



Lived Experience Network: Signposting to support

This document has been created to support you as a member of the Include to Improve Lived Experience Network (LEN). Taking part in discussions and sharing information about your personal experiences can be physically and emotionally demanding. There is lots of help and support available if you feel you need it, which you can find out how to access in this document.

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Peer and community support

Connecting with others who have shared lived experiences can be incredibly beneficial. Peer support involves both giving and receiving help, which can include sharing knowledge, providing emotional support, social interaction, or practical advice. Everyone's experiences are treated as equally important, and no one is considered "more of an expert" than anyone else. How much support you give or receive depends on what feels right for you at the time.

Benefits of peer support:

- Improved wellbeing and confidence.
- Stronger social networks and sense of belonging.
- Reduced isolation and emotional strain.
- Increased resilience and ability to cope with challenges.

Where to find peer support

NHS services

Some NHS services run peer support groups. Ask your GP or other healthcare professional about this.

Mental health groups

[Mind local peer support groups](#) - You can find what is available in your area.

[Rethink](#) has peer support groups run by volunteers who often have lived experience of mental illness. Some meet for mutual support, while others offer activities such as art or sport.

[Together UK](#) runs peer support groups. Contact your local one to find out if you need a referral or can self-refer.

You can also check your local library or community centre message board, as local groups may put flyers up there.

Peer support for specific groups of people

Some peer support services are aimed at people with certain mental health conditions or who are part of communities.

[Bipolar UK](#) has support groups hosted by staff or volunteers who are affected by the condition.

Carers UK has a directory of local support groups. You can talk honestly to other carers and get tips on supporting someone and looking after yourself.

Peer Talk has a network of peer support groups for people who experience depression.

Hearing Voices Network has groups for people who hear voices, see visions or have other unusual sensory experiences.

Befriending Networks lists peer support groups for specific groups of people, including people from BAME communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, older people, disabled people, single parents and more.

Online communities

Side By Side is an online community hosted by Mind, where you can talk about your mental health and connect to others who understand what you're going through.

Togetherall is an online community for people with anxiety, depression and other mental health problems. You may need an access code to register, or your local council or healthcare provider may have already signed up.

Beat's message boards for people with an eating disorder and those who support them.

Bipolar UK's eCommunity is a forum that's open 24/7 and a space for individual support groups to share updates with members.

All these forums are moderated, meaning a team will check all posts to keep the community safe and stop harmful messages from being shared.

Talking therapies

Talking therapy involves speaking with a trained professional about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. It can help you notice patterns, understand the source of negative feelings, and develop strategies to manage them. This can support peer advocates in processing the emotional impact of their work and improving confidence and wellbeing.

Who can benefit from talking therapy?

Talking therapy can help with:

- Difficult life events such as bereavement or redundancy.
- Relationship problems.
- Events from your past that still cause you distress – consciously or unconsciously.
- Mental health challenges.
- Some long-term physical health conditions.
- Strong emotions (anger, shame, low self-esteem).

You don't need to wait for a crisis, it's okay to seek support proactively in a safe, non-judgemental space.

Where to find talking therapy

Online directories

- The [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#).
- The [Counselling Directory](#).
- The [Online CBT Register](#) for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) practitioners.
- [Pink Therapy](#) for therapists with LGBTQIA+ experience.
- The [Black, African and Asian Therapy Network \(BAATN\)](#) for therapists of Black, African, Asian and Caribbean heritage.

Through your place of work or education

- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) may provide free sessions.
- Many colleges and universities offer free therapy services.

Other organisations offering support

- Your local [Mind](#) or [Rethink](#) may offer talking therapy.
- [Anxiety UK](#) offers reduced rate therapy.
- The [British Psychotherapy Association](#) offers low-cost intensive therapy.
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) offers bereavement counselling.
- [Sign Health](#) offers therapy for deaf people (sign language/lip reading).

Online information and support

Information

You can access reliable, evidence-based mental health information through trusted websites. For example:

- The Mental Health Foundation: [A-Z pages](#) and [Getting help with your mental health](#).
- [Every Mind Matters](#) NHS website.

Podcasts and videos

Podcasts and videos can also be helpful. For example, the NHS provides [mental wellbeing audio guides](#), and Mind has an informative [YouTube channel](#).

