We hope you have found this information helpful!

Created by the Talking Therapies Involvement Group in association with Plymouth University Peninsula School of Medicine and Dentistry.

For copies of the booklet:
'A guide to talking therapy treatments and ideas to help yourself',
Email: margaret.hart@plymouth.ac.uk or
Call Margaret Hart on 01752 764260.

PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY PENINSULA
SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY

Are You Feeling Low or Stressed?

A guide to talking therapy treatments and ideas to help yourself

Foreword

You've been given this booklet because you've asked for help with the way you are feeling. You may have been feeling low, or anxious, or experiencing stress.

This booklet has been put together by people who have felt like you have, and have shared their experiences.

This booklet aims to provide information so that you will be able to make decisions about what is best for you. This information may help when talking about treatment choices to your GP, therapist or with whoever gave you this booklet or indeed with friends or family.

Section 1. Discusses the experiences that others have had with low mood, stress or anxiety and with waiting for treatment.

Section 2. Discusses how services may be able to help you and what treatment is on offer.

Section 3. Discusses what others have done to help themselves and what you can do to help yourself.

Throughout the booklet you will come across the following speech bubble:

"This speech bubble indicates direct quotes or a specific tip from patient focus groups."

Glossary

CBT Stands for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. This is a type of psychological talking therapy that focuses on thoughts and behaviour

Cognitive Means thinking or thought processes.

Counsellor Is a term for a practitioner who has received nationally recognised training in counselling.

High Intensity (HI) Worker This is a term used to describe IAPT practitioners who usually have a recognised qualification and also training in CBT.

IAPT Stands for Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies. This is a national programme which aims to provide evidence based talking treatments for people with anxiety or depression.

Low Intensity (LI) Worker This is a term often used to describe an IAPT practitioner who provides short-term CBT support (see also PWP).

PWP Stands for Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner. This is another term used for Low Intensity Worker and performs the same role.

Moving Forward

Don't be too hard on yourself. It can be very difficult finding the energy and motivation to actively try and help yourself. But, if you are able to take an active part in your own treatment, it should help your situation improve. So keep doing!

"I go to this course, see what it's like and sometimes I get a bit jittery, I don't know if I should be in the same room as other people who I don't know, strangers and all that. To me my confidence is getting better now"

"All these courses I've been on have been improving my people skills and my group skills... I've got a writing blog and it's very good therapy for me..."

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Section One: Introduction

While I'm waiting–can I take charge?

Sometimes there is a gap between asking for help and actually getting to see someone who can help.

"I was referred to the psychology service and it was about a 3 week wait"

We wanted people to have information that could help them straightaway, so we put this booklet together. We also think letting people know how they can help themselves is really important. The good news is that some people found that just deciding to ask for help was an important step in starting to feel better.

"For me the big thing was taking charge… And I think that was the start of recovery…just to take control"

Volunteering

Volunteering can introduce you to new people, help you to re-discover old skills or learn new ones, and it can help prepare you to return to paid employment.

"I spend most of my time helping people with mental health so it gives me a focus in life."

Websites for volunteering:

- Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk
- DO-it www.do-it.org.uk
- CSV www.csv.org.uk
- Reach www.reachskills.org.uk

"I've become a health buddy… to help other people with mental illnesses… I love helping other people."

Mindfulness and guided relaxation

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention in a particular purposeful way to the present moment without judgement. It is a way of being that suspends thoughts about the future, the past, worries or concerns. It is a good way to increase awareness of yourself, develop a clarity of mind and acceptance of the present reality. It can also be a good way to break automatic thinking habits that may be unhelpful.

Mindfulness quite often involves practical exercises that focus your attention on observing non-judgementally rather than thinking and being critical. These may include breathing and meditation type exercises. It is a skill like any other that can take time and patience to develop. For more information and links to courses and exercises:

Websites:

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/
www.freemindfulness.org

What is it that I'm feeling?

Too much stress is very common. People often use phrases like *"I'm stressed. I'm feeling down"* to describe a temporary low mood or how they're feeling about a particular situation in their life. Often these stressed or low periods are short-lived. Most people have their own ways of dealing with stress.

Other people have felt like you do. Approximately 1 in 5 people in the UK have a common mental health problem like anxiety or depression or a mixture of both. It's just an illness like arthritis or diabetes but it can sometimes be difficult when other people cannot see that you are ill.

"Before I got it I didn't believe in depression…it's not until you actually have it that you realise what a horrible illness it is, it's a proper illness"

It can also be difficult for some people to realise when their own mood gradually changes over time. Other people around you may notice that you are not yourself before you do.

