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

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

How do I access private health care or therapy?

Private GPs, nurses or clinics

You can:

- ask your NHS GP to refer you or make a suggestion
- search online for a private health care provider and contact them directly
- use an online listing service, such as Patient.co.uk's search facility (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30).

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

- for doctors – the General Medical Council's List of Registered Medical Practitioners (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29)
- for nurses – the Nursing and Midwifery Council register (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30).

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

Private counsellors or therapists

You can find a therapist through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29). Any therapist you find through this website will have signed up to the BACP's ethical framework, which means they must:

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

How do I pay for private health care?

Private health care can be expensive, so you may need to think carefully about how – or if – you will be able to afford it. There are two main payment options:

- Paying the health care provider directly. Your health care provider should explain any treatment or appointment costs clearly beforehand. Some providers may have payment plans that allow you to pay in instalments.
- Taking out private health care insurance. Insurance can cover part or all of the cost of your treatment, depending on your policy. Not all policies cover psychiatric treatment or pre-existing conditions, so before taking out any policy you should check it carefully and make sure you understand what it covers. The consumer organisation Which? publishes some guidance about choosing private health care insurance on its website (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30).

Private therapy costs will usually depend on what the therapist charges, how many sessions you go for and how often you go. Some private therapists offer a sliding scale of payment depending on your circumstances.

What other support options are there?

Although the NHS is the largest provider of health care in the UK, there are other affordable options for getting support to help you cope with a mental health problem. These include various voluntary, community and charity sector organisations such as:

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

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

- talking treatments
- support groups
- peer-to-peer support
- advocacy
- arts and alternative therapies
- advice services
- online services like forums, live chat or peer support.

However, they are not likely to provide medical services, like psychiatry, nor prescribe medication.

How do I find these kind of services?

- Mind's Infoline can help you find services in your area (see 'Useful contacts' on p.29).
- Your GP or health care provider might also be able to give you details of more local organisations.
- If you are a student, your student services department can let you know if your university or college provides any free counselling services.

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

How can I get help in a crisis?

A crisis is any situation in which you feel seriously at risk and need urgent help. The table below gives general information on how you can get help.

| What's happening: | Ways you can get help: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you think you may act on suicidal feelings, or you have seriously harmed yourself | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you can go to any hospital A&E department and ask for help (if you need to, you can call 999 and ask for an ambulance) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you are feeling extremely distressed, or are experiencing suicidal feelings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you can contact the Samaritans on 08457 90 90 90 (they're there to listen) • if you are already in touch with a CMHT, you can contact them and ask how they can support you • you can go to Mind's website and click the yellow 'I need urgent help' button at the top of the home page for more options |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you need medical help or advice fast, but it's not an emergency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you can call NHS 111 (in England) or NHS Direct (in Wales) (see 'Useful contacts' on p.30) • you can contact your GP and make an appointment for as soon as possible |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you're worried that you might experience a crisis in the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • see our web pages on <i>crisis services</i>, and <i>support in a housing crisis</i> for information |

(See our booklets *How to cope with suicidal feelings*, *Understanding self-harm*, and *How to cope with hearing voices* for more information about how to deal with these experiences).

How can I support someone else to seek help?

This section is for friends and family of someone who is experiencing a mental health problem, who want to support them to seek help.

What emotional support can I offer?

If someone lets you know that they are experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings, it's common to feel like you don't know what to do or say – but you don't need any special training to show someone you care about them, and often it can be the most valuable help you can offer.

For example, it can be helpful to:

- **Listen.** Simply giving someone space to talk and listening to how they're feeling is really important, and can be really helpful in itself.
- **Offer reassurance.** Seeking help can feel lonely, and sometimes scary. Let them know that they are not alone, and that you will be there to help.
- **Stay calm,** even though you might be feeling distressed. This will help them feel calmer too, and show them that they can talk to you openly without upsetting you.
- **Be patient.** You might want to know more details about their thoughts and feelings, or want them to get help immediately. But it's important to let them set the pace.
- **Try not to make assumptions.** Your perspective might be useful, but try not to assume that you already know what may have caused their feelings, or what will help.
- **Keep social contact.** Part of the emotional support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could include involving your friend or family member in social events, or chatting about other parts of your lives.

What practical support can I offer?

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

- **Look for information that might be helpful.** When someone is seeking help they may feel worried about making the right choice, or that they have no control over their situation. The sections 'What decisions can I have a say in?' on p.8 and 'How can I make sure people listen to me?' on p.10 in this booklet suggest ideas for information you could find to help them feel empowered.
- **Help to write down lists of questions** that the person you're supporting wants to ask their doctor, or help to put points into an order that makes sense (for example, most important point first).
- **Help to organise paperwork**, for example making sure that your friend or family member has somewhere to keep their notes, prescriptions and records of appointments safe.
- **Go to appointments with them**, if they want you to – even just being there in the waiting room can help someone feel reassured.
- **Ask them about specific practical tasks** you could help with, and work on those. For example, this could include:
 - offering a lift to their appointment
 - arranging childcare for them
 - taking over a chore or household task.
- **Learn more** about the mental health problem they experience, to help you think about other ways you could support them.

