

SAMARITANS

Finding your way

A guide for anyone who
is struggling to cope

#FindingYourWay

samaritans.org/FindingYourWay



Contents

Who is this guide for?	3
Signs you may be struggling to cope	4
Poor mental health and stigma	5
What to do if you're feeling low or struggling to cope: Helping yourself	6
The importance of connection	9
What to do if you're feeling low or struggling to cope: Seeking outside support	10
If you're thinking about self-harm or are self-harming	12
If you're thinking about suicide or feeling suicidal	17
How to support someone you're worried about	20
Using Samaritans: How we can help	23
Signposting: Useful contacts and helplines	24

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been created for anyone who is struggling to cope. You may be feeling low and finding life very difficult and/or may be engaging in self-destructive behaviours.

You may be self-harming or thinking about harming yourself. You may also be experiencing suicidal thoughts or perhaps you are actively suicidal and thinking about how you would end your life.

If you are struggling to cope, this resource can provide you with some guidance and support.

This guide is also suitable for anyone supporting someone else who is struggling to cope (see page 20).

If you need to talk to someone, you can always talk to Samaritans. Call us free anytime, day or night, on **116 123** or write us an email at jo@samaritans.org.

You are not alone

When people are going through a tough time, they often experience negative thoughts about themselves and feel they have no-one to turn to. You are not alone in feeling like this. Many people struggle to cope at one point or another, and going through a range of emotions during this time is common.

Even if you don't have family or friends close by, you are never alone. Samaritans volunteers are here for you every day of the year, round the clock.

This guide also includes some resources from Heads Above the Waves.

Heads Above the Waves is a not-for-profit organisation in Wales that raises awareness of depression and self-harm in young people. Their resources are suitable for all ages.

Find out more at hatw.co.uk



Signs you may be struggling to cope

Maybe you can't quite put your finger on it, but you're not feeling okay.



You might be feeling tired more often, more emotional, or you might not want to do the things that you usually enjoy right now.

Struggling to cope with everyday life doesn't look or feel the same for everyone. We can't generalise about how it'll make you feel or act.

Signs to look out for:

- Lacking energy or feeling tired.
- Feeling exhausted all the time.
- Experiencing 'brain fog', finding it hard to think clearly.
- Finding it hard to concentrate.
- Feeling restless and agitated.
- Feeling tearful, wanting to cry all the time.
- Not wanting to talk to or be with people.
- Not wanting to do things you usually enjoy.
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings.
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things and tasks.
- Experiencing 'burn out'.
- Thinking about self-harm or self-harming.
- Having thoughts about suicide.

There are all sorts of reasons why you may be finding it hard to cope.

Often, it's due to a combination of things. It can be useful to identify these triggers.

Perhaps you're going through:

- relationship and family problems
- loss, including loss of a friend or a family member through bereavement
- financial worries or debt
- job-related stress
- college or study-related stress
- worry about current events
- loneliness and isolation
- bullying, abuse or neglect
- childbirth and/or becoming a parent
- depression
- questioning or working to understand your gender and/or sexuality
- painful and/or disabling physical illness
- heavy use of or dependency on alcohol or other drugs
- thoughts of suicide.

Poor mental health and stigma



When you're feeling low or struggling to cope, it is normal to feel a range of emotions about how other people will react or view you. You may feel:

- embarrassed
- ashamed
- like a burden to friends and family
- like you've let people down
- like there's something wrong with you
- like everyone else is doing better than you.

Unfortunately, some people may still experience stigma and/or discrimination if they have poor mental health or suicidal feelings. However, it is really important to remember the following:

- You matter. Your feelings are just as important as everyone else's and you are not a burden. You deserve to feel well.
- Mental health is just as important as physical health. If you are struggling, it is not your fault. If someone breaks their arm, no-one would suggest it was their fault – poor mental health is no different.
- Quite often, poor mental health or suicidal feelings are a valid and natural response to difficult and challenging events, such as relationship breakdown or financial problems. Everyone struggles sometimes and you are not weird or alone in feeling like this.
- Asking for help and reaching out is a strength, not a weakness.

What to do if you're feeling low or struggling to cope: Helping yourself

Everyone feels low at some point in their lives and if you're struggling to cope it may be difficult to see beyond your current situation.



It's important to remember that these feelings may not last forever.

If you have noticed a change in mood and are struggling to cope with everyday life, there may be some things you can do by yourself to help you feel better.

- Make time for yourself, relax and do things you enjoy.
- Eat healthily, get plenty of sleep and exercise.
- Spend time with people you love and trust.
- Talk about your problems with people you trust.
- Be proud of what you're good at, as well as aware of what you struggle with.
- Pay attention to what you're feeling.



Relaxation exercises

Controlled breathing

It might sound simple, but controlled breathing can be a useful tool for feeling calmer quickly and reducing feelings of stress and anxiety. This technique is easy to memorise and can be practised almost anywhere. Practise this for as long as you need to feel the benefits.

To practise this technique, all you need to do is this:

1. Breathe in for four seconds.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Breathe out for four seconds.
4. Wait four seconds before repeating.

