

Worried about someone's mental health?

This factsheet explains what you can do if you are worried about someone's mental health. It explains how to get them help and support. This information is for people who are worried about the mental health of someone who is over 18 and lives in England. It is also for anyone else interested in this subject.

Key Points.

- Changes in behaviour may mean your relative is developing a mental health problem. These changes might be sudden. Or they may develop over time.
- You can encourage your relative to see their GP or get other help.
- Your relative can get urgent help if they need it.
- They may not want to get help. There are things you can do.
- It is important to look after yourself.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What are the signs that my relative might need help?](#)
2. [What if my relative needs urgent mental health help?](#)
3. [How can I encourage my relative to see their GP?](#)
4. [What other help might be useful for my relative?](#)
5. [My relative will not get help. What can I do?](#)
6. [How can I get help for myself?](#)

Key word

In this factsheet we use the words **your relative** to mean the person that you are worried about. But if the person is not your relative the advice and information still applies to them.

1. What are the signs that my relative might need help?

We all go through stressful events from time to time that can change our behaviour. Short-term changes to behaviour are common. We may feel more stressed, angry or sad. These feelings are not always a sign of a mental health problem.

But changes in behaviour can be a sign that your relative is developing mental health issues. You may notice that they start to behave differently. You may see a change over a short time or over some months.

Below are some common changes to look out for. Your relative may:

- be anxious,
- be irritable,
- try to start arguments,
- have mood swings,
- self-harm,
- sleep too much or too little,
- not want to be around other people,
- be less able to cope with work or studies,
- have concentration problems,
- have memory problems,
- eat more, or less, or
- have suicidal thoughts.

You can find more information about:

- Suicidal thoughts - How to support someone
- Self-harm

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What is psychosis?

Psychosis is a medical term. It means that your relative may hear or see things that are not there.

It can also include unusual beliefs that you and other people do not share.¹

The changes in your relative's behaviour may be easier to spot if your relative develops psychosis.

If your relative has psychosis they might:²

- focus on odd ideas or beliefs,
- believe that friends or family members want to harm them,

- think that the TV or device is talking to them,
- believe they are on a special mission or have special powers,
- not talk to anyone or not want to leave their room for days,
- have problems concentrating or remembering things,
- stop eating, washing, or dressing properly, or
- be suspicious and paranoid. Such as thinking people are talking about them.

You might think that your relative might be experiencing psychosis. If you do, one option is to contact their local NHS early intervention in psychosis team. See [section 5](#) of this factsheet for more information.

You can find more information about '**Psychosis**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

2. What if my relative needs urgent mental health help?

Your relative might need urgent mental health help. You or your relative can call their local **NHS urgent mental health helpline**.

See [section 4](#) of this factsheet under '**What are NHS urgent mental health helplines?**' for more information about them.

To find your relative's local helpline go to: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

These helplines are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Your relative might feel like they are:

- going to take steps to take their own life, or
- going to harm themselves.

You can:

- call 999,
- take them to the local accident and emergency department (A&E) at your local hospital. You can find your nearest A&E here: www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-an-accident-and-emergency-service?q=A%26E+Near+Me

If your relative feels like they are going to harm someone else, call the police immediately on 999.

You can find out more about urgent mental health help on our website at www.rethink.org then '**Get help now.**'

You can find more information about:

- Getting help for someone in a mental health crisis
- Suicidal thoughts - How to support someone
- Self-harm

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

3. How can I encourage my relative to see their GP?

If you have a mental or physical health problem, you will normally see a GP to begin with. So, if your relative is having issues with their mental health, seeing their GP is a good place to start.

It is always best if your relative agrees to get help or treatment for their mental health.

Your relative cannot be forced to have treatment if they do not want it. They can only be forced to have treatment if they are detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

They will only be detained if they are a severe risk to themselves or other people because of their mental health.

How can my relative's GP help them?

