

Mental health services



Accessing mental health services is important — whether your concern is for your own wellbeing or the wellbeing of another person. Here are some tips to help you talk to healthcare providers about mental health issues.

Talk to a GP first

Your GP is a good first point of contact if you are concerned about your mental health. They will be able to talk to you about your symptoms and may be able to provide a diagnosis and treatment options for some of the more common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

If they're unable to help, they will be able to refer you to other NHS mental health services.

Mental health charity SANE has the following tips to help you get the most out of your appointment if you're uncertain about how your doctor might respond¹:

- Ask to see a doctor who has a particular interest in mental health
- Book a double appointment if you can to give yourself more time to talk about your concerns
- Before your appointment, write down how you have been feeling. This acts as a reminder but also helps the GP understand your situation
- Take a friend or family member with you if you are comfortable with this. They can ask questions you might not think of and help you remember what was said afterwards

Other useful sources of mental health support

Speaking to your GP can unlock additional NHS mental health services and treatment where needed but there are other services you could contact initially for support and advice.

Many employers offer an employee assistance programme (EAP). These are confidential helplines that provide practical guidance and emotional support 24/7, 365 days a year.

Support is also available through charities including Mind, SANE and the Samaritans.

Treatment and support

Once you have a diagnosis, either from your GP or through a referral to another mental health service, you will be offered some options for treatment and support.

Medication is one option and there is a wide range of different drugs available to treat mental health conditions. It can take time to find the most suitable medication as they affect people differently. It is important to allow any medication that is prescribed time to take effect, and you should speak to your GP and/or pharmacist if you feel your medication is not working or it is causing any unwanted side-effects.

Medication alone will not always help treat your feelings and a referral to a psychological therapy service or specialist mental service is another treatment option. These services will often provide talking treatments, such as counselling or therapy. This may be offered on a one-to-one basis or in a group with other people with similar problems. In some cases, it might also involve your partner or family.

Services can be delivered face-to-face, over the telephone or, following its widespread adoption during the pandemic, virtually.

Talking to a counsellor or therapist can help you understand and manage your mental health. They will allow you to talk about your feelings and emotions in an accepting and non-judgemental environment, providing suggestions to help you cope more positively.

Find a counsellor or a therapist

Your GP can refer you to an NHS mental health service for therapy but as waiting lists are often long, you may want to consider arranging a counsellor or therapist privately.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) have directories of accredited mental health professionals to help you find someone in your area or someone who is able to provide services remotely.

Therapy and counselling are very personal so you might want to consider these questions when finding the right therapist for you.

- Do you feel comfortable with them?
Many therapists offer a short phone consultation for free so you can both assess whether it would be a good fit.
- What training and qualifications do they have?
- Have they worked with people similar to you (including people from your cultural background, if that is important to you)?
For how long?
- How will you work together to establish goals and evaluate your progress?
- How often will you meet? Can you call or email between appointments?
- What kinds of improvement can you expect to see?

It's also sensible to think about the practical aspects of seeing a counsellor or therapist. Think about how far you need to travel and also how much the service will cost. Many will also offer a virtual service, which will be more suitable for some people.



What can you do?

Make a list of the questions or concerns you'd like to discuss with a GP or mental health professional.

Sources:

1. Accessing mental health services - [SANE](#)

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