



Mental Health Handbook

Support for your mental health with coping strategies, contacts to help and practical activities.



If at any point you feel you are a risk to yourself or others, you should call your GP and reach out to a helpline such as Samaritans and Childline. If there is immediate danger you could call 999 or visit your local A&E.

Your health handbook

A guide to coping in a crisis

Everyone can experience struggles with their mental health for lots of different reasons. Often, when we least expect it. But don't forget, you're not alone...

It is important that we all know how to improve our mental health and what to do when we suffer. This can be a hard time, but with the right support you can get through it!

There is lots of information out there about what to do, but very little about how to support **YOU** and keeping a healthy mind.

This guide will help and support you to improve your mental health and give you support if or when you need it.





Information about Mental Health



What is mental health?

Understanding your own mental health can help

Mental health is

“The emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of wellbeing and an underlying belief in our own, and others dignity and worth.

“Mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret events. It affects our capacity to learn, to communicate and to form, sustain and end relationships. It also influences our ability to cope with change, transition and life events.”

Anxiety and panic attacks

Everybody experiences anxiety at some point in time.

Anxiety is a natural response, useful in helping us to avoid dangerous situations and motivating us to solve everyday issues. Anxiety can vary in severity from mild uneasiness through to a terrifying panic attack.

Anxiety disorders may be caused by environmental factors, medical factors, genetics, brain chemistry, substance abuse or a combination of these. It is most caused by stress in young people.

For more information on specific mental health issues, symptoms and getting targeted support, visit:

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk>

Low mood

Most people feel low sometimes, but if it's affecting your life, there are things you can try that may help.

Support is also available if you're finding it hard to cope with low mood, sadness or depression.

Symptoms of a low mood

Symptoms of a general low mood may include feeling sad, anxious or panicky, more tired than usual or being unable to sleep, angry or frustrated, low on confidence or self-esteem. A low mood often gets better after a few days or weeks. It's usually possible to improve a low mood by making small changes in your life. For example, resolving something that's bothering you or getting more sleep. There is lots of information in this booklet!

If you have a low mood that lasts 2 weeks or more, it **could** be a sign of depression. You should book an appointment with your GP.

Low self-esteem

We all have times when we lack confidence and do not feel good about ourselves.

But when low self-esteem becomes a long-term problem, it can have a harmful effect on our mental health and our day-to-day lives.

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the opinion we have of ourselves.

When we have healthy self-esteem, we tend to feel positive about ourselves and about life in general. It makes us better able to deal with life's ups and downs.

When our self-esteem is low, we tend to see ourselves and our life in a more negative and critical light. We also feel less able to take on the challenges that life throws at us.

If you have symptoms over a prolonged period of time, you should book an appointment with your GP.



Things you can do to help your mental health



Helpful coping strategies

- ✓ try talking about your feelings to a friend, family member, health professional or counsellor. You could also contact Samaritans, call: 116 123 if you need someone to talk to
- ✓ use calming breathing or grounding exercises
- ✓ exercise – activities such as running, walking, swimming and yoga can help you relax
- ✓ find out how to get to sleep if you're struggling to sleep
- ✓ eat a healthy diet with regular meals to keep your energy levels stable
- ✓ consider peer support, where people use their experiences to help each other. Find out more about peer support on the Mind website
- ✓ listen to free mental wellbeing audio guides
- ✓ search and download relaxation and mindfulness apps or online community apps

More helpful coping strategies

- ✓ keep a journal of your thoughts, feelings and coping strategies
- ✓ work out what is making you stressed and either manage it or avoid it.
- ✓ watch your favourite TV show or movie. This can help with reorientation and calm yourself down.

What are **YOUR** coping strategies?

Write them below and share them with a friend.

How to have a healthy self-esteem

- To boost your self-esteem, you need to identify the negative beliefs you have about yourself, then challenge them.
- You may tell yourself you're "too stupid" to apply for a new job, for example, or that "nobody cares" about you.
 - Start to note these negative thoughts and write them on a piece of paper or in a diary. Ask yourself when you first started to think these thoughts.
 - Next, start to write some evidence that challenges these negative beliefs, such as, "I'm really good at cryptic crosswords" or "My sister calls for a chat every week".
 - Write down other positive things about yourself, such as "I'm thoughtful" or "I'm a great cook" or "I'm someone that others trust".
 - Also write some good things that other people say about you.
- Aim to have at least 5 positive things on your list and add to it regularly. Then put your list somewhere you can see it. That way, you can keep reminding yourself that you're OK.
- You might have low confidence now because of what happened when you were growing up, but we can grow and develop new ways of seeing ourselves at any age.

