The National Police Wellbeing Service

OSCAR KILO

Police Family Support Handbook

Information on mental health, bereavement and wellbeing for the loved ones of the policing community

The information within this booklet is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace medical advice.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know is developing a mental health problem, please contact your GP or NHS 111 and select the mental health option

Contents

Section 1:	Introduction to the National Police Wellbeing Service	3
Section 2:	Living with someone in the police service	4
Section 3:	What to do to support your loved one	7
Section 4:	Mental Health	9
Fact files:	Depression	9
	Anxiety and Panic Disorder	14
	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	18
	Bipolar	22
	Schizophrenia	26
	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	32
	Suicidal Thoughts	38
	Burnout	45
	Coping with a loved one's mental illness	50
	Talking to children and family about mental illness	51
	Department for Work and Pension Benefits for people with mental health problems	53
Section 5:	Coping with Bereavement	55
	Coping with the death of a child	64
	Supporting a child who has lost a parent	69
	Department for Work and Pension Benefits following a bereavement	71
Section 6:	Looking after yourself	73
Section 7:	Other information and support	74
Section 8:	References	78

Section 1: Introduction to the National Police Wellbeing Service

Oscar Kilo, the National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS) is here to support police forces across England and Wales build better organisational wellbeing and healthy working environments to meet their legal and moral duty of care. We want to help people to stay well, feel valued and thrive at work and at home.

Developed for policing, by policing, we offer evidence-based, sector-specific support that's tailored to the unique challenges faced by officers, staff, their families, and those leaving the service.

We provide national solutions that help forces deliver consistent, cost-effective wellbeing support, saving them time and resources and through our website, we offer direct access to help, guidance and support for everyone connected to policing.

We want every member of the police service to feel confident that their wellbeing is taken seriously and that they are properly supported by their organisation. Because when the people behind policing are supported, the whole service is stronger and better able to protect the public.

We recognise the vital role that families play and how critical they are to wellbeing. They can be an amazing source of love and support. Policing is a challenging occupation and at times the impacts of this are first felt at home. We hope this guide can be a handrail for those invested in our policing personnel, helping them navigate policing life and giving them somewhere to turn to when they themselves need support and assistance.

The guide is also a great resource for anyone interested in mental health and wants to find out more about how they can support their friends, family and colleagues.

For more details about NPWS services please visit www.oscarkilo.org.uk

Support for the loved ones of the policing community

We recognise that families across the UK have a lot of deal with – busy jobs, children, caring responsibilities, financial challenges, the list goes on. Having a partner, family member or a close friend in the police service is sometimes an additional worry. It may be that you are concerned about the pressure of the job, the hours they work, or the conditions they must work in, all of which can impact on their mental health and potentially their relationships at home. The nature of the job means that policing colleagues must attend particularly difficult or traumatic incidents, and as someone watching on, it is not always easy to be able to reach out and help them.

This handbook has been created to provide information on mental health and bereavement, and to support the partners, children, parents, friends and family members of people who serve in the UK's police service. This handbook contains valuable life skills and is also useful for those that work within the service. The information contained within it can be drawn upon in several settings.

It covers:

- Recognising the signs and offering support for common mental health conditions
- Accessing information, advice, and support
- Taking care of yourself or a loved one struggling with their mental health
- Helping someone struggling with grief and loss
- Talking to children about mental health or bereavement.

Section 2: Living with someone in the police service

Working in the police service can be incredibly rewarding, with many people considering it a calling or vocation, rather than a job. The job can be exciting and satisfying yet at the same time challenging and demanding.

In this section we'll cover:

- Common issues you may come across
- How the brain processes traumatic memories
- The support the police service may offer after a difficult job
- Tips and advice on what you can do to help

Issues you may come across

The coping culture

The historical coping culture of 'just keep going' still exists in today's services, many people refer to it as 'putting on a game face' to continue getting the job done. This way of thinking can make people anxious about seeking help from their organisation, manager or colleagues for fear they may appear weak or unable to cope. This means many people may not be accessing effective support to help them process the traumas they experience at work, which results in them doing it at home.

Secondary trauma and the anxiety of the unknown

Friends and family members are an extremely important part of our emotional support system. However, hearing someone recount the day's tough calls or difficult jobs can cause a lot of distress for family members, sometimes referred to as 'secondary' or 'vicarious' trauma.

If they have nowhere to go for help and support, a family member experiencing secondary trauma, can often feel very anxious when their loved one is working as they don't know what trauma or dangers, they will be facing.

Shift work

People in the police must work very long shifts, sometimes at unsociable hours. This can have significant physical and mental health risks, and it can also significantly impact on their family life too.

This impact can lead to their partners or family members taking on a greater responsibility in everyday life, for example childcare, the school run, shopping, cleaning and general housekeeping. The 24/7 nature of policing working patterns can also make it difficult for partners to maintain hobbies, leisure pursuits or a healthy social life. This uneven balance in the household can often lead to conflict and foster feelings of guilt or resentment.

Dealing with trauma and difficult jobs

Police personnel deal with difficult or traumatic jobs day in, and day out. Here are a few examples…

- **Response Officers** may see multiple traumatic events in a single day
- **999 Call Handlers** are usually the first police member 'on the scene' and regularly talk to people who are about to take their own life, have found a child or partner unconscious, or are in extreme distress
- **Child Protection & Abuse Investigators:** Deal with severe child abuse, neglect, and sexual exploitation on a regular basis.
- **Homicide & Major Crime Detectives:** Experience frequent exposure to murder scenes, child deaths, and sudden traumatic fatalities
- **Specialist Units (Firearms, Terrorism):** Reviewing horrific terrorism material, managing lethal threats, and critical incidents
- **Custody Officers:** May experience deaths and violence in the custody suite

How the brain processes traumatic memories

How the brain handles memories is very complex, the key areas of the brain that we are going to focus on are the hippocampus and the amygdala.

- The hippocampus has the role of giving memories a 'date stamp' before being passed on to another area of the brain for long-term storage
- The amygdala stores details about the event, such as the sights, sounds, smells and how you were feeling at the time

During a traumatic event, stress levels become very high which causes the hippocampus to fail putting a 'date stamp' on the memory before it's stored. Unlike the hippocampus, when stress levels rise, the amygdala gets better at its job so the brain stores the memory in much more detail than it normally would.

One of the key tasks of the brain is to keep you safe, and when needed, it will react before thinking, for example stepping out the way of an oncoming car. However, traumatic memories are stored in rich detail but the lack of 'time stamp' can cause the brain to think the event is happening again right now. This can lead to someone being constantly on 'red alert' and they may react suddenly if they come across a cue or trigger which reminds them of the original event.

For more information about triggers and how to spot if your loved one is struggling with traumatic memories, visit the **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder fact file** later on in this handbook.

Force support

Police personnel have been trained to handle very difficult jobs, but sometimes a certain job will stick with them and force them to relive the experience or second-guess their decisions.

The UK is made up of 43 police forces and after a significant incident or a call out with multiple casualties, each force supports their personnel differently. Below is a list of some of the things your loved one's force may do to support them.

On-scene manager debrief

Directly after a difficult job, a manager may take someone aside to ask them some questions to assess

- How they are doing?
- If they're able to continue their shift?
- The learning points?
- If they need any support?

The manager will then signpost the individual to areas of support, such as Occupational Health, health and wellbeing representatives, counselling support services or support charities.

Trauma risk assessment

Around 72 hours after a traumatic job, a specially trained trauma risk practitioner may invite someone to take part in an assessment (they can refuse to take part if they wish). During the assessment the individual is asked a range of questions to assess the likelihood of them developing PTSD. The assessment is retaken around four weeks later and the scores from both sessions are compared. Where appropriate, the individual will then be signposted to where they can get additional support

Emotional support debrief

A couple of weeks after a traumatic job, a manager may set up a debrief to assess how the individual is feeling and if they are still impacted by the job. If appropriate, the manager will then signpost the individual to areas of support.

Peer support

Many forces run programmes for individuals to seek support from their colleagues who have been specially trained in peer support. NPWS support many forces in England and Wales with our specialised training. Learn more about the NPWS peer support programme on our website – **go to Peer Support.**

Section 3: What to do to support your loved one

Everyone needs a bit of extra help every now and again. If policing is impacting your home life, there are a few things you can do to help:

Talking

Communicating in an honest, calm and safe space is key to finding solutions that will minimise the impact on your family life.

If you're worried about their mental health, it can be difficult to know how to talk to them about it. If they're struggling, it's important to not wait to talk to them. Holding off or hoping they will come to you will only delay in them getting the support they need. These can be difficult conversations to have, but it's the first step in finding out what's troubling someone and what you can do to help.

Here is an infographic of how you can have a conversation about mental health with someone.



Suggest they speak to their line manager or occupational health service

If they have a good relationship with their line manager, then speaking with them would be the best first place to go. All police forces have an occupational health service. These services are focused on mental and physical health and are usually accessed through a line manager. If there are any issues with the line manager, then encourage them to make direct contact with their occupational health service.

Encourage them to talk to a third party

Sometimes police personnel prefer to access support away from their force. There are a range of police charities and organisations dedicated to supporting officers, staff and their families. In addition, there are many excellent national charities.

Services provided include:

- counselling and talking therapies
- support for trauma or PTSD
- support with bereavement
- physical rehabilitation and physiotherapy
- financial guidance
- income maximisation support
- financial grants during times of exceptional circumstances

These charities are completely independent and confidential, and nothing will be shared with a force. You can learn more about the charities that support the police service and their eligibility criteria at: Police Charities UK

If you believe that they may be in crisis then encourage them to ring the National Police Wellbeing Service Mental Health Crisis Line 03001312789.

Section 4: Mental health

Each year, 1 in 4 people in England will experience a mental health problem of some kind. If you have a mental health problem, or are worried about someone else, having access to the right information is vital.

In this section we'll:

- Provide fact files on common mental health conditions including symptoms, self care tips and guidance on when to seek medical advice
- Share information on the benefits available for those with mental health problems

Fact file: Depression

One of the most common illnesses in the world, depression is a complex condition that can vary wildly from person to person.

Depression is much more than feeling sad or low for a few days. Everyone can feel down or fed up, but people with depression can feel sad for weeks or months at a time and it's not something they can 'snap out of'

Symptoms of depression

Symptoms of depression can range from mild to severe. At its mildest, you may feel persistently low, while severe depression can interfere with your work, personal care, family life or even make a person feel like life is no longer worth living.

Symptoms include:

- continuous low mood
- hopeless and helpless
- low self-esteem
- tearful
- guilt-ridden
- irritable and intolerant of others
- lack of motivation or interest
- difficult to make decisions
- no enjoyment out of life
- feeling anxious or worried
- having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- moving/speaking more slowly
- changes in appetite or weight
- constipation
- unexplained aches and pains
- lack of energy
- low sex drive
- changes to your menstrual cycle
- disturbed sleep
- lack of personal hygiene
- avoiding contact with friends
- neglecting your hobbies
- self-medication with drugs or alcohol

Depression can come on gradually, so it can be difficult to notice something is wrong. Many people dismiss or try to cope with their symptoms without realising they are unwell, and it can sometimes take a friend or family member to notice something isn't right.

When to seek help

If you or someone you care about may be suffering from depression, it's important to seek help from a GP as soon as you can. Feeling unsure as to whether someone has depression or not is quite common. There is a short NHS **self-assessment quiz** that can be completed to help provide an indicator.

If someone is worried about speaking to their GP, **visit the Mental Health Foundation website** for a handy guide on how to prepare for the appointment.

Other areas of support

Feeling low can make it difficult to talk to someone but talking and sharing experiences with that trusted person, can help improve things.

If this isn't possible there are other avenues to try:

- Talking to an Employee Assistance Programme. This is a confidential employee benefit that provides support for personal and work-related issues that may impact an employee's job performance and well-being. In some forces family members can also use this service so it is worth exploring
- Speaking to people in a similar situation, sometimes called 'peer support'.
- Websites like **SANE** and **CALM** have details of support groups you could join.
- Speak to someone completely independent. The National Police Wellbeing Service run a Mental Health Crisis Line **0300 131 2789** that is specifically designed to meet the needs of police officers and staff in crisis. The Samaritans run a 24-hour helpline where you can talk to someone confidentially, just call 116 123

Self help

If you're struggling with depression, you may feel like you're in a black hole with no way to escape, however there are a few things you can do to help ease your symptoms.

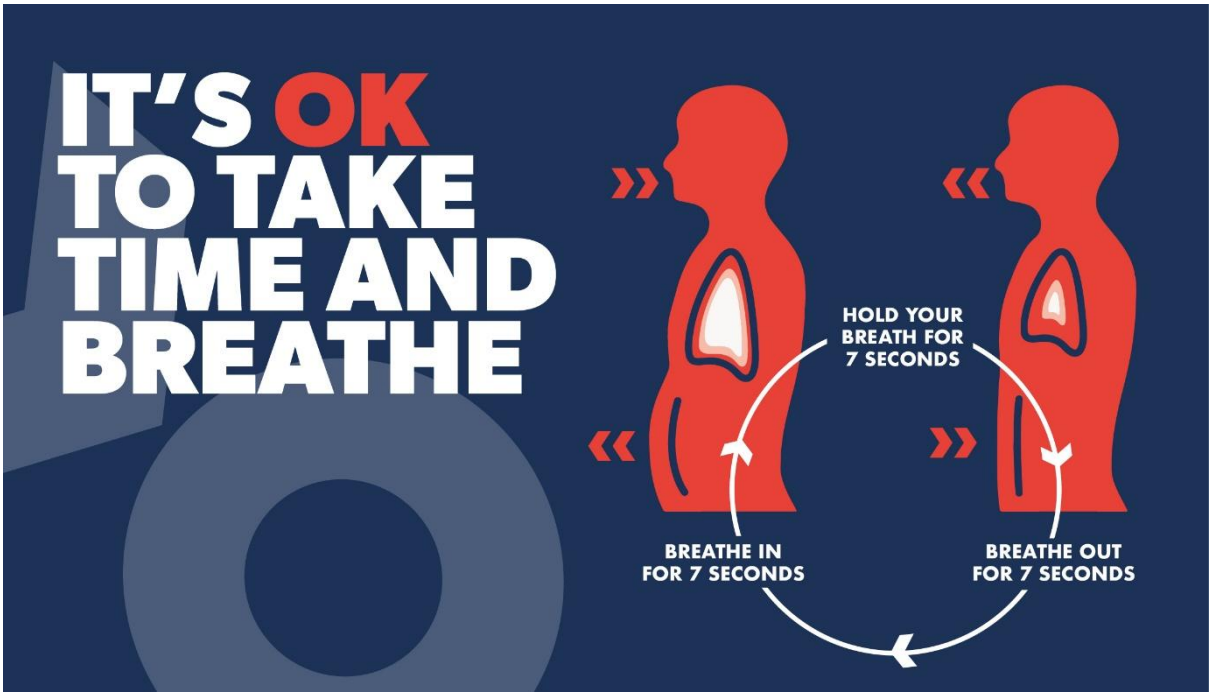
Practice mindfulness

Paying more attention to your current thoughts, feelings, and the world around you can help you enjoy the present moment and improve your wellbeing. This self-awareness is sometimes called 'mindfulness'

For examples of mindfulness exercises you could try, visit the **Mind website**.