"…I think things had been getting slowly worse for a long time really and people at work had said…'you lost your spark"

What is it that I'm feeling? (Continued…)

There are a wide range of feelings associated with stress and mood problems. You might think the association with 'mental health' suggests the problems are in your mind, but in fact many symptoms are very physical and may be noticed pretty much anywhere in your body.

"I just got no sleep and the more sleep deprivation you have, the more anxious you become; I was nauseous therefore couldn't eat and lack of sleep and no food was an absolute nightmare"

Worrying about what other people are thinking about you can also be difficult, particularly as this isn't something that is easy to see like, for example, a broken leg.

"And that's probably one of the biggest things, somebody from the outside would look in and say [that] isn't too bad"

Looking after your physical self (continued…

Sleep

- Go to bed only when you're tired, but try not to sleep in the day
- Try to get into and maintain a regular pattern of being active during the day and sleeping during the night-try to minimise disruption to this regular pattern as much as possible
- Relax in bed, try to lie still and take a few long, deep breaths
- Try reading or enjoy resting even if you aren't sleeping.

Feed your thirst in a healthy way

- 2 litres (approximately 8-10 glasses) of water a day will help your body stay healthy and can make you feel less tired.

- If you are drinking alcohol, remember that 2-3 units per day is the maximum recommended amount without risking your health. However, alcohol can lower your mood and make you feel worse because it acts as a depressant.

Looking after your physical self (continued…)

"Walking every day…that really helps"

"I belong to a running group… we've got some people there that do suffer SAD in the winter and they've said how running, even though it's night time and we're running in the evenings after work, can have such a positive effect because of endorphins"

Eat Well

There is increasing evidence that diet affects mood:

- Try to eat at least five portions of fruit or vegetables a day
- Reduce your fat intake
- Cut down on sugary foods –sugar highs and lows can affect mood

Taking the first steps to getting help

In asking for help you've taken the first step in dealing with how you've been feeling.

"I'd always been a strong person who'd never gone under… I didn't expect to have to need support and that was quite difficult really to deal with… to sort of accept that actually you're just as vulnerable as anybody else is."

Section Two:
How services can help

Talking Therapies

You have probably been given this booklet because someone has suggested that you attend a Talking Therapies service (also known as Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies or other service names). Talking Therapies services are mainly based on something called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Some of the people who we talked to said that it was useful to know what CBT is, and how it works, before they attended a session.

"It has given me a real insight…as to how what we do affects our mind."

Looking after your physical self

Lifestyle and physical health can contribute to mood. Making small changes can help.

Exercise

Exercise can help lift your mood as well as protecting against physical health problems. Naturally released endorphins are responsible for this feel-good factor. There are many ways to exercise and they don't all involve the gym!

- Walk to the shops or go for walks further afield, perhaps in nature
- Get off the bus earlier than usual and walk the rest of the way
- Go swimming on your way home from work
- Go for a run in the park, work out to music or run up and down the stairs

Key tips:

- Build up exercise gradually.
- It will make you puff – it means you are getting fitter!

Web-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

If you have access to a computer, these new web-based courses are free and can be used any time of the day:

Living Life to the Full is a programme designed for people with mild to moderate anxiety and depression. It is easy to access, with accompanying soundtrack, information links, print-outs and exercises that can be tailored to the individual.

Website: www.llttf.com

Mood Gym is a web-based programme, for mild to moderate anxiety and depression and free to use at home. It assesses the individual's strengths and problems and uses fictional case studies to help understand psychological issues and effects.

Website: www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Moodscope is a web based tool for tracking your mood on a daily basis to help you identify your ups and downs and help you link your mood to events or situations in your day.

Website: www.moodscope.com

A list of mobile applications and other online tools for managing your mood can be found at the following website: www.getselfhelp.co.uk (Click "self-help resources", then click "computerised CBT Online".)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT focuses on the present and is particularly suitable for those who want to learn tools and strategies to use by themselves, but may not want to talk in depth with others about their individual problems. CBT cannot remove your problems, but can help you manage them in a more helpful way by focusing on changing the way you think and behave. CBT works by helping you make sense of overwhelming problems by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Compared with other talking therapies, CBT can take place over a relatively short period of time. However, to benefit from CBT, you need to commit yourself to the process. A therapist can help and advise you, but it requires your full and active participation and engagement in your own treatment. CBT often requires tasks outside of treatment sessions, which may include keeping 'thought diaries' or 'activity logs'.

