Social inclusion and mental illness

How can I become more connected?

Social inclusion is important for good mental health. This factsheet explains what you can do to be more socially included and who can help you. This information is for adults affected by mental illness in England. It's also for their carers, friends and relatives and anyone interested in this subject.

Key Points.

- Social inclusion means that you have the best chance to enjoy life and take part in society.

- If you live with mental illness it can make it more difficult to be socially included.

- Social exclusion means having limited involvement in society and the community where you live.

- Many things can cause or add to social exclusion, such as mental health issues and low income. Often social exclusion is connected with your community's social or ecomonic circumstances.

- But there are options for things you can do yourself to become more socially included. We provide advice and information on these things in this factsheet.

This factsheet covers:

1. What is social inclusion?

Social inclusion means that you have the best chance to enjoy life and take party in society. It means you have the opportunity to do things like:[1]

- Connect with loved ones and the local community
- Work or volunteer
- Have an affordable home that's secure and safe
- Take part in leisure activities
- Have good internet connectivity and communication tools
- Have a say in decisions that affect you
- Take part in education or training
- Use services such as the NHS, social care, and public transport.

You should have a valuable and meaningful place in society, regardless of things like:[2]

- Your age
- Your cultural background and ethnicity
- Your sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Any differing abilities
- Your mental and physical health
- Any religious or other beliefs you have
- Economic or other status
- Education
- Life experiences.

It is your right not to be discriminated against. These rights are protected by laws such as Human Rights Act and Equality Act 2010.[3,4]

2. Why is social inclusion important?

Strong social networks are important to a good quality of life for many people severely affected by mental illness.[5]

Social inlcusion can help improve mental health symptoms.[6] And positive support from family and friends can be essential to mental health recovery.[7]

Services linked to education, leisure, and employment can help promote mental health recovery. This can include your local NHS metal health team. These services can be the basis of social inclusion.[8]

Most people who use mental health services want them to be socially inclusive. They want services to help them with opportunities to be included in things like employment and personal and social relationships.[9]

In a study in 2017 and 2018 nearly 50% of adult social care users said they didn't have enough social contact.[10,11]

Social isolation and loneliness increase the risk of suicide.[12,13]

You can find out more about '**Recovery and mental illness'** at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

3. What is social exclusion?

What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion is the opposite of social inclusion.

Social exclusion means you feel like you have a limited involvement in the community where you live and society.[14]

What can cause social exclusion?

Many things can cause social exclusion. They are often connected with your community's social, cultural or ecominic circumstances. They can include: [15]

- stigma and discrimination,
- poor housing,
- unemployment,
- rates and effect of crime,
- heavy use of alcohol or illegal drugs,
- physical or mental illness,
- relationship or family issues,
- financial issues,
- poor education or work skills, and
- being young or old.

Can some people face additional barriers?

Some people who live with mental illness might face additional barriers to social inclusion.

Some examples are people from LGBT+ and BAME communities, older and younger people, people who live with physical disabilities, homeless people and people who have low incomes.

You can find out more about:

- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) mental health
- LGBT+ and mental health
- Discrimination and mental health - The Equality Act 2010
- Housing options for adults who live with mental illness

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- Work and mental illness - Getting a job
- Criminal courts and mental health
- Drugs alcohol and mental health
- Studying and mental illness
- Worried about your mental health - How to get treatment and support

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

You can find more information about '**What are my options for dealing with debt'** at: www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en

4. Is being lonely the same as being socially excluded?

Loneliness and social exclusion are not exactly the same thing but they can be linked.   If you are social excluded it could increase your chances of being lonely.

You can read more about loneliness and how to deal with it at the links below:

- **Mind:** www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/about-loneliness
- **NHS:** www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/feeling-lonely
- **Rethink Mental Illness:** Loneliness, isolation, and mental health: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/loneliness-isolation-and-mental-health

5. How is mental illness linked to social exclusion?

Social exclusion and mental health can be linked. This means:

- being socially excluded can make symptoms of mental illness more likely, and
- having symptoms of mental illness can make social exclusion more likely.

If you live with a mental illness you could lose contact with family, friends and community support networks.[16] Or find it difficult to become socially included for different reasons.