Relaxation techniques

Relaxation exercises, meditation, aromatherapy or breathing techniques can help you to relax, ease some of your physical symptoms and help you re-establish feelings of control. We have included a breathing exercise over the page for you to try.



Keep a journal of your day

Keeping a journal can help you track your mood and if any particular activities, places or people make you feel better or worse. You might even find that you have more good days than you think.

Try and get a good night's sleep.

Getting a good night sleep can help you feel refreshed and boost your mental health. For tips on how to get a good night sleep, visit the Families section on the Oscar Kilo website or visit **UK's Sleep Council website**.

Eat well

Nutrition and vitamins are so important to your mental health, and eating regularly can help improve your blood sugar levels which can boost your mental health too. For more information about diet and depression, visit Oscar Kilo or **The Association of UK Dietician's website**.

Exercise regularly

Regular exercise can boost your mood and it's especially useful for people with mild to moderate depression. Any exercise is beneficial for your health, even going for a walk. For more information about exercise and depression, visit the **NHS website**.

Tips to help someone else

Be open and non-judgemental

Many people, especially those in the police service, can find it hard to open up about how they're feeling. It's important that you create a safe atmosphere for someone to talk and be open about depression and difficult emotions, so the person knows it's ok to not be ok.

If you have never experienced depression yourself, it can be hard to understand how your loved one is feeling. Try not to put too much pressure on them to get better straight away as they're probably feeling guilty about their feelings already.

Gently encourage them

If someone is struggling with depression, it is tempting to want to take care of everything for them, such as housework or cooking. While that may appear the kind thing to do it is important that you encourage them to do things for themselves. Everyone is different, so talk to them about what they might need help with and what they can do themselves.

Try and gently encourage them to look after themselves by staying active, eating a balanced diet and doing things they enjoy.

Keep in touch

People who are depressed can become isolated and may find it hard to leave their home. Try and keep in touch with them regularly by meeting for coffee or giving them a call. Even sending them a text to let them know you're thinking of them can make a big difference to their mood.

Take care of yourself

Looking after someone else can put a strain on your mental and physical health, so make sure you look after yourself and have time to focus on your own wellbeing.

Useful apps for depression

MindDoc

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 3,000,000 downloads

If you're struggling with emotional problems or simply want to be more aware of your mood and wellbeing, MindDoc accompanies you with daily questions. By answering questions and recording your mood, you'll receive regular mental health reports detailing your symptoms and providing a synopsis of your emotional state. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

TalkLife

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads

Are you battling with your mental health, anxiety and depression? If you're finding life really hard TalkLife can help. The app provides a peer support platform and access to a community of likeminded people to speak to.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Calm Harm

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 500,000 downloads | Aimed at teenagers

Calm Harm is an award-winning app developed for teenagers to provide tasks to help resist or manage the urge to self-harm. The app was created using the basic principles of an evidence-based therapy called Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Catch It

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 50,000 downloads

Catch It is a joint project between the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester. The app aims to help users better understand their moods through use of an ongoing diary. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Tellmi

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 40,000 downloads | Aimed at teenagers

The Tellmi app provides a safe and secure forum for teenagers. Users can anonymously get advice from experts or other teenagers going through similar experiences in areas such as mental health, self-harming and relationships. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Resources and agencies who can help

- Talk to your GP
- Low mood – HSE Website
- Mental health services – NHS website
- Get help from a mental health charity – NHS website
- Clinical depression – NHS website
- About depression – Mind website
- Get help – CALM Website
- Emotional support – SANE Website
- Living with the black dog video – Living with a black dog

Fact file: Anxiety and panic disorder

Anxiety happens when someone is worried, tense or frightened, particularly about things that can or will happen in the future. It's a natural human response for when we feel under threat and most of us have felt anxious at some point. However, some people find it hard to control their worries and experience anxiety regularly or even constantly, and it can often affect their daily lives.

Anxiety is the main symptom of several conditions, including panic disorder where sufferers often have sudden attacks of panic or fear, called 'panic attacks', often for no apparent reason.

Symptoms of anxiety and panic disorder

Anxiety feels different for everyone, and someone might experience mental and physical effects such as:

- a churning feeling in their stomach
- feeling light-headed or dizzy
- pins and needles
- feeling restless or unable to sit still
- headaches, backache or other aches and pains
- faster breathing
- a fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- sweating or hot flushes
- sleep problems
- grinding of teeth, especially at night
- nausea (feeling sick)
- needing the toilet often
- changes in sex drive
- feeling tense or nervous
- having a sense of dread
- feeling like other people are looking at them
- feeling like they can't stop worrying
- worrying about anxiety itself
- thinking over a situation again

Panic attacks

Panic attacks can be very distressing and come on very quickly with no apparent reason. Symptoms include:

- a racing heartbeat
- feeling faint
- sweating
- nausea
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- trembling
- hot flushes
- chills

- dizziness
- numbness or pins and needles
- dry mouth
- a need to go to the toilet
- ringing in the ears
- a feeling of dread or a fear of dying
- a churning stomach
- feeling like they're not connected to their body
- shaky limbs
- a choking sensation

Although frightening, panic attacks aren't dangerous and most last between 5 and 20 minutes. When someone has a panic attack, they may start to avoid certain situations because they fear it will trigger another attack. This can create a cycle of fear and can add to their sense of panic, causing them to have more attacks.

When to seek help

Feeling anxious every now and again is completely normal, but if anxiety is causing distress or affecting daily life, then talking to the GP can help.

When diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, the doctor may recommend Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which is a talking therapy that helps a person cope with their anxiety. The therapy works by focusing on how thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect them and teaches coping skills for dealing with them.

It can also be helpful to join a support group and talk to people who are or have been in a similar situation. **Anxiety UK** and **No Panic** currently run support groups, alternatively the GP may be able to recommend a group that would be suitable.

Self help

Learn how to deal with a panic attack

A panic attack can be very frightening, but knowing what to expect and what to do to manage an attack can help people cope much more easily. If you or a loved one has an attack:

- do not fight it
- if possible, stay where you are and breath slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth
- remind yourself that the attack is not life-threatening and that it will pass
- focus on positive, peaceful and relaxing images, such as your favourite forest, beach or waterfall

Exercise regularly

Regular aerobic exercise can help relieve tension and encourage the brain to release a chemical called Serotonin which helps boost mood.

Aim for 150 minutes of exercise a week that raises the pulse and increases breathing. Examples of good aerobic exercises include walking fast, swimming and cycling. For more information about exercising, visit the **NHS website**.

Avoid caffeine

Drinking too much tea, coffee, energy or fizzy drinks can make you more anxious. That is because caffeine can disrupt sleep, this makes it more difficult to control anxious feelings when you are tired.

Learn to relax

Knowing how to calm down and control thoughts is very important for managing anxiety. Many people like to do yoga or Pilates to help them relax, in addition there are several relaxation exercises on **Mind's website**.

Tips to help someone else

Helping someone through a panic attack

It can be frightening if someone you care about is having a panic attack – especially if it comes out of the blue.

- Try to stay calm and reassure them that you are here for them
- Encourage them to breathe in slowly through their nose and then out through their mouth. It may help them to give them something repetitive to focus on, like counting as they breathe in and out or stamping their feet on the spot
- If they are in a loud or busy area, try and move them somewhere quiet to give them space to focus on their breathing.
- When they are feeling better ask them about their experience and listen to them to help you understand how they feel

Just ask

Everyone has different needs, and it's likely that your loved one already knows how you could help them manage their anxiety. By asking them how you can help you are showing them that you care are they will feel reassured and calmer knowing that someone is around who can help them when their anxiety is heightened.

Be patient

People with anxiety regularly experience fear and worry, so it's important to not put pressure on them to do more than they're comfortable with. You may want them to face their fears, but you may unintentionally make them feel like you are forcing them into a situation which they're not ready for which can cause their anxiety to increase.

Remember that being unable to control their worries is part of having anxiety and they are not choosing to feel the way they do. Instead, be patient, listen to them and take things at a pace they are comfortable with.

Support them to seek help

People with anxiety can be nervous about seeking support, so if you think your loved one's anxiety is becoming a problem you could help them by:

- offering to help them arrange a doctor's appointment
- attending their appointments with them or help them plan what they want to talk to their GP about. Visit the **Mental Health Foundation website** for a handy guide on how to prepare for a mental health appointment with a GP
- help them seek help from a therapist

Useful apps for anxiety

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

My Possible Self

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 50,000 downloads

Use the simple learning modules to manage fear, anxiety and stress and tackle unhelpful thinking. Record your experiences and track symptoms to better understand your mental health.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Thrive

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 50,000 downloads

This game-based app can help you prevent and manage stress, anxiety and related conditions to help you live a happier, more stress-free life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Resources and agencies who can help

- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- Anxiety and panic attacks – **Mind website**
- Panic disorder – **NHS website**
- Generalised anxiety disorder in adults – **NHS website**
- About anxiety – **Anxiety UK**
- Anxiety disorders fact sheet – **Rethink Mental Illness website**

Fact file: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a common form of anxiety that involves distressing and repetitive thoughts which can cause a significant amount of distress and interfere with life.

Symptoms

The key symptoms of OCD are obsessions and compulsions.

- Obsessions are unwanted, distressing and repetitive thoughts, images or urges which come into your mind automatically. They usually cause you to feel distressed or anxious and may seem completely irrational. Some people describe these thoughts as a 'stuck record' and trying to stop them can sometimes make them worse.
- Compulsions are repetitive behaviours, acts or 'rituals' that you feel you need to do to temporarily relieve the anxiety brought on by an obsession. It's important to know that compulsions may have no connection to the nature of the obsession, and from the outside the compulsion can look completely irrational.

Here are three examples of obsessions and compulsions:

- Paul has obsessive thoughts about germs and getting ill. To cope, he has a compulsion to wash his hands over and over again.
- Lisa has just had a baby and is obsessed that her child is going to be harmed. To cope, she has a compulsion to constantly check all the baby-proofed cabinets and regularly checks the baby is breathing during the night.
- Kevin is constantly worrying that his house is going to be burgled. To cope, every time he leaves the house, his ritual is to lock the door five times, and at night turns all the lights on and off ten times.

People with OCD are often reluctant to seek help because they feel embarrassed about their condition, but it's important to remember that OCD is a recognised illness and it's not your fault if you suffer from the condition. It's normal for people experience anxiety or obsessive thoughts every now and again, but if it's a regular occurrence, or it's impacting on other areas of life such as work or social life, speak to your GP.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) may be recommended for somebody with OCD, a talking therapy which can help you cope with and overcome anxiety.

Tips to help yourself

Educate yourself

Knowledge is power when it comes to OCD, so take some time to learn about your condition. Self-help materials can never replace the support you will receive from a trained counsellor, but the more you understand about OCD, the more prepared you will be for therapy. Visit **OCD UK's website** for a list of recommended self-help books.

Join a community group

Talking to people who have had similar experiences can make a big difference to your mental health. Groups are held all over the country and websites like **OCD Action**, **OCD UK** and **TOP UK** can help you find support groups in your local area.

Focus on the here and now

Paying more attention to your current thoughts, feelings, and the world around you can help you enjoy the present momentand improve your wellbeing. This self-awareness is sometimes called 'mindfulness'

For examples of mindfulness exercises you could try, visit the **Mind website**.

Try an exposure exercise

An essential part of managing OCD is learning to live with the uncomfortable feelings when you do something you'd usually avoid, or when you don't perform a ritual that brings relief from intrusive thoughts. An exposure exercise can help you identify where you can make small steps to improve your mental health.

- Make a list of situations/activities that cause you distress and make you want to perform a ritual.
- Give each situation a 'difficulty score' out of 10. If a situation causes you no distress, rate it 0. If it causes extreme distress, rate it 10. Then put the situations in order, from least distress to most distress.
- Start with the lowest-ranked item on your listand try to do it without performing a ritual. Keep repeating the lowest-ranked item on your list until you can do it without performing a ritual.
- Move onto the next item.

For more information about exposure activities, visit the **NHS Inform website**.

Tips to help someone else

Be open and patient

If your loved one has OCD, they may find their condition embarrassing or hard to talk about. They may also have kept their feelings and compulsions secret for a long time and may be worried that you will judge them.

It's important to remember that their fears are very real to them, regardless of how unrealistic they seem to you, so try and be patient with them and encourage them to talk about their fears in a way that is comfortable for them.

When your loved one talks to you about their OCD, they may tell you things that you find upsetting or shocking. Try to avoid judging them and avoid acting shocked as it may prevent them from talking to you in the future. Make it clear that you love and support them.

Learn everything you can about the condition

It can be hard to understand what your loved one is going through, and their fears and compulsions may seem very extreme to you. Try and learn everything you can about OCD to boost your understanding of the condition and how you can best help your loved one.

To help you get started, we've included several links to resources at the end of this fact file or alternatively, **click here** to read some OCD case studies on the MIND website.

Come up with a plan that works for both of you

Sometimes, the easiest way to figure out how to help someone is to just ask. This can help open a door so that you can work together on how you can support your loved one, or maybe even challenge their thinking. For example, if the person collects things as part of their ritual, you could ask them if they want the thing they're collecting or if it's just part of their OCD.

