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# Mental Health Helplines

## **Alcoholics Anonymous**

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)  
0845 769 7555

## **Alzheimer's Society**

[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)  
0300222 1122

## **Anxiety UK**

[www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)  
08444 775 774

## **Cruse Bereavement Care**

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)  
0844 477 9400

## **Bipolar UK**

[www.bipolaruk.org.uk](http://www.bipolaruk.org.uk)  
0333 323 3880

## **CALM**

[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

## **Depression Alliance**

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

## **BEAT**

[www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)  
0800 801 0711

## **Gamblers Anonymous**

[www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk)  
0845 769 7555

## **Mencap**

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)  
0808 808 1111

## **Men's Health Forum**

[www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)  
020 7922 7908

## **Mental Health Foundation**

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

## **Mind**

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
0300 123 3393

## **Narcotics Anonymous**

[www.ukna.org](http://www.ukna.org)  
0300 999 1212

## **No Panic**

[www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk)  
0844 967 4848

## **NSPCC**

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)  
0808 800 5000

## **OCD Action**

[www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk)  
0845 390 6232

## **OCD UK**

[www.ocduk.org](http://www.ocduk.org)  
0845 1203778

## **PAPYRUS**

Young Suicide Prevention Charity  
[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)  
0800 068 4141

## **Family Lives**

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)  
0808 800 2222

## **Relate**

[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)  
0300 100 1234

## **Refuge**

[www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)  
0808 802 5544

## **Rethink Mental Illness**

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)  
0300 5000 927

## **Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)  
116 123

## **Sane**

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)  
sanemail@org.uk  
0845 767 8000

## **Shout**

[www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org)  
Text SHOUT to 85258

## **Victim Support**

[www.victimsupport.org](http://www.victimsupport.org)  
0808 168 9111

## **Young Minds**

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)  
0808 802 5544

## The Aspire2 Mental Health Media and Events team:

### Editorial

#### Sam

Senior Editor  
sam@aspire2.org.uk

#### Alex

Deputy Editor and Feature Correspondent  
alex@aspire2.org.uk

#### Tom

Digital & Media Pod Correspondent  
tom@aspire2.org.uk

### Management

#### Peter

Operations Manager  
peter@aspire2.org.uk

#### Connor

Deputy Operations Manager  
connor@aspire2.org.uk

### Marketing and PR

#### Tiegan

Social Media & Marketing Manager  
tiegan@aspire2.org.uk

#### James

Public Relations/Media & Digital Consultant  
james@aspire2.org.uk

### Advertising and Sales

#### Bobby

Advertising & Sales Manager  
bobby@aspire2.org.uk

### Finance and Administration

#### Janet

Finance & Administration Consultant  
janet@aspire2.org.uk

# What makes a crisis?

## Welcome to the October issue of Aspire2

Firstly, I'd like to say that we were so pleased with the reception our first issue received.

Thank you to everyone who read last month's edition and especially to those who sent their kind words of congratulations and encouragement. We hope you find this month's edition even more interesting, informative and entertaining.

Since our debut issue, we have formed promising relationships with people we will be collaborating with in the future and I urge anyone interested in talking about mental health to come forward and get involved - we have some really exciting stuff planned.

With a small team of writers and a large page count to fill, we have had to work hard once again this month but I am pleased to say that this month's edition contains even more news and articles than last month.

The biggest difference I have found while compiling this issue compared to the last is the sheer amount of mental health-related news there has been in the last four weeks. While there was plenty to talk about throughout August, September seemed to deliver item after item of mental health news, both negative and positive.

However, the theme of this month's edition is decidedly negative: **crisis**.

The UK's suicide rate was recently reported to be at its highest since 2002, and there has been an increase in child suicide. Youth happiness is at a 10-year low, there are 8-week waiting lists for thousands of people in need of mental health appointments and nurses are having to take almost a million sick days

per year for their mental health.

It is hardly a stretch to suggest we are approaching, or maybe already in, a mental health crisis, as many have claimed.

Another of the key subjects this month is SAD (seasonal affective disorder), prompted entirely by the unfortunate shift in weather and decrease in daylight.

SAD is a condition that, like most, needs better media exposure and a greater understanding. The summer has now long-gone and we can expect increasingly dark and gloomy weather from now until March, probably.

Those with SAD will struggle the most with this changing of the seasons. If you've chalked feeling worse mentally over the last month to the weather, you may need to explore SAD.

It's not all bad though, and there's a lot of positivity in this month's issue to counter all that bad news. We have explored why dogs and cats are so good for us mentally, why music can be used to treat all sorts of conditions and the mental benefits of labouring in the kitchen.

I hope you enjoy October's Aspire2 and I look forward to hearing responses from you, our readers.

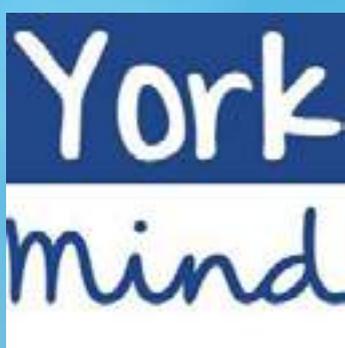
**Sam Atkin, Senior Editor.**

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# We support...



If you would like your mental health charity to appear here, contact Peter at [peter@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:peter@aspire2.org.uk)



## World Mental Health Day

**October 10** marks World Mental Health Day 2019.

The occasion is an opportunity for everyone to speak openly about mental health and help break down the stigma of mental illness.

This year, the theme for the day is Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Awareness. With suicide giving us some truly awful statistics this year, this seems a timely choice.

Of course, the day is about advocating for better health no matter the circumstances; however you choose to talk about mental health doesn't matter; what matters is that you **are** talking about it.

At Aspire2, we will be publishing a 12-page digital newspaper featuring articles from our brand ambassadors based all over the globe. The idea is to bring a perspective on how mental health is dealt with in different parts of the world and to provide stories from people with contrasting living conditions.

If you would like to tell us about mental health in your country or how you are planning to celebrate (or celebrated) World Mental Health Day, email us at [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk)

You may also be interested in joining in on a campaign on the day, such as YoungMinds's #HelloYellow, where participants simply need to wear yellow to show their support.

## World Suicide Prevention Day

**September 10** was World Suicide Prevention Day 2019.

While doing everything to prevent suicide is absolutely essential 365 days a year, World Suicide Prevention Day is a major event that boosts awareness for the rest of the year.

Around the world, 800,000 people take their own lives every year, equivalent to one person every 40 seconds. In the UK, suicide is the biggest killer of men under the age of 45 and there are, on average, 16 suicides every day here.

Sadly, it looks like it's getting worse. Statistics show that there were 6,507 suicides in the UK in 2018, up from approximately 5,821 the year before. There was also a major spike in the amount of suicides by men.