Keep repeating this until you start to feel calmer. Look for both mental and physical signs, like your thoughts and your heartbeat slowing down.

You may already know what triggers your negative thoughts and feelings. If you do, try using this breathing technique if you know you will encounter a certain trigger, or immediately after.

Muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and releasing pairs of muscles in sequence. It can help if you imagine tension leaving your body as you release your muscles.

You'll need a quiet, private space for this to work well. Find somewhere to sit, with your feet planted shoulder width apart, flat on the ground. You might like to read through the steps of this simple technique first, then practise without any guidance, and you may want to use the breathing exercise above before you use this one.

We'll start with the muscles in your head. Tense your forehead muscles by raising your eyebrows and holding for up to 10 seconds. Then release, imagining tension leaving your body.

Repeat this, working down through pairs of muscles throughout your body. Try to tense them for up to 10 seconds before releasing.

When you've finished, don't get up straight away. Stay where you are for a minute or so, then, when you do get up, do so slowly. You can practise this technique whenever you notice yourself becoming stressed or anxious.

Set achievable goals

If you're feeling anxious about doing something, try breaking it down to a list of smaller tasks. For example, if you haven't been to the shops in a while, you might want to try walking in that part of town before going inside. Focus on what you want to achieve and try not to compare yourself to what you think others are doing. Go at your own pace.



Get active

Exercise can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and other difficult feelings. There are lots of different ways to be active. You could start off with a brisk walk or join a free online exercise class. Setting goals with others is a great way to stay motivated. Try teaming up with friends and family or taking part in an online challenge.

Make time for yourself

It could be something creative, playing sports, or taking a copy of the paper to a park for half an hour in the sun. Even stepping away and taking a five-minute break over a cup of tea can help you relax and take some time for yourself.



Talk about how you're feeling

Talking can help put things into perspective and help us feel less isolated. It can be hard to reach out but talking to a trusted friend, colleague or family member is something we'd encourage you to try, however you can. Remember, you can always talk to Samaritans too.



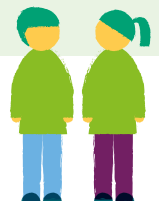
Enjoy nature

Whatever way you can, taking some time to enjoy the outdoors can have a positive effect on your mood. From visiting local parks to tending to plants indoors, spending quality time with nature has been proven to have a positive effect on our mood.



Connect and meet up with other people

Relationships are important for our wellbeing. They can help with our self-esteem and make us feel valued. Supporting others can also boost our own wellbeing.



The importance of connection

Humans need social connection and relationships. A lack of social contact can have a negative impact on your physical and mental health.



There are some stereotypes surrounding loneliness and isolation. Loneliness is a normal emotion, and it can affect anyone, no matter your age. In the UK, 9 million people have reported feeling lonely some or most of the time.

There may be different reasons you're feeling lonely or isolated, such as moving somewhere new (like university for example), experiencing bereavement, or struggling with a mental health condition. Loneliness can be a really difficult emotion and it can be hard to know where to start in finding some social connections to help with these feelings.

How can I combat loneliness?

- **Community groups.** Local community groups are a great way to make new connections and make friends. Some groups, such as Men's Sheds (see page 27) may focus on bringing people together to combat loneliness or talk about mental health. There are all sorts of groups that focus on different hobbies and interests, such as choirs or running clubs.
- **A befriender service.** A befriender is a trained volunteer who can provide support to anyone feeling lonely or isolated. You can connect with a befriender at [befriending.co.uk](https://www.befriending.co.uk).
- **Online communities.** Online communities such as Mind's Side by Side can provide a place to share your experiences with other people who feel the same way. You can share your experiences with others on Side by Side at [sidebyside.mind.org.uk](https://www.sidebyside.mind.org.uk).
- **Volunteering.** Volunteering is a powerful way of making new friends and improving your wellbeing. You can find out about local volunteering opportunities at [doit.life/volunteer](https://www.doit.life/volunteer).

- **Talk to someone.** If you're feeling lonely and isolated and need to talk to someone, you can always talk to Samaritans. Call us free anytime, day or night, on **116 123** or write us an email at jo@samaritans.org.

Social comparison

Social media can bring up a number of issues linked to poor mental health, including social comparison.

Many of us compare ourselves to others on social media, which can affect our own self-esteem. You may feel like friends or people you follow on social media have a better life than you or that they seem happy all the time.

However, it's important to remember that many people feel like you do. Social media rarely shows the whole picture; people may choose to portray themselves in a way that makes their lives seem different and better than their reality.

Take a break from the news and social media

If social media is making you feel inferior or low, it can be helpful to take a break from it. Social media breaks can help improve our mental health. If you find it hard to stay offline, prioritising other activities can help you switch it off. Try turning off your notifications or leaving your phone in another room for a few hours. If your job involves lots of screen time, taking a break away from your devices after work might help you relax.

What to do if you're feeling low or struggling to cope: Seeking outside support



If you've stopped doing things you usually enjoy, you're tearful, not eating or sleeping properly, drifting from people close to you, using alcohol or drugs to cope, self-harming, or thinking about suicide, it is important you seek help.

