

Psychological Self-Management Guide for Injured Parties



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Introduction

This guide has been put together to provide some useful, bite-sized information on common psychological symptoms and/or conditions. You'll find practical self-management advice and guidance that you can immediately put into practice to support your recovery.

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****If you're feeling distressed, in a state of despair, suicidal or in need of emotional support you can phone NHS 24/7 on 111. For an emergency ambulance phone 999.****

Section 1: Trauma & PTSD

What is Trauma & PTSD?

Trauma is sometimes described as a very distressing or frightening event. It can occur at any age and the timeframe for the effects of trauma can vary in nature, occurring anytime from shortly afterwards to years down the line. A situation that a person finds traumatic can lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Common symptoms

- **Flashbacks:** The reliving of certain aspects of a traumatic event where you can feel the same emotions or physical sensations you did at the time.
- **Sleep issues:** There may be disruption to your normal sleeping pattern or you may experience nightmares. (Please also see section 6 on sleep).
- **Panic attack:** This is a fear response and may involve a racing heartbeat, struggling to breathe, feeling dizzy or faint, shaking and nausea. (Please also see section 2 on anxiety).
- **Hyperarousal:** This is the feeling of being on edge or very anxious and may make you hypervigilant to potential threats or danger.
- **Self-harm:** This involves hurting yourself as a way of coping with difficult emotions or memories. This can be anything from harming yourself with a weapon to abusing alcohol and drugs. (Please see section 4 on self-harm and suicide).
- **Suicidal feelings:** These are preoccupied thoughts of ending your life which may include methods and plans on how to do so. (Please see section 4 on self-harm and suicide).

Self-management tips

1. Keep a diary of your flashbacks

If you experience flashbacks, it may be useful to keep a diary of them to help you understand your triggers and notice any early signs when they are happening. Triggers could be anything from a smell, sound, word or a place.

During a flashback try do the following:

- focus on your breathing and slow it down by counting to five as you breathe in and out
- tell yourself that you are safe and find something that comforts you, e.g., listening to soothing music, playing with a pet or wrapping up in a duvet
- use grounding techniques where you try to connect with the present, e.g., describing your surroundings.

2. Confide in someone

If you feel comfortable, try to confide in someone. You don't have to go into detail about the trauma as this might be hard, but you can express how you are feeling to a friend, family member or even some peer support if they have gone through a similar experience.

3. Make a list of things you are avoiding

Avoiding people, places or situations due to your experience could make things worse and cause disruption to your life. To reduce this, try listing what you're avoiding in the order of least to most distressing and work your way through this.

4. Talk about or think through your experience

Regularly talking about or thinking through your experience can help you process trauma. This can be hard in the beginning but the more you do this, the more likely your brain will move it from your short-term memory, where it pops into your mind regularly, into your long-term memory where it can be stored in a healthy way.

5. Challenge and question your thoughts

You may find yourself having unhelpful thoughts about yourself, others and the world. This might include jumping to conclusions, mind reading or catastrophising. To help with this, try to challenge and question those thoughts.

Questions can include:

- Is there any evidence for or against the thought?
- Can you identify any patterns of unhelpful thinking?
- What advice would you give a friend in a similar situation?
- Is there another way you could look at the situation?

6. Take care of your physical health

Ensure you are taking care of your physical health and indulge in self-care and things that make you feel good to help your emotional state. For example, maintain a healthy diet, exercise, spend time outside in green spaces and avoid drugs and alcohol.



Section 2: Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can range from mild to severe. Everyone experiences anxiety at some point, for example, nerves before a test or when you are about to go on a rollercoaster. However, some people struggle to control their worries which ends up affecting their daily lives.

Anxiety can be a symptom of various conditions such as PTSD, panic disorders or phobias. A common condition people can experience is Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), which is where there is no specific trigger, but you may feel anxious about several issues.

Common symptoms

Symptoms can either be physical or psychological.