Despite these distressing statistics, it was encouraging to see the reaction to World Suicide Prevention Day on social media.

In one particularly inspiring post Matt Haig, author of Reasons to Stay Alive, took to Twitter to describe how he used to think about suicide compared to now, and the dangers of toxic masculinity:

*When I was suicidal I remember calling myself a 'coward' and 'chicken' for not doing it. I wasn't. I was ridiculously strong to hold on through infinite pain. But that's why toxic masculinity kills. We have it ingrained in us that even death is better than looking weak. Our lowest point is never eternal"*

## Help for suicidal thoughts

If you're feeling like you want to die, it's important to tell someone.

Help and support is available right now if you need it. You don't have to struggle with difficult feelings alone.

### Phone a helpline

These free helplines are there to help when you're feeling down or desperate.

Unless it says otherwise, they're open 24 hours a day, every day.

### **Samaritans – for everyone**

**Call 116 123**

**Email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

### **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

**Call 0800 58 58 58 – 5pm to midnight every day.**

### **Papyrus – for people under 35**

**Call 0800 068 41 41 – Monday to Friday 10am to 10pm, weekends 2pm to 10pm, bank holidays 2pm to 5pm**  
**Text 07786 209697**

**Email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)**

### **Childline – for children and young people under 19**

**Call 0800 1111 – the number won't show up on your phone bill**

### **The Silver Line – for older people**

**Call 0800 4 70 80 90**

Talk to someone you trust

Let family or friends know what's going on for you. They may be able to offer support and help keep you safe.

There's no right or wrong way to talk about suicidal feelings – starting the conversation is what's important.

## IMPORTANT

**Is your life in danger?**

**If you have seriously harmed yourself – for example, by taking a drug overdose – call 999 for an ambulance or go straight to A&E.**

**Or ask someone else to call 999 or take you to A&E.**

For more information visit:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/suicide](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/suicide)

# SAMARITANS

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Chris O'Donovan Photography/Samaritans

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# Child suicide rate rises prompting calls for urgent action in mental health crisis

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics show that suicides in 10 to 19-year-olds rose by 13.9% from 2017 to 2018, with the increase set to continue this year according to provisional figures.

There were 188 suicides in 10 to 19-year-olds last year compared to 165 in 2017. Between January and June this year, 93 have taken their own lives.

Young Minds says that school pressures, concerns around appearance, bullying and trauma can have a devastating effect on children's mental health.

"The reasons why young people feel suicidal are often complex, but we know that traumatic experiences at a young age - like bereavement, bullying or abuse - can have a huge impact on mental health. School pressure, concerns about how you look and difficult relationships with family or friends can also have a significant effect," said Tom Madders, Campaigns Director at the charity.

"We urgently need a new government strategy which looks at the factors that

are fuelling the crisis in young people's mental health and which ensures that anyone who's struggling to cope can get early support," he continued.

"We're seeing some much-needed investment in NHS mental health services - but we need much more action to ensure young people can get early help, long before they reach crisis point," Tom concluded.

The Department of Health and Social Care said: "Every suicide is a preventable death and we are working urgently with partners across government, businesses and communities to tackle this problem."

With statistics this month finding that children are at their most unhappy in a decade, and with one in five concerned about their mental health, many have claimed that the UK is experiencing a mental health crisis.

Earlier this year, Young Minds launched a petition calling for the government to introduce a strategy for young people's mental health. You can sign it [here](#).

## Scotland: Unemployed and workers in male-dominated jobs at highest risk of suicide

Figures released to the BBC by the National Records of Scotland show that unemployed people have the highest rates of suicide, with male-dominated jobs such as farm workers and tradesmen following.

Despite a decline in suicide rates in Scotland over the previous decade, the number of suicides rose by 15% last year, which SAMH described as "devastating."

More than a quarter of those who took their own lives in Scotland between 2011 and 2017 were unemployed. Farm and forestry workers were second, followed by skilled construction trades.

"These figures show us that those employed in skilled trades are at a higher risk of suicide, along with those who are unemployed," said Billy Watson, Chief Executive at SAMH.

"While there's compelling evidence to show a positive link between employment and mental health, this highlights that employers have a responsibility to create a culture that is open in talking about mental health and which challenges discriminatory behaviour."

"We need to better understand the risk factors associated with suicide," he added.

Last year, the Scottish Government published its suicide prevention action plan and a National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group has been tasked with implementing it.

The aim is to reduce Scotland's rate of suicide by 20% by 2022.



## US state to let students take mental health days

Students in Oregon, USA, will be able to be excused from school for mental health reasons including panic attacks or appointments with psychologists.

The new law will take effect this autumn, following a push for a change in legislation. The previous law stated that students in the state were allowed to take five days of excused absences within a three-month period, but unexcused absences could result in grade penalties or loss of class credit.

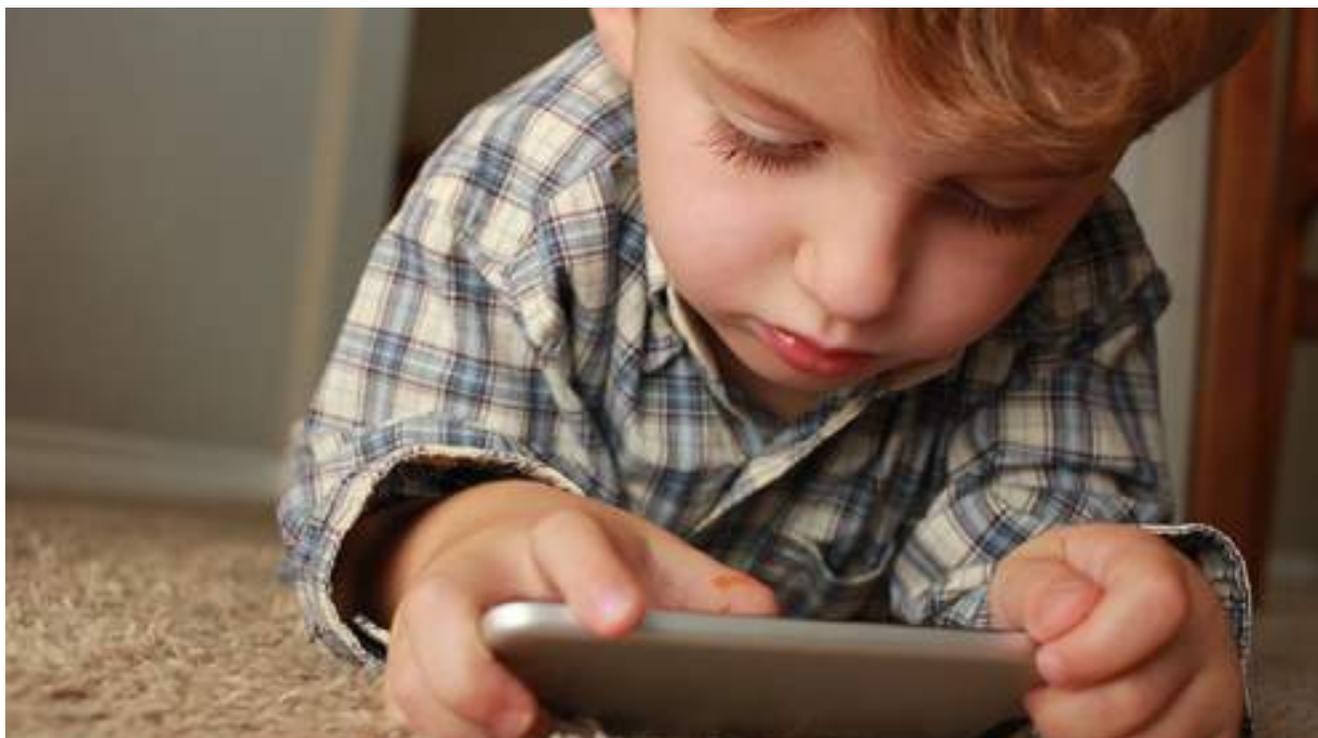
“Hopefully it creates a culture where it’s acceptable to say, ‘Hey I’m struggling and I’m having a tough time,’ and then people will say, ‘Hey what can I do to help you, are you alright?’” said Cheri Helt, an Oregon Representative who carried the bill in the house.