Ways to improve low self-esteem

Here are some other simple techniques that may help you feel better about yourself.

Recognise what you're good at

Build positive relationships

Be kind to yourself

Learn to be assertive & start saying "no"

Give yourself a challenge

Write at least **five** positive things about yourself.

A large, empty white rectangular box intended for writing five positive things about oneself.

5 steps to mental wellbeing

Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life

Connect

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in the local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity that you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work or school, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you feel.

Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for something new. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument. Cook your favourite food or a new dish. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. You will feel more confident and have fun!

Give back

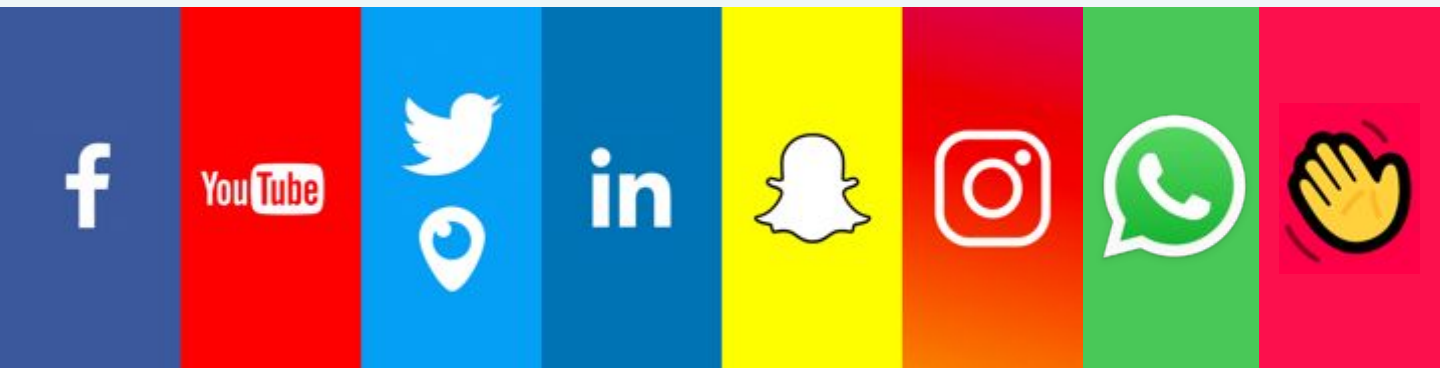
Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a new community. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, as your happiness, linked to the wider community can be rewarding.

What can help your mental health

A guide to coping in a crisis

Consider how to connect with others:

Maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead of meeting in person – whether it's people you normally see often or connecting with old friends.



But think about how much time you are spending on social media and take more time for you. Don't waste your time looking at EVERYONE else's life when you could spend it on your own. It is almost important not to compare your life with ones you see on social media... **you only know what they want to show you!**

There are age restrictions on ALL social media websites, so make sure you check you are old enough to use it,

Help and support others:

Think about how you could help those around you – it could make a big difference to them and can make you feel better too. **Could you message a friend or family member nearby? Are there community groups that you could join to support others locally?**

And try to be accepting of other people's concerns, worries or behaviours.

Talk about your worries:

It is quite common to feel worried, scared or helpless about something. Remember everyone experiences a difficult time and sharing how you are feeling and the things you are doing to cope with family and friends can help them too. If you don't feel able to do that, there are people you can speak to via NHS recommended helplines or you could find support groups online to connect with.

Look after your physical wellbeing:

Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which in turn can make you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise inside where possible and outside once a day, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs.

Look after your sleep:

Feeling anxious or worried can make it harder to get a good night's sleep. Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel mentally and physically, so it's important to get enough.

Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices – like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment. The Every Mind Matters sleep page provides practical advice on how to improve your sleep.

Think about your new daily routine:

Think about how you can adapt and create positive new routines – try to engage in useful activities (such as cleaning, cooking or exercise) or meaningful activities (such as reading or calling a friend). You might find it helpful to write a plan for your day or your week.

Do things you enjoy:

When you are anxious, lonely or low you may do things that you usually enjoy less often, or not at all. Focussing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood.