Physical symptoms	Psychological symptoms
• Dizziness and nausea • Tension or aching of the head, stomach or muscles • Heart palpitations • Sleep issues/tiredness	• Feelings of dread or constantly on edge • Irritability • Difficulty relaxing • Restlessness • Unable to stop worrying • Rumination • Difficulty concentrating

Self-management tips

1. Avoid drinks which contain caffeine as this can make you more anxious.
2. Exercise regularly to help release tension and tackle stress.
3. Set aside a specific time to focus on your worries
This will keep you reassured that you haven't forgotten about anything. Some people find it helps to set a timer.
4. Write down your worries
Write your worries down and keep them in a particular place, for example, you could write them in a notebook or on pieces of paper you put in an envelope or jar.
5. Keep a diary of what happens when you get anxious
Doing this will help you spot triggers or early signs that it's starting to happen. It's also a good idea to note what is going well to act as a reminder of the good things in your life.
6. Breathing exercises can help with anxiety symptoms and feeling more in control:
 - Whether you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground and place your feet roughly hip-width apart.
 - Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable without forcing it.
 - Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
 - Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
 - Then let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again.
 - Keep doing this for at least 5 minutes.
7. Practice mindfulness
Some people find mindfulness helpful for coping with certain anxiety disorders and managing their day-to-day wellbeing, but other people say it makes them feel worse, as some find noticing their negative thoughts too intense. The theory behind mindfulness is to help you notice how thoughts come and go, notice what your body is telling you and create space between you and your thoughts.

Have a go at some free online mindfulness sessions at www.oxfordmindfulness.org

8. Join a peer support group

Find a peer support group that brings together people who've had similar experiences. It can help to share ideas on coping strategies and feel less alone. Contact a specialist organisation; you can find details of support groups, forums and helplines on the Anxiety Care UK, Anxiety UK, No More Panic, No Panic and Triumph Over Phobia UK websites.

9. Try out some complementary or alternative therapies such as:

- yoga
- meditation
- aromatherapy
- massage
- reflexology
- herbal treatments
- Bach flower remedies
- hypnotherapy.



Section 3: Depression

What is depression?

Most people can go through periods of feeling down or sad for a few days, but depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time and affects your everyday life.

Common symptoms

Symptoms can be split into behaviour and feelings.

Behaviour	Feelings
• Avoiding social events and activities you usually enjoy • Self-harming or suicidal behaviour • Difficulty speaking, thinking clearly or making decisions • Losing interest in sex • Difficulty remembering or concentrating on things • Using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual • Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much • Feeling tired all the time • No appetite and losing weight or eating too much and gaining weight • Physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause • Moving very slowly or being restless and agitated	• Down, upset, or tearful • Restless, agitated or irritable • Guilty, worthless and down on yourself • Empty and numb • Isolated and unable to relate to other people • Finding no pleasure in life or things you usually enjoy • A sense of unreality • No self-confidence or self-esteem • Hopeless and despairing • Suicidal

Self-management tips

1. Exercise regularly

Regular exercise encourages your brain to release serotonin which is a chemical that helps to improve mood.

2. Spend time in nature

This has been found to help with mental health problems like depression.

3. Create a self-care box

Put together a self-care box that is full of things that might help you in times when you are struggling, for example, comfy slippers or a blanket, a favourite book or CD, photos of good memories or anything that helps to distract you.

4. Keep a mood diary

Using a mood diary to keep track of changes in your mood can help identify any triggers and may even highlight that you have more good days than you think.

5. Take care of your physical health

When depressed it can be hard to find the energy to do much but looking after your physical health can help with how you feel. Try to get good sleep, maintain a good diet with regular meals and try to look after your hygiene, as just having a shower and getting dressed for the day, even if you are not going out, can help you to feel a bit better.

6. Talk to someone you trust

It can help to open up to someone you trust about how you feel, as sharing your experience could help you feel better and make you feel like they care.