In most cases, the student will still need a parent or guardian to write a note or contact the school, but the student will be able to decide if they need to take a day for their mental health.

The law is one of the first of its kind in the US and there is no current equivalent in the UK.

You can help raise awareness of mental health in schools in the UK by joining Mental Health Foundation’s [petition to put mental health at the heart of what children learn in school](#).

Sign the petition [here](#).



## Set a curfew, set an example

A recent study of the effects of social media on young people has suggested that parents should be aware of how long their children spend online – and try to reduce it.

The study was conducted by The Lancet on more than 12,000 teenagers at school in England. It revealed that social media is “disrupting teen sleep and exercise” and that parents should ban phones from bedrooms from 10pm.

The research reinforced preconceived ideas that teenagers who checked social media apps more often had worse mental health and greater psychological distress, and the researchers said there was evidence of a strong link between social media use and mental wellbeing.

In 2015, the Office for National Statistics reported that children who spent more than three hours on “social websites” on a normal school night were “more than twice as likely to show symptoms of mental ill-health” compared to those who spent less than three hours or no time at all on such websites.

### What can parents do?

In an article for Child Mind Institute, Dr Catherine Steiner-Adair and Dr Donna

Wick, clinical psychologists, advised parents that they should try to set an example to their children by reducing their own social media usage while around them.

While not all parents actively use social networking platforms, acts like checking emails can indicate to children that they are not getting your full attention and demonstrate that it’s okay to be using social media during family time.

Dr Wick advises waiting as long as possible before introducing children to social media. Once they have it, it is important not to use it to spy on your children. Friending them on Facebook is okay but avoid reading personal messages unless there is a genuine cause for concern.

The dangers of social media on young people are widely discussed but is important to note that social media can help teenagers form better friendships with classmates, keep in touch with friends at different schools, express themselves, reduce feelings of isolation and even find interesting and educational content.

**Banning social media use may not be the answer but limiting it and setting an example could help.**



# “National scandal” as report finds child happiness at lowest level in a decade

**A new report by The Children’s Society has found that almost a quarter of a million children in the UK are unhappy with their lives.**

The charity’s annual Good Childhood Report, which examines the state of children’s wellbeing, revealed that children’s happiness with life is at its lowest since 2009, citing issues around boys’ appearance, friendships and school as potential driving factors.

The charity also warned that the decline in happiness is a “national scandal” and exposes huge failings for the country’s most vulnerable children.

*“Modern childhood is a happy and carefree time for most, yet for too many it is not. It is a national scandal that children’s unhappiness is increasing so quickly,” said Mark Russell, Chief Executive at The Children’s Society.*

The report found that 7.7% of boys aged between 10 and 15 (the equivalent of 180,000) are unhappy with their appearance. Though boys have historically been more content with their appearance, the gap appears to be narrowing. It has been suggested that social media platforms such as Instagram may be a factor.

11.8% of children are unhappy with school, with suggested factors including bullying and feeling unsafe. Happiness with friendships is also down, which the charity believes could be a result of bullying, lack of out-of-school time with friends, social media and loneliness.

33% of 10-17-year-olds have concerns about whether they will make enough money in the future and children as young as 10 are worried about societal issues including crime, the environment, information sharing online, the economy and even Brexit.

“Today’s young people are becoming progressively unhappy with their friendships – one of the fundamental building blocks of well-being – as well as appearance and school. Children are also burdened with fears ranging from worrying about the future, not having enough money to not feeling safe at school and bullying,” Mark continued.

*“Many young people tell us they feel side-lined and ignored by those in power. We are urging the Government to introduce a national measurement of children’s well-being so we can really listen, respond and show young people they matter.”*

“Together we can build a brighter future and bring optimism and confidence back to being young,” he concluded.

You can read the report by clicking [here](#).



Mind Infoline: **0300 123 3393**

Text 86463 | [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

Open Monday to Friday 9am - 6pm.

We provide information on mental health problems, where to get help, treatment and advocacy.

[mind.org.uk/info](http://mind.org.uk/info)



Mind is a registered charity (219830). Registered company in England number 424438.



## 122,000 NHS patients wait more than **eight weeks** for mental health appointments

### NHS nurses take nearly a million sick days for mental health problems

A report by the Daily Mirror and the Royal College of Nursing has found that almost one million sick days were taken by nurses in the UK for mental health problems in just eight months.

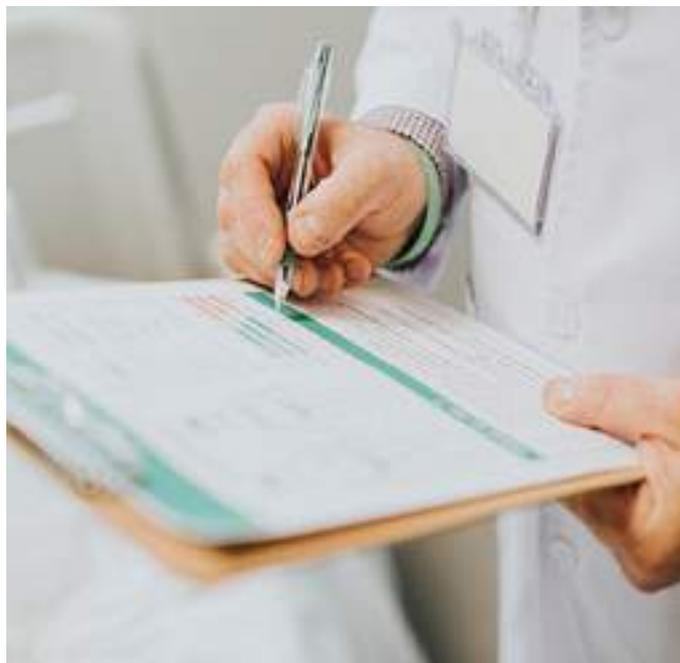
922,210 days were lost to stress anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions between July 2018 and March 2019; a quarter of all sick days taken by nurses.