You may be at a stage with your mental health where it is not appropriate to try and handle it by yourself and you may need support from your GP or mental health services.

Remember, reaching out and asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.

Emergencies and urgent cases

If you feel you can't keep yourself safe, are thinking about suicide or have hurt yourself, the quickest way to get support is to call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E. If you go to A&E, the staff should treat you with respect and look after any immediate physical and mental health needs.

If you need urgent help for your mental health but it is not an emergency, call 111. You can also contact your GP and ask for an emergency appointment.

Accessing mental health services

Mental health services are free on the NHS, but you will need to go to your GP to access them.

Your GP will assess your circumstances and offer appropriate advice or treatment. They can also refer you to a psychological therapy service or a specialist mental health service for further advice or treatment.

Unfortunately, it's very common to have to spend time on a waiting list before getting therapy through the NHS and it's important you continue to access some form of other support, for example calling a helpline, while you wait.

Mental health services may be provided by your GP surgery, a large local health centre, a specialist mental health clinic or a hospital. The treatment may be provided on a one-to-one basis or in a group with others with similar difficulties. Therapy can also sometimes involve partners and families.

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

- your mood, thoughts and behaviours – sometimes by using questionnaires or forms that measure depression and anxiety
- your lifestyle and any recent events in your life that might be affecting your wellbeing
- any sleep problems or changes in appetite
- your medical history, and your family's medical history.

You can always bring a friend or family member to an appointment to support you.

It may feel daunting to talk about your mental health with someone you don't know and that's okay – it's common to feel like that. It can be useful to make a note of what you would like to cover in your appointment. Be honest and open, and remember that how you feel is very

important. If there is anything you don't understand during your appointment, make sure you talk to your doctor and ask them to explain it more clearly.

Where available, there can be a range of treatments for those struggling with their mental health, and you should feel free to ask about them.

- **Talking treatments** (may be referred to as counselling, psychotherapy or talking therapy)
- **Medication** (this can include antidepressants, antipsychotics, sleeping tablets or mood stabilisers)
- **Arts and creative therapies**
- **Complementary and alternative therapies** (such as yoga or meditation)

Making decisions about your treatment should be a joint conversation and you should feel like an active participant in your care.

Therapists at your place of work or education

- If you're a student – many colleges and universities have a free counselling service.
- If you're an employee – your workplace might have an Employee Assistance Programme, which might offer some free therapy sessions.

Private therapists

There are many reasons you might consider private therapy. It is not for everyone because it can be expensive. When searching for a therapist, it is important to find one who is registered with a professional body. Here are the best websites to do this:

- The Counselling Directory [counselling-directory.org.uk](https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk)
- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) [bacp.co.uk](https://www.bacp.co.uk)

When enquiring about therapy, it can help to ask about the price per session and whether they offer reduced rates for people on low incomes.

Charity and third sector therapists

Some community and charity organisations may offer free or low-cost talking therapies. For example:

- Your local **Mind** branch may be able to offer you talking therapies.
- **SilverCloud** is an online therapy platform that helps people manage their problems. You can access SilverCloud directly without a referral from your GP.
- **Anxiety UK** offers talking therapies for anxiety. There is a fee, but they do offer reduced costs for people on a low income.
- **Cruse Bereavement Care** may offer free counselling services if you have experienced the death of someone close to you.

If you're thinking about self-harm or are self-harming



Self-harm is often a way of coping with painful and difficult feelings.

Someone may harm themselves because they feel overwhelmed and don't know how else to deal with things. It's usually a very private issue and motivations and methods will differ from one person to another. Some forms of self-harm carry a serious risk, but this doesn't mean someone who self-harms is always intending to cause themselves serious injury.

There's no such thing as a typical person who self-harms. It can affect anyone of any age, background or race. People who self-harm often find that this means they are further isolated from everyone because of the shame they feel and the difficulty they experience in being able to talk about what is going on. Some people who self-harm see it as a way of staying alive and coping with the difficulties they are facing.

For many, self-harm is not about the inflicting of physical pain but coping with emotional pain. Other factors that can lead to self-harm may include stress arising from a difficult home environment or a general sense of having no control over life. Self-harm can be a way of seeking relief. Where many people cope by, say, crying on another person's shoulder, some people find that self-harm is a way of coping with difficult feelings when they do not know how else to cope with them.

Whether you sometimes think about self-harm or you've already hurt yourself, seeking help is an important first step. You should start by talking to your GP.

If you have hurt yourself and need immediate medical attention, the quickest way to get support is to call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E.

Visiting your GP

Your GP should take your self-harm seriously. Remember, you can always ask to speak with a second doctor if you think you're not being offered the support you need; your GP surgery should be able to advise you on how to do this.

It can be helpful to ask a friend or family member to accompany you to the appointment to give you extra support.

A GP will listen and discuss the best options for you, which could include self-help or support groups. They can also give you advice and treatment for minor injuries.

They may ask you detailed questions to help them understand the cause of your self-harm. It's important to be honest with them, even if you do not know why you self-harm.