Set goals:

Setting goals and achieving them gives a sense of control and purpose – think about things you want or need to do that you can still do at home. It could be watching a film, reading a book or learning something online.

Keep your mind active:

Read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles, sudokus, jigsaws or drawing and painting. Find something that works for you.

Take time to relax and focus on the present:

This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and can improve wellbeing. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety. For useful resources see Every Mind Matters and NHS' mindfulness page.

If you can, once a day get outside, or bring nature in:

Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. If you can't get outside much you can try to still get these positive effects by spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight, or get out into the garden if you can.

Getting more sleep

Helping you maximize your sleep

If you have difficulty falling asleep, a regular bedtime routine will help you wind down and prepare for bed:

Sleep at regular times

First of all, keep regular sleeping hours. This programmes the brain and internal body clock to get used to a set routine. Most adults need between 6 and 9 hours of sleep every night. It is also important to try and wake up at the same time.

Make sure you wind down

There are lots of ways to relax:

- a warm bath (not hot) will help your body reach a temperature that's ideal for rest
- writing "to do" lists for the next day can organise your thoughts and clear your mind of any distractions
- relaxation exercises, such as yoga, help to relax the muscles.
- relaxation Apps work by using a carefully narrated script, gentle hypnotic music and sound effects to relax you
- reading a book or listening to the radio relaxes the mind by distracting it
- avoid using smartphones, tablets or other electronic devices for an hour or so before you go to bed as the light from the screen on these devices may have a negative effect on sleep

You could also make your bedroom sleep-friendly and keep a sleep diary.

You should also contact your GP if you have insomnia that lasts for more than 4 weeks.

LGBTQ+ Support

These organisations offer mental health advice, support and services, including helplines, for LGBT people.

Albert Kennedy Trust

The trust supports young LGBT people between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. They can help with finding specialist LGBT mental health services.

Gendered Intelligence

The organisation works with the trans community, especially young people, and those who affect trans lives.

Imaan

Imaan is a support group for LGBT Muslims, providing a safe space to share experiences, with factsheets and links to relevant services.

LGBT Consortium

The consortium develops and supports LGBT groups and projects around the country. Use the site's directory to find local mental health services.

Mind LGBTQ

Get information about mental health support for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning.

Pink Therapy

Pink Therapy has an online directory of therapists who work with LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning), and gender- and sexual-diversity (GSD) clients.

Stonewall

Find LGBT mental health services near you using Stonewall's "What's in my area?" search box.

Unhelpful coping strategies

-  do not feel you are a burden by talking to someone. Talking about how you are feeling will help improve your mental health.
-  do not try to do everything at once – set small targets that you can easily achieve
-  do not focus on the things you cannot change – focus your time and energy into helping yourself feel better
-  do not avoid situations that make you anxious – try slowly building up time spent in worrying situations to gradually reduce anxiety
-  try not to tell yourself that you're alone; most people experience anxiety or fear at some point in their life
-  try not to use alcohol, cigarettes, gambling or drugs to relieve anxiety as these can all contribute to poor mental health



Activities to help you and keep you healthy



Check in with you

Its important to check in with yourself, and think about how you are feeling and why

Feelings tracker

Date &
Time



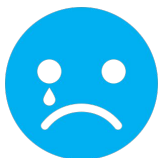
Right now I feel (tick the emotion that you feel to the left)...



I feel this way because...

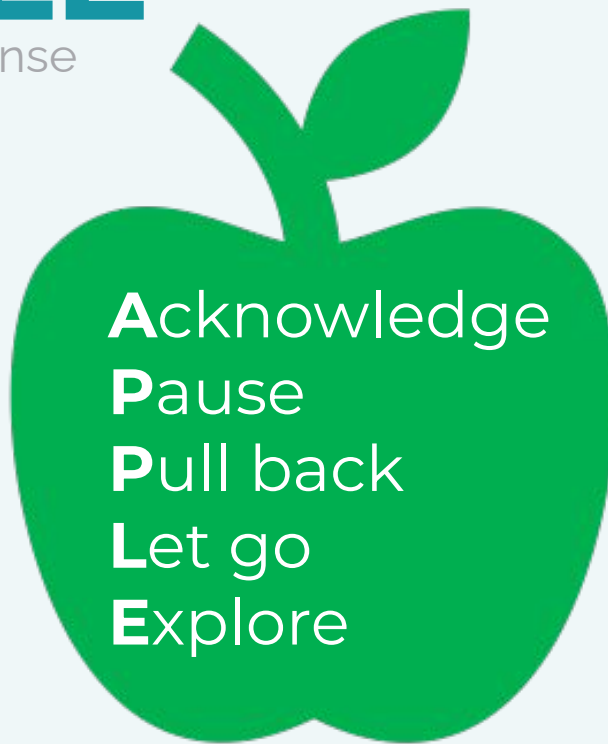


To feel better I will...