Chronic staff shortages are believed to be a contributing factor - with more than 40,000 vacancies in the NHS, according to The Royal College of Nursing.

"It's heartbreaking but not surprising," said Kim Sunley, the College's National Officer for Employment Relations.

"Employers are taking steps to improve support for staff but it's a sticking plaster when the greater problem is too few nurses."

**Are you a medical practitioner or training to be one? Tell us about how your mental health is affected by NHS staff shortages. Email [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk)**



People seeking help with mental health conditions are being kept on "hidden waiting lists" according to a [report by The Independent](#).

The publication revealed that more than 122,000 people were made to wait more than eight weeks to see a doctor following their initial appointment.

Patients who had initial therapy sessions were told to wait longer for a follow-up appointment in 90% of NHS clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in 2018-19, according to The Labour Party.

Clinical commissioning groups are responsible for planning health services in local areas and there are currently 191 across England.

Average waits for second appointments exceeded the nationally set waiting time target of six weeks after first appointments in 55% of CCGs.

In the worst-performing CCG, Eastern Cheshire, patients waited more than 15 weeks on average for a follow-up appointment, compared to less than four weeks for their first.

"It appears patients are rushed into the

system to meet targets only to leave them on hidden waiting lists without mental health support," said Barbara Keeley, Labour's shadow cabinet minister for mental health and social care.

"Early intervention is crucial in mental health, which is why targets are so important to ensure that people get the support they need as quickly as possible."

"No one should be left waiting weeks and even months to receive the support they need. The government is failing to invest adequately in mental health services and address this current crisis," Barbara added.

The government's Department of Health and Social Care responded by saying "We want to ensure patients have access to high-quality care in a timely manner, and we introduced one of the world's first waiting time standards for mental health."

"We are transforming mental health services with a planned record spend of £12.1bn in 2018-19 and, as part of our long-term plan for the NHS, announced a further expansion of mental health services, with an additional £2.3bn every year in real terms by 2023-24."

But with more than 122,000 people waiting in excess of eight weeks for a second appointment, and funding cuts for local authorities during a decade of austerity, many are calling for further investment.

"We need to invest in a variety of talking therapies, community resources, well-being interventions and self-care education," Sarah Hughes, chief executive of Centre for Mental Health told The Independent.

"It takes a lot for people to take that first step in seeking help. Any delays in it happening can make people feel worse or they can disengage and lose faith that the help is there," she added.

# Men at career “breaking point”

**61% of men in the UK who want to quit their job blame the effects of the position on their mental health, according to new research from CV Library.**

The views of more than 2,000 UK workers were analysed and the jobs website found that men are more likely to experience the effects of poor mental health in the workplace than women, despite the fact that more women (35.4) said they suffer from a mental health condition than men (21.2%).

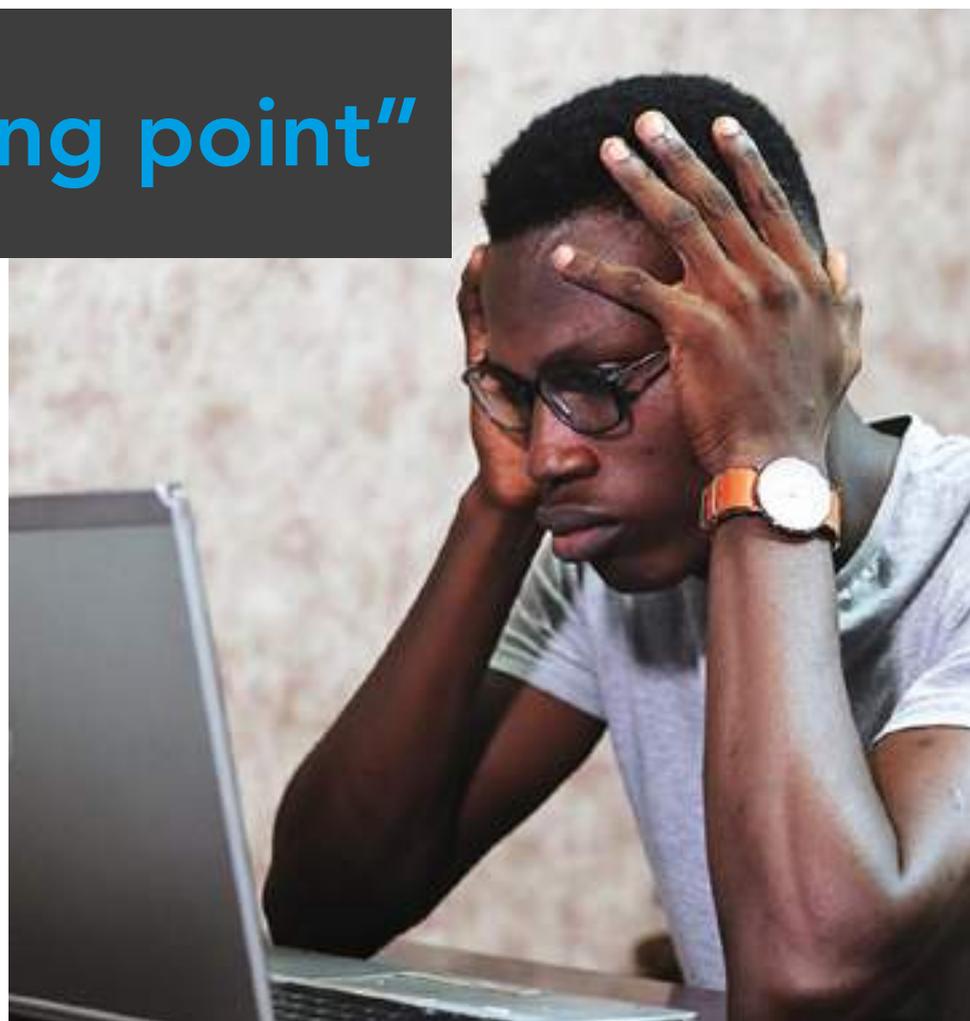
81.8% of men said that poor mental health affects their working life, compared to 67.8% of women.

“It’s extremely concerning that work plays a principal factor in worsening men’s mental health,” said Lee Biggins, Founder and CEO of CV Library.