Encourage them to challenge their compulsions, where appropriate

Earlier in this fact file, we gave an example of an exposure exercise. By asking someone to rank their fears and compulsions you will get a better idea of where and when you can challenge their thinking by asking them to think about why they want to do a compulsion again.

Useful apps for OCD

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

GG OCD Anxiety & Depression

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 10,000 downloads

This app aims to improve the negative thinking associated with OCD, by increasing awareness and training the brain to challenge them.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

NOCD: OCD Treatment App

Available on Android and IOS | Monthly charge after 30 days | Over 50,000 downloads

Made by people with OCD, along with some of the world's top experts. The app offers live video-based OCD therapy and in-between session support.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

GG Relationship Doubt & Obsessions (ROCD)

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 10,000 downloads

This app provides quick daily training to manage relationship OCD, and reduce obsessions, doubts and fears.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Serenity: Guided Mental Health

Available on Android | Free | Over 10,000 downloads

Serenity is a mobile conversational companion. Through private, judgment-free conversations, Serenity helps you to become more conscious of the connections between your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions.

Download on Android

Resources and agencies who can help

- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- OCD – **NHS website**
- OCD – **Mind website**
- Resources – **OCD Action website**
- Introduction to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – **OCD UK website**
- What is OCD – What is OCD? | TOP UK

Fact File: Bipolar

Bipolar disorder used to be called manic depression, and it's an illness where you're affected by extreme high and low mood swings. Everyone can have mood swings now and again, but if you have bipolar disorder these changes can be very distressing and have a big impact on your life. People suffering from the condition may also suffer psychotic symptoms.

A diagnosis of bipolar disorder can only be given by a trained mental health professional, such a psychiatrist. Your GP can't diagnose you, but they can refer you

The key symptoms of bipolar disorder

Are extreme highs or 'mania' and extreme lows or 'depression'. The episodes of mania or depression can last for days or weeks at a time, and in-between each episode you may feel and act completely normal.

Psychosis

Some people with bipolar disorder can also suffer from psychotic symptoms such as delusions, paranoia, and hallucinations like hearing voices. Psychosis is more common during manic episodes, but it can happen during depressive episodes too. During psychosis, the things you see and hear can feel very real to you. For more information about bipolar symptoms and episode cycles, visit the Mind website.

Mania

Mania or manic episodes can last for a week or more, and can severely affect your life, even stopping you from doing everyday activities. Severe mania is very serious and often needs to be treated in hospital.

Symptoms of a manic episode include:

- feeling happy or euphoric
- uncontrollably excitement
- irritable and agitated
- increased sexual energy
- easily distracted
- very confident
- feeling untouchable
- feeling like you can perform tasks better than normal
- thinking you can see or hear things that other people can't
- being more active than usual talking a lot or not making sense to other people
- being very friendly
- saying or doing things that are inappropriate or out of character
- sleeping very little or not at all
- being rude or aggressive
- misusing drugs or alcohol
- spending money excessively
- losing social inhibitions
- taking serious risks

When to seek help

Bipolar disorder can have a big impact on your life, and your therapist or GP may recommend a combination of different treatments, such as medication and talking therapies. However, if your symptoms are severe, or if you're being treated under the Mental Health Act, you may need treatment from a hospital.

During depressive episodes, someone suffering from bipolar disorder may feel incredibly low and may even consider suicide or think that life isn't living. In a crisis, it's vital that the person isn't left alone and is given medical attention as soon as possible. For more information about what to do in a crisis, see our suicidal thoughts fact file later in this handbook.

Self Help

Track your moods

Keeping a daily diary of your moods, feelings and what happened that day is incredibly useful as over a long period of time it will help you:

- Identify any patterns in your behaviour to help you plan for the future.
- Spot any triggers that cause you to be manic or depressed so you can put a plan in place to avoid or cope with them.
- Notice any warning signs in your behaviour before an episode starts, for example you may find that you start sleeping less before a depressive episode or spend a lot more money before a manic episode. Noticing these signs can help you and your loved ones manage and cope with your condition better.
- Bipolar UK has a mood scale that may be useful in tracking your mood. **Click here** to download the mood scale.

Create a routine

Creating a daily routine is an easy way to give yourself some structure which can help you feel calmer, motivated and stable. Your routine could include day-to-day activities, time to yourself to relax and destress, set times to take your medication and dedicated time to fill in your daily mood tracking diary.

Manage your stress

Policing is a challenging profession, and stress can trigger both manic and depressive episodes, so it's important to set aside time to focus on reducing your stress levels. How you de-stress is different for everyone, but you could try:

- Yoga
- Pilates
- Talking to a friend over coffee
- A mindfulness exercise. Visit the **Mind website** for examples of exercises
- Taking a warm bath

- Listening to your favourite music

Plan for a crisis

It can be hard to think about being in crisis, and even harder to plan for something you hope will never happen. If you do end up in crisis it can be really difficult to cope or let others know how to help, which is why it's so important to make a plan about what you want to happen when you're well.

- Your plan will be very personal to you, but you should try and make sure it covers:
- Details of how your loved ones might help you spot the signs of a crisis
- Information about how you would like them to help you, for example, do you have a **self-care box** they could get for you?
- Details on who they could contact, for example do you want them to call you GP, do you have a therapist they could call, or should they call Samaritans in the first instance?

For more information and advice on how to plan for a crisis, visit the **Mind website**.

Tips to help someone else

Put a plan in place to deal with manic episodes

When someone is in a manic episode, it can prevent or even stop them from doing everyday activities. If you're not sure how to help them it can cause you both a lot of distress, and make you feel out of control. When your loved one is well, talk to them about how you can support them when they are in a manic episode. For example, you could offer to help them keep a regular routine or make sure they take their medication.

Gently encourage them during depressive episodes

If your loved one is struggling with depression, you may want to take care of everything for them. While it will be useful to them, it's important that you encourage them to do things for themselves. Everyone is different, so talk about what they might need help with and what they can do themselves.

Try and gently encourage them to look after themselves by staying active, eating a balanced diet and doing things they enjoy.

Help spot triggers and warning signs

For people suffering with bipolar disorder, it can sometimes be hard to identify the things that trigger an episode, or the warning signs that an episode is starting. By helping them learn more about how their condition affects them, you could give them a greater chance of preventing an episode or reducing its impact.

Work with your loved one and help them identify out-of-character behaviours, patterns that would help them pinpoint their triggers and the emotions, behaviours or events which could be early signs of an episode.

Look after yourself

During an episode, your loved one's behaviour can have a profound effect on you, and it's not always easy to offer sympathetic support to someone who may have been behaving erratically, angrily, recklessly or thoughtlessly.

Once your loved one is out of an episode, especially a manic episode, they may be shocked, ashamed or embarrassed at their behaviour. This can lead to an extraordinary amount of stress and confusion, so it's vital that you take time to look after yourself so that you are well enough to support your loved one.

In some cases, you may want to seek help from a support group or counsellor. Visit the **Bipolar UK website** for more information about the condition and the support that is available to you.

Useful apps for bipolar disorder

MyLife Meditation: Mindfulness

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads

Learn to meditate and be more mindful with MyLife Meditation, an award-winning app offering daily wellness check-ins and suggests activities personalized on how you feel. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

eMoods

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000 downloads eMoods is a user-friendly app for patients to track their Bipolar symptoms to help them identify triggers and patterns and help prevent relapses. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Medisafe

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads An award-winning app pill reminder and medication tracker app.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

CBT Thought Diary

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000 downloads

A free journal and mood tracker which uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tools to help you to analyse your thoughts and identify your thinking traps.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

UP!

Available on Android | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000 downloads

An automated mood diary to help you track your warning signs of depression, mania and hypomania.

Download on Android

Resources and agencies who can help

- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- Bipolar disorder – **NHS website**
- Bipolar disorder – **Mind website**
- Bipolar disorder – **Royal College of Psychiatrists**
- Home – **Bipolar UK**

Fact file: Schizophrenia

Usually described by doctors as a type of psychosis, schizophrenia is a severe and long-term mental health condition that affects how you think, feel and behave. Episodes of schizophrenia can last several weeks and be very frightening. People with schizophrenia may find it hard to tell the difference between their own thoughts and reality.

A diagnosis of schizophrenia can only be given by a trained mental health professional, such a psychiatrist. Your GP can't diagnose you, but they can refer you.

Symptoms of schizophrenia

Each person's experience of schizophrenia is unique, but the main symptoms of the condition are:

- hallucinations or hearing/seeing things that do not exist
- delusions or unusual beliefs which aren't based on reality
- muddled thoughts
- losing interest in everyday activities
- not caring about your personal hygiene
- wanting to avoid people, including friends
- not able to carry on with day-to-day activities

It's important to know that schizophrenia doesn't cause someone to be violent, nor do people with the condition have a 'split personality.'

Schizophrenia symptoms are usually called either 'positive' or 'negative'.

- Positive symptoms add something to your life, such as hearing voices or seeing things that aren't real
- Negative symptoms take something away from your life, such as losing interest in things or being motivated

Suffers usually find the positive symptoms the most distressing, however the negative symptoms tend to cause the most issues as they can last much longer.

When to seek help

The earlier schizophrenia is diagnosed and treated, the better. So, if you're experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia, it's vital to see a GP as soon as possible as early support and treatment can reduce the condition's impact on your everyday life.

Once diagnosed with schizophrenia, your GP may recommend a combination of treatments, such as medication and talking therapies.

Tips to help yourself

Learn to spot the warning signs

1 in 4 people make a full recovery from their first episode of schizophrenia, however many more may experience relapses. Learning how to recognise the signs that you're becoming unwell can help you manage your illness, help you prepare, and give you time to seek medical support to reduce the impact on you and your loved ones.

The signs you're experiencing a relapse can be different for everyone, but common signs are:

- Losing your appetite
- Feeling anxious or stressed
- Disturbed sleep
- Milder schizophrenia symptoms like feeling suspicious, worrying about others' motives and hearing quiet voices

Plan for the bad times

It can be hard to think about relapsing, and even harder to plan for something you hope will never happen. If you do end up in crisis it can be difficult to cope or let others know how to help, which is why it's so important to make a plan about what you want to happen when you're well.

Your plan will be very personal to you, but the **National Institute of Health Care Excellence** (NICE) recommends it should cover:

- possible early warning signs of a crisis and coping strategies
- support available to help prevent hospitalisation
- where you would like to be admitted in the event of hospitalisation
- your practical needs if you are admitted to hospital (for example, childcare or the care of other dependants, including pets)
- details of advance decisions
- if and how much your family or carers are involved
- information about 24-hour access to services
- named contacts

You should also try and include an advanced statement. During an episode, you might become unable to make decisions about your treatment (legally called 'losing capacity'). If you're worried about losing capacity, an advanced statement is a written declaration of what you would like to happen if you become unwell. In your advanced statement you should include the following details as such as:

- what treatment you would prefer
- who you would like to be contacted in a crisis
- any spiritual or religious views
- your food preferences

Your GP, care coordinator, psychiatrist or another health care professional can help you make an advance statement. It's important to know that an advanced statement isn't a legally binding document, but health professionals will try to follow your wishes wherever possible. For more information about your rights if you lose capacity, visit the **Mind website**.

Avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs

Many people with schizophrenia like to smoke or use alcohol and drugs to provide short-term relief from their symptoms. However:

- Smoking could change the effects of any antipsychotic drugs you are prescribed
- Alcohol is a 'depressive' drug which can cause depression and psychosis, which could make your condition worse
- Drugs can react badly with antipsychotic drugs and affect the way they work

People with schizophrenia are recommended to avoid all alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, but if you're struggling to quit, there is a range of support available online or you can speak to your doctor who can refer you to local groups.

Avoid stress

Stress, and especially stressful life events, is the main psychological trigger of a schizophrenic episode. Too much stress can also make the symptoms of schizophrenia worse and increase the chances of you becoming unwell.

It's important to set aside time to focus on reducing your stress levels. How you de-stress is different for everyone, but you could try:

- Yoga
- A mindfulness exercise.
- Visit the Mind website for examples of exercises
- Pilates
- Talking to a friend over coffee
- Listening to your favourite music
- Taking a warm bath

You also need to avoid too much stress, and, in some cases, you may need to cut down on the number of responsibilities you have. This includes work-related stress. Under the **Equality Act 2010**, all employers must make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, including people diagnosed with schizophrenia or other mental illnesses.

Tips to help someone else

Talk about their feelings

If your loved one has schizophrenia, it can be difficult to understand what is happening or what to do, especially if they're seeing things or hearing voices.

It's important to remember that their experiences feel very real to them, so telling them 'it's all in your head' can make them feel isolated and alone. Instead, focus on what they're currently feeling and how you can help. Ask them questions like: "that sounds scary, is there someone you can talk to about it?"

Focus on the positives

It can be hard watching someone you care about suffer from schizophrenia. As well as the delusions and hearing voices, people with the condition offer lack motivation, avoid seeing people, and stop taking care of themselves.

Remember that these are symptoms of schizophrenia, and your loved one isn't choosing to be this way. Instead, it can help to focus on the positive things and setting small, realistic goals to aim for rather than what they can't do. For example, setting a goal of getting showered and dressed every day or taking all their medication without help.

Help create a crisis plan

When someone is experiencing the worst schizophrenic symptoms, it can be distressing for everyone, and almost impossible if you don't know how to help. When your loved one is well, encourage them to create a plan of:

- the symptoms that they might be
- what they want to happen if they about to relapse become unwell, such as what treatment they want,
- what their triggers are
- how you can help
- who they would like you to contact if they become unwell

More information about creating a crisis plan is available earlier in this fact file.

When having these conversations, make sure you also think about how much you can cope with and try to only offer support that you feel able to give. It is important to look after yourself too.

Be there in an emergency

If your loved one is having a relapse, and you think they may be at risk of hurting themselves or others, their 'nearest relative' can request a mental health assessment. The assessment is performed by an approved mental health professional and looks at treatment options and if the person should be admitted to hospital under the **Mental Health Act**.