Online chat services

If talking face-to-face or on the phone is difficult, real-time online chat can be a supportive alternative. Some options include:

- If you're a young person, you can contact [The Mix](#) (for people under 25).
- If you're LGBTQIA+, contact [Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline](#) to talk to an LGBTQIA+ volunteer.
- If you're experiencing domestic abuse, you can use [Galop's webchat service](#).
- You can talk to a [Beat](#) advisor if you're affected by an eating disorder.
- [CALM](#) offers a webchat service for anyone feeling down who needs to talk.

Smartphone Apps

Apps can provide mental health information, tips, exercises, and self-help tools. Download from trusted sources (Apple App Store or Google Play) and check reviews to ensure reliability.

Online self-help programmes

Some NHS and local services offer online courses, often using CBT techniques. Guided programmes may include phone or email support from a therapist and can be convenient, anonymous, and flexible. Speak to your GP to find what is available.

Online therapy

Online therapy (also called e-therapy, internet counselling, or remote counselling) allows you to meet a counsellor via video call. You can access this through:

- Your GP or local NHS psychological therapies service.
- Private therapists registered with accredited professional bodies, such as [BACP](#) or [UK Council for Psychotherapy](#).

Crisis support

Sometimes, despite our best coping strategies, we can reach a point where things feel overwhelming. A mental health crisis can mean different things for different people. You might feel extremely anxious, experience panic attacks, have thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or simply not feel safe.

Whatever your situation, help is available. You are not wasting anyone's time by reaching out.

Crisis care can take many different forms – calling a helpline, going to A&E, or making an emergency doctor's appointment. Different things might work for you at different times.

If you need urgent help

Depending on your situation, you can:

- Call 999 or go to your [nearest A&E](#) if you are in immediate danger or have tried to harm yourself.
- Call 111 (UK) or make an [emergency GP appointment](#) for advice and support.
- Call a [NHS urgent mental health helpline](#) for advice and support (England only).
- If you are supported by a community mental health team, contact your crisis team directly.
- Ask your doctor about short-term crisis support such as a [crisis house](#).
- Tell someone you trust like a partner or friend. If you're not sure what to do or need support to get help

Helplines and immediate emotional support

- Call 116 123 to speak to the [Samaritans](#) confidential 24/7 listening service.
- Contact [Shout](#) by texting "Shout" to 85258 for confidential support by text.

- Call 0300 123 3393 or text 86463 to speak to Mind. They also have practical tools and information to help manage a crisis or if you need [urgent help](#).
- Call 0808 808 8000 to speak to [Lifeline](#) (Northern Ireland).
- Call 0800 58 58 58 to speak to the [CALM](#) helpline (open 5pm to midnight). You can also use their webchat or send a WhatsApp.
- Call 0300 330 0630 to speak to the [LGBT+ Helpline](#) (open 10am–10pm daily) or use their webchat.

Useful contacts and resources

For further practical guidance, staff can access resources such as Mind's Wellbeing at Work Guide, which offers tips and tools for supporting [mental health in the workplace](#).

Rethink Mental Illness have a useful [factsheet](#) about working or volunteering with a mental illness.

For tailored support with work, volunteering, or self-employment, you can also contact the [Shaw Trust](#), which provides employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities or health conditions.

You can also find advice and peer connection through specialist organisations such as the [Association of Disabled Professionals \(ADP\)](#), which supports disabled people in employment, self-employment, and further education.

The [ACAS website](#) provides practical advice for employees and managers about managing mental health in the workplace, including tips on having supportive conversations and resolving issues early.

[Access to Work](#) can help you get or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability. The support you get will depend on your needs.

If you are a union member, your union representative can also advise you and help advocate for reasonable adjustments or flexible working.

If you've been off sick, talk to your GP about a fit note, which can recommend adjustments to help you return to work gradually. The [NHS 'Returning to work after mental health issues' guide](#) explains how to plan a phased return and what support might help.

Get in touch



Send an email to includetoimprove@activityalliance.org.uk.



Call 0808 175 6991 and select Option 3.



Write to Activity Alliance – Include to Improve, Trafford House,
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