“Statistics show that suicide is the most common cause of death amongst men aged 20-49 and something clearly needs to change in order to ensure men have the support they need. Our findings suggest it starts in the workplace, so employers have an important role to play here,” he continued.

The study also found that more than 60% of men feel like they can’t discuss their mental health problems with their boss and almost 40% worry that their boss would judge them for doing so.

In terms of how work could be made better for mental health, 54% of men suggested that employers should promote a healthy work-life balance, 40% that employees should be referred to a counselling service and 36% said they’d like a reduction in pressure to work longer hours.



“Our research outlines just some of the areas that can help to ease the strain on men’s mental health in the workplace and employers need to listen, said Biggins.

“Alongside supporting a healthy work-life balance, whether that’s by encouraging employees to switch off or promoting remote and flexible working options, offering a counselling service is also a popular choice.”

“It’s vital to show that you’re an employer who cares. There’s plenty of ways to do this, but ultimately if you don’t act, you’ll end up losing employees who simply can’t cope with the pressures of the modern working world,” he concluded.

## Workers take four mental health days a year – but feel they need to lie about them to their boss

A poll of more than 2,000 people by law firm Slater and Gordon has found that employees take an average of four days off per year but lie about it to their boss through of fear of being judged, demoted or fired. More than half that lied about their mental health days said they had a physical illness instead.

A quarter of the poll sample said they have left at least one job because of pressure and the negative impact it was having on their mental health. One in six still works in a role that causes them stress and anxiety.

The study also found that the average worker spent an additional unpaid 27 unpaid minutes at work every day – which equates to 2.5 extra weeks of work per year, and two in five people said that stress from their jobs has a negative impact on their mental health.

“We speak to a lot of people who are feeling so stressed and anxious with work they are forced into taking mental health days,” said Peter Lyons, employment liability lawyer at Slater and Gordon.

“Many isolate themselves, trying to work harder, which causes their personal lives to suffer and mental health to deteriorate further. The biggest thing we would say is, don’t fight stress alone at work,” he added.

“Keep detailed notes of what is causing stress and anxiety, then speak to a trusted colleague or manager to create a plan to tackle the issues. Union representatives or legal advisers specialising in this area can also provide guidance,” Peter concluded.

# UK businesses training record number of mental health first aiders



**British companies are responding to increases in workers expressing mental distress by training record numbers of workplace mental health first aiders, according to a [report by The Guardian](#).**

The publication sent requests to every FTSE 100 company and results show that those businesses alone have trained more than 10,000 staff members. Mid-sized and small businesses are also appointing first responders who can be approached for mental health conditions.

According to Mental Health First Aid England (MHFA), the national training body, 140,000 people were trained in 2018/19, which is the most ever in a single year.

MHFA has now trained close to 500,000 people so far, which is around one in every 100 adults in the UK. They say there's still a long way to go to reach their goal of one in ten.

The study found that more than half of the FTSE 100 companies (the 100 largest UK companies by market value) now have dedicated mental health first aiders, often called "champions," "buddies," or "advocates". Lloyds Banking Group leads the way with a programme to train 2,500 mental health

first aiders by next year and the likes of the BBC and the NHS are also involved.

Mental health first aiders generally volunteer to perform the role alongside their standard position and complete a two-day training session where they are trained to be "listeners" who can signpost services, rather than acting as counsellors, psychologists or experts. Mental health first aiders might encourage colleagues to seek the appropriate support from professionals but are not trained to give advice.

Though these new figures are encouraging, there are doubts about the scale of impact that training mental health first aiders can achieve, with some sceptical about the amount that can be taught in a two-day course.

Last year, the Health and Safety Executive reported that "there is limited evidence that MHFA training leads to sustained improvement in the ability of those trained to help colleagues experiencing mental ill health."

Many argue that companies are simply "ticking boxes" by providing the training.

"My main problem with it is that organisations see it as a tick in the box. It's essentially reactive, when what they

really need to be doing is the preventive bit, the proactive management of stress risks at work," Alan Bradshaw, a business psychologist told *The Guardian*.

But despite the lack of depth to the training and the scepticism, the awareness raised by the courses is beneficial, even if it does not provide instant results.

"There are pros and cons. Anything that raises people's understanding of mental health is a really good thing. But it's not sufficient to tackle mental illness in the workplace," said Dr Jo Billings, a consultant clinical psychologist at UCL, speaking to *The Guardian*.

"Mental health first aid on its own is not enough. We need to ensure prevention, early intervention, job design and to ensure that people are not tied to phones and emails all the time," Simon Blake, Chief Executive at Mental Health First Aid told *The Guardian*.

**Does your company have a mental health first aider or a progressive approach to employees' mental health? Maybe your workplace has a unique way of caring for staff?**

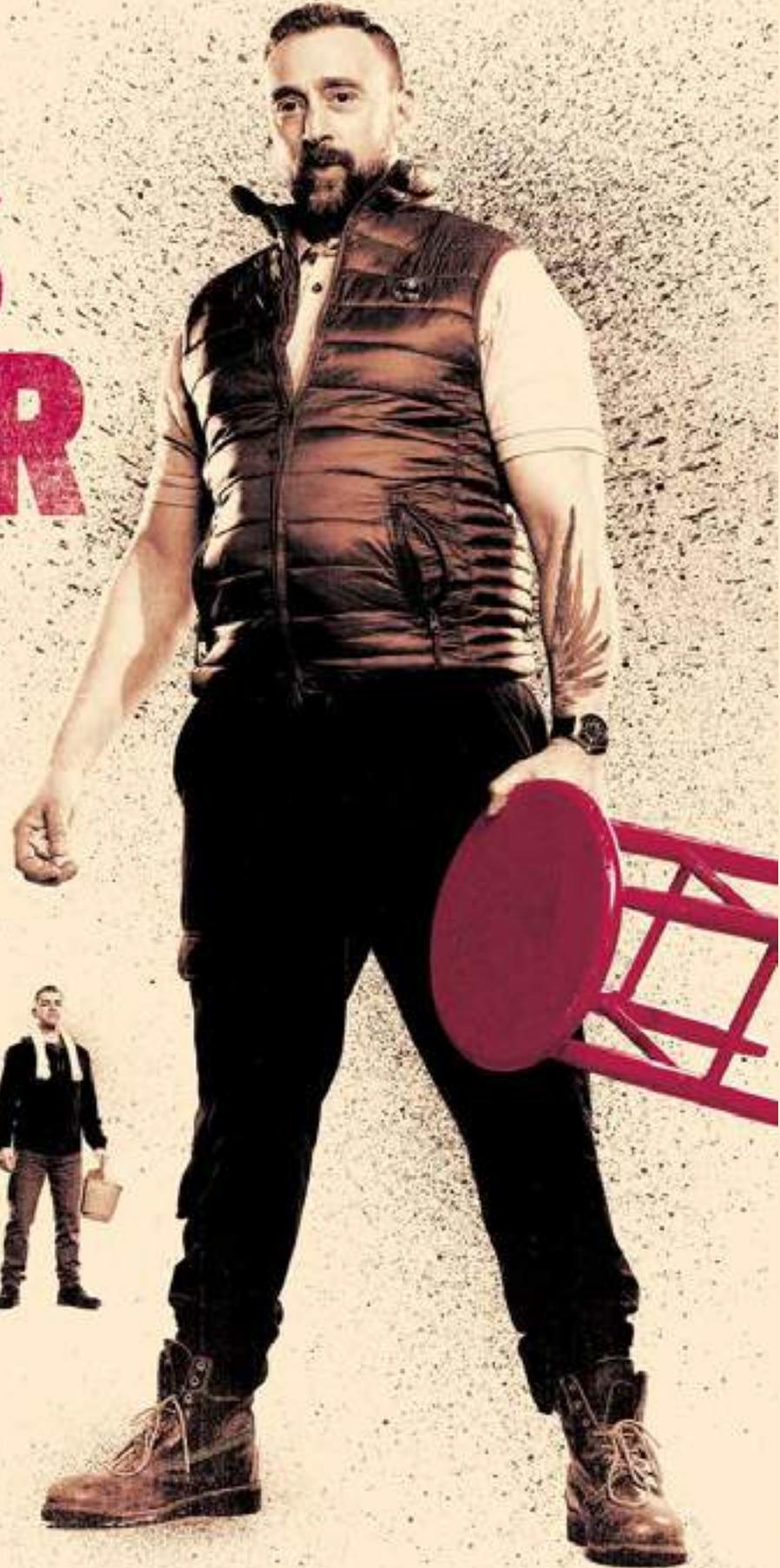
**Write to [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk) to tell us about it.**