Section 4: Self-harm/Suicide

What is self-harm/suicide?

Self-harm, or self-injury, describes a wide range of things people deliberately do to themselves that appear to be harmful but usually do not kill them.

Suicidal thoughts relate to the preoccupied thoughts of ending your life, which may include methods and plans on how to do so. Self-harm can be one of the strongest predictors of suicide. Those who feel suicidal are usually experiencing a severe life stressor or mental health disorder that is causing a lot of pain and they feel suicide is a way to end that.



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Common symptoms

Types of self-harm can include:

- cutting or burning the skin
- hitting your own body
- poisoning yourself with tablets
- alcohol or drug misuse
- eating disorders.

Those who self-harm will often try to keep it a secret and cover it up, but signs may include unexplained injuries and signs of depression or low self-esteem. The person self-harming may feel deep shame and guilt or confused and worried about their own behaviour.

Self-management tips

1. See your GP

It is important for anyone who self-harms to see their GP, so they may help in treating the underlying emotional cause and any physical injury. Try to be honest and open with your GP.

2. Use distraction techniques

Distraction techniques can help replace a dangerous activity with something more constructive or unarmful. Examples you could try when feeling like self-harming include:

- holding ice cubes in your hands
- keeping a rubber band on your wrist – you can snap it against your wrist whenever you feel you need to
- drawing red lines in pen on your body, where you would otherwise cut yourself
- using exercise to release pressure and stress
- writing, drawing or scribbling on paper with a red pen
- doing meditation, such as practising relaxation or breathing techniques
- focusing your attention on something simple for some time – this may help your negative thoughts pass.

3. Create a safety plan

This is a tool aimed to help someone stay safe when experiencing suicidal feelings. You can create yours using the guidance from <https://www.every-life-matters.org.uk/safety-planning/>

4. Talk to someone you trust and feel comfortable with

This could be a friend, family member, manager, health care professional or charities and helplines (some of which are listed below):

- Samaritans – open 24/7. You can call 116 123 (free from any phone).
- National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK. For over 18s. Open 6pm to 3:30am every day on 0800 689 5652.
- Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM). Open 5pm to midnight every day on 0800 58 58 58.

If you do not want to talk to someone over the phone, these text lines/webchats are open 24 hours a day, every day (unless specified):

- Shout Crisis Text Line – for everyone. Text “SHOUT” to 85258.
- Young Minds Crisis Messenger – for people under 19. Text “YM” to 85258.
- CALM webchat service – 5pm to midnight every day.



Section 5: Work-related stress/Burnout

What is work-related stress/burnout?

Work-related stress is when someone perceives that the demands of work exceed their ability to cope.

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

Common symptoms

Symptoms of work-related stress include:

- mood swings, feeling depressed or anxious
- withdrawal
- more sickness absence
- decreased performance
- loss of motivation or confidence
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty sleeping.

Burnout is characterised into three dimensions. These are:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from your job or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to your job
- reduced professional efficacy.

Self-management tips

1. Make sure you get enough rest

Being well rested can improve cognitive functioning and information processing. If you are feeling physically and emotionally drained, it is important to take some time out to re-charge. That may involve taking leave from work and just relaxing at home or 'unplugging' with a digital detox to help clear your mind.

2. Spend time with others

We are social creatures and connecting with others is important for our wellbeing. In difficult times it can be beneficial to have people we care about and who care about us around for support.

3. Take a break

If you are reaching burnout, try to take a complete break from work and remove yourself from the situation so you can re-charge.

4. Change your perspective

When in work, try to change your feelings about your role so you feel a sense of purpose. Focus on aspects of the job you enjoy and try to find some value in your work. Make some friends at work to help break up the monotony of the day, as having a chat or laugh with a friend through the day can help to reduce the stress of a demanding job.