Below are some examples of how mental illness can be linked to social exclusion.

- You lose contact with friends and family after a mental health crisis or long spell of mental ill-health.[17]

- After discharge from long term mental health care in hospital, you move to a new area, away from your support network.
- Living in a new area, you feel isolated not knowing where things like the local GP surgery or supermarket is.[18]
- Information is not easily provided to you on what community wellbeing projects are in your area.[19] These projects involve things like gardening, arts and crafts or social clubs.
- You find it difficult to work.
- Your employer does not understand how to support your mental health.
- It's challenging for you to leave your home.
- Travel is difficult for you.
- You feel overwhelmed in busy or noisy places.
- You find it difficult to speak to people you do not know.
- Your self-confidence holds you back.
- It's hard for you to go to unfamiliar places.
- You find it hard to have the motivation to do things you would like to do.
- You do not have enough money to do things you would like to do.
- You can only go to places if you are supported by another.
- You feel embarrassed claiming benefits and withdraw from people you know.
- You experience discrimination or negativity from a support service and no longer want to engage with them.
- You use unhelpful coping techniques such as excessive alcohol to manage emotional pain.
- You do not have the skills or confidence to use the internet. You find it hard to locate contact numbers for support services, or connect with people online.

You can find out more about '**Worried about your mental health - How to get treatment and support'** at www.rethink.org. Or you can call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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6. What is Rethink Mental Illness' Communities that care model?

We think people who are affected by mental illness should be able to get high quality treatment without waiting too long.

But there are other important things too that can affect your mental health, such as:[20]

- social connectedness,
- physical health,
- housing,
- finances, and
- employment and volunteering.

We understand that a lack of support can make mental health problems worse. This can leave people not knowing where to turn.

We think it's time that organisations and communities come together. This is to play their part in helping people who live with mental illness.

You can find our more about this in our '**Building communities that care'** report and video by clicking the following link: www.rethink.org/campaigns-and-policy/campaign-with-us/resources-and-reports/communities-that-care

7. What can I do to become more socially included?

You'll see from section 3 that we think that organisations and communities and should come together to help people who live with mental illness. This includes helping people become more socially included.

But there are things you can do yourself to become more socially included.

We have provided you with advice and information below on the following things:

- What are peer support groups?
- What are Rethink Mental Illness community support services?
- How can I become a member of Rethink Mental Illness?
- What is a link worker?
- What are NHS recovery colleges?
- What is social care support?
- How can I stay in contact with people?
- How can make more contact with people?
- How can I get into work, volunteering, or study?
- How can I exercise with others or join conservation volunteer schemes?
- How can I think about how relationships affect me?
- What advice can I get about money and housing issues?
- What are social broadband and phone tariffs for people on certain welfare benefits?
- What are emotional support lines?

What are peer support groups?

In peer support groups people who have similar experiences get together to help each other.

Getting peer support can:

- help your confidence,
- make you feel understood,
- give you a chance to share your experiences,
- give you hope for the future,
- be a good way to help yourself,

- lead to you becoming more in control of your life,
- open up opportunities for you, and
- help you develop according to your needs.

We have over 140 peer support groups across England. You can search for them here: www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups

You can also search for local peer support groups below:

- **Local Minds:** www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds
- **Hub of Hope:** https://hubofhope.co.uk
- **Bipolar UK** – for people who live with bipolar disorder**:** www.bipolaruk.org/find-a-support-group
- **Andy's Man Club** - for men**:** https://andysmanclub.co.uk
- **Men's Sheds Association** - for men: https://menssheds.org.uk

Some NHS services also run peer support groups. To find out if the NHS run any peer support groups in your area you can:

- search on the internet using a search term like 'NHS [the area where you live] mental health peer support group'
- call NHS 111 and ask
- ask staff at your GP practice
- ask staff at your NHS mental health team, if you are with one
- ask your local NHS Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) service: www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363.

There are also online peer support services:

- **Side by Side:** https://sidebyside.mind.org.uk
- **Clic**: https://clic-uk.org
- **7 Cups**: www.7cups.com
- **Mentell -** for adult men: www.mentell.org.uk
- **Together All:** https://togetherall.com/en-gb
- **Sane**: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum

What are Rethink Mental Illness' community support services?