# BE IN YOUR MATE'S CORNER

1 in 4 of us will fight mental health problems this year. So if your mate's acting differently, step in.

- 1 Text, call, reach out**
- 2 Listen without judging**
- 3 Be yourself, do everyday things**

[time-to-change.org.uk](http://time-to-change.org.uk)  
#inyourcorner



**time to change**

let's end mental health discrimination

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# Retail PTSD?

A report by the City University of London shows that shop workers are experiencing “severe mental health consequences” including long-lasting anxiety and PTSD as a result of violent crimes in their workplaces.

The study found that more than 42,000 assaults or threats were recorded in the retail industry in 2018 in scenarios that include encountering shoplifters, refusing age-restricted goods, hate crimes and robberies.

“All too frequently, shop workers are suffering physical injuries, as well as chronic and life changing mental health consequences of violence, such as long-term anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder,” the report said.

Government action is “urgently needed” to protect staff, according to the report’s author, Dr Emmeline Taylor. Earlier this year, The British Retail Consortium said around 115 staff

members in the UK faced threats or assaults every day.

One instance, explained by a store manager interviewed as part of the report, said a member of staff has had life-changing PTSD as a result of retail violence:

*“Rebecca was 21 years old at the time. She had been working on the shop floor when a guy in his thirties came in and picked her up by her jacket. He then pulled her by her hair down one of the aisles to the office where he demanded that she emptied the safe. He then went back to the front of the store, threatened the girl behind the till and ripped the cash drawers out before leaving.”*

*Rebecca was in a very bad way. She was very shaken up. She tried to carry on for two weeks but then she handed in her notice. The GP said it was PTSD and she’s not been able to work since.”*



*She’s on medication and is just stuck at home. I know she’s using Lifeworks (counselling) and she said it’s really helping her but she’s still too scared to leave the house.”*

“Multiple data sources show that the frequency and severity of violence towards shop workers is increasing,” Dr Taylor said.

**Has working in retail affected your mental health? We want to hear about it. Write to us at [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk)**

## For sale: Your mental health information

### Have you ever done a ‘depression test’ online?

If so, you should know that a study has revealed that many mental health websites in the UK, France and Germany share user data with third parties including advertisers.

The research by Privacy International (PI) found that almost all of the 100 websites they investigated used cookies that were there for marketing or advertising purposes, enabling targeted ads from the likes of Google, Facebook and Amazon.

The study said the way the information was being sold was “neither transparent nor fair and often lacked a clear legal bias.”

Many of the websites used Hotjar, a company that provides software that allows everything that users type or click on to be logged and played back.

*“It is exceedingly difficult for people to seek mental-health information and for example take a ‘depression test’ without countless third parties watching,” said Frederike Kalthener, PI’s director of corporate exploitation.*

It should be much more difficult for advertising cookies to be used because of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which states that in the case of sensitive information such as health, consent from the user to allow cookies must be explicit.

However, the Privacy International

investigation proved that, in many cases, cookies were being installed on devices before consent had even been given. Some websites did not even have a cookie consent form.

“We visit these sites and reveal so much about ourselves and that should not be used by companies we have never heard of to track you around the internet and use the data in an opaque advertising eco-system,” Frederike added.

**While getting information and advice on mental health is important, please ensure that you are doing so in a secure way. Check that websites are credible before handing over any personal details.**

# Rob Hill Foundation



**FREE York workshops  
available now at:**

Friargate Quaker Meeting House,  
Lower Friargate, York YO1 9RL  
7.00pm till 8.30 pm.

## About the charity



**The Rob Hill Foundation** (Registered Charity No. 1181220) is dedicated to Rob Hill (left), brother to Chris Hill, who tragically lost his life May 2014 to an accidental drug overdose. The charity aims to reach out to as many people in the world as possible and share the solution to beating addiction; so that other families do not suffer such a tragedy.

After losing his brother and having battled 20 years of addiction to drugs, alcohol and nicotine, **Chris Hill** discovered the solution to overcoming addiction. He published his best-selling book *Get Your Life Back: The Road to Freedom from Addiction*. He then extracted the self-help section from the book, to create his addiction recovery programme.

@ [chris@beatmyaddictions.com](mailto:chris@beatmyaddictions.com)

@ [team@robhillfoundation.org](mailto:team@robhillfoundation.org)

📞 0800 644 6313

f [robhillfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/robhillfoundation)

The Rob Hill Foundation provides free addiction and mental health workshops and support groups.

We are aiming to launch these nationwide to help anyone struggling with addiction.

For workshop locations visit  
[www.robhillfoundation.org](http://www.robhillfoundation.org)

# Social prescribing continues to see mental health success in Bradford

Last month we explored the case of GPs in Hulme, Manchester 'prescribing' plants as a new holistic form of antidepressant, a way of encouraging social interaction, daily mindfulness and feelings of accomplishment.