Their GP can:

- offer your relative treatment for their mental health,
- refer your relative to specialist NHS mental health services, if appropriate,
- tell your relative how to access NHS talking therapy,
- refer them to a link worker,
- refer them to a drugs and alcohol team, or
- give them advice things like exercise or how to get better sleep.

You can find more information about '**GPs and your mental health**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

How can I encourage my relative to see their GP?

You can encourage your relative to get help from their GP.

Your relative might not want to visit their GP. They may:

- not think they are unwell,
- not realise a GP can help with mental health issues,
- understand they need help but feel too embarrassed or frightened to talk to a doctor.

Your relative is more likely to speak to their GP if it is about something that worries them. Rather than something that worries you.

Say, your relative is not sleeping well. You could encourage them to speak to the GP about this. This may help the GP ask more questions about your relative's mental health.

How can I start to talk to my relative?

Below you can read some examples of how you can start a supportive conversation about getting help for your relative.³

Problem	Bad Example	Alternative
Telling your relative they should do something	"You should go to see the doctor."	"I am worried about your mental health. Have you thought about talking to your GP about it?"
Speaking for others	"We are worried that you have seemed down recently."	"I am worried that you have seemed down recently."
Mind reading	"You have been very angry recently."	"It has seemed as though you have been angry recently. Is that the case?"
Judging	"You never do what I ask you to."	"Why do you not want to see the doctor?"
Dwelling on the past	"You're not helping at all, just like 2 weeks ago."	"I am disappointed that you have decided not to speak to the GP again. Will you reconsider?"
Assuming things	"You never think about how I'm feeling."	"I feel as though you are not seeing my point of view."
Arguing about delusions	"There is no reason to be worried about the GP trying to harm you."	"Why do you think the GP would want to hurt you? What makes you think that?"
Bringing up many different problems	"You stay in bed all day, don't do anything around the house and you lash out when I try to talk to you."	"I am concerned that you stay in bed all day. Do you feel tired? Has something been worrying you recently?"
Not saying what you think	"It's okay with me if you don't want to talk to your GP." You say this while sighing and rolling your eyes.	"I think it would be a good idea to speak to your GP about how you are feeling."

Think about the words you will use when you talk to your relative. And how they might react to them.

- Are there any subjects that have caused arguments in the past?
- Are there any words that seem to get the person angry or upset?
- When is the best time to bring this up?
- If you are unsuccessful the first time, you can try to be persistent.
- People change their minds, and moods, over time.

What can I say to my relative to encourage them to see their GP?

There are some things you could tell your relative.

- “Stress, anxiety, or other symptoms seem to be making it hard for you to cope as well as usual. Your GP could help.”
- “I can go with you to GP’s appointment for support. Would you like that?”
- “GPs are used to dealing with patients who want to talk about their mental health. 4 out of 10 GP appointments involve mental health.⁴”
- Your relative might be worried they might be detained in hospital for their mental health. This is unlikely if they ask for help and treatment. Most mental health problems can be treated in the community.
- GP records are confidential. This means the GP cannot usually share information with anyone else unless you agree to it.

You can find more information about:

- Confidentiality
- Responding to unusual behaviour linked to mental illness
- Supporting someone with a mental illness
- Mental Health Act

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

4. What other help might be useful for my relative?

Rather than seeing their GP, your relative might want to try other help. Other they might want to try other help as well as seeing their GP.

They can try:

- Contracting emotional support lines
- Private or NHS talking therapy
- Complementary and alternative treatments
- Self-help, like mindfulness or breathing exercises
- Self-help online
- Peer support groups

You can find out more about:

- Worried about your mental health - How to get treatment and support. **This has information on self-help.**
- Complementary and alternative treatments
- Talking therapy
- Social inclusion and mental illness - How can I become more connected. **This has information on peer support groups.**

At www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

You can find contact details for emotional support lines in the [Useful contacts](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

Can charities help my relative?

You could try to get your relative help from a local charity. Your relative might find a local charity less clinical than a GP surgery. This may make them feel more comfortable.