APPLE

A mindful response
to thoughts



ACKNOWLEDGE - Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.

PAUSE - Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Just pause, and breathe.

PULL BACK - Tell yourself this is just the anxiety or depression talking, and this thought or feeling is only a thought or feeling. ***Don't believe everything you think!*** Thoughts are not statements of fact.

LET GO - Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

EXPLORE - Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing, and the sensations of breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right NOW. Then, SHIFT YOUR FOCUS OF ATTENTION to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully, with your full attention.

Grounding exercises

Grounding techniques can keep you connected to the present and help you avoid feelings, memories, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts that you don't feel able to cope with yet. You could try:

Breathe slowly

Lie on the floor and breathe

Stamp on the spot

Listening to sounds around you

Colour in a colouring book

Take a walk

Hold an ice cube

Repeat today's date and time out loud

Whistle, Yell, Sing, Laugh

Create a safe place in your mind and visit it

Walk barefoot

Smell something strong

Eat something strong

Write or draw in your journal

Talk to someone

Cuddle a soft toy or wrapping yourself in a blanket and feeling it around you

Grounding exercises



Describe 5 things you **see** in the room.

Name 4 things you can **feel** (“my feet on the floor” or “the air in my nose”)

Name 3 things you **hear** right now (“traffic outside”)

Name 2 things you can **smell** right now (or 2 smells you like)

Name 1 good things about **yourself**

Stress container

The stress container shows us

Stress flows **into** the container



Vulnerability is shown by the size of the container. We all have different sized containers.

If the container **overflows**, problems develop – emotional snapping

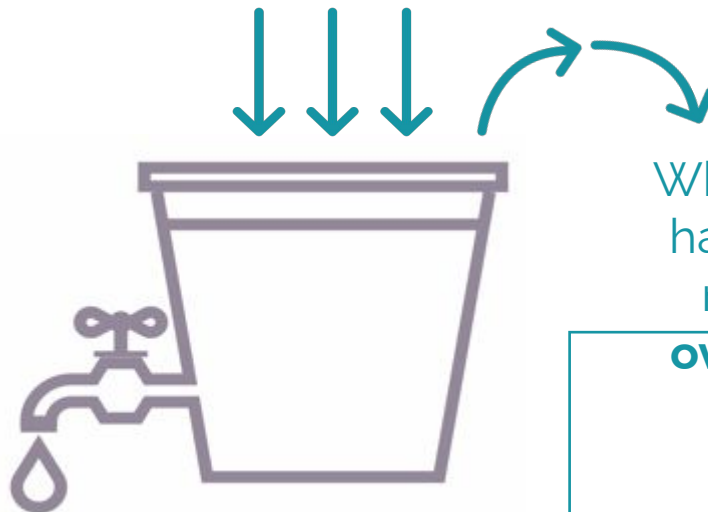
Helpful coping strategies = tap working, **lets the stress out**

Unhelpful coping strategies = tap blocked, so stress fills container and overflows

Your stress container

Have a go at the activity below...

What are your stresses that flow **into** the container?