Now, it seems the concept of 'social prescribing' has seen success in Bradford too, as the Restore BD4 Recovery College in Tong Street has been enjoying the successful reception of its fresh take on battling mental wellbeing in the BD4 area of Bradford, with prescriptions of classes and workshops as opposed to conventional medicine.

To recap, 'social prescribing' denotes an approach to mental and emotional treatment that uses workshops, classes and activities as a means to help patients and their mental health issues as an alternative to conventional tablet medicines.

The 'social' aspect aims to encourage recovery through interaction in conversational classes, workshops or physical activity (gardening, exercise, community projects etc).

Last month we covered the practice in Manchester of prescribing domestic plants for upkeep as part of a scheme utilising the restorative and mindful nature of gardening and the social interaction supplied by returning the plant to the practice's communal growing space.

The same concept applies in Bradford as the Recovery College prescribes a range of classes and workshops to educate, discuss and prevent mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.



*Social prescribing can involve classes such as art workshops and yoga*

Since its launch in May, The Restore BD4 Recovery College has been based at Highfield Health Centre in a generally deprived area which makes mental health issues more likely and successful treatment more necessary.

Classes range from yoga to body confidence, art workshops and bereavement support as well as finance classes to help tackle the monetary anxiety, depression and isolation lower income areas suffer from.

In the four months since it's opening the college has seen great participation with patients attending a range of sessions and workshops.

Now supported by Bradford District Credit Union, the emphasis and education on financial responsibility and banking has seen successful decreases in anxiety and depression in relation to money worries.

Monetary anxiety can have significant detrimental effects on people's physical and mental wellbeing. It can be isolating, scary and depressing to live with overbearing financial fears.

The Money SOS hosted by The Credit Union continues to inspire improvement of people's wellbeing and financial situation.

*"We are working with our local Credit Union and police to put on some very unusual classes...When you have high levels of crime in the community or people lose control of their finances, they don't feel safe, they don't go out of their houses, they get depressed, they get anxious and they get isolated," said Dr Angela Moulson, a GP at Highfield Health Centre, clinical lead for NHS mental health with the Bradford District and a member of the Recovery College Steering Group.*

These classes, as well as multiple other activities, have already witnessed the positive effects of this new method of 'social prescribing' from alleviating money trouble, aiding social isolation and even supporting a man contemplating suicide following a bereavement.

The efforts made across the north into the application of social prescribing and alternative treatments have seen a positive trend and signal an encouraging indication of the future of mental health treatments embracing more personal and bespoke treatments alongside conventional medications.

**The Restore BD4 Recovery College is starting more classes this autumn, for more information about the programme, call 01274 685449.**

# Let's talk...

Something on your mind? Need advice? In this regular section in the newspaper, we're offering you the opportunity to send in any mental health questions you have for qualified psychotherapist **Kirsten Antoncich**, which will be answered in Let's Talk each month. This is a fully anonymous service and your questions for Kirsten will be dealt with confidentially. Send your questions in now!

*This month, Kirsten explains why the changing of the seasons and increase in darkness and gloomy weather can spell trouble for mental health.*



## As the nights draw in...

Welcome to the second edition of Aspire2! I wrote last month about the importance of hanging on to hope - it being one of the biggest predictors of positive outcome in therapy.

This month I can really feel the seasons change, its suddenly darker, colder and the impulse to withdraw gets stronger.

The coming of winter (avoiding any GoT puns!) is often a difficult time for people battling depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

The dark nights can limit our social contact, our leisure time, our daylight time and all of this can have a big impact on how we feel.

Many of us can feel the impact of SAD (seasonal affective disorder), which this edition has an in-depth article on, and others dread the coming of events like

Christmas and the New Year that can make them feel isolated.

We know from research such as Bristol University's recent 2019 study that loneliness increases for many people over winter - particularly for men. Loneliness can bring unwelcome side effects such as mood lowering, lowered self-esteem, and social anxiety to name but a few.

The lower we feel, the more tempted we are to pull away from people, to retreat, withdraw into ourselves and this can trap us into a vicious circle. Our attempt to keep ourselves okay actually increases our negative feelings.

Connecting with people when we don't feel great can be hard at the best of times, let alone during Winter. Despite the raft of positive mental health stories



featured in the media and the campaigns that tell us 'it's okay to not be okay', we can still feel shame, concerned that no-one will have seen our particular issue before, that people will think less of us for our vulnerability, and that we will be judged and this can stop us from connecting.

If your pattern as winter approaches is to batten down the hatches, to cope alone with feeling low, to weather the storm of anxiety unsupported or to keep your loneliness to your chest, now is the perfect time to take charge and take some steps to change the pattern.

We often talk in therapy about the opposite action technique - it's as simple as it sounds, doing the opposite of what you feel you want to do when things get difficult. If you can decide today that you don't want to feel like you did last winter or that you don't want to feel as you do right now, now is the perfect time to reach out and connect.

It doesn't have to be with a therapist, it can be simple, small steps that can really make a difference to how you feel - having a bit of chat with the shop assistant, smiling at people as you pass them, finding online support forums - anything that helps connect you to others more.

Why? Because the brain loves connections, it's a social animal. Our neurobiology changes when we feel heard, connected and understood by others and all of this is great news for good mental health.



### About Kirsten

Kirsten Antoncich is a UKCP accredited psychotherapist who has worked in a variety of positions from the NHS to private practices.

Kirsten's research background was in self harm and suicide ideation and she has written guidance for professionals about supporting good mental health.

Kirsten works with children, young people and adults and is passionate about sharing access to mental health education. You can follow her on Instagram at @kirstenantoncich.

**Send your questions to Kirsten at:**

[kirsten@aspire2.org](mailto:kirsten@aspire2.org)

*Please note: Aspire2 is sadly unable to offer a crisis service. If you are in need of immediate help, please visit your GP or any of the mental health services featured in this newspaper. These include the Samaritans, Mind and CALM.*

*The "Let's Talk" service is an educational service and questions and answers might be altered slightly to benefit a wider audience of readers.*



## World Mental Health Day 2019

10th October

### Special 12-page Online Digital Edition

Join our campaign for the day  
"Buy a Homeless Person a Meal"

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Aspire2 Mental Health Media and Events will be producing a special 12-page digital edition of our newspaper.

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Words and illustrations  
by Alex Morrall

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

# S SEASONAL A AFFECTIVE D DISORDER

**“For people who suffer from SAD, it’s exactly this time of year that they start to worry.”**

The idea of ‘winter blues’ is one most of us are familiar with; the nights drawing in and the weather cooling down producing feelings of sadness, melancholy and lethargy.

Winding back the clocks often comes in a wistful and gloomy manner as autumn takes hold and the frivolity of summer is covered by the dewy promise of coldness, darkness and cushy isolation.