If needed, a GP may discuss referring you for an assessment with a local community mental health team (CMHT). An assessment will help your care team work out a treatment plan with you, such as a talking therapy, to help you manage your self-harm.



Self-harm safety plan

A self-harm safety plan can be an important tool for helping you get through some of your most difficult times. Knowing how to spot that you've been triggered, thinking of things you can do to keep safe, and knowing the places you can turn for support are useful tools. It's important to remember that self-harm is a coping strategy. A self-harm safety plan can help protect you from harm when you're feeling like a risk to yourself.

Download and print this plan at [hatw.co.uk](https://www.hatw.co.uk).

Fill this out with someone you trust and who can help you with your answers. Remember – these feelings will pass. You got this, keep going!

What are the warning signs or feelings that I might self-harm?

Are there any physical or mental things you're going through?

Is there anything I can do right now to keep myself safe? Can you distract yourself, throw away anything you are using to self-harm, or ask for help?

What coping strategies would I like to try now? This could be something that has helped before or something new you want to try. It could be doing some exercise, drawing or colouring, writing down your feelings, taking a nap, listening to music, tidying your room to keep your mind busy – whatever works for you.

If my best friend was feeling like this, what would I say to them? Try and apply it to yourself now. Think of something positive you can tell yourself right now ("this feeling won't last forever, I've survived 100% of my bad days so far, I've got this – I can get through this").

What would calm me down right now or be helpful?

What is one thing that is important to me and worth living for right now?

Who can I speak to and ask for help right now?

Who can I call that will be able to distract me?

Friend:

Teacher:

Family member:

Helpline:

Where is my safe place I can go to in an emergency? How can I safely get there? What do I need to take with me? (Phone, medication etc.)



Stopping self-harm or distracting yourself

Si Martin is one of the founders of Heads Above the Waves. He self-harmed as a teenager and as an adult, and has put together some things that helped him get past self-harm. He's also included some things that HATW have gathered that may help.

Spot when you've been triggered

Know what it feels like when you've been triggered. For me, that's getting knots in my stomach and flustered in my face. These are my physical signs, but what are yours?

A step back from this: what are your triggers? What is it that sets you off, leaves you feeling like you're going to self-harm? If you're not sure what exactly it is that triggers you, try keeping a note of your situation every time you feel like self-harming. Where are you? Who are you with? What time is it? All these details over a month or two can help you spot patterns and figure out what your triggers are. Once you know what your triggers are, you can put things in place to avoid them, and/or look at finding something else to try next time you get triggered.

What good does self-harm do?

Self-harm is serving some sort of purpose. It's a coping mechanism (but it's a harmful one). Maybe it's helping you release your anger or frustration. Maybe it's a way for you to feel something if you feel numb otherwise. Maybe it's a physical way of showing the pain you're feeling inside. Whatever it is, take some time to think about and acknowledge what you're getting out of self-harm.

Once you know what it is you're getting from self-harm, try to find some other way to get that same result. So, if it's a release for anger, maybe you could try playing drums, or if it's a way of fighting numbness, you could try something intense (like having some hot sauce!), or if self-harm is about expression for you, it might be that writing or even just talking about it might help serve that same purpose.

We've compiled a list of things that have helped us and others on our [Things To Try](#) page to help you find what works for you.

Be mindful

Once you've found something you want to try as an alternative to self-harm, you've got to be mindful while you do it. I've recently found playing video games a really useful escape when everything's feeling a bit too much. One of the most important things I've learned from this is that there's a difference between kicking back on the PlayStation 4 because I'm bored, and spotting when I'm in a bad headspace and giving myself 45 mins to chill and reset my brain.

I'm physically doing the same thing, but it's the mindset I go into it with that determines whether it's going to have a positive impact on my mental health. So, whatever it is that you're trying out, each time you do it tell yourself "this is helping me get better".

Give yourself time

This works two ways:

1. You need to give yourself time for these new coping techniques to work. They won't necessarily work straight away; you need to keep trying them and stick with it until they start to work.
2. A useful distraction technique might be to give yourself a target time. Say "I'm not going to self-harm for the next two minutes" – and if you can go two minutes without self-harming, and you still feel like doing it at the end of those two minutes, then that's ok. But if you can get through two minutes and then say, "I'm not going to self-harm for another five minutes" and keep on extending it, you'll not only feel a sense of accomplishment for hitting those little goals, but often by the end of these little time limits, the urge to self-harm can pass, and you can look to try putting something else in place.

Communication is key

It's something we keep coming back to but talking it out can make such a difference. Whether that's having a friend who checks in on you and makes sure you stick with the new things you're trying, or whether that's reaching out to a **helpline** and talking through the emotions you're going through during this time.

Talking about self-harm is really hard and kind of scary the first time you do it, but it honestly gets easier. There are people out there who will listen and care about you, or even just be able to relate to you. Knowing that you're not in this alone might be a cliché but hot dang, it's helpful.

Self-harm is a complex and unique issue that's going to be different for so many people who deal with it. These are just a few ideas of what's helped in the past, and what might help you. But it's important to find what works for you.

If you're thinking about suicide or feeling suicidal



Suicidal thoughts can be complex, frightening and confusing.