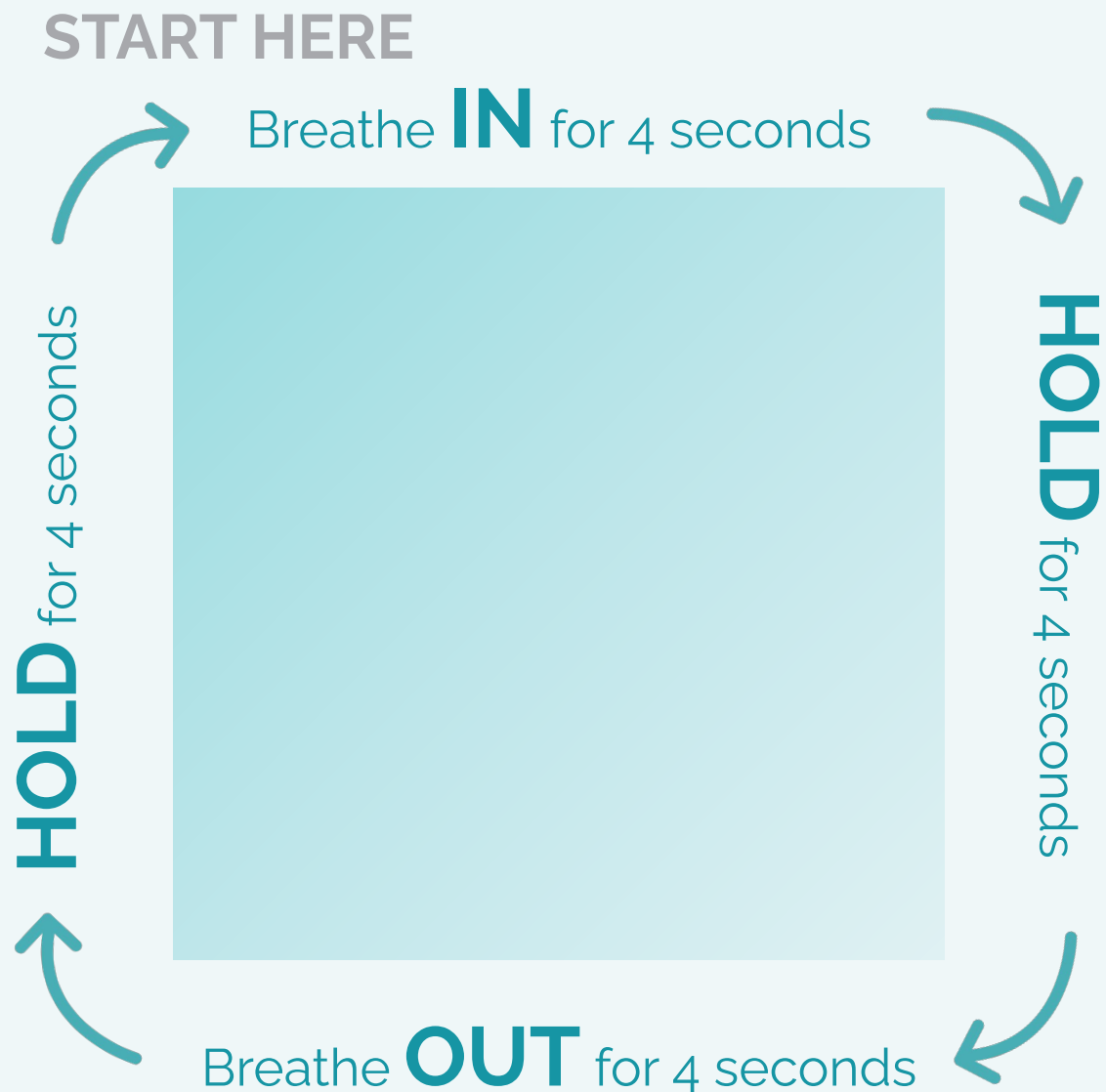
What could happen to make it **overflow**?

What are your **helpful coping strategies**?

What are your **unhelpful coping strategies**?