"One of the things they did do, was ensure you recorded things like your coping strategies and building your resilience for when things do go a bit awry and help you deal with that."

CBT (continued…)

In some IAPT services CBT is delivered in a group setting and some people really appreciate knowing other people are having similar experiences:

> "To actually see other people are in the same position as you, you think well actually no, it isn't just me."

CBT can show you how to change unhelpful patterns of thinking or behaving to improve the way you feel. The diagram on page 10 shows how thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviour are interconnected with each other and the main problem.

Making changes in one area can have a positive effect, not just on that one area, but also the other connected areas and the overall problem as well.

Monitoring your Mood

Take time out if you need it because you are feeling low, it can be difficult to see beyond the day-to-day problems in life.

Some people find that writing a diary or keeping a log of the way they are feeling can help identify the signs that your mood is on a downward spiral. Others prefer to use the questionnaires that Talking Therapy services use to keep track of how they are doing. See the following website for access to an online version of a questionnaire used by Talking Therapy services to monitor low mood:
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression/Pages/Symptoms.aspx

Noting down how you feel after certain activities can help in highlighting the things that lift your mood and make you feel better.

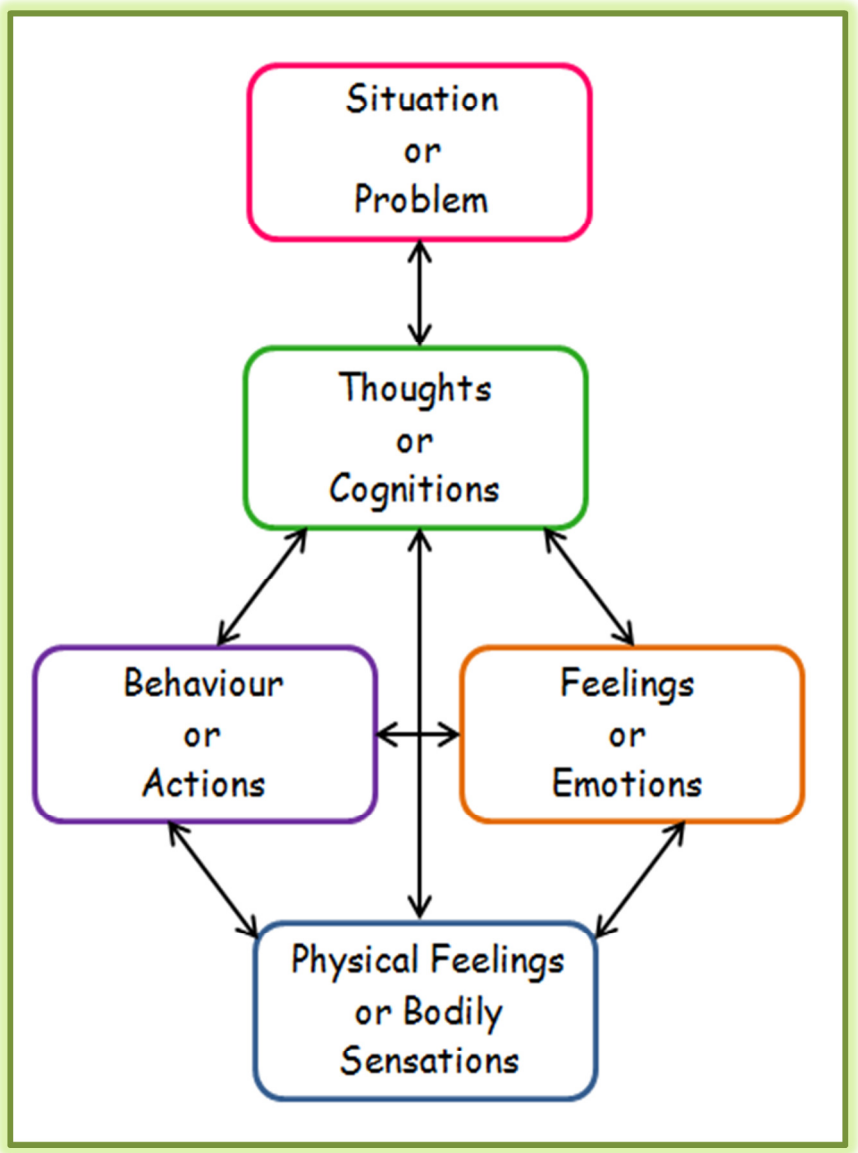
Asking for Help

Everyone needs help from time to time. Don't be afraid to ask for help, even though it may feel difficult – whether it is from friends and family or from your doctor, nurse, a local support group or helpline.