Community support services give people affected by mental illness help to:

- build their confidence,
- stay in or return to work, and
- take part in social activities they enjoy.

You can search for them here: www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services

Other charities may run community support services within your area.

How can I become a member of Rethink Mental Illness?

You could become a member of Rethink Mental Ilness.

Membership offers a mixture of benefits, like:

- invitations to webinars and events,
- receiving our member magazine,
- becoming part of a community of like minded people with similar experiences of mental illness,
- be able to support our campaigns to improve national and local mental health services, and
- join a local committee.

You can find out more about becoming a member of Rethink Mental Ilness you can:

- click here: www.rethink.org/get-involved/use-your-experience/membership,
- call us on 0121 522 7016, or
- email us at membership@rethink.org

What is a link worker?

A link worker is also known as a social prescriber. They offer non-medical support to help improve your wellbeing.

A link worker will try to connect you to community-based support. This can include activities and services that meet your practical, social, and emotional needs that affect your health and wellbeing.[21] They will work with you to find out what is important to you.[22]

They can connect you with local support such as: [23]

- activity groups,
- support groups,
- services, such as charities, and
- social services.

You can talk to your GP about seeing a link worker. The NHS encourage people to self refer to link workers. The following might also be able to refer you to a link worker:[24]

- other staff at your GP practice,
- other NHS services,
- hospital discharge teams,
- the fire service,
- the police,
- job centres,
- social care services,
- housing associations, and
- and voluntary, community, or social enterprise organisations.

Link workers are not yet available in all areas of the country yet. But the NHS is working to expand this service.[25]

What are NHS recovery colleges?

Recovery colleges are part of the NHS. They offer free courses about mental health to help you manage your symptoms. They can help you to take control of your wellbeing and recovery.

The courses are usually short term, and length can vary from a few hours up to 8 weeks.[26]

You can usually self-refer to a recovery college.

Recovery colleges are designed to be person-centred. This means that if you attend a recovery college course you are involved in deciding what you learn.

Recovery colleges often support students to lead their own recovery and are available in most areas. To see if there is a one in your area you can:

- search online at the following link: https://mindrecoverynet.org.uk/search
- search on the internet, or
- call NHS 111.

What is social care support?

You may be entitled to get help from social services. Social care support can include support to help you to do things like:[27]

- Keep in touch with friends and family
- Make new social connections
- Get out of the house
- Get a job or take part in education
- Prepare meals or go shopping
- Manage money

You're entitled to a social care assessment to see:

- if you qualify for social care support, and
- what your needs are.

With more support you may feel more able to take control of your recovery.

If you qualify for social care support, you are entitled to a care plan.[28]

You should be involved in making your care plan, and you should be in control of planning your support.[29]

Being in control of your care planning can help you to reach your recovery goals.

You can find more information about:

- Social care assessment - Under the Care Act 2014
- Social care - Care and support planning under the Care Act 2014

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

How can I stay in contact with people?

It can help your recovery to stay in contact with people who can help you stay well.

You can stay in contact with people the following ways.

- Face-to-face. You could visit a friend or loved one.
- Online. You can use a free online app such as 'Zoom' or 'WhatsApp' to speak to family or friends.
- Phone.
- Text message.
- Email.
- Letter.

You don't have to talk about your mental illness, unless you want to.

How can I make more contact with people?

Below are some things you can do if you want to make more contact with other people.

- **Join social groups**. Such as through the website **Meet up** or other websites. www.meetup.com
- **Volunteer.** You can find more information about volunteering and opportunities on the following websites: www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk, www.ncvo.org.uk and https://doit.life/
- **Look for local classes, clubs or societies that interest you**. You can usually find information on these on the internet, social media, in your local library, and on your local authority's website. www.gov.uk/find-local-council
- **Join a litter picking group.** You can find out more on the **Keep Britain Tidy** website here: www.keepbritaintidy.org/home in the 'get involved' section.
- **Join a dog walking group.** You can search for local groups on the internet and social media and on the following website: **Meet up**: www.meetup.com. You can get information on group dog walking on the **Blue Cross** website: www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/dog/group-walking-with-your-dog

- **Online forums**. This is where people talk about a particular subject. For example, if you're interested in cars you can join a forum where people discuss them.