Section 23 of The Mental Health Act defines the 'nearest relative' as a strict list of people who can act on your behalf. The person who is highest on your list is your nearest relative:

- Husband, wife or civil partner (including cohabitee for more than 6 months).
- Son or daughter

- Father or mother (an unmarried father must have parental responsibility in order to be nearest relative)
- Brother or sister
- Grandparent
- Grandchild
- Uncle or aunt
- Nephew or niece

Useful apps for schizophrenia

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Medisafe

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads An award-winning app pill reminder and medication tracker app.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Catch It

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 50,000 downloads

Catch It is a joint project between the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester. The app aims to help users better understand their moods through use of an ongoing diary.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Tellmi

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 40,000 downloads | Aimed at teenagers

The Tellmi app provides a safe and secure forum for teenagers. Users can anonymously get advice from experts or other teenagers going through similar experiences in areas such as mental health, self-harming and relationships.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

My Possible Self

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 50,000 downloads

Take control of your thoughts, feelings and behaviours by recording your experiences, tracking your symptoms and learning how to manage your anxiety and stress.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Resources and agencies who can help

- Speak to your GP
- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- Schizophrenia – **Rethink Mental Illness**
- Schizophrenia – **NHS website**
- Schizophrenia – **Mind website**
- Home page – **Carers UK website**
- Home page – **Hearing Voices Network website**

Fact file: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur after you have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. Previously known as 'shell shock', the condition is famously linked to soldiers and veterans, but anyone can develop PTSD.

It's estimated that an average person will experience one or maybe two traumatic events in their lifetime. However, some people working in the police service are exposed to distressing and traumatic events much more frequently and are more likely to develop PTSD.

For more information on **how your brain processes traumatic memories**, visit section 2.2 earlier in this handbook.

Traumatic memories can be triggered by anything, such as your own thoughts and feelings, locations, sounds and smells.

Symptoms of PTSD

PTSD can have a significant impact on day-to-day life. In most cases, the symptoms develop in the first month after the traumatic event, but sometimes it can be months or even years before symptoms start to appear.

Some people with PTSD experience long periods when their symptoms are less noticeable, followed by periods where they get worse. Other people have constant severe symptoms.

The specific symptoms of PTSD can vary widely between individuals, but common symptoms are:

Reliving and re-experiencing the event

The most common symptom of PTSD, re-experiencing is when someone involuntarily and vividly relives the traumatic event through:

- flashbacks
- nightmares
- intense distress at real or symbolic reminders of the trauma
- intrusive, repetitive and distressing images and thoughts
- physical sensations, such as pain, sweating, feeling sick or trembling

Feeling numb or avoiding feelings or emotions

People with PTSD usually go out of their way to avoid being reminded of the traumatic event. This can mean they avoid talking about their experience, going to places or seeing people who remind them of the event. People with PTSD may also:

- Try and keep busy with work or hobbies to distract themselves from the memories
- Do things that could be self-destructive or reckless
- Use alcohol or drugs to self soothe and avoid thinking about the memories

Some people may also attempt to cope by trying not to feel anything at all, known as 'emotional numbing'. This can lead to them becoming isolated and withdrawn, and they may also give up pursuing activities they used to enjoy.

Feeling constantly alert or on edge

Due to the way the brain processes traumatic memories, people with PTSD can be constantly on alert for threats and may easily startled. This 'on edge' or 'hypervigilance' feeling can lead to:

- Irritability
- Angry outbursts
- Sleeping problems
- Difficulty concentrating

Complex PTSD

People who repeatedly experience traumatic situations can develop complex PTSD. You are also more likely to develop complex PTSD if:

- you experienced trauma at an early age
- the trauma lasted for a long-time escape or rescue were unlikely or impossible
- you have experienced multiple traumas
- you were harmed by someone close to you

The symptoms of complex PTSD are like PTSD except they also include:

- feelings of shame or guilt
- difficulty controlling emotions
- periods of losing attention and concentration
- physical symptoms, such as headaches, dizziness, chest pains and stomach aches
- isolation from friends and family
- relationship difficulties
- destructive or risky behaviour, such as self-harm, alcohol misuse or drug abuse
- suicidal thoughts

Symptoms of the condition may not develop until years after the traumatic event. For more information about complex PTSD, visit the **NHS website**.

When to seek help

After a distressing or upsetting event, it's normal to experience some of the symptoms listed above, but the symptoms will start to lessen over a few weeks. If your symptoms last more than four weeks, you should speak to your doctor who may refer you to a qualified mental health professional for a diagnosis.

Tips to help yourself

Focus on your breathing

When a memory is triggered, you may become quite distressed or panicked. This can cause your breathing to be short and shallow which can make your anxieties feel worse. Take a moment to focus on your breathing by following this exercise:

1. Before you begin, make yourself as comfortable as possible. You can stand up, sit down in a chair that supports your back or lie down on the bed or floor. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.
2. Concentrate on slowing your breathing. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. Let your breath flow in as deep as is comfortable. As you do, notice how your chest rises.
3. Hold your breath for 3 seconds and then slowly breathe out through your mouth for a count of 6. As you do, notice how your chest falls and any other sensations in your body.

Do this 10 times.

Try a grounding exercise

When you experience intrusive thoughts or images, it can be calming to connect to the present and what's happening around you. This is called 'grounding'. Here is an example of an exercise:

- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and then out through your mouth.
- Aloud, say five things you can currently see
- Then say four things you can hear
- Then say three things you can feel, or three things you like the feel of
- Then say two things you can smell, or two things you like the smell of
- Finally, say one thing you can taste, or like the taste of

Other examples of grounding exercises are describing your surroundings outloud, counting objects around you or looking for objects in a certain colour.

Hold on to the present

Try and always have something with you that you can hold or touch, and which also reminds you of the present, for example a smooth pebble or a piece of jewellery.

Keep a diary

Keeping a daily diary of your moods, feelings and what happened that day is incredibly useful as over a long period of time it will help you spot any triggers that cause you to experience flashbacks so you can put a plan in place to cope with them.

Tips to help someone else

Be patient

If you've not experienced PTSD yourself, it can be hard to understand why your loved one can't seem to 'move on'. It can be incredible difficult to talk about PTSD, and talking about it can also trigger flashbacks.

It's important not to pressure someone into talking as it will not help them in the long-term and you could make their symptoms worse. Be patient and give them space but remind them that you are here to listen and support them when they are ready. If someone wants to talk about how they're feeling:

- Give them time to talk and don't assume you know how they feel
- Reassure them that it's ok to be upset about what has happened
- Don't dismiss or minimise their experience by using phrases like 'other people have had it worse' or 'the situation could have been worse'
- Don't ask them why they didn't say or do something differently
- Give them space and ask for their permission before you touch them

Learn their triggers

Everyone has a different experience of PTSD. Their triggers will be very particular to them and the traumatic incident they experienced or witnessed. For example:

- A person who was assaulted by a man may be triggered by the smell of the same cologne
- A police officer who attended a very traumatic road traffic incident may be triggered if they visit the same stretch of road, or even the type of vehicles that were present at the event
- A soldier may be triggered by sudden or loud noises that resembles gun fire or explosions

To help your loved one, it can be useful to talk with them about the sort of things that trigger their flashbacks or intrusive thoughts. Understanding their triggers could help you to avoid these situations and feel more prepared when flashbacks happen.

Learn what to do during a flashback

When someone experiences a flashback, it can be incredibly distressing for them and their loved ones. If someone is having a flashback, there are a few things you can do to help:

- Avoid any sudden movements as it may startle them
- Always ask before you touch them as they may find physical contact threatening and could react aggressively
- Remind them they are having a flashback and reassure them that although it may feel real, the event is not actually happening
- Remind them of their present surroundings. Try and describe what is around them in detail
- Encourage them to concentrate on their breathing by taking deep slow breathes so that they do not hyperventilate. An example of a breathing exercise is available earlier in this fact file

Help rebuild their sense of security

Due to the way the brain processes traumatic memories, someone with PTSD is constantly hypervigilant, 'on edge', or expecting the traumatic experience to happen again. This can make them incredibly anxious and see the world as a dangerous and frightening place. It can also damage their sense of security or trust in themselves and others. You can help rebuild their sense of security by:

- Letting them know that you'll always be here to support them
- Creating routines to add structure and stability to their day. This could be as simple as your loved one helping with the shopping once a week, or setting regular mealtimes
- Minimising stress at home and making sure they have the time to rest and relax
- Keeping your promises. Following through on what you say you will help build trust with your loved one
- Emphasizing their strengths and, where appropriate, look for things they're capable of doing themselves to boost their confidence and trust in their own abilities

Useful apps for PTSD

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

eMoods

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000 downloads eMoods is a user-friendly app for patients to track their Bipolar symptoms to help them identify triggers and patterns and help prevent relapses. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Catch It

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 50,000 downloads

Catch It is a joint project between the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester. The app aims to help users better understand their moods through use of an ongoing diary. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Breathe2Relax

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 100,000 downloads

Breathe2Relax is a portable stress management tool providing information of the effects of stress on the body and exercises to help manage stress. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

PTSD Coach

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 100,000 downloads

This app offer education about PTSD, information about professional care, a selfassessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help you manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Other resources and agencies who can help

- Speak to your GP
- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- PTSD - **NHS website**
- Complex PTSD - **NHS website**
- PTSD - **Mind website**
- Complext PTSD - **Mind website**
- Mind Blue Light - **Mind website**
- Home - **PTSDUK website**
- PTSD - **Rethink Mental Illness website**
- PTSD - **Royal College of Psychiatrists website**

Fact file: Suicidal thoughts

Suicidal thoughts or feelings, sometimes called 'ideation' by medical professionals, is when someone is thinking about ending their own life. There are two types of suicidal ideation:

- **Passive ideation** is when someone doesn't desire to be alive. They may feel like people would be better off without them, or that they wish they were dead, but they have no current plans of taking their own life. If left untreated, passive ideation can turn into active ideation
- **Active ideation** is when someone is thinking about taking their own life and putting plans

It's vital that passive suicidal ideation is not taken less seriously because someone doesn't have an immediate plan to take their own life. Regular thoughts of suicide are an issue regardless of whether attempts are made, and if your loved one is experiencing suicidal thoughts, it's critical that they receive help as soon as possible

Symptoms of suicidal thinking

Thay are:

- Isolating themselves from loved ones
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Being tearful
- Being tired or lacking in energy
- Feeling hopeless or trapped
- Feeling extremely anxious
- Talking about death or suicide
- Giving away possessions
- An increase in substance misuse
- Increased mood swings or anger/rage
- Risk-taking behaviour
- Accessing the means to kill yourself, such as medication
- Saying goodbye to people

When to seek help

If you're experiencing suicidal thoughts, it's vital that you seek help as soon as possible. You could:

Talk to someone you trust

If you can, tell someone you trust about your thoughts and how you are feeling. As well as providing a listening ear, they can also make sure you are safe and support you to receive the help you need.

Speak to your GP

It's common to worry about talking to your doctor about suicidal feelings, but they are used to listening to people who are experiencing difficult feelings. You doctor can also signpost you to other support agencies for support, arrange for you to receive talking therapies or prescribe you medication.

Call a helpline

There are many free helplines you can call to talk to someone when you're feeling low. Here are just a few:

Mental Health Crisis Line

For officers and police staff

Call 0300 131 2789

Visit **Oscarkilo.org**

Samaritans

Call 116 123

Visit **Oscarkilo.org**

Email **jo@samaritans.org**

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

Call 0800 58 58 58 – 5pm to midnight every day

Visit their **webchat page**

SOS Silence of Suicide – for everyone

Call 0300 1020 505 – 4pm to midnight every day

Email support@sossilenceofsuicide.org

Papyrus

For people under 35

Call 0800 068 41 41 – 9am to midnight every day

Text 07860 039967

Email pat@papyrus-uk.org

Childline

For children and young people under 19

Call 0800 1111

Contact a text line

If you don't want to talk to someone over the phone, these text lines are open 24 hours a day, every day:

Shout crisis text line

Text SHOUT to 85258

Police officers and staff members can also text BLUELIGHT to 85258 to access Shout's text line for emergency service workers.

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

For people under 19

Text "YM" to 85258

Contact NHS 111

NHS 111 can assess your current situation and recommend the best source of support for you. To access the service, dial 111 or visit https://111.nhs.uk

Get in touch with your local Crisis Team

Depending where you are in the UK, your local NHS trust may have a Crisis Team who can support you when you're feeling suicidal. To find more details about your local arrangements, visit your NHS trust's website. Alternatively, visit the **NHS website** for a list of NHS urgent mental health helplines you can contact.

Self help

Focus on the next five minutes

Right now, you might be feeling like life isn't worth living and that these feelings will never end. But it's important to remember that these thoughts will not last, and like all things, they will pass.

Sometimes your feelings are so strong it can seem overwhelming. Instead make a plan for the next five minutes and then reward yourself when you complete it. For example:

- 5mins: remove everything near me that I can use to harm myself Reward: a piece of chocolate
- 5mins: do a breathing exercise Reward: listen to my favourite song
- 5mins: call a friend to talk about how I'm feeling Reward: put on my favourite perfume/cologne

Distract yourself

Occupying your mind with something else can help distract you from your suicidal thoughts. If possible, try and do something that you enjoy, or if that seems too much do something that focuses your mind and senses on a small task such as:

- Place an ice cube in your hand until it melts and focus on how cold it is
- Take a very cold shower
- Speaking out loud, list off five things you enjoy for each sense e.g. five smells you like tear up a piece of paper into sounds hundreds of pieces and try to count the pieces as you do

Visit the **Mind website** for lots of tips and ideas on how to distract yourself.

Create a safety plan

When you're struggling with suicidal thoughts, it can be hard to cope. To help, try and create a safety plan when you're in a better mindset. The aim of safety plan is to cover everything you need to know and do in a crisis. Many people find it helpful to write their plan down and to give a copy to a loved one they trust. You plan will be very personal to you, but try and include:

- how to recognise your warning signs
- details of coping strategies that work for you
- the contact details of anyone who may be able to help
- the contact details of professionals or organisations you can contact when you're in crisis
- details of helplines or text lines you can contact
- steps to take to make your immediate environment safe
- details of a safe place you can go

Create a self-care box

Fill a box with items and memories that can help lift your mood when you feel down.