Charity support will be different across the country. But often they can help with recovery plans, one-to-one support, and support groups.

Some charities can provide mental health treatments such as talking therapies, but they can't prescribe medications.

You can search for local mental health charities online and on the websites below at

- **Rethink Mental Illness:** www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services and www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups
- **Local Minds:** www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds
- **Hub of Hope:** hubofhope.co.uk

[Top](#)

5. My relative will not get help. What can I do?

Your relative may not want to get help or see their GP. This is this could be for many different reasons. They have the right to choose to not to get help. Even if that seems like a bad decision.

But if you are really worried about your relative's mental health, there are things you can do.

Can I contact my relative's GP?

You can share your concerns with your relative's GP, if you know who they are.

You can do this by phone, face-to-face or in writing by email or letter.

If the GP will not speak to you, you could contact them in writing.
Explain your concerns clearly. Keep to the facts and give examples.

An example is below.

- My wife has started self-harming and takes a lot of time off work. She has started buying many packets of tablets and storing them. I found them and she got angry with me for throwing them away. She gets so angry and starts smashing up the house. Every time I leave the house to go to work, she starts crying and does not want me to go.

It might help to give evidence of changes in your relative's behaviour. So, your relative may have sent you an email, letter or text that seems odd or distressing. Keeping a diary of behaviour might help.

You should tell the GP if there is a history of mental illness in the family.

The GP might invite you to make an appointment to discuss things. Or you could try to make an appointment yourself.

A GP may contact your relative to invite them for a checkup or they may agree to visit your relative at home. Although this is unlikely to happen without your relative's consent.

Your relative's GP might say listening to your concerns breaches their duty of confidentiality. This is not true. Confidentiality rules do not stop a doctor listening to your concerns.⁵ This is because the GP is not giving information to you.

Will the GP share information I give them with my relative?

The GP might need to share the information you give them with your relative.

You might worry that this will affect your relationship or trust with your relative.

You could ask that any information you share is used as sensitively as possible. You could explain that this is needed to protect your relationship.⁶

Can my relative's GP give me information about them?

A GP or mental health team will need agreement from your relative to share their information with you.

You may not know which GP surgery your relative is registered with. If you ask a surgery if your relative is a patient there the surgery will not usually be able to tell you this.

You can find more information about:

- GPs and your mental health
- Confidentiality, information and your loved one

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What if my relative is already with an NHS mental health team?

Your relative might already be with an NHS mental health team. If you are worried about your relative's mental health, you can contact their NHS mental health team.

A lot of the same advice applies that we have given above under '**Can I contact my relative's GP?**'

What are NHS urgent mental health helplines?

NHS urgent mental health helplines provide 24-hour advice and support for:⁷

- people who need urgent mental health help, and
- their relatives and loved ones.

They can:⁸

- assessment your relative's care and support needs,
- help you to speak to a mental health professional, and
- advise you on the best thing to do.

You can call your local helpline if:

- I think your relative needs urgent mental health support, but
- they will not agree to get help or treatment.

You can also call them if they do agree to get help or treatment.

These helplines are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

To find your local helpline go to: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

The helpline can:

- make a referral to the appropriate NHS mental health team,
- make a referral to other appropriate local services, and
- signpost you to other appropriate local services.

This might include help from:

- NHS community mental health team (CMHT)
- NHS crisis team

- NHS early intervention in psychosis teams (EIT)
- Local charities or mental health services

You can find more information about:

- NHS mental health teams
- Getting help for someone in a mental health crisis

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What are NHS early intervention in psychosis teams?

Early intervention in psychosis teams (EIT) can support your relative if they experience psychosis for the first time.⁹

Psychosis is a term used to describe when people lose some contact with reality. Common symptoms are hearing voices or having strong beliefs that are not shared by most people.

You can find more information about '**Psychosis**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy.

You might be worried that your relative is experiencing symptoms of psychosis. If you are you can contact their local EIT.