5. Split big tasks into more manageable ones to help prevent feeling overwhelmed and ask for help.

6. Ensure you have balance in your life

Where you may find work demanding, try to balance that with satisfaction elsewhere, through family, friends, hobbies or voluntary work. Practice self-care and develop wellbeing rituals.

7. Self-care

It's important we make a conscious effort to promote our own mental and physical health. Some ways to do this could involve maintaining a healthy sleep routine, regular exercise, drinking plenty of water or finding a fun or relaxing activity.

8. Develop some wellbeing rituals

This can contribute to improving your health. Ideas can include meditation, keeping a diary, mindfulness and self-talk or affirmations.

Section 6: Sleep problems

What are sleep problems?

Most people experience problems with sleep at some point in their lives. According to The Great British Bedtime Report 2017, it's thought that a third of the British public will have episodes of insomnia at some point during their lives. A lack of quality sleep will inevitably impact on mood.

Common symptoms

Insomnia can take on many forms. According to the NHS, you suffer with insomnia if you regularly experience any of the following symptoms:

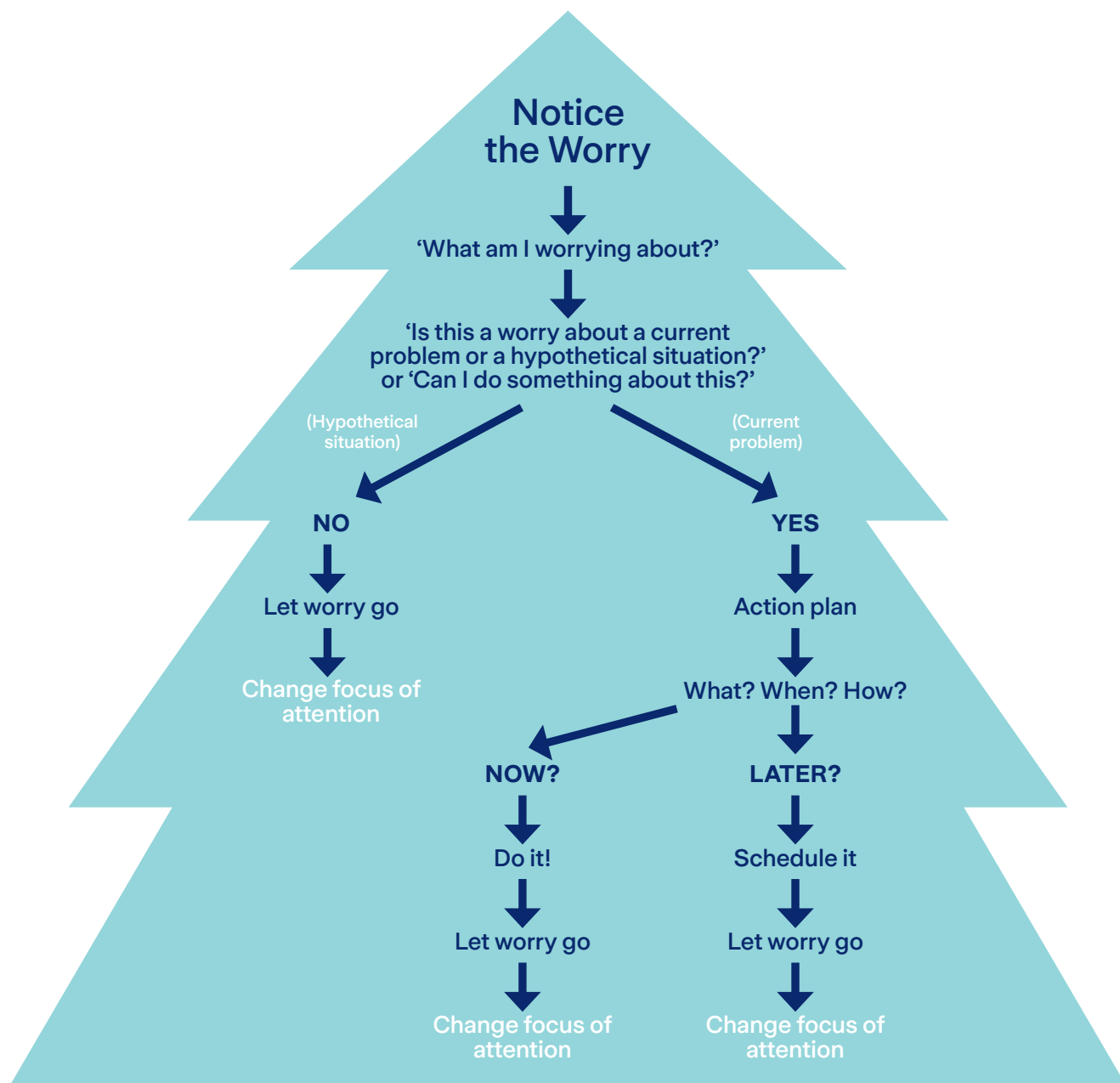
- find it hard to go to sleep
- wake up several times during the night
- lie awake at night
- wake up early and can't go back to sleep
- still feel tired after waking up
- find it hard to nap during the day even though you're tired
- feel tired and irritable during the day
- find it difficult to concentrate during the day because you're tired.