You might be experiencing some of the following:

- Feeling sure that you want to die.
- Desperately wanting a solution to your nightmare and can't see any other way out.
- Not caring if you live or die and taking more risks or living recklessly.
- Not actively want to kill yourself but would welcome death if it happened.
- Viewing death as a release or way of taking control.
- Not knowing why you are having suicidal thoughts or suicidal feelings and feeling completely powerless to know what to do about it.

If your life is at risk right now

If you feel like you might attempt suicide, or may have seriously harmed yourself, it is important you seek urgent help:

- Call 999 for an ambulance.
- Go straight to A&E, if you can.
- Or call your local crisis team, if you have their number.

If you can't do this by yourself, ask someone to help you.

Mental health crises and emergencies are serious. You are not a burden, and you are not wasting anyone's time.

Reaching out

Just like feeling low, or self-harm, you should follow the same steps if you are feeling suicidal. It's important you tell someone how you feel.

You might feel there is some stigma around suicide and that telling someone how you feel will result in them judging you or thinking of you in a certain way. You may feel like you've let people down. However, feeling suicidal does not make you a failure, and although you might not see it in the moment, these feelings will pass and there is help to get you through this time.

Making a safety plan

Feeling suicidal is the result of experiencing extreme pain, and not having the resources to cope. We therefore need to reduce pain and increase coping resources.

A Safety Plan includes what you would do, and who might support you, in a crisis. They are best created when you are not in a crisis and are designed to help keep you safe. It takes around 20–40 minutes to complete.

Download and print this plan at getselfhelp.co.uk.

What I need to do to reduce the risk of me acting on the suicidal thoughts:

What warning signs or triggers are there that make me feel more out of control?

What have I done in the past that helped? What ways of coping do I have?

What I will do to help calm and soothe myself:

What I will tell myself (as alternatives to the dark thoughts):

What would I say to a close friend who was feeling this way?

What could others do that would help?

Who can I call:

Friend or relative:

Another?

Health professional:

Other?

Telephone helpline:

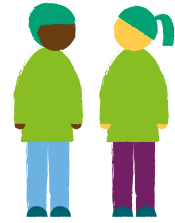
Other?

A safe place I can go to:

If I still feel suicidal and out of control:

I will go to the A& E department. If I can't get there safely, I will call 999.

How to support someone you're worried about



Many people struggle to cope at one point or another in their lives. Reaching out to someone could help them know that someone cares, that they are valued, and could help them access the support they need.

Everyone copes and reacts in their own way, but here are some general signs to look out for. For some people, several of these signs might apply – for others just one or two, or none.

Signs to look out for:

- Feeling restless and agitated.
- Feeling angry and aggressive.
- Feeling tearful.
- Being tired or lacking in energy.
- Not wanting to talk to or be with people.
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy.
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings.
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things.
- Not replying to messages or being distant.
- Talking about feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless.
- Talking about feeling trapped by life circumstances they can't see a way out of, or feeling unable to escape their thoughts.
- A change in routine, such as sleeping or eating more or less than normal.
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviour, like gambling or violence.

It can also be useful to identify circumstances that can trigger suicidal thoughts or make it hard for someone to cope.

Situations to look out for:

- Loss, including loss of a friend or a family member through bereavement.
- Suicide or attempted suicide of a family member, friend or public figure.
- Relationship and family problems.
- Housing problems.
- Financial worries.
- Job-related stress.
- College or study-related pressures.
- Bullying, abuse or neglect.
- Loneliness and isolation.
- Challenging current events.
- Depression.
- Painful and/or disabling physical illness.
- Heavy use of or dependency on alcohol or other drugs.

Again, these may not apply to everyone who is struggling, but they can be useful to look out for.

What to do if you think someone is struggling

Many people worry that reaching out will be intrusive or make things worse. You'll soon be able to tell if the person you're speaking to isn't comfortable or doesn't want to have that kind of conversation. If they don't want to open up, you'll still have let them know you're there for them.

Once someone starts to share how they're feeling, it's important to listen. This could mean not offering advice, not trying to identify what they're going through with your own experiences and not trying to solve their problems. We've compiled some listening tips to help you give the best support you can.



Show you care

Focus on the other person, make eye contact, put away your phone.



Have patience

It may take time and several attempts before a person is ready to open up.



Use open questions

Use questions that need more than a yes/no answer, followed up by, for example, "tell me more".



Say it back

Check you've understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution.



Have courage

Don't be put off by a negative response and, most importantly, don't feel you have to fill a silence.

When you're talking to the person you're worried about, you can mention services that you think would be useful and pass on contact information. You can also offer to accompany them to appointments or agree on a point at which it might be useful to call them.

You can't force someone to seek help – but you can make sure they know that you're there for them and will support them if they do.

Supporting someone with suicidal feelings

How to offer support

Simple actions can help you be there for someone who is experiencing suicidal thoughts or recovering from an attempt to take their own life.

It's also important to know when to seek professional support, and when to step back to look after yourself.