What you put in your box is entirely up to you, but try and make sure that you include line spacing

things for all your senses. For example:

- A soft blanket
- A DVD of your favourite comedy movie
- A scented candle or plug-in air freshener
- A CD of your favourite songs
- Something you enjoy eating

Tips to help someone else

Keep them safe

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, it's important that you take their feelings seriously. If you feel like someone is planning to end their life soon, it's unlikely that you will be able to make their feelings go away, but you can try and keep them safe. For example, you could:

- Not leave them on their own

- Remove items they may use to self-harm such as knives and razors, cleaning products, rope, belts and medications
- Talk to them – see below for tips
- Give them places they can go for support – see earlier in this fact file for a range of services and helplines

If someone has attempted suicide, call 999 and stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

Know how to listen

It can be incredibly hard for someone to talk about their suicidal thoughts and feelings. Once your loved one starts talking, it's important to listen rather that offering advice, trying to solve their problems or identifying their feelings with your own experience. Samaritans recommends an active listening acronym called SHUSH:

Show you care

Focus on your loved one, put away any electronic devices, make eye contact and let them know they have your full attention.

Have patience

A key part of listening is building trust and a safe space. Don't rush them or push them to open up. You may find it takes some time for them to verbalise their thoughts and feelings. If this happens, avoid filling any silences. This will give them time to work through their emotions.

Use open questions

Questions are 'open' when they can't be answered with a simple yes or now.

- How are you feeling today?
- What are you worried about right now?
- How can I help?

By using open questions, you are encouraging your loved one to talk, allowing them to lead the conversation and encouraging them to think, reflect and expand on their feelings. Most open questions can be followed up with a 'Tell me more' to gain a deeper understanding of how they're feeling.

Say it back

Repeating something back is a great way to confirm you understand what they are saying and also reassuring them that they have your full attention. However, avoid interrupting them and don't try to offer up a solution.

Have courage

It can feel intrusive to ask someone how they feel, but you may be surprised by how willing they are to talk, and sometimes talking to someone is exactly what they need.

If someone doesn't want to talk, don't be put off. Instead, remind them that you are always here if they want to talk.

For more information about SHUSH, visit the **Samaritans website**.

Encourage them to make a support plan

Different from a safety plan, a support plan is where the individual with the suicidal ideation records how they want to be helped when they're in crisis. By encouraging and helping them to create a support plan, you will know their wishes, how you can help and what coping techniques work for them. A support plan could include:

- Details of the people or organisations they would like to be contacted when they're in crisis
- Instructions on how you can help to help keep them safe e.g. remove all sharp objects, take them somewhere peaceful
- What will make them feel worse
- Who to contact in an emergency
- Instructions on how they want to be supported e.g. ask 'how am I feeling"
- Details of helplines you can call to help get them support
- Techniques you can do with them to distract them

While a support plan is very useful, it's not a legal document, and you don't have to follow the plan if you're not comfortable with it.

Involve others

Supporting a loved one when they're suicidal can be incredibly distressing, overwhelming and scary, especially if you're doing it on your own or over a long period of time. To support your loved one as best you can, it's important you take care of yourself too. This may mean that you need to step away every now and again, or you may want to think about talking to other people in their life, like a parent, sibling or friend.

Encourage them to connect with trusted friends, family members, healthcare providers, and others who can also offer compassionate support.

Useful apps for suicidal thoughts

StayAlive

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 50,000 downloads

A pocket suicide prevention resource packed full of useful information and tools to help you stay safe in crisis.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

distrACT

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 5,000 downloads

Created by doctors and experts in self-harming and suicide prevention, this app gives easy, quick and discreet access to information and advice about self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Virtual Hope Box

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 100,000 downloads

The Virtual Hope Box is designed for use by health providers and their patients as an accessory to treatment. The app contains simple tools to help with coping, relaxation, distraction, and positive thinking.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Calm Harm

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 500,000 downloads | Aimed at teenagers

Calm Harm is an award-winning app developed for teenagers to provide tasks to help resist or manage the urge to self-harm. The app was created using the basic principles of an evidence-based therapy called Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

TalkLife

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads |

This app provides access to peer support and a community of likeminded people who are struggling with their mental health, anxiety or depression.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Other resources and agencies who can help

- Speak to your GP
- Help for suicidal thoughts - **NHS website**
- Find an NHS urgent mental health helpline - **NHS website**
- Home - **NHS 111 website**
- Suicidal feelings - **Mind website**
- Home - **Samaritans website**
- Home - **ShoutUK website**
- Home – **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) website**
- Home - **Silence of Suicide website**
- Home - **Staying safe from suicidal thoughts website**

Fact file: Burn out

It is very common to hear people in the police service talk about feeling burnt out. Burn out is not a mental health condition but a collection but a collection of symptoms for physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. The symptoms are caused by excessive and prolonged stress, feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained.

Not all stress is bad, in some situations it can actually be very useful, but long-term stress can harm your mental and physical health and lead to things like anxiety, ulcers, and cardiovascular disease.

Burnout was first recognised by the World Health Organisation as an 'occupational phenomenon' in 2019 and **studies suggest** that in burnout of police officers and staff could be due to:

- Lack of administrative support
- Long hours and shift work
- Poor home/work life balance
- Pressure to meet targets
- An imbalance between the care they want to give and the care they can give
- Abuses of the service and staff

Signs of burnout

Burnout is made up of three elements: exhaustion, mental detachment from your job, and poorer performance at work. Common symptoms include:

- Feeling tired or drained
- Feeling helpless, trapped or defeated
- Feeling detached or alone
- Having a negative outlook
- Having a sense of failure or self-doubt
- Loss of motivation
- Procrastinating and taking longer to get things done
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishment
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Insomnia

> "Professionals regularly exposed to the traumatic experiences of the people they service are particularly susceptible to developing compassion fatigue. This can impact standards of patient care, relationships with **colleagues, or lead to more serious mental health conditions.**"

Compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue occurs when burnout is combined with the physical, emotional and psychological impact of helping others who are or have experienced trauma. Due to the high demands of their work, and the difficult jobs they attend daily, police officers and some staff are at a much higher risk of developing compassion fatigue.

- Symptoms of compassion fatigue include:
- Exhaustion
- Anger
- Inability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Negative coping behaviours such as substance misuse
- Inability to feel sympathy and empathy
- More absent from work
- Unable to make decisions and care for patients
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Headaches
- Poor work life balance

When to seek help

Early signs of pre-burnout can sometimes be mistaken for depression. Unlike depression, burnout can't be treated with medication, but it's still important to seek advice from a trained medical professional who will be able to diagnose the condition.

Tips to help yourself

Create a plan

The main treatment for burnout is lifestyle changes. One of the easiest things you can do is put a plan together to break up your day and make sure you have enough time to rest, eat healthy meals, and have time to yourself to de-stress and focus on your wellbeing. Many people find having some non-work-related activity to look forward to can really help. For example, you could:

- Arrange with your partner to have 30minutes quiet time to yourself as soon as you come in from work to decompress
- Plan a night-in with a friend or loved one once a month
- Take the kids to the park after school
- Arrange time to phone or video chat a friend you haven't seen in a while

Learn to say no

Sometimes life can feel overwhelming, and you just need everything to slow down for a while. When this happens, it's important to know how to say no to any invitations or requests for help so you don't spread yourself too thin.

Learning to say no isn't easy at first but over time, and with practice, it does become easier. For example, you could say:

Thank you, I appreciate the offer but am unable to make the time right now	Apologies but I do not have any availability
I cannot help this time, maybe next time	Thank you for thinking of me perhaps a little later in the year

Remember, you don't have to justify your decision or offer up any excuses.

Make healthy food choices

Nutrition plays such a big part in how we feel throughout the day and in the long term. Consuming food and drinks high in sugar or caffeine may give you a boost at the start, but you may end up crashing and feeling worse.

- Try to eat at least one starchy carbohydrate at each meal e.g. plain porridge with fruit for breakfast, a baked potato at lunch and wholewheat pasta for dinner
- Eat at least 5 fruits and veg a day. They don't need to be fresh – canned or frozen works too! Why not try adding some fruit and oats to a yoghurt for breakfast or changing your mid-morning snack for an apple or pear?
- Fish is a good source of protein and contains many vitamins and minerals. Aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week, including at least one portion of oily fish.

For more advice on how to eat healthily, **visit the NHS website**. The Oscar Kilo website also has a free module on healthy eating. **Click here to take a look**.

Create a sleep-friendly bedroom

Sleep is incredibly important for our mental, physical and emotional health. For those working in the police service, sleep can be difficult due to the nature of shift work. So, try and make your bedroom a comfortable sleeping place no matter what time of the day it is:

- Keep your bedroom dark with well-fitted blackout blinds or curtains
- Make sure your bed is comfortable and not too warm. For those who don't like to be too hot in bed, try and use a couple of sheets rather than a duvet
- Using earplugs or a white noise machine can help dull noise when you need to sleep during the day
- Screens produce blue light which can keep you awake, so ideally, you should avoid all screens for half an hour before bed. This isn't always possible, so if you need to use your mobile phone, try installing a blue light filter app.

For more advice on getting a good night's sleep, **visit the NHS website** .

Tips to help someone else

Start the conversation

Sometimes it's much more obvious to someone on the outside that you're struggling. If you're worried that someone is suffering from burnout, make sure to check in with them and ask them how they are. You may find they don't want to talk. If this happens, remind them that they are not alone and that you're here to listen if they need to talk or vent.

Make sure they're using all their annual leave

When things are busy at work, it can see impossible to take time off, but having some time away to relax or focus on their homelife and wellbeing can be exactly what they need. If someone seems stressed, encourage them to take a break – even just a day off can make a big difference to their mood.

Don't assume you know what they need

Everyone responds to stress differently. Some people need to take time away to relax, others like to press through a busy period and then then decompress at the end. If your loved one is stressed or experiencing the symptoms of burnout, ask them what you can do to help them and then come up with a plan together.

Remind them about the support they have available

If your loved one is struggling, it's important to remind them that they're not alone and that they have a range of support available to help them, such as:

- You, their family and friends who can provide a listening ear and a place to vent if they need it
- Their employer. These days, most employers provide a range of wellbeing support, especially mental health support, for their staff members. Your loved one should be able to learn more about their employer offers by contacting their HR department.
- Qualified counsellors. If your loved one is particularly struggling, they could speak to an expert in mental health for advice and guidance. Counsellors are available privately or **through an NHS referral**.
- Oscar Kilo are passionate about supporting the mental health of the UK's police communities and can provide support ranging from talking therapies and counselling to advice on coping mechanisms and online wellbeing guidance
- Other organisations and charities. There are a range of organisations and charities who provide support for stress, burnout and general mental health including **Mind**, **SANE** and **Rethink**.

Useful apps for burnout

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

TalkLife

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 1,000,000 downloads

Are you battling with your mental health, anxiety and depression? If you're finding life really hard TalkLife can help. The app provides a peer support platform and access to a community of likeminded people to speak to.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Provider Resilience

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 10,000 downloads

Through user self-assessments, the Provider Resilience app calculates an overall resilience rating as well as ratings for compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress, allowing users to monitor their professional quality of life over time. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Calm

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 10,000,000 downloads

Calm is a leading app for meditation and sleep with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, masterclasses, and relaxing music.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

ThriveFree

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 50,000 downloads

This game-based app can help you prevent and manage stress, anxiety and related conditions to help you live a happier, more stress-free life.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Other resources and agencies who can help

- Talk to your GP
- Get help from a mental health charity - **NHS website**
- Get help - **CALM website**
- Emotional support - **SANE website**
- Burnout bitesize booklet - **Working Well Gloucestershire website**

Coping with a loved one's mental illness

It can be heart-wrenching to see a loved one struggling with a mental health condition, and often it can be hard to know how to best cope with their illness. It's important to remember that many mental health conditions are manageable and people can go on to live full, rewarding lives, especially if they seek treatment as soon as possible.

Family members are an incredible source of support for someone struggling with their mental health, but to protect your own wellbeing it's important that you also know how to cope with your loved one's condition. Here are four tips to help:

Educate yourself about mental illness

Reading this information is a great start. Learning everything you can about your loved one's condition is vital in understanding them. Look into the treatment options, what you can do at home to help improve symptoms, what to look out for that could make their symptoms worse, and what techniques and mechanisms you could put in place to handle the symptoms. Don't forget to also look into what support is available for you as their family member.

Accept the reality of the situation

While you can offer valuable support, it's important to accept that you can't cure your loved one's mental disorder. Where appropriate, try and speak to your GP about what medication is available as this may help restore some stability or functionality into your loved one's life.

Set boundaries and clear limits

When your loved one is unwell, it's easy to give too much. If you start feeling strong resentment towards them, this is a sign you need a break. Find a way to make some time for yourself – even just an afternoon can make a big difference. It's important to also not tolerate violent behaviour. You can only help your loved one if you are well yourself, so if they become violent, as hard as it is, you may need to leave the situation or make other arrangements for support and care.

Don't lose hope!

Advances in our understanding and treatment of severe and chronic mental illnesses occur every day. People get better and learn effective ways of coping. While your loved one may never completely heal, and coping with the situation may challenge

you like nothing else, it's possible to learn how to manage the stress of the situation as you care for your loved one as well as yourself.

Talking to children and family members

Your family can provide a huge amount of emotional support during a difficult time, but many people struggle talking to their loved ones about bereavement or their mental health. In this section, we'll be sharing advice and tips on how to start these important discussions.

Talking to your loved ones about your mental health

It can be difficult to talk about your feelings with the people you care about. You may feel worried about upsetting them or nervous about how they will react or what they will think and the impact it could have on your relationship.

When you feel ready, there's no right or wrong way to start a discussion with your loved ones, but it is worth taking a little time to prepare yourself first. Here are a few tips and things to consider:

- ### How are you going to share the information?

  You need to pick a way of communication that is comfortable for you. Some people like to do this face-to-face, but if this is too difficult, could you do it over the phone or in a letter or email instead?

- ### When is a good time to talk?

  Finding the perfect time and place could be a challenge, but try and find somewhere quiet and comfortable, and where you're unlikely to be disturbed. For example, trying to talk to someone in the middle of the school run may not be the best idea, instead could you talk to them in an evening when the kids are in bed?

- ### What do you want to tell them?

  It's easy to get flustered and forget what you want to say. You may find it helpful to plan out what you want to talk about; you may find it useful to put notes on paper or even rehearse if it helps you feel more comfortable. Phrases such as "I've not been feeling like myself lately" or "I'm finding it hard to cope at the moment" might provide a starting point.