EIT teams usually accept referrals from friends or relatives, as well the person experiencing symptoms of psychosis.

You can find details of your loved one's local team by:

- searching online, 'NHS early intervention in psychosis team X', where X is your loved one's local area.
- calling NHS 111, or
- calling the local NHS urgent mental health helpline:
www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

EIT teams aim to see patients within 2 weeks of the referral.¹⁰

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that EIT teams should be open to people of all ages.¹¹

[Top](#)

6. How can I get help for myself?

It is important to look after yourself. Trying to get help for your relative might be stressful.

You can find more information about:

- Stress – How to cope
- GPs and your mental health
- Supporting someone with a mental illness

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)



Useful Contacts

Carers UK

They have an advice line, online support and carers groups throughout the UK.

Phone: 0808 808 7777

Address: 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

Email: advice@carersuk.org

Website: www.carersuk.org

Carers Trust

They give practical advice about caring for someone, they can give information about local support if you call them.

Phone: 0300 772 9600

Address: 2-6 Boundary Row, London SE1 8HP

Email: info@carers.org

Website: www.carers.org

Hub of Hope

A national mental health database which contains information on local support groups and mental health services.

Website: hubofhope.co.uk

Samaritans

Can be contacted by telephone, letter, e-mail and mini-com. There's also a face-to-face service, available at their local branches. They are open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Phone: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Sane

Work with anyone affected by mental illness, including families, friends and carers. They also provide a free text-based support service called Textcare and an online supportive forum community where anyone can share their experiences of mental health.

Phone: 0300 304 7000

Email: support@sane.org.uk

Textcare: www.sane.org.uk/how-we-help/emotional-support/textcare

Website: www.sane.org.uk

PAPYRUS

Charity that offers emotional support to people under 35 who are suicidal. They can also support people who are concerned about someone under 35 who might be suicidal.

Phone: 0800 068 41 41

Text: 07860 039 967

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

Support Line

They offer confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults by telephone, email and post. They work with callers to develop healthy, positive coping strategies, an inner feeling of strength and increased self-esteem to encourage healing, recovery and moving forward with life.

Phone: 01708 765200

E-mail: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Address: PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

The Silver Line

Aimed at people over 55. The Silver Line is a confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK. They also offer telephone friendship where we match volunteers with older people based on their interests, facilitated group calls, and help to connect people with local services in their area.

Phone: 0800 4 70 80 90

Website: www.thesilverline.org.uk

The Mix

If you're under 25 and need help but don't know where to turn, call The Mix for free. They'll explore your situation with you and find organisations that may be able to help you further. You can also webchat to them.

Phone: 0808 808 4994

Website: (email, webchat, crisis messenger and telephone counselling options) www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team

Mood Swings

Aimed at anyone affected by a mood disorder, including friends, families and carers.

Phone: 0161 832 37 36

E-mail: info@moodswings.org.uk

Website: www.moodswings.org.uk

Shout

If you're experiencing a personal crisis, are unable to cope and need support, text Shout to 85258. Shout can help with urgent issues such as suicidal thoughts, abuse or assault, self-harm, bullying and relationship challenges.

Text: Text Shout to 85258

Website: giveusashout.org

Broken links?

All links to other pages on our website, and other websites, worked when we last reviewed this page. If you notice that any links no longer work, you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org and we will fix them. Many thanks.

Incorrect information?

All the information in this factsheet was correct, to the best of our knowledge, when we published it. If you think any information is incorrect you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org. Many thanks.

References

¹ NHS Choices. *Psychosis*.

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Psychosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx (accessed 19 January 2024).

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© Rethink Mental Illness 2024
Last updated: November 2023
Next update November 2026
Version: 5

This factsheet is available
in large print.

Phone 0808 801 0525
Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



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affected by severe mental illness.**

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on Rethink Mental Illness
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Email info@rethink.org



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Need more help?

Go to **www.rethink.org** for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?

We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to **www.rethink.org/donate** or call 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.



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