Evidence shows asking someone if they're suicidal can protect them. By asking someone directly about suicide, you give them permission to tell you how they feel and let them know that they are not a burden.

People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it was to be able to talk about what they were experiencing.

If someone does let you know that they are having suicidal thoughts, always take them seriously. You don't have to be able to solve their problems. But, if you feel you can, offer support and encourage them to talk about how they're feeling.

Want to remember how to listen well? Just think: SHUSH

What does 'being there' for someone involve?

The needs of a person who is struggling with suicidal thoughts will depend on their circumstances. For this reason, there isn't one simple set of steps to follow.

What you can do, however, is provide a supportive presence, free of judgement. This creates a safe space for them to feel their feelings and express themselves, if they want to. Or to sit in silence and know they are cared for, if they want to.

How to listen

If the person you're with does share how they're feeling with you, it is usually better to listen and respond with open questions – not advice or opinions.

If it feels appropriate, you can let the person you're supporting know that you value them. Using your own words, you could say something like, "you're important to me".

The important thing is to let the person know you will support them, without judgement, as far as you are able to. You don't need to change what they are going through for them. Remember as well that it's okay to decide that you are no longer able to help someone and to let them know you won't be contactable for a while.

The idea is not to make them feel guilty, but to let them know they are not worthless, and that they contribute meaningfully to the lives of others. Avoid expressions that centre around negative consequences of their actions, such as "I'll be so upset if you die".

Other ways to help

You can also offer to help with practical things they might need in the moment, like getting them a glass of water, calling the GP or getting in touch with their friends or family (with their permission). Or they might need you to watch TV with them or do an activity.

When they're feeling able to think about next steps for looking after themselves, you can suggest you make a 'safety plan' together. A 'safety plan' will lay out steps for coping in a crisis and help them make sure they have the support they need going forwards. You can complete one together, and both keep copies to refer to. It will also help you know how best to support them in the future (see pages 13 and 17).

Using Samaritans: How we can help

People contact us with all sorts of concerns and what might be a small issue to you, may be huge to someone else.



You could be going through something new or have been struggling to cope for some time. Either way, we're here if you feel you need some extra support.

If you need someone to talk to, we listen. We won't judge or tell you what to do.

Whatever you're going through, you can call us free any time, from any phone on **116 123**.

What happens when you call us?

- A volunteer will answer.
- If you phone us, we will answer with something like "Samaritans, can I help you?".
- You talk, we listen.
- We listen to you and help you talk through your concerns, worries and troubles.
- We give you space to be yourself.
- We'll focus on your thoughts and feelings and may ask questions to help you explore how you feel.
- We won't tell you what you should do.
- We won't make decisions for you, our advice or opinions are not important for the call.

Our numbers are free to call from both landlines and mobiles, including pay-as-you-go mobiles. You do not need to have any credit or call allowance on your plan to call.

Our service is confidential, except for in certain situations where our safeguarding policy means we may tell someone, for example, by calling an ambulance.

We're here for you, whatever your age. Our first responsibility is to you, not your parents or guardian.

Other ways to contact us

Sometimes writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you understand them better. It could also simply be that you don't feel comfortable talking on the phone.

You can email us at jo@samaritans.org – our volunteers aim to respond within 24 hours.

You can write to us for free at:

Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

Our volunteers aim to respond to letters within 7 days.

I'm feeling suicidal – how can Samaritans help me?

We're not afraid of going into difficult areas with you, and we'll take you seriously whether you're having a few suicidal thoughts or have made clear plans to end your life.

We're experienced in listening to people with suicidal thoughts, feelings and plans and are here to support you:

- when you're desperate or on edge, we can help you get through that moment
- we'll help you make sense of what you're feeling
- we can identify other forms of help if you think you want it.

Find out more at samaritans.org.

Signposting: Useful contacts and helplines



Below is a list of useful contacts and helplines.

Please note that the listed opening hours are for the helplines. For opening hours for online chat or email, please visit the listed website.

Samaritans

Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year, to listen and offer a safe space to talk whenever things are getting to you.

These numbers are FREE to call and will not show up on your phone bill.

Freephone: 116 123

Our Welsh Language Line is open every day 7pm–11pm on 0808 164 0123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: samaritans.org

Samaritans Self-Help App

We designed this app to provide a type of support that you can use without having to discuss your feelings with someone else. It will help you learn safe, memorable techniques for coping with things that are troubling you, through a range of interactive features. It can also help you make a plan to stay safe in a crisis, and keep track of things you can do away from the app to help yourself feel better.

Try Samaritans Self-Help:
selfhelp.samaritans.org

Addiction

Turning Point

A registered charity that can provide a range of support services, from detox and residential rehab to supported living and aftercare.

Website: turning-point.co.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous

AA is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help.

Freephone: 0800 9177 650

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Email: help@aamail.org

Website: alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Talk to Frank

A helpline and website that provides information and answers questions for young people, parents and carers who are concerned about drugs.

Helpline: 0300 123 6600

Opening hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Text: 82111

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

Website: talktofrank.co.uk

Benefits and rights

Citizens Advice – Adviceline

Impartial advice on rights and responsibilities across the UK.