Sometimes, you might not be able to find the words to explain how you're feeling, so try and look for an example in a book, movie or TV show to help your loved one understand.

Be honest

It's not always easy to share such personal and private information, but explaining it will help your loved ones understand what you're experiencing, and the effects your mental health is having on your life. Being honest also opens a doorway for you to ask for help and for your loved ones to gain a better understanding of how they can support you.

Be realistic

It may take time for your loved ones to understand fully what you have told them. Sometimes people can be shocked and react badly - give them time and, if possible, agree to continue the discussion at another time once they have had time to process what you have just told them.

How to talk to your child about poor mental health

Many parents who are struggling with their mental health worry about how it might be impacting their children. Common worries include:

- Being unsure how to start a conversation with their child
- Feeling like they lack enough information
- Saying something 'wrong'
- Does their child notice their symptoms and what they think
- Not having the answers to their child's questions

It's natural to want to protect your child from stress and confusion, and it's for this reason that many parents avoid talking to their children about their mental illness.

However, helping your child understand your mental illness and its symptoms can be a very powerful way to support them and help them cope better. By talking about your mental health, you can help reduce any fears they have as well as helping them to make sense of the changes they see in you when you're unwell and know that they are not to blame for your symptoms.

Here are a few tips to help you start a conversation with your child about mental health.

- ## Be honest

  The truth is not nearly as bad as what the child imagines Be open and honest with your child about your mental health to reduce any confusion or fears they may have and to help them to understand your actions and behaviours.
  It may help you to talk to someone or get advice before you speak to them to help you decide what you to want to say to them. If you don't have someone you can go to for help, there are many support agencies that you could go to, such as **Young Minds**.
  During your talk your child may ask you questions. It's important that you answer them as honestly as you can. If you don't know the answer to their question, tell them you will look it up or you will ask someone else who will know the answer.

- ## Use words they will understand

  Be very clear and deliberate with the words you use and avoid using any words or euphemisms your child won't understand. Keep your explanations about how your mental health affects how you feel and behave as simple as possible.

- ## Reassure them

  Don't forget to regularly reassure your child that they are not responsible for how you are feeling.

- ## Give them time to talk

  Children are naturally curious and they may have several questions. It's important you give them time to speak, but also ask them questions about how they are feeling about what you have told them.

- ## Set them limits

  Be very clear about what information about your mental health difficulties you are happy for them share and who they can share it with.

- ## Tell them where they can go for help

  Let them know that it's ok if they feel like they can't talk to you. If this is the case encourage them to talk to someone they trust or give them details of organisations and charities who can help such as **Young Minds**, **Barnardo's**, **Family Action** and **Childline**.

Department of Work and Pension benefits for people with mental health problems

When you're struggling with your finances, even the simplest tasks such as food shopping, paying a bill or opening mail, can cause an extraordinary amount of worry and stress which could seriously impact on your mental health. However, did you know that if you're struggling with your mental health, you may be entitled to extra benefits such as Universal Credit?

Personal Independent Payment (PIP)

If you need extra help because of an illness, disability or mental health condition you may be entitled to PIP. PIP is there to help with daily living or improving mobility and covers:

- Preparing and cooking food
- Eating food or drinking
- Managing therapy or monitoring a health condition
- Taking medication
- Washing and bathing
- Managing toilet needs or incontinence
- Dressing and undressing
- Communicating verbally
- Reading and understanding signs, symbols and words
- Socialising with other people
- Planning and following journeys
- Moving around

Deciding about your money and budget

Unlike Universal Credit, to qualify for PIP you don't need to have paid any National Insurance, and it doesn't matter what your income is, if you're working or if you have any savings. To be eligible for PIP you need to be classified as 'needing help to do an activity'. This means you need a person or device to:

- Do it for you
- Do it with you
- Remind you to do it
- Watch you do it to keep safe

You may also be classified as needing help if you do an activity yourself but:

- You are not safe
- You can't complete the task well enough
- You can't complete the task often
- It takes you a long time

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Once your Statutory Sick Pay is exhausted after 28 weeks, you can claim for ESA from the following day. ESA can be paid in addition to your occupational sick pay and is currently valued at £75 per week.

After the initial 13-week assessment phase, the Department of Work and Pensions will assess your ability to work, and if you're deemed unable to work, your weekly entitlement will increase to £114 pr week. Depending on your circumstances, you may also be entitled to Universal Credit as a top up.

ESA is claimable by anyone who has paid the appropriate amount of tax contribution in the qualifying number of tax years (usually the last two years). It isn't means tested and is only reduced by an Occupational Pension.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a benefit for working-aged people and the amount you can get will depend on your individual circumstances and how much income you have. You can also claim for Universal Credit if you work but have low earnings and if you live in rented accommodation an amount for housing costs will also be included.

Oscar Kilo is here to support your financial wellbeing

As part of our commitment to supporting the financial wellbeing of the UK's police service we work closely with a number of financial organisations who can support you. We have produced a family finance fact sheet www.Oscarkilo.org.uk. Also getting in touch with your local Citizens Advice Bureau is a great idea, you may be entitled to extra support, need guidance on reducing debts, tips on how to maximise your income or help in applying to the Department of Work and Pensions for support.

Section 5: Coping with bereavement

Grief is an overwhelming emotion and can seem unbearable at times. When someone you know dies, you may experience many thoughts feelings and behaviours, which add to the pain of grieving.

Everyone's experience and response to loss will be different and many factors may affect your feelings, such as who the person was, the nature of your relationship, or the circumstances around how the person died.

In this section we will:

- Cover the stages and symptoms of grief
- Explain what "complicated" or "traumatic" grief is
- Give you tips to help you or a loved one cope during a bereavement
- Discuss how the death of a child can affect their parents and offer techniques to help you cope
- Explain how to talk to your child about grief

The people in the UK's police service spend many hours with their colleagues, and they quickly become their second family. When a colleague passes away, especially if it was sudden or unexpected, many police officers and staff 'put on a game face' to try and help them cope, but this can delay the grieving process.

It can be difficult to distinguish between grief and depression. They share many of the same characteristics, but there are important differences between them. Grief is an entirely natural response to a loss, while depression is an illness.

People who are grieving find their feelings of sadness and loss come and go, but they're still able to enjoy things and look forward to the future. In contrast, people who are depressed constantly feel sad. They find it difficult to enjoy anything or be positive about the future. Visit the **NHS website** to learn more about coping with grief.

The five stages of grief

It's important to understand that there is no right or 'normal' response to loss. However, there are some common reactions and feelings that you may experience in the hours, days, weeks and months following a death or traumatic event. These feelings can sometimes be very strong and frightening and may ebb and flow.

Everyone's reaction to grief is different and the five stages of grief do not necessarily occur in any specific order. It is very common to move between stages repeatedly before you start to accept the loss and begin adapting to the world as it is now. Some people also don't go through every stage of grief.

1. Denial

Losses you are unprepared for, particularly if you were not present to hold or touch the person, can be difficult to accept as real. It's not unusual to pretend the loss hasn't happened at all and you may enter a state of shock, denial and numbness.

As you begin to accept the reality of the loss, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. However, the emotions you may have been trying to suppress during the denial stage of grief could begin to rise to the surface.

2. Anger

Anger is a very common phase of the grieving process. It can be a natural reaction to loss and a way of hiding the fear and painful emotions that you may be feeling. It's also not unusual to become angry with the person who has died, and you may resent them for causing you pain or for 'leaving' you. In some cases, you may also get angry with the people you love or even direct your anger at yourself.

Anger is possibly one of the strongest and most challenging emotions that you may experience in grief, but, if you don't allow yourself to feel angry, you might find yourself lashing out or reacting in other unhealthy ways.

3. Bargaining

Grief can make you feel vulnerable and helpless, and as you experience these moments of intense emotions, it's not uncommon to look for ways to regain control or want to feel like you can change the outcome of an event. In these instances, you may find yourself creating a lot of 'what if' and 'if only' statements.

4. Depression

Although this is a very natural stage of grief, dealing with depression after a bereavement can be extremely isolating and overwhelming. Depression is not a sign of mental illness, but an appropriate and understandable response to losing someone you care about.

As you start to feel the reality of the loss, feelings of depression and low mood may come to the surface in the form of emptiness, fear, sadness and hopelessness. Losing someone may trigger memories of other deaths that you have experienced in your life.

You may feel frightened about being left alone, or of a similar event happening again. A sound, or smell, or visiting a particular place could remind you of that person and may evoke very strong memories.

During this phase of grief, you may find yourself retreating or becoming withdrawn and less sociable. You may feel empty and hopeless about the future, or that life is not worth living. You may also feel like harming yourself or, in extreme cases. have suicidal thoughts. While depression is a normal phase of grieving, some people may get 'stuck' and not feel able to move past this stage. In these cases, it may be beneficial to seek professional help from a therapist or bereavement counsellor.

5. Acceptance

Acceptance is about acknowledging the reality that someone has died and is physically gone. Reaching this stage is a gift not necessarily afforded to everyone. Death may be sudden or unexpected and we may never see beyond our anger or denial. However, we try to learn to live with it.

Acceptance is not about 'getting over it' and doesn't necessarily mean that we no longer feel the pain of loss. This phase of grief is about re-adjustment and coming to terms with how your life will be without that person. You may start to reach out to others and tentatively begin to live again, knowing that there will be good days and bad days, and that's okay.

The symptoms of grief

Everyone has their own way of grieving and coping with loss. It is important to try and take each day at a time and not to expect too much of yourself.

The impact on your mind

Grief, particularly after a traumatic loss, can have a significant impact on your brain. Common symptoms of grief are:

- Repeated and intrusive thoughts of the person who has died, or the circumstances surrounding their death
- Unable to concentrate
- Feeling clumsy or accident-prone
- Constantly recalling or reliving past losses
- Recurring dreams or nightmares

The impact on your behaviour

Feeling sensitive, emotional, and tearful is a common response when someone dies. Other common symptoms include:

- Crying excessively for no apparent reason, or in situations that would not normally evoke an emotional outburst.
- Neglecting your own wellbeing, health or personal hygiene
- Doing things you wouldn't normally do, such as excessively drinking alcohol or avoiding situations, places or people that might remind you of the person who has died.

The impact on your body

When you are experiencing a bereavement, you are often more susceptible to physical illnesses. Other common physical symptoms include:

- difficulty sleeping
- irritability
- increased heart rate
- loss of appetite
- stomach upsets
- exhaustion
- feelings of panic or anxiety
- generally feeling unwell
- headache

The impact on your relationships

When you are grieving, your relationships with your family members, friends and loved ones may be affected. You may find that some people are naturally supportive, but others may struggle to know what to do and may even avoid you in case they say the wrong thing. This may leave you feeling unsupported and isolated.

A crisis can bring people together, but it can also create strain and tensions, and in that instance, you may find that you just want to be left alone.

Complicated grief

It's normal for it to take a while to adapt to life after a loss, and even then, there still may be days when the grief seems fresh. Most people gradually learn to cope, however, some people they feel like they can't 'bounce back', instead they feel stuck with the emotional impact of their grieving. This is known as complicated grief.

Everyone copes with grief differently, so there isn't a set rule around when someone has complicated grief, but research typically estimate around six months after the loss. Symptoms of complicated grief include:

- Intense sorrow, pain and rumination over the loss of your loved one
- Extreme focus on reminders of the loved one or excessive avoidance of reminders
- Intense and persistent longing or pining for the deceased
- Problems accepting the death
- Numbness or detachment
- Bitterness about your loss
- Feeling that life holds no meaning or purpose
- Lack of trust in others
- Inability to enjoy life or think back on positive experiences with your loved one trouble carrying out normal routines
- Isolated from others and withdraw from social activities depression, deep sadness, guilt or self-blame
- Wishing you had died along with your loved one

To find out more about complicated grief, visit **Cruse's website**.

When to seek help for complicated grief

If you have experienced a bereavement in the last six month and feel stuck or unable to move on, then it's worth speaking to someone:

- Your GP may be able to refer you for support
- **Cruse Bereavement Care** run an online chat and helpline for people who are struggling with bereavement. Call Cruse at 0808 808 1677 or take part in an online chat on the **Cruse website**
- If you are a friend or family member of a police officer or member of staff that has taken their own life or died whilst on duty then visit Oscarkilo.org.uk and find out more about our bereavement helpline.

Traumatic grief

When someone dies in a traumatic situation it can be shocking and you may find it very painful to cope. Traumatic grief usually occurs when a person's death is sudden or unexpected, but it can also happen when you have witnessed someone suffering. Common causes of traumatic grief are:

- ### Suicide
  When someone dies by suicide, it's common to be plagued by questions like 'why did they choose to do it?' and 'could it have been prevented?'. You may also feel angry and rejected by your loved one, or maybe even guilty as you feel you could have done more to help.
- ### Substance misuse
  Death as a result of alcohol or drugs can be very sudden and traumatic as you may not have known about your loved one's substance use or been aware of the full extent of their use. Feelings of anger, guilt and disbelief are common, and many people can feel like them or their loved one is being judged because of how they died.
- ### Crime or violence
  Death through crime or violence, particularly murder or manslaughter, can be especially difficult to come to terms with. You may repeatedly ask yourself questions like 'why them?', 'how could this have happened?' and 'why wasn't it me instead?'.

It's very common to feel numb, anger, and disbelief and you may also experience feelings of intense unfairness and revenge. When someone dies tragically from crime or violence, it's usual for it to be picked up by the local media or community and this can make you feel very isolated from your support network. In the days, weeks and months after a traumatic event you may experience:

- Disbelief
- Loss of meaning
- Feeling numb
- Haunting images
- Intense emotional and physical pain
- Anger
- Guilt
- Fear

These feelings can be overwhelming and frightening, but for most people the feelings do lessen over time. For more information about traumatic grief, **download this handy booklet from Cruse Bereavement Care**.

Four tips to help yourself when you're grieving

1. Talk to someone you trust

One of the most helpful things you can do is talk about the person who has died, and your relationship and memories with them. There are many people who you could speak to, such as your family members, a friend or colleague, someone else who also knew the person who died, or even a faith or spiritual advisor.

There are also a number of support groups and organisations you could speak to. For example, **Cruse Bereavement Care** run an online chat and helpline for people who are struggling with bereavement. Call Cruse at 0808 808 1677 or take part in an online chat on the **Cruse website**.