Self-management tips

1. Go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
2. Get regular exercise each day, preferably in the morning (not just before bed); try to include exposure to outdoor space.
3. Review your bedroom environment. Try to keep your bedroom a comfortable temperature, tidy, quiet and dark. You could try thicker, blackout curtains or earplugs to help with this. Use your bed for sleep and sex only. Keep TV and electronic devices out.
4. Practice relaxation activities to help unwind, such as yoga or a warm bath.
5. Check labels for over-the-counter remedies such as Nytol as they are not suitable for everyone.
6. Set aside an hour before bedtime to write down your worries using the worry tree to prioritise these and free up your mind for sleep. This can be found on page 12.
7. If you find yourself awake for more than 20 minutes, go to a different room and participate in a quiet activity such as colouring or flicking through a magazine, (avoid reading a stimulating book), then return to bed when you feel sleepy.
8. Do not have caffeine, (e.g. coffee, tea, cola, chocolate), 4 hours before bedtime.
9. Do not use alcohol as an aid to sleep. This will have the adverse effect. It may make you drowsy, but you will wake to go to the toilet.
10. Do not smoke before bed as it is a stimulant.
11. Do not command yourself to go to sleep (it won't work – it only makes your mind more alert).



The worry tree



Section 7: Drugs/Alcohol misuse

What is drug/alcohol misuse?

Alcohol or drug misuse is when you use either substance in a way that's harmful or when you become dependent on it.

Common symptoms

- poor coordination
- slurred speech
- impaired thinking
- memory impairment
- wanting to stop drinking or drug taking but not managing to do so
- diverting energy from work, family and social life to drink or take drugs
- being secretive about the extent of the alcohol/drug misuse to protect it
- engaging in risky behaviour, such as drink driving
- being in denial about the extent of the problem or becoming defensive when asked
- becoming distressed at the prospect of not having access to alcohol or drugs
- change in appearance, such as bloodshot eyes, poor skin tone and appearing run down.

Self-management tips

1. Consult a doctor specialised in addiction treatment

When a person who regularly partakes in alcohol or drug misuse stops or significantly reduces the amount of intake, withdrawal symptoms will emerge; symptoms can include shaking or anxiety. Delirium tremens (DTs), a severe withdrawal symptom, can include confusion, fever and rapid heartbeat. There is a general advisement that alcohol withdrawal should occur under the care of a doctor specialised in addiction treatment, as some withdrawal symptoms can be life-threatening.

2. Keep health risks from alcohol to a low level by not drinking more than 14 units a week.

3. Identify your triggers

What or when are the times when you are more likely to drink or use? If you can see the patterns, you can address those situations and do something different.