Telephone: 0344 477 2020

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: citizensadvice.org.uk

Bereavement

Child Bereavement UK

Child Bereavement UK supports families when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.

Freephone: 0800 028 8840

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Email: support@childbereavementuk.org

Website: childbereavementuk.org

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people. They offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies and work to enhance society's care of bereaved people.

Freephone: 0808 808 1677

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: cruse.org.uk

Bullying

The National Bullying Helpline

The National Bullying Helpline is the UK's only charitable organisation addressing Adult Bullying and Child Bullying.

Helpline: 0845 225 5787

Opening hours: 9am–5pm
Monday to Friday

Website: nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk

Carers

Carers UK

Carers UK is a national charity for carers that offers support to those who need help with looking after a friend or family member.

Freephone: 0808 808 7777

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: carersuk.org/help-and-advice

Child abuse

NSPCC

The NSPCC is the UK's leading children's charity, preventing abuse and helping those affected to recover. If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact their professional counsellors for help, advice and support.

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8am–10pm or 9am–6pm at the weekends

Email: 0808 800 5000

Website: nspcc.org.uk

Debt

Step Change

Debt advice for people in the UK.

Freephone: 0800 138 1111

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Online support:
stepchange.org/Debtremedy

Website: stepchange.org

Dementia

Dementia UK

Charity in the UK supporting those living with dementia and their carers.

Helpline: 0800 888 6678

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–9pm or Saturday and Sunday, 9am–5pm

Email: helpline@dementiauk.org

Website: dementiauk.org

Disability

Scope

Scope provide free, independent and impartial information and support on issues that matter to disabled people and their families.

Freephone: 0808 800 3333

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Email: helpline@scope.org.uk

Website: scope.org.uk

Eating disorders

BEAT

Beat is the UK's eating disorder charity and offers support and information relating to all eating disorders.

Helpline (Adult Support)

Freephone: 0808 801 0677

Email: help@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Youthline (Under 18)

Freephone: 0808 801 0711

Email: fyp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Studentline (Available for all students)

Freephone: 0808 801 0811

Email:
studentline@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Family support

Family Lives

Family Lives is a charity with over three decades of experience helping parents to deal with the changes that are a constant part of family life. Family Lives offers a confidential helpline service for families in England and Wales (previously known as Parentline).

Helpline: 0808 800 2222

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–9pm or Saturday and Sunday, 10am–3pm

Email support: askus@familylives.org.uk

Website: familylives.org.uk

Food Banks

The Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust support a nationwide network of food banks and provide emergency food and support to people experiencing poverty.

Find your nearest food bank:

trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank

Gambling

National Gambling Helpline

The National Gambling Helpline provides confidential advice, information and emotional support to anyone experiencing problems with gambling.

Freephone: 0808 802 0133

Live chat: gamcare.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: gamcare.org.uk

Health advice

NHS 111

Telephone: 111 (non-emergency)

Opening hours: Available 24/7

Website: 111.nhs.uk

Housing and homelessness

Shelter

Housing and homelessness charity offering advice and information for those in the UK.

Website: shelter.org.uk

Visit website to find contact details, locations and opening hours for your region.

Centrepoint UK

Charity in the UK supporting young people at risk of homelessness.

Helpline: 0808 800 0661

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm

Website: centrepoint.org.uk

Learning disabilities

Mencap

The Learning Disability Helpline is the free helpline service offering advice and support for people with a learning disability, and their families and carers.

Freephone: 0808 808 1111

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm

Email: helpline@mencap.org.uk

Website: mencap.org.uk

Loneliness and Isolation

British Red Cross Support Line

If you feel lonely, worried or need help with basic needs, such as access to food, British Red Cross can help.

Freephone: 0808 196 3651

Opening hours: Every day, 10am–6pm

Website: redcross.org.uk

Men's Sheds Association

Men's Sheds are community spaces for men to connect. The activities are often similar to those of garden sheds, but for groups of men to enjoy together. They help reduce loneliness and isolation, but most importantly, they're fun.

Find your local shed:

menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed

Meet Up

Meetup is a platform finding and building local communities. You can use Meetup to meet new people, find support and learn new things.

Find a local group: [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

Side by Side

Side by Side is Mind's online community where you can connect with someone else over shared experiences.

Join the community: sidebyside.mind.org.uk

Mental health

SANE

SANE is a UK mental health charity improving quality of life for anyone affected by mental illness. Their SANEline is a national out-of-hours helpline offering specialist emotional support, guidance and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers.

SANEline: 0300 304 7000 (open to those aged 16 and older)

Opening hours: Every day, 4pm–10pm

Email: support@sane.org.uk

Website: [sane.org.uk](https://www.sane.org.uk)

Mind

Mind provides information on a range of topics including types of mental health problems, where to get help, medication and alternative treatments, and advocacy.

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Text: 86463

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Website: [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–6pm (except Bank Holidays)

Childline

Childline is there to help anyone under the age of 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through.

Freephone: 0800 1111

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Online chat: [childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)

Website: [childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)

YoungMinds

Charity in the UK providing mental health support to young people and their parents.

Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9:30am–4pm

Website: [youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

HOPELINE UK

If a child or young person is having thoughts of suicide or you're concerned for a young person who might be you can contact HOPELINEUK for confidential support and practical advice.

Freephone: 0800 068 4141

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Text: 07786 209697

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Website: papyrus-uk.org

Nightline

Nightline is a listening, emotional support, information and supplies service, run by students for students. Nightlines are open at night, run by trained, caring, fellow student volunteers. Nightline can be contacted by phone, face to face, by email or by online chat.

Students can find out whether their university has a Nightline at:
nightline.ac.uk/want-to-talk

Military

Veterans' Gateway

Veterans' Gateway is the first point of contact for veterans/military personnel and families seeking support.

Freephone: 0808 802 1212

Text: 81212

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: veteransgateway.org.uk

Minority ethnic organisations

BAME Mental Health Support (BMHS)

BMHS is a not-for-profit organisation focused on education and advocacy to inspire a mentally healthy BAME community by providing support appropriate to their mental health and wellbeing.

Telephone: 0800 144 8824

Opening hours: Every day, 12pm–11pm

Website: bamementalhealth.org

Older people

Age UK Advice

Age UK is the foremost information and advice service in the UK on matters affecting older people, their families, friends and/or carers.

Telephone: 0800 678 1602

Opening hours: Every day, 8am–7pm

Website: ageuk.org.uk

Visit the website to find contact information for your region.

The Silver Line

The Silver Line is a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people.

Freephone: 0800 470 8090

Opening hours: 24 hours a day, every day of the year

Website: thesilverline.org.uk

Relationships

Relate

Relate provide relationship counselling for individuals and couples, family counselling, mediation, children and young people's counselling and sex therapy. They also provide friendly and informal workshops for people at important stages in their relationships.

Website: relate.org.uk

Visit the website to find contact details for your local Relate services. Please note Relate provide paid-for services.

Self-Harm

Heads Above The Waves

Heads Above The Waves is a not-for-profit organisation that raises awareness of depression and self-harm in young people. They promote positive, creative ways of dealing with the bad days.

For straight-up advice for young people and adults: hatw.co.uk/straight-up-advice

Sexuality and gender

Switchboard

Switchboard provides a one-stop listening service for LGBT+ people on the phone and through instant messaging.

Helpline: 0300 330 0630

Opening hours: Every day, 10am–10pm

Website: switchboard.lgbt

Stonewall Information Service

Stonewall are there to help with any issues affecting LGBTQ+ people or their families. Whatever your situation, you're not on your own. Please be aware that this is an information service, not an advice service. Although they can put you in touch with organisations who provide counselling services and legal advice, they don't offer these services themselves.

Freephone: 0800 050 2020

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9:30am–4:30pm

Website: stonewall.org.uk/help-and-advice

Sexual or domestic abuse

Refuge

Charity in the UK providing support to women and children who are victims of or are at risk from domestic abuse. Refuge have a helpline and also provide support through email, online chat and in BSL.

Helpline: 0808 200 0247

Opening hours: Helpline – 24/7;
online chat – Monday to Friday 3pm–10pm;
BSL – Monday to Friday 10am–6pm

Email: Available via web-form

Website: refuge.org.uk or visit nationaldahelpline.org.uk for chat and email support

Rape Crisis

Rape Crisis is a national organisation offering support and counselling for those affected by rape and sexual abuse.

Helpline: 0808 802 9999

Opening hours: 24 hours a day, every day of the year

Website: rapecrisis.org.uk

Survivors UK (Male Rape and Sexual Abuse Support)

Survivors UK are there to help sexually abused men as well as their friends and family, no matter when the abuse happened, and challenge the silence and attitudes.

Webchat: survivorsuk.org

Opening hours: Monday to Sunday, 12–8pm

Text: 020 3322 1860

Whatsapp: 07491 816064

Website: survivorsuk.org

Sexual health

Terrance Higgins Trust

Terrance Higgins Trust is a British charity that campaigns on and provides services relating to HIV and sexual health.

Helpline: 0808 802 1221

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 10am–8pm

Email: info@tht.org.uk

Website: tht.org.uk

Suicidal thoughts

Staying safe from suicidal thoughts

StayingSafe.net offers compassion, kindness and easy ways to help keep people safer from thoughts of harm and suicide, seek support and discover hope of recovery through powerful videos from people with personal experience.

Website: stayingSAFE.net

Refugees and asylum seekers

Migrant Help UK

Migrant Help UK supports asylum seekers, refugees and victims of human trafficking and modern slavery.

Freephone: 0808 800 0630

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Website: migranthelpuk.org

Victims of crime

Victim Support

Victim support offers help for victims of crime, witnesses and their families and friends.

Freephone: 0808 168 9111

Opening hours: 24/7

Website: victimsupport.org.uk

SAMARITANS

Web

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

 **[facebook.com/samaritanscharity](https://www.facebook.com/samaritanscharity)**

 **twitter.com/samaritans**

A company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372) and a charity registered in England & Wales (219432), in Scotland (SC040604) and in Ireland (CHY11880).