2. Create a memory box

As you experience grief, you don't forget the person but you gradually find new ways to remember them. Reminiscing about the past can be painful but creating a memory box with meaningful items can be a powerful way to keep precious memories of the person alive. This may be especially helpful for children as it can provide an opportunity to talk to them about the person they have lost, help them to open up about their feelings, or encourage shared memories.

3. Try some relaxation exercises

Try some relaxation exercises It's important to remember that the physical symptoms of grief, while unpleasant and sometimes frightening, are natural reactions that will fade as time passes. Relaxation exercises, meditation, aromatherapy or breathing techniques can help you to relax and help you re-establish feelings of control.

The NHS website has free mental wellbeing audio guides you can download.

Visit the Mind website for examples of mindfulness exercises you could try

4. Attend a memorial service or remembrance event

You may choose to visit the place where the person died, place a wreath in a significant place, or attend a memorial service or other ritual of remembrance, such as planting a tree in their memory.

Four tips to help someone who is grieving

1. Be a good listener

When grieving, it can be incredibly hard for someone to talk about their thoughts and feelings, however offering a listening ear is usually the most helpful thing you can do. Once your loved one starts talking, it's important to listen rather that offering advice, trying to solve their problems or identifying their feelings with your own experience. Samaritans recommends an active listening acronym called SHUSH:

Show you care

Focus on your loved one, put away any electronic devices, make eye contact and let them know they have your full attention.

Have patience

A key part of listening is building trust and a safe space. Don't rush them or push them to open up. You may find it takes some time for them to verbalise their thoughts and feelings. If this happens, avoid filling any silences. This will give them time to work through their emotions.

Use open questions

Questions are 'open' when they can't be answered with a simple yes or no:

- How are you feeling today?
- What are you worried about right now?

By using open questions, you're encouraging your loved one to talk, allowing them to lead the conversation and encouraging them to think, reflect and expand on their feelings.

Say it back

Repeating something back is a great way to confirm you understand what they are saying and also reassuring them that they have your full attention. However, avoid interrupting them and don't try to offer up a solution.

Have courage

It can feel intrusive to ask someone how they feel, but you may be surprised by how willing they are to talk, and sometimes talking to someone is exactly what they need. If someone doesn't want to talk, don't be put off. Instead, remind them that you are always here if they want to talk.

For more information about SHUSH, visit the **Samaritans website**.

2. Offer practical help

When struggling with grief, it's easy to forget or ignore the little things in everyday life, such as grocery shopping, washing clothes or making dinner. To support your loved one, you could offer to help them finish these tasks or even do some of them for them. However, it's important to be specific about what you can help with. You also need to make sure you're only offering to help with things you are able to do.

3. Help them set up rituals

For many people, grief becomes more manageable over time, but the loss never truly goes away, and you may find they struggle around anniversaries or special days. In these instances, you could help them to set up little rituals to remember the one they've lost. For example:

- Lighting a candle on their birthday
- Helping them to create a memory box full of trinkets, photos and mementos to remind them of the great memories they have with person who has died
- Picking out a special ornament for the Christmas tree that reminds them of their loved one
- Taking them to the National
- Memorial Arboretum in
- Staffordshire to visit the National
- Police Memorial

4. Understand that everyone grieves differently

Everyone experiences grief differently, and how they grieve can be impacted on their individual needs and the circumstances around how their loved one died. You may find they experience mood swings, or they may act like nothing has happened, they may even use dark humour to cope.

While their grieving process may seem strange to you, don't forget to remind them that you are there to support them and provide a listening ear.

Useful apps for a bereavement

Calm

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 10,000,000 downloads

Calm is a leading app for meditation and sleep with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, masterclasses, and relaxing music. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Headspace

Available on Android and IOS | Free (in app purchases) | Over 100,000,000 downloads

Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and develop tools to help you focus, breathe, stay calm, and find balance in your life. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Apart of Me

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 10,000 downloads

A multi-award-winning therapeutic game for children which offered bereavement counselling techniques in a 3D magical world.

Download on Android | **Download on IOS**

Good Grief

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 1,000 downloads

A social networking app for people to connect, support, and chat with others who have recently suffered a bereavement. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Tellmi

Available on Android and IOS | Free | Over 40,000 downloads | Aimed at teenagers

The Tellmi app provides a safe and secure forum for teenagers. Users can anonymously get advice from experts or other teenagers going through similar experiences in areas such as mental health, self-harming and relationships. **Download on Android** | **Download on IOS**

Other sources of support for when you're grieving

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Over the years, the charity has helped bereaved people in times of crisis, such as after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and the Manchester arena bombings and have expanded to support hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Cruse run an online chat and helpline for people who are struggling with bereavement from 9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday.

Call: 0808 808 1677 (England) | **Call :** 0808 802 6161 (Scotland)

Visit: **www.cruse.org.uk** (England) | **Visit:** **www.crusescotland.org.uk** (Scotland)

Visit: **www.hopeagain.org.uk** (Children and young people)

Join the online chat: **www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/crusechat**

Samaritans

Samaritans is a national charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection that can lead to suicide. Samaritans' volunteers are available day and night to provide a listening ear if you're struggling with your mental health.

Call: 116 123 | **Visit:** **www.samaritans.org**

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide are the only national charity providing dedicated support to adults who have been bereaved by suicide.

Call: 0300 111 5065 | **Email:** **email.support@uksobs.org**

Visit: **https://uksobs.org**

Your local council

Depending on where you are in the UK, your local council may offer bereavement services. **Click here to find out more about your local support.**

Please note the above is only available in England and Wales.

NHS talking therapies

If you live in England are over 18 years old, you can access the NHS psychological therapies service for talking therapies, counselling and self-guided help. You GP can refer you, or you can refer yourself **on the NHS website**.

At a Loss

At a loss was created in 2016 to provide bereaved people a place to go to find the support the need. You can search for support based on your location, your relationship to the person who has died, how the person died and your age. Learn more on **At A Loss' website**.

WAY Widowed and Young

WAY is a UK charity that offers a peer-to-peer support network for anyone who's lost a partner before their 51st birthday. Learn more on **WAY's website**.

Coping with the death of a child

The death of a child, at any age, is devastating and cause a heavy loss within the whole family. The loss of a child can haunt parents for a very long time, and they may not know how to handle the situation. They may retreat inside themselves or avoid giving their other children attention. Parents who lost children in accidents can also develop a sense of guilt and blame themselves for not being able to save their child.

Feelings and thoughts after your child dies

When a parent loses their child, they will experience the normal **stages of grief**, but the loss will be especially traumatic and painful. They may also experience several feelings and thoughts that will make the experience different from other bereavements.

"It's against the natural order."

It's natural for parents to think they will die before their children. The death of a child can lead to feeling like everything has been turned upside down, and this will be particularly strong if the death was sudden or unexpected.

Loss of role and meaning

For many people, being a parent is a big part of their identity. When a child dies, a parent's role is also gone which can lead to them feeling confused and lost, and many parents struggle to find meaning in life after they lose their child.

Guilt

Feeling guilty is a common part of grief, but when a child dies their parents' guilt can be overwhelming. They may feel guilty they couldn't protect them or that they failed at their job as a parent. Some parents may also feel like they're being punished.

Loss of a future

Many parents like to think about what their child is going to be like when they're grown up. So, when a child dies, particularly if the child was young, a parent may feel like their future has been lost or stolen, and it can be very painful to not know how their child might have changed and grown up.

Effect on the family

Grief and loss affect family members differently. Partners may grieve in different ways or process their loss at different speeds. This can put a lot of strain on relationships and lead to a lot of anger and resentment with thoughts like "why isn't he more upset?" and "why did she get over it so quickly?"

Siblings will also be grieving and finding it difficult to cope, and it can be especially hard for parents to help their children when they are grieving themselves.

Others' reactions

The death of a child is acknowledged to be one of the worst pains possible. Many people don't know what to say or how to help, usually because they're worried about making things worse. This can lead to them avoiding the family, which can make them feel very isolated.

Looking after yourself after you lose a child

After your child dies, the loss will always be with you and sometimes it may feel overwhelming. It's important to take things a step at a time and below are five tips that may help you cope.

Be kind to yourself

After the death of your child, you may find yourself constantly going through every detail of their death and you may think of all the things you could have, and should have, done to protect them.

These feelings of guilt and regret are normal but try not to be so hard on yourself when assessing your child's death. We are normally a lot harsher with ourselves than with other, and the more negativity you add to your own actions around your child's death will make it even more difficult to accept your loss. Instead, it can be helpful to take a more outward view – if a friend was in a similar situation and was saying the same things to themselves, what would you say to them?

Find a quiet place

Coping with the loss of a child can cause an ebb and flow of painful emotions for a long time. Try and find a quiet place to be alone with your own thoughts and process what you're going through. If possible, find a safe space where no one will interrupt you and let your loved ones know that when you go to this place that you want to be left alone.

Take a step back if you need it

If you have a partner, children, or other dependents, they may be asking for your help or pushing you in directions you're not ready to deal with yet. After you lose a child, taking care of others may not be one of your immediate priorities, it may even seem impossible for a while. It's okay to take a step back from your responsibilities while you adjust to your loss.

If possible, ask a friend or family member to help you out with things like managing your household and looking after the children for a few days. Something as simple as ordering the weekly groceries can make a big difference to you and your family while you're grieving, and many loved ones will be happy to help.

Get enough sleep

After a loss, all some parents want to do is to sleep. Others find themselves pacing the floors at night and staring blankly at the TV.

The death of a child takes an extreme toll on the body. Research has found that those who frequently get fewer than six hours a night are at significantly increased risk of stroke and heart disease. For more information about the effects of sleep, visit **The Sleep Charity** website.

If you feel tired or sleepy, it's important that you listen to your body. If you regularly don't feel tired, it can help to create a calming nighttime routine and make some changes to your bedroom to promote a good night's sleep. Websites like the **NHS**, the **Mental Health Foundation** and the **Sleep Council** have tips to help you get started.

Find someone to talk to

Withdrawing from others is a natural reaction to grief, but holding in your feelings can make you feel worse. Talking about the death of your child is something that can seem almost forbidden, but it's one of the most helpful things you can do during your grief.

Relatives and friends

Family and friends can be a great source of emotional support to grieving parents. However, you may find that some people aren't prepared for what you tell them or don't know how to respond, and that's okay. To help, try and pre-arrange a quiet time to talk when you have their undivided attention, and so they can prepare to help you.

Support groups

Sometimes it can be incredibly helpful to talk to people who have gone through the same things, which is why many parents turn to support groups and charities like:

- **Care For the Family**
- **The Compassionate Friends**
- **Child Bereavement UK**
- **The Lullaby Trust**
- **Child Funeral Charity: Financial Support for Families**

Professionals

For some people, they feel most comfortable talking to a professional who's completely independent from then. These days there are many professionals to choose from, and the **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy** has a list of over 10,000 professionals which you can sort by specialty and location.

While you may never 'get over it', over time, many people find their grief easier to cope with and can carry on with their life while keeping the memory of their child alive. Many parents who lose a child find the idea of 'growing around grief' helpful. While you may feel like the pain of losing a child never really goes away, in time your life will grow and become 'filled' with other things.

Remembering your child's memory

You'll never forget your child, and making sure their memory is kept alive can help you stay feeling of connected to them. Below are three ways you could remember them.

Host a memorial gathering

When the time feels right, invite your friends and loved ones to a gathering or party to remember your child, celebrate their life and honour their memory. Invite people to share stories and memories of your child or create a wall full of photos and invite people to add their own.

Create a scrapbook

Gather photos of your child, their artwork and mementos, and put them in a scrapbook with captions and stories. The scrapbook is something you can look at when you want to feel close to your child, and it's also a great way for younger children learn about their sibling.

Celebrate their birthday, if it feels right

Initially, your child's birthday can be intensely painful, and you might just want to focus on getting through the day. However, over time, some people find comfort in celebrating their child's life on their special day. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Some people go to their child's favourite place, others like to buy their child's favourite cake or even arrange a small birthday party/memorial event, some people just light a candle to remember the one they lost. For more ideas and tips on how to remember someone, visit **Cruse Bereavement Care's website**.

How to help someone after the loss of a child

When someone you know loses a child, it's understandable to feel uncomfortable about not knowing how to help, or anxious about doing/saying the wrong thing. However, staying silent or avoiding contact can make your loved one feel isolated, which can make their sadness worse. Below are four tips on how you can help your loved one after they lose a child. For more advice, download this dos and don'ts list from **Care for the Family**.

Stay in touch

Grief, and others' reaction to it, can be incredibly isolating. Reaching out and letting them know you're available to talk or listen can be extremely helpful to a bereaved parent.

However, it's important to think about the best way to contact someone. For example, your loved one may find it very difficult to talk or remember things initially, so a text or email may be better than a call or voicemail. Some people may welcome a drop-in visit, whereas others may find it an inconvenience. When in doubt, ask.

Let them talk

Talking about their loss can be one of the most helpful things to a grieving parent. You may find it difficult to hear because of your own grief and you're unable to make the pain go away, but just listening can be a big help.

Focus on listening rather than finding out more. Make sure to give them space to open up and don't pressure them if they don't want to talk about certain things. Samaritans recommends an active listening acronym called SHUSH, **click here** to learn more.

Focus on the bereaved person rather than coming back to your own feelings about loss. Unless you have your own experience of losing a child, it may not be helpful to make comparisons with your own experiences.

Offer practical support

Your loved one may struggle to do everyday things or meet or their responsibilities, such as cleaning the laundry, making dinner, going grocery shopping or looking after their other children.

To help them, you could offer to take a few things off their shoulders for a short time. However, try and avoid using phases like 'If you need any help, let me know' as this puts the pressure on your loved one to ask at a time when they may not be thinking clearly. Instead, be very clear with what you can help with. For example, you could say:

- "Do you want me to go to the supermarket for food and make your dinners for the rest of the week?"
- "Can I take the kids to the park and then take them out for dinner? I will have them back with you by 6pm."
- "Do you want me to do the laundry?"

Acknowledge the person who died

When someone dies, it can feel like they are wiped from people's memories. While talking about the person who died may initially bring up painful feeling, many parents actually appreciate the opportunity to talk about the child or hear others' memories. Asking questions like 'what's your favourite memory of them?' or 'tell me a time that they made you laugh' can be a good starting point.