How can I become a campaigner for Rethink Mental Illness?

You can become a campaigner for us at **Rethink Mental Illness**.

We campaign nationally and locally to improve the quality of life for everyone severely affected by mental illness.

We push mental health up the public agenda and campaign to change government policy.

You can find out more about our current campaigns here: www.rethink.org/campaigns-and-policy/campaign-with-us

You can join us as a campaigner here: www.rethink.org/campaigns-and-policy/campaign-with-us/become-a-campaigner

What are befriending services?

Befriending services usually involve a volunteer visiting you or contacting you by phone. They have a friendly chat with you or might go with you to an activity.

Befriending Networks have a directory of befriending services on their website: www.befriending.co.uk/directory

Age UK provide phone and face-to-face befriending services for older people. You can find out more here: www.ageuk.org.uk/services/befriending-services.

Re-engage run call companion services for older people: www.reengage.org.uk/join-a-group/get-a-call-companion They also run a phone befriending service for LGBT+ people in their 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond. www.reengage.org.uk/latest-news/launch-of-rainbow-call-companions

What is the NHS check in and chat service?

This service provides you with short-term phone support. They do this if you are in need of a friendly phone call and encouragement to improve your mental health and wellbeing.[30]

Ask an NHS link worker or your GP to refer you to the **NHS check in and chat service**.

What are allotments?

An allotment is an area of land that you lease, usually for the use of growing fruit and vegetables.[31]

You can grow fresh food and you can meet others. It can also give you sense of achievement and wellbeing, having contact with nature.[32]

You can search for local allotments here: www.gov.uk/apply-allotment.
You can find out more about them on **The National Allotment Society's** website here: www.nsalg.org.uk

How can I join a musical group or choir?

You can search for local groups on the internet and on the following websites and others:

- **Making Music:** www.makingmusic.org.uk/resources/find-a-group-list
- **National Association of Choirs:** www.nationalassociationofchoirs.org.uk
- **British Association of Barbershop Singers:** www.singbarbershop.com/find-a-chorus-or-quartet-near-you,
- **Natural Voice Network:** www.naturalvoice.net/find-a-choir

What is the Prince's Trust?[33]

If you are 11-30 the Prince's Trust can support you to build confidence, gain essential skills for work or start a business.

You can meet likeminded people, complete courses, take part in enterprise initiatives, mentoring opportunities, and more.

Support is free and offered in-person or online.

Their website is: www.princes-trust.org.uk

How can I get into work, volunteering, or study?

Many people find work, volunteering or study important for social connections and feeling good about themselves.

You could try different opportunities such as, voluntary, apprentiships, part-time or full-time work or study.

Various organisations offer help and support with choosing the right option for you and helping you to find work.

You might be getting support from an NHS mental health team. An individual placement support service at the team may be able to help you find employment.

You can find more information about volunteering and opportunities on the following websites: www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk, www.ncvo.org.uk and https://doit.life/

You can find more information about:

- Work and mental illness – Getting a job, and
- Studying and 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 factsheets.

How can I exercise with others or join conservation volunteer schemes?

You can:

- ask a friend or relative if they want to exercise with you,
- talk to your GP, or care coordinator about accessing a link worker
- search on the internet, or use the **Hub of Hope** to find local support services. https://hubofhope.co.uk
- look on your local council's website. www.gov.uk/find-local-council

You might have local organisations that organise physical activities. You can:

- see if there are any local **Rethink Mental Illness community services** or groups at www.rethink.org, or
- check other organisations such as **Mind** at www.mind.org.uk.

You can find out more about '**Physical activity and mental health'** at www.rethink.org.

How can I find local walking groups?

You can find local walking groups on the **Ramblers Association** website here:
www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/ramblers-groups.

You can also usually find details of local walking groups at your local library.

Walking groups are available in many local areas. They can be a way to get active and to meet with others and explore new places.

How can I find local sports clubs?