Breathing

A clever way to regulate your breathing



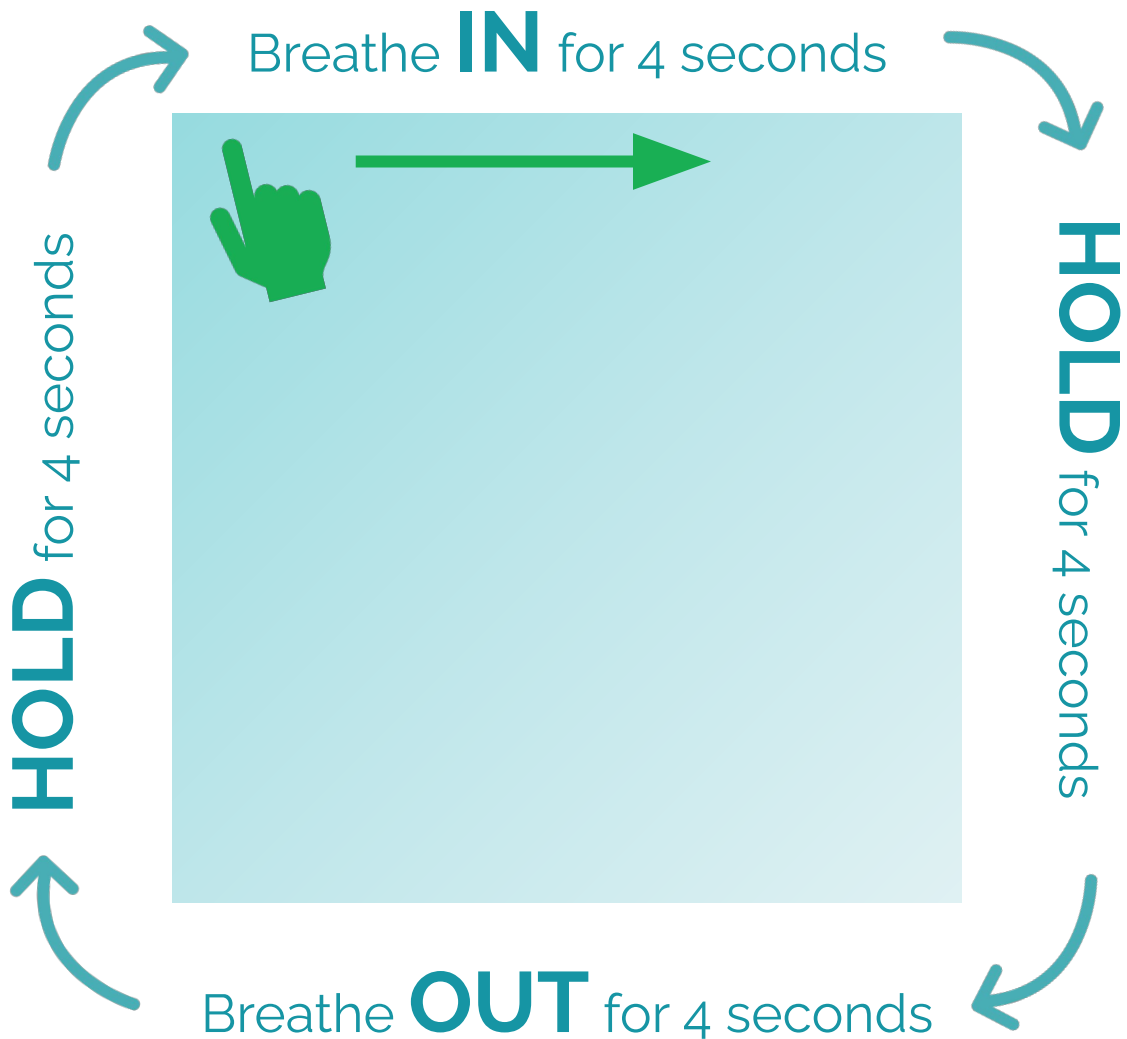
You can repeat until you feel grounded.

If this worked for you, you can find lots of information on breathing exercises and mindfulness breathing.

Breathing

Have a go at the breathing activity.
Follow your finger around the box...

START HERE



You can repeat until you feel grounded.

Talk to someone

There are GREAT services you can access from your phone



Text **THEMIX** to

85258

0808 808 4994

<https://themix.org.uk>

k



0800 1111

<https://www.childline.org.uk>

e.org.uk

**IT'S OKAY
TO TALK**

SAMARITANS

116 123

Email

jo@samaritans.org

People you can talk to

At The Bridge, we have people you can talk to...



Teachers

Form tutor

Senior
Leaaders

Safeguarding

Attendance

Friends and
Family

School
Counsellor

**Do not suffer in
silence!**

Coping with exams

Make a realistic revision schedule. Work out how much you have to do and the time you have to do it in, then break it down into manageable chunks. Aim to do a few hours of revision each day, and mix up your subjects so you don't get bored.

Find a revision style that suits you. Studying alone in a quiet room suits some people, but not everyone likes working in silence. Try playing music quietly in the background, or revising with a friend (but don't let them distract you!).

Customise your notes to make them more personal. Experiment with colour coding, notes on postcards, diagrams or whatever helps you learn your topic.

Make sure you understand everything. If you come across something you don't understand, try to find a new source of information that will help you understand it. Just memorising it won't help you in your exam. Don't be afraid to ask your teacher or a friend for help if you need it.

Look at past exam papers. It means you can familiarise yourself with the layout and type of questions you'll be asked. Practise completing exam papers in the set time limit to improve your exam technique.

Take regular short breaks. Studying for hours and hours will only make you tired and ruin your concentration, which may make you even more anxious. A break every 45 to 60 minutes is about right.