Supporting a child who has lost a parent

The grief of children who have lost a parent is a delicate situation that needs to be handled carefully.

Talking to a child who has lost a parent

A parent dying is one of the hardest things that can happen to a child, and it will completely change their life. As well as feeling sad or upset, grieving children may also feel confused, scared or angry.

Talking to a child about someone close to them dying can be difficult. You may be worried that you will frighten them or say the wrong thing, but it's important to be open and answer their questions as honestly as possible - what a child imagines can often be much worse that the reality. Here are a few tips to help you start a conversation with your child about the death of a loved one:

Build on their understanding

Be very deliberate with the words you use and try to only use words your child will understand. Perhaps start by asking them, "what do you think?" then build your answers around what they understand about what is happening. Try and give information in small chunks to give them time to process and understand.

Be clear

Try to avoid euphemisms as this may confuse your child. It's much clearer to say someone has died rather than "they have gone for along sleep" or "they have gone away". Phrases like these could also lead to your child becoming scared of going to sleep or anxious that you may not come back whenever you leave the house without them.

Listen to your child

Listening is a very important part of the conversation with your child as it will help you understand what they know about what has happened and how they're feeling. Try not to tell them how they are feeling or how you think they should be feeling. Reassure them that their feelings are okay, including the bad ones – like feeling relief that the person has died.

Let them process their emotions

Don't tell them not to worry or be sad, like you they may find it hard to control their feelings. You may find that your child is quieter than normal, or they may not seem sad at all. Everyone handles grief differently and you need to give them time to process everything.

Don't hide your own sadness

It's okay to cry in front of children, as it normalises a natural part of the grieving process. It can also help for them to understand why you are crying and that people cry for many reasons. Let them know that it's okay to cry and reassure them that they're loved.

Expect lots of questions

Children are naturally curious and are likely to ask lots of questions, and sometimes the same question over and over. You may find this quite distressing, but it's part of your child's need for reassurance and it will help them to process what has happened.

Reassure them

Sometimes children can believe that a person has died because of something they did or said. Explain simply to them that they are not to blame, for example "they died because their heart stopped".

Talking to children of different ages

It's important to not assume a child is too young to understand what is going on. If a child lacks information on what has happened, they could create their own interpretation which could result in them taking responsibility for their parent's death.

Very young children

Children younger than 5 might:

- be afraid of being separated from the people they love
- not understand what death is or that the person won't come back
- feel guilty

Even young children will understand that something is wrong, and their sadness might come out in ways that aren't easy to spot. For example:

- they may withdraw from playing with other children
- a child who's normally quiet may become loud, angry or throw their toys
- a child who's normally confident may become clingy or cry at things that never used to bother them

It's important to notice these changes, and to support your child as best you can. Try and talk openly and honestly. You don't need to tell them everything in detail, but try and explain the situation in simple language they will understand.

Children between 8 and 12

Children of this age can usually understand death, and their feelings may come out in the way they behave. For example:

- They may feel guilty or feel that the death is somehow their fault
- They might feel angry for not being or having given them enough attention
- They might be angry because you're going to leave them when you die

Children of all ages can react as if they were much younger when they're feeling stressed, so it's important to be patient, sensitive and straightforward when talking to them. If you're too subtle, they may not understand what you are trying to say.

Teenagers

Teenagers are most likely to feel confused and unsure about themselves when they're grieving. The teenage years are when children try to establish independence, and this can mean that they find it difficult to reach out to others for help. They may also:

- become distant from their family and talk to their friends instead
- isolate themselves
- become anxious, angry, moody, or depressed
- pretend that they're coping well, when inside they feel very scared

A teenager's reactions are likely to be more intense than an adult. It's very important to give them time to grieve about the illness, and to include them in what's happening.

Other agencies who can help children struggling with grief

- **Child Bereavement UK**
- **Help 2 Make Sense**
- **Hope Again**

Department of Work and Pension benefits following a bereavement

When a loved one has passed away, many people don't know where to start handling the situation, and finances can seem especially overwhelming. However, did you know that if you have recently experienced a bereavement, you may be eligible for additional benefits and support from the Department of Work and Pensions?

Bereavement Support Payment

Following the death of a loved one, widows, widowers or surviving civil partners are entitled to a Bereavement Support Payment. The payment consists of a one-off lump sum and up to 18 monthly instalments.

The amount of payment you could get depends on how old you are when your spouse or partner died, but typically people on the standard payment rate receive a lumpsum of £2,500 and up to 18 monthly instalments of £100.

Higher rate Bereavement Support Payment

You are entitled to the higher rate payment if you:

- were pregnant at the time of your late spouse or partner's death
- or had a child living with you at the time of your late spouse or partner's death

Those who are eligible for the higher rate will receive a lump sum of £3,500 and up to

18 monthly payments of £350. Any Bereavement Support Payment you receive (standard or higher rate) is not included as income when working out your entitlement to other benefits.

Help with funeral costs

If you need help to pay for a funeral you're arranging, and you receive either:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- the disability or severe disability element of Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

You may be eligible for a Funeral Expenses Payment to help pay some of the costs for:

- burial or cremation fees
- travel to arrange or go to the funeral
- the cost of moving the body within the UK
- death certificates or other documents
- You may also get up to £1,000 for any other funeral expenses, such as funeral director's fees, flowers or the coffin

Section 6: Looking after yourself

Whether you're part of the UK's police community, or are the family member of one, it's important that you look after your own wellbeing.

In this section we'll

- Give you tips and advice on how to look after yourself
- Share details of a range of organisations and websites that can help with mental health and bereavement support

Six ways to look after yourself

It's common knowledge that eating well, drinking enough water, getting enough exercise and having a good nights' sleep are incredibly important for your wellbeing, visit the following websites for more information:

- Eat well guide – **NHS website**
- Healthy eating – **Oscarkilo.org**
- Exercise – **NHS website**
- Physical activity guidelines – **GOV.uk website**
- Seven ways to a better nights' sleep – **UK Sleep Council website**
- Sleep difficulties – Oscarkilo.org
- Looking after yourself as a carer – **Mind website**

However, there are also little changes you can make to your life that can have a big impact on your wellbeing. Here are six ideas to get you started.

1. Wake up early

Waking up ten minutes before you need to be out the door may be a good way to get some extra sleep, but it can be a terrible way to start your day, we well as increasing your stress levels and blood pressure!

Instead, try and get up half an hour earlier to give yourself plenty of time to wake up, have something to eat and plan your day. If you need to get ready for work, try and put out your uniform/clothes and pack your lunch the night before so you can focus on starting your day off right.

2. Practice mindfulness

Paying more attention to your current thoughts, feelings, and the world around you can help you enjoy the present moment and improve your wellbeing. This self-awareness is sometimes called 'mindfulness'

For examples of mindfulness exercises you could try, visit the **Mind website**.

3. Learn to say no

Sometimes life can feel overwhelming, and you just need everything to slow down for a while. When this happens, it's important to know how to say no to any invitations or requests for help so you don't spread yourself too thin.

Learning to say no isn't easy at first but over time, and with practice, it does become easier. For example, you could say:

- Thank you, I appreciate the offer,
- I do not have any availability now, but I am unable to make the time at the moment
- I cannot help this time, maybe next time

Remember, you don't have to justify your decision or offer up any excuses.

4. Focus on the positives

When you've had a bad day, it can seem like everything was awful but there will have been good bits in your day, not matter how small. For example, you may have enjoyed your dinner, you could have had a nice commute to work, or you may have had fun with your children. Focusing on the small positives in your day will help you feel better about yourself and your life.

Some people also find it helpful to write down three things they're grateful for before they go to bed, so they end their day on a positive note.

5. Acknowledge your feelings

It's normal to feel sad, depressed, anxious or lonely, and it's okay to not be okay. Sometimes it can be helpful to sit alone in a quiet place to process and acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. However, if you're really struggling you may want to think about sharing your feelings with a loved one or a support organisation.

6. Do something for yourself

Everyone needs some time to themselves now and again. So, try and find some time to yourself once a fortnight to relax and do something you enjoy. For example, you could go for a walk or drive in the countryside, you could try painting or you could go out to dinner with a friend you haven't seen in a while.

Section 7: Other sources of information and support

Support for police officers and staff

Mind Blue Light

A programme set up by Mind to support the emotional health of the people in the UK's blue light services.

Visit: **www.mind.org.uk**

Doctors in Distress

A charity dedicated to reducing suicide among healthcare workers. Visit: **www.doctors-in-distress.org.uk**

Frontline 19

Frontline19 is a free independent, confidential and UK-based nationwide service delivering psychological support to people working on the frontline. Visit: **www.frontline19.com**

Project 5

Project5 is an acute crisis response service giving NHS staff access to free one-to-one support sessions with either accredited clinical psychologists, mental health experts or coaches.

Visit: **www.project5.org**

Duty to Care

Duty To Care provides access for NHS workers to free online sessions to improve and sustain their mental health and wellbeing.

Visit: **www.dutytocare.info/nhs/s**

Lifelines Scotland

Lifelines Scotland helps first responders to stay well, beat stress and boost their resilience.

Visit: **www.lifelines.scot**

Support for mental health

Mind

Mind is a national charity providing advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

Visit: **www.mind.org.uk**

Samaritans

Samaritans provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.

Visit: **www.samaritans.org**

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

CALM exists to prevent suicide. The national charity run a free and confidential helpline and webchat – 7 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Visit: **www.thecalmzone.net**

Zero Suicide Alliance

The Zero Suicide Alliance is a collaboration of National Health Service trusts, charities, businesses and individuals who are all committed to suicide prevention in the UK. Visit: **www.zerosuicidealliance.com**

Mental Health Foundation podcasts

The UK's Mental Health Foundation have created a series of videos and podcasts to help you improve your wellbeing including practicing mindfulness, overcoming fear and stress management techniques.

Visit: **www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos**

Headspace

An app based around teaching mindfulness meditation principles to improve wellbeing.

Visit **www.headspace.com**

Moodpanda

An anonymous app to help you keep track of your moods.

Visit **www.moodpanda.com**

Stay Alive App

Developed by Grassroots Suicide Prevention, the Stay Alive App is a suicide prevention pocket app allowing you to create a list of resources and strategies to stay safe from suicide.

Visit: **www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/stay-alive-app**

Support for children

Young Minds

Young Minds is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health.

Visit: **www.youngminds.org.uk**

Childline

Run by the NSPCC, Childline supports anyone under 19 years old in the UK. Children can contact the national charity to talk through any issue they're going through. Visit: **www.childline.org.uk**

Anna Freud

Anna Freud is a mental health charity for children, young people and their families. The charity provides specialist help and carries out research into children's mental health. Visit: **www.annafreud.org**

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is a national charity that supports children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling. Visit: **www.winstonswish.org**

Papyrus

Papyrus is dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. The charity provides confidential support to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide. Visit: **www.papyrus-uk.org**

Support for bereavement

Cruse

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Visit: **www.cruse.org.uk**

National Bereavement Association

The National Bereavement Alliance's vision is that all people have awareness of and access to support and services throughout their bereavement experience. Visit: **https://nationalbereavementalliance.org.uk**

Sue Ryder

Sue Ryder provides support to people who are living with a terminal illness, a neurological condition or who have lost someone.

Visit: **www.sueryder.org**

Child Bereavement UK

The charity helps children and young people up to the age of 25 who are facing bereavement, and anyone impacted by the death of a child of any age.

Visit: **www.childbereavementuk.org**

Little Things & Co.

Little Things & Co. are a UK based charity offering practical and emotional support to those who have suffered the loss of a baby.

Visit: **www.ltandco.org**

Section 8: References

NHS Digital. 2007. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England - 2007, Results of a household survey - NHS Digital. [online] Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-andinformation/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adultpsychiatric-morbidity-in-england-2007-results-of-a-household-survey> [Accessed 31 July 2021].

Ons.gov.uk. 2021. Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics. [online] Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/januarytomarch2021> [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Martin-Merino, E., Ruigomez, A., Wallander, M., Johansson, S. and GarciaRodriguez, L. (2009). Family Practice, 27(1), pp.9-16.

The Guardian. 2020. Mental health leave for paramedics in England nearly triples since 2011. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jul/23/mentalhealth-leave-for-paramedics-in-england-nearly-triples-since-2011> [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Nice.org.uk. 2018. Obsessive-compulsive disorder. [online] Available at: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/backgroundinformation/prevalence/> [Accessed 21 July 2021].

National Center for Biotechnology. 2020. The mental health of emergency services personnel in the UK Biobank: a comparison with the working population. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7534319/> [Accessed 31 July 2021].

Vos, T., Barber, RM., Bell, B., Bertozzi-Villa, A., Biruyukov, S., Bollinger, I., ...Murray, CJ.. (2013). Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 301 acute and chronic diseases and injuries in 188 countries, 1990-2013: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease study. The Lancet, 386(9995), 743-800.

Metro. 2017. Have you got one of the most stressful jobs?. [online] Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2017/11/08/have-you-got-one-of-the-most-stressful-jobs7063089/#> [Accessed 24 July 2021].

Moreno-Küstner B, Martín C, Pastor L. Prevalence of psychotic disorders and its association with methodological issues. A systematic review and meta-analyses. McKenna PJ, editor. PLoS One [Internet]. 2018 Apr 12 [cited 2019 Sep 7];13(4):e0195687. Available from: journals.plos.org

nhs.uk. 2021. Living with - Schizophrenia. [online] Available at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/schizophrenia/living-with/> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

nhs.uk. 2021. Overview - Post-traumatic stress disorder. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorderptsd/overview/> [Accessed 31 July 2021].

Mind.org.uk. 2016. One in four emergency services workers has thought about ending their lives. [online] Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/one-infour-emergency-services-workers-has-thought-about-ending-their-lives/> [Accessed 24

July 2021].

NHS Digital. 2021. NHS Sickness Absence Rates NHS Sickness Absence Rates January to March 2021, and Annual Summary 2009 to 2021, Provisional Statistics - NHS Digital. [online] Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhssickness-absence-rates/march-2021-annual-summary-2009-to-2020#resources> [Accessed 7 August 2021].

US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. 2016. Compassion Fatigue among Healthcare, Emergency and Community Service Workers: A Systematic Review. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4924075/> [Accessed 7 August 2021].