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

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

| You can: | You can't: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be patient. You won't always know the full story, and there may be reasons why they are finding it difficult to ask for help.• Offer emotional support and reassurance. Let them know you care about them and you'll be there if they change their mind.• Inform them how to seek help when they're ready (for example, you could show them this booklet).• Look after yourself, and make sure you don't become unwell. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Force someone to talk to you. It can take time for someone to feel able to talk openly, and putting pressure on them to talk might make them feel less comfortable telling you about their experiences.• Force someone to get help (if they're over 18, and are not posing immediate danger to themselves or someone else). As adults, we are all ultimately responsible for ourselves. This includes when – or if – we choose to seek help.• See a health care professional for someone else. A doctor can't share any specific advice or details about someone else without their consent. |

If your friend or family member is having delusions or seeing things that other people can't see, they may not realise or agree that they need to seek help. They may be feeling paranoid, or experiencing psychosis. In this case, it can also be helpful to:

- try not to either validate or challenge their perceptions
- acknowledge how their perceptions are making them feel (for example anxious or unsafe).

(See our online booklets *Understanding psychosis* and *Understanding paranoia* for more information.)

What can I do if it's an emergency?

There may be times when your friend or family member needs to seek help more urgently, such as if they are putting themselves or someone else at immediate, serious risk of harm.

In this situation, as long as you feel safe to do so, you should stay with them and help them follow the steps on getting help in a crisis described on p.23. (Our booklet *How to support someone who feels suicidal* also provides guidance on supporting someone who's experiencing suicidal feelings.)

How does someone get sectioned?

In exceptional circumstances it's possible to keep a person in hospital under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983 (often called being sectioned), and treat them without their consent. The decision to section someone is very serious, and can only be taken by a team of approved mental health professionals (AMHPs).

If you feel someone is at serious risk and will not approach anyone for help, you can contact their local social services, who can decide to arrange an assessment (you can usually find the number for social services on the local council's website).

This is a heavy responsibility, so before taking action it's important that you understand what might happen, and what your loved one's rights are (our web pages on *sectioning* provide more information).

It might also be a good idea to talk this through with someone you trust.

How can I look after myself?

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

For example:

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

(See our booklets *How to cope as a carer* and *How to manage stress* for more ideas about how to keep yourself well.)

Useful contacts

Mind Infoline

tel: 0300 123 3393

Open from 9am to 6pm,
Monday to Friday.

text: 86463

email: info@mind.org.uk

web: mind.org.uk

Details of local Minds and other local services, and Mind's Legal Line. Language Line is available for talking in a language other than English.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

tel: 01455 88 33 00

web: bacp.co.uk

Information about counselling and therapy. See sister website, itsgoodtotalk.org.uk for details of local practitioners.

Elefriends

web: elefriends.org.uk

Elefriends is a friendly, supportive, online community for people experiencing a mental health problem.

General Medical Council

web: gmc-uk.org

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

HealthTalk

web: healthtalk.org

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

Information Standard

web: england.nhs.uk/tis

Certification programme for all organisations who produce health care information for the public.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

web: nice.org.uk

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

NHS 111

tel: 111

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

NHS Choices service finder

web: [nhs.uk/service-search](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search)

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

NHS Direct Wales

tel: 0845 46 47

web: [nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](https://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

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

Nursing and Midwifery Council

web: [nmc-uk.org](https://www.nmc-uk.org)

Professional body which regulates and registers all nurses and midwives.

Patient.co.uk

web: [patient.co.uk](https://www.patient.co.uk)

Offers information about public and private health care, and provides a directory of health professionals.

Samaritans

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

Chris PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

24-hour helpline: 08457 90 90 90

email: jo@samaritans.org

web: [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.

Which?

web: [which.co.uk](https://www.which.co.uk)

Provides a factsheet on what to consider when choosing private medical insurance.

Further information

Mind offers a range of mental health information on:

- diagnoses
- treatments
- practical help for wellbeing
- mental health legislation
- where to get help

To read or print Mind's information booklets for free, visit mind.org.uk or contact Mind Infoline on 0300 123 3393 or at info@mind.org.uk

To buy copies of Mind's information booklets, visit mind.org.uk/shop or phone 0844 448 4448 or email publications@mind.org.uk

Support Mind

Providing information costs money. We really value donations, which enable us to get our information to more people who need it.

Just £5 could help another 15 people in need receive essential practical information.

If you would like to support our work with a donation, please contact us on:

tel: 020 8215 2243

email: dons@mind.org.uk

web: mind.org.uk/donate

This information was written by Rachel Boyd

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web: mind.org.uk

Mind

We're Mind, the mental health charity for England and Wales. We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We're here for you. Today. Now. We're on your doorstep, on the end of a phone or online. Whether you're stressed, depressed or in crisis. We'll listen, give you advice, support and fight your corner. And we'll push for a better deal and respect for everyone experiencing a mental health problem.

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