National Helplines:

- SANELINE– 0845 767 8000 (Emotional support, crisis care & practical mental health advice, 6pm–11pm daily)
- Samaritans– 08457 90 90 90 or email jo@samaritans.org
- Mind Infoline– 0300 123 3393 or email info@mind.org.uk (9am–6pm Mon–Fri)

The 5 areas model of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy



Counselling

Some Talking Therapy services also provide counselling. Counselling is probably the best known talking therapy. Sometimes, the term 'counselling' is used to refer to talking therapies in general, but counselling is also a specific type of therapy in its own right.

Counselling on the NHS usually consists of 6 to 12 sessions, each between 50 and 60 minutes long. You talk in confidence to a counsellor about how you feel about yourself and your situation. The counsellor supports you and may offer practical advice.

Counselling is ideal for people who need help coping with a current or historical crisis, such as: anger, relationship issues, grief or loss, losing a job, the onset of a serious illness, depression (or sadness), identity issues or other life changes.

Counselling is different from CBT in a number of ways, it tends to be less structured than CBT therefore it can provide a bit more time and space to talk about particular issues in your life and explore difficult or confusing emotions. Whereas CBT tends not to focus as much on your feelings, or exploring why you may be feeling the way you do.

Meeting with others with similar problems

Some people benefit from going to support groups, which provide an opportunity to talk with others who are experiencing the same kinds of difficulties and understand what you are going through.

"I mean it's only since I've met guys like you lot that I realise that it's not my fault"

Your Talking Therapies service should be able to tell you about self-help and peer-support groups in your local area. Also the following organisations arrange support groups based upon common conditions:

- Depression Alliance - www.depressionalliance.org
- Triumph Over Phobia - www.topuk.org

Reading

Many found that self-help books about mental health and depression helped them as well. There are a number of self-help books mainly based on CBT recommended by mental health professionals available to borrow from your local library. In some areas a book prescription scheme may operate and a GP or mental health practitioner may give you a prescription for a book (or books) or a list of book titles for you to choose from yourself to borrow from the library which will provide information and practical ways of making changes in your life that may help.

Website: www.booksonprescription.org.uk

Other titles that people have found useful include:

- The Naked Birdwatcher – Suzy Johnston
- Shoot the Damn Dog – Sally Brampton
- Living with a Black Dog – Matthew Johnstone
- Books by Dr Raj Persaud, Dr Anthony Clare and Dorothy Rowe
- Books from the Constable Robinson "Overcoming" Series some of which are available on the Book Prescription schemes.

Other sources of counselling

In some Talking Therapy services counselling may not be provided. For a list of accredited counsellors in your area please see the following websites:

- United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapists www.psychotherapy.org.uk
- British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies www.babcp.co.uk
- British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy www.bacp.co.uk

There are also national organisations set up for specific situations that may offer counselling:

- Cruse Bereavement Care – a charity that provides bereavement advice and support www.cruse.org.uk
- Relate – a charity that offers relationship advice and counselling www.relate.org.uk
- Rape Crisis – a charity for women and girls who have been raped or sexually abused www.rapecrisis.org.uk
- Victim Support – a charity to help victims and witnesses of crime www.victimsupport.org.uk

Medication

Another option which your doctor may discuss with you is medication.

Medication is thought to work by changing the levels of a group of chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. Certain neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and norepinephrine can improve mood, emotions and other symptoms.

Increasing the levels of neurotransmitters is a gradual process. Most people will need to take medication for two to four weeks before they notice any improvement in their symptoms.

Increasing levels of neurotransmitters can also disrupt pain signals sent by nerves, which may explain why some antidepressants can also help relieve symptoms of long-term (chronic) pain.

It is common for people to take medication and receive talking therapy together. This can be useful as they both address symptoms and causes in different ways.

For more information please see the following websites:

- MIND Website: www.mind.org.uk
- Royal College of Psychiatrists Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk
- NHS Choices Website: www.nhs.uk

Section Three: Things you can do for yourself

Talking

Sometimes we let things build up inside us. Talking can help release these feelings.

Most people can feel overwhelmed by their problems at some point. Being lonely, isolated, or in poor physical health makes it harder to cope and leaves you feeling down.

- Talk to your family and friends, meet up often.
- Phone, text or write to friends and your wider family.
- Identify someone you think will be good at listening to you and find time to talk – you could make their day too.

"I try to be a bit more open with my family, instead of thinking I'm a darn nuisance every time I'm not well."