Reward yourself. For example, you could take a long bath or watch a good DVD once you have finished your revision session.

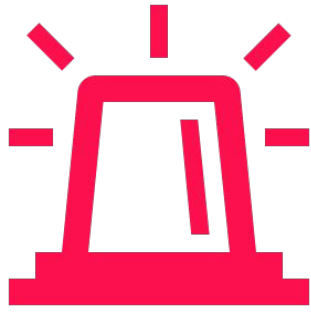
Do something physical. When you're not revising, use your spare time to get away from your books and do something active. Exercise is good for taking your mind off stress and keeping you positive, and it will help you sleep better.

Ask for help. If you're feeling stressed, it's important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, teacher or a friend. Lots of people find exams difficult to deal with, so don't be embarrassed to ask for support.



Services and helplines





Dealing with a mental health crisis or emergency

A mental health crisis often means that you no longer feel able to cope or be in control of your situation. You may feel great emotional distress or anxiety, cannot cope with day-to-day life or work, think about suicide or self-harm, or experience hallucinations and hearing voices.

Call Samaritans or ChildLine

They have a free to call service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, if you want to talk to someone in confidence.

Samaritans are 116 123 and ChildLine is 0800 1111.

Contact NHS 111 or use the app

You can call NHS **111** or visit the website <https://111.nhs.uk/> if you or someone you know needs urgent care, but it's not life threatening.

Book an emergency GP appointment

You can also contact your GP surgery and ask for an emergency appointment. In a crisis, you should be offered an appointment with the first available doctor.

Visit A&E or call 999

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a medical emergency. Examples of mental health emergencies include thinking you're at risk of taking your own life or seriously harming yourself and needing immediate medical attention. Call 999 or go to A&E if you or someone you know experiences an acute life-threatening medical or mental health emergency³²

Virtual Support **YOUNG MINDS**

Online, text and call services

fighting for young people's mental health



0808 808 4994
85258 (crisis messenger service, Text THEMIX)
themix.org.uk

85258 (crisis messenger service, text YM)

youngminds.org.uk
0808 802 5544



0800 58 58 58



Call us free 24/7 on
116 123
samaritans.org



0800 068 41 41
07786 209697 (text)



hubofhope.co.uk



mind.org.uk



03444 775 775 (helpline)
07537 416 905 (text)



0808 808 1677



0300 123 6600



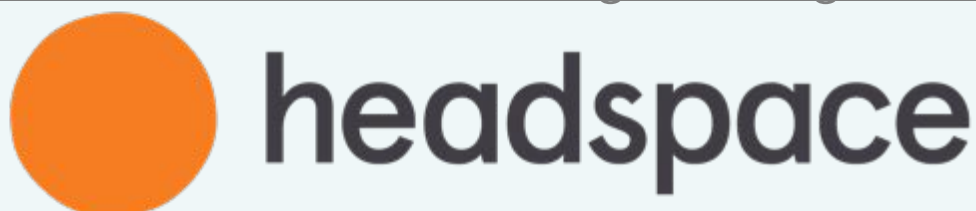
0300 5000 927
rethink.org

Mental wellbeing audio guides and apps

On the page below (link to the NHS website) you can listen to a series of mental wellbeing audio guides to help you boost your mood.

You can listen to them privately, in your own time, to help you through feelings such as anxiety or a low mood.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/>



Headspace and **Calm** are the two most popular and successful apps which help you calm down, be mindful and support sleep. The NHS also have lots of apps which you can find out about here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>



MeeTwo helps you talk about difficult things. Anonymous posts in the app allow chat with other people (posts moderated in advance).



<https://www.meetwo.co.uk>

Websites

Places you can go for help and support

If you need **urgent help** visit:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/?ctald=/need-urgent-help/using-this-tool/slices/using-this-tool/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/how-can-i-distract-myself/games-and-puzzles/>

Other websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<http://ayemind.com/toolkit/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/message-from-childline/>

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk>

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/mental-health-advice-for-children-and-young-people/the-advice-resource-vault/advice-for-children-age-13-17>

<https://www.giveusashout.org/get-help/>

<https://calmharm.co.uk/>

<http://thehideout.org.uk/>

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

<https://www.fearless.org/en>

For parents and carers:

<https://emergingminds.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people-with-worries-and-anxiety-coronavirus/>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-children/>

<https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/how-we-can-help/young-people/646-saysomething.html>

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand>

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