You can think about joining a sports club to meet and play sport with other people. You can get information on how to find local sports clubs here:
www.bbc.co.uk/sport/get-inspired/45353880

How can I find local conservation volunteer schemes?

These schemes run environmental projects and community groups where people can volunteer to help keep and maintain local green spaces. They provide a chance to help your local area, be outdoors and get physically active.

You can find volunteering opportunities near you on the **Wildlife Trust's** website here: www.wildlifetrusts.org/closer-to-nature/volunteer

The **Canal and River Trust** also offer volunteering opportunities to help maintain the canal network. For more information see here: https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer

You can find conservation volunteer groups on **The Conservation Volunteers** website here: https://www.tcv.org.uk

How can I think about how relationships affect me?[34]

Relationships are important to all of us. They can affect our physical and mental wellbeing.

If you're connected to your loved ones and community, you're more likely to be happier and physically and mentally healthier.

The quality of your close relationships is important, rather than the amount of friends you have.

The following links contain some helpful advice about relationships:

Guide to investing in relationships: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Relationships-21st-Century-Summary-Report.pdf

Tips for building a healthy romantic relationship: https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/relationship-help.htm

What advice can I get about money and housing issues?

Money and housing worries can cause a lot of stress for anyone. If you are living with a mental illness they can make your condition worse.

Secure finances and a suitable place to live are an important part of recovery and social inclusion.

It's important to get help early if you start to have money or housing problems. If you ignore issues, they are unlikely to go away and may get worse.

If you find it difficult to manage your money due to your mental health you can take a look at the following website: www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/managing-money/how-do-i-manage-my-money-if-i-have-mental-health-problems

You can find more information about:

- Managing money with a mental health condition, and
- Options for dealing with debt

at: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/money-benefits-and-mental-health

You can find more information about '**Housing options - For adults who live with 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.

These guides include organisations you can contact for free housing and money advice.

What are social broadband and phone tariffs for people on certain welfare benefits?

Social tariffs are cheaper broadband and phone packages. They are for people claiming universal credit, pension credit and some other benefits. Some providers call them 'essential' or 'basic' broadband.

They're delivered in the same way as normal packages, just at a lower price.

Ofcom encourages companies to offer social tariffs to help customers on low incomes. Ofcom is the communications regulator in the UK.

You can get more information on Ofcom's website, including how to apply for a social tariff: www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/costs-and-billing/social-tariffs?mc_cid=83327cd65a&mc_eid=81f13abcf7

You can also use Fasterbroadband's website to compare and apply for broadband social tariff deals: www.fasterbroadband.co.uk/social-broadband-tariffs

What are emotional support lines?

You can contact emotional support lines, that are also known as listening services. They are a place that you can say how you are feeling to someone who is trained to listen.

Emotional support lines aren't the same as counselling. Counselling is a type of talking treatment.

Useful Contacts

Emotional support lines

Samaritans
Can be contacted by telephone, letter, email and online chat. 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

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

Phone: 0161 832 37 36
Email: info@moodswings.org.uk
Website: www.moodswings.org.uk

Sane Line
Work with anyone affected by mental illness, including families, friends and carers. They 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
Textcare: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare
Support Forum: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum
Website: www.sane.org.uk

Support Line
They offer confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults by phone, 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
Email: info@supportline.org.uk
Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Papyrus UK
A UK charity dedicated to the prevention and the promotion of the positive mental health in young people.

Phone: 0800 068 41 41
Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org
Text: 07860 039967
Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

C.A.L.M. (Campaign Against Living Miserably)
CALM is leading a movement against suicide. They offer accredited confidential, anonymous and free support, information and signposting. The provide this to people anywhere in the UK through their helpline and webchat service.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58
Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat
Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Silverline

Aimed at people over 55. The Silver Line operates the only confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK. They also offer phone 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.

Phone: **0808 808 4994**
Crisis support: text **THEMIX** to 85258 for crisis support - www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/crisis-messenger
E-mail: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us
Telephone Counselling: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service
Webchat: 1 to 1 chat service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team
Website: www.themix.org.uk

If you are in crisis, you can contact the following text support service for help and support:

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: https://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

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