4. Use distractions

Have some go-to distractions you can use when you have the urge to drink or use; this might be calling a friend, going for a run or taking part in a hobby.

5. Avoid social situations where you might feel more tempted and consider building a new social life.

6. Practice saying "No – I don't drink" or "No – I don't use".

7. Write down all the reasons you would like to stay dry or clean and carry it around with you.

8. Set up a reward system to treat yourself, starting with something after each successful day and then bigger treats as you succeed each week. Be sure the treat does not involve any temptations.

9. Consider and find out about local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or other similar and relevant support groups.

Section 8: Other common difficulties

Financial stress

Financial worry is one of the most common stressors to people. Problems could stem from job loss, an unexpected expense or struggling with debt. This can lead to:

- insomnia
- weight gain
- depression or anxiety
- relationship issues and social withdrawal
- unhealthy coping mechanisms
- physical ailments such as headaches or sickness.

Tips to help with financial stress

1. Talk to someone you trust

Once the problem is out in the open and first steps are taken, it can make it easier to move on to the next step. Keeping your stress inside will only make it worse.

2. Seek professional advice

Citizens Advice is a good place to start as they can provide information about benefits, how to deal with debt, what you're entitled to if you're made redundant and who to speak to if you're at risk of losing your home.

3. Manage your overall wellbeing

Try to stay active; if you have more time due to no longer working, continue to keep busy, see friends, exercise and update your CV. This will help prevent your mood from declining. You can also practice relaxation techniques, get some good sleep, eat healthily and do things you enjoy.

4. Review your finances

Take control of your situation by detailing your incomings and outgoings to identify any spending patterns or triggers, stop impulse spending and look to make small changes.

5. Put together a detailed plan

With a plan, you can identify your financial problem, devise a solution, put the plan into action and monitor progress. Do not get derailed by setbacks as we are all human and can get back on track. Ensure a monthly budget is in the plan.

Relationship issues

Dealing with relationship issues can have a negative impact on your wellbeing, whether that is with a partner, friend, family member, neighbour or colleague. Here are some tips to help with relationship issues:

- Identify patterns and triggers to your feelings so you may focus on mending that area of the relationship.
- Take turns being active listeners as this boosts healthy communication skills and in turn conflict resolution.
- Pencil in one-on-one time when life is feeling hectic.
- Share a list of things you want from each other that would make you happy and help build up that trust and communication.
- If there are distractions and a feeling of absenteeism in your relationship, experiment with setting aside time to fully unplug and communicate with each other.

Section 9: Useful resources and references

Below are some resources that may be useful to you.

Websites

- PTSD UK is a charity dedicated to raising awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder – <https://www.ptsduk.org/>
- The Anxiety UK website can provide further information and advice – <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>
- The Stress Management Society's tag is 'from distress to de-stress'. Here you can find plenty of resources and guides to support you – <https://www.stress.org.uk/>
- Money Helper (formerly Money Advice Service) <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/> and Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> are two of many organisations that provide free, impartial advice about issues that may be contributing to someone's distress.
- The Mind website has a tool for getting through a crisis, moment by moment – <https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/what-can-i-do-to-help-myself-cope/>
- Relate is the largest provider of relationship support in England and Wales and helps people to strengthen the relationships that mean the most to them – <https://www.relate.org.uk/>

Apps

- Headspace for mindfulness and meditation for stress, anxiety, and sleep.
- Calm for sleep and meditation.
- The Stay Alive app is a suicide prevention resource for the UK packed full of useful information and tools to help you stay safe in a crisis.

Mindfulness

<https://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

<https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/free-online-mindfulness-course-sessions/>

Books

Suggested by the NHS, Reading Well provides helpful information and support on mental health, with books on mindfulness and other subjects available free from your local library –

<https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/mental-health>

References used to write booklet

- NHS UK
- NHS inform
- Mind UK
- Relate UK
- <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/self-harm>
- <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/>
- <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>
- <https://helpguide.org/>



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