But there is a point in which this commonplace phenomenon turns from regular feelings of sadness to a diagnosable and nonignorable disorder.

### What is SAD?

It’s known as ‘seasonal affective disorder’ and it affects 6% of the British population and around 10-15% in its sub-syndromal form (in which individuals experience symptoms but not clinical depression). Essentially, shorter days, reduced sunlight

and poorer weather conditions trigger depression in people with SAD. Sharing many of the same symptoms as major depressive disorder but not its absolute longevity, the precedence of seasonal affective disorder can slip under the radar.

“It can be on a scale – people might experience mild to moderate symptoms, but for some it can be debilitating,” said Dr Sarah Davies, a Chartered Counselling Psychologist, who works with people who suffer with SAD.

### Symptoms that match major depressive disorder include:

- A persistent low mood
- A loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities
- A shortened temper (irritability)
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Feelings of despair, guilt and worthlessness

### Symptoms unique to SAD include:

- Sleeping too much and finding getting out of bed difficult (as opposed to the lack of sleep more common in major depressive disorder)
- Cravings for carbohydrates and weight gain

As tricky as spotting depression in other people so too is the identification of SAD, but some things to look out for in others are:

- Visible exhaustion
- Isolation (not wanting to see people)
- A proneness to physical illnesses such as cold flus and other infections
- A lack of interest in sex or any physical contact
- Lack of concentration at work or at home
- Noticeable change in appetite and diet

"The days feel full of dread. In extreme cases it can leave people feeling suicidal," said Dr Sarah.

### How does SAD work?

Research has provided multiple indefinite reasons for the disorder, the most common being the body's reaction to the reduced levels of sunlight working out of sync to regular physiological and psychological function, known as circadian rhythm (a fancy term for body clock).

Dopamine and norepinephrine are both neurotransmitters, brain chemicals that function as motivation, energy and happiness

signals, and they play critical roles in terms of how we wake up in the morning and how we energise the brain. It is theorised these processes are delayed in patients suffering from SAD.

Another more speculative idea is that it is a remnant of ancient human physiology and our ancestors' tendency to use less energy in winter months as a way of self-preservation, with women of reproductive ages shutting down the most to maintain such energy-requiring functions such as pregnancy.

Indeed, women in early adulthood make up 80% of SAD diagnoses. Often mistaken as a 'lesser form of depression' the tendency to explain symptoms as simply 'winter blues' puts those suffering from the disorder at risk of not seeking support and allowing it to increase its grasp of their mental wellbeing.

SAD is not a lesser form of depression but a different variant of it, with the same severity but triggered more distinctly by place and time.

"I don't think it's very well-known or understood," said Dr Sarah.

"People who don't have it can quite easily feel like it's a mind over matter thing when, actually if you've suffered from SAD, it's as much as a physical thing as it is psychological."

"I've worked with a lot of people

who've had partners or friends or family telling them "you just need to get out and about." But physically, in extreme cases, you don't have the energy to even get out of bed," she added.

### How can I help someone with SAD?

Often the best thing to do to help someone you may suspect is dealing with seasonal affective disorder is unclear, and you may feel helpless in the knowledge a loved one is suffering.

Seasonal depression is not as simple as winter blues and you can't 'fix' someone else's depressive episodes - but you can support them.

"It's often dismissed as "all of us feel like this in the winter" and there is some truth in that but that's quite different to how SAD is, where those feelings are more extreme," Dr Sarah said.

What you can do is talk to them and open up a compassionate and patient conversation. Remind the person that they are loved and valued and that you are there for them throughout this difficult period in the year and that it is a temporary feeling. Sometimes a simple 'you may not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change' is enough to comfort a loved one in need.

Offering company on walks and other physical activities is a great place to start, to encourage regular

levels of dopamine and norepinephrine to resume. Keeping spaces well-lit and warm can also help alleviate symptoms as the darkness and cold can amplify feelings of sadness.

Encouraging them to seek help is also one of the best things you can do, whether it be their GP, a therapist or even the emergency services if necessary.

#### What if I think I may have SAD?

If you suspect yourself of showing signs of SAD it is important you seek support, whether from a friend, a family member or a doctor. It may seem daunting at first, but no one knows you better than your friends and family, and doctors are trained to respond and treat disorders such as these.

Stay active, it can feel difficult enjoying the activities you once did but forcing yourself out into the world can be incredibly helpful when feeling depressed or isolated. The natural endorphins and sense of achievement can improve your mood massively.

Eating a healthy diet when dealing with SAD can help reduce symptoms of cravings as well as helping to control natural weight gain.

Many people find light therapy extremely effective - one way to get light therapy at home is to sit in front of a light box for 30 minutes to an hour each day to essentially 'trick' your body clock into the regular and happier rhythms of the summer months. Light boxes are much brighter than home lighting and can boost mood in a way similar to the sun, aiding in sleep and waking up naturally in the morning.

But, if you feel that you may not need such support quite yet, there is a wealth of self-help and self-care resources both online and in local communities throughout the country, books, meetings and online courses are there if you feel they may help.

## It's okay to ask for help...

### Contacts to talk about SAD and other mental health conditions:

#### MIND

0300 123 3393  
info@mind.org.uk  
Text: 86463  
Mind Infoline  
PO Box 75225  
London  
E15 9FS

#### NHS Choices

nhs.uk  
Provides information on a wide range of health and social care topics. Provides an online search tool to find GPs and NHS services near you, including day services.

#### CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight)  
thecalmzone.net  
Provides listening services, information and support for men at risk of suicide, including web chat (5pm–midnight).

#### Samaritans

116 123 (freephone)  
email: jo@samaritans.org  
Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK  
PO Box 90 90  
Stirling FK8 2SA  
samaritans.org  
24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.

#### NHS 111

Call: 111  
111.nhs.uk  
Non-emergency medical help and advice for people living in England, and certain areas of Wales.

#### Befrienders Worldwide

befrienders.org  
Worldwide directory of emotional support helplines.



Having a pet has been proved to help a huge variety of mental health conditions. With dogs and cats increasingly used for therapy and emotional support, what is it about our canine companions and feline friends that makes them so beneficial to our mental health? **Aspire2 Senior Editor Sam Atkin** investigates what makes cats and dogs such...

# Pawfect partners

**I**t has been widely reported that having a pet has a major positive impact on both our physical and mental health, with studies showing that it can reduce our stress levels, aid with mental health conditions and even help us live longer.

In the UK, the most common pets are cats. A quarter of adults have a cat, with an estimated population of 11.1 million pet cats. Dogs are a close second, with 24% of adults owning one, with around 8.9 million pet dogs. In total, 49% of adults in the UK own a pet.

## Dogs

Though cats are first place in terms of their popularity, there can be no doubting that dogs are amazing at making us feel loved and

wanted. More often than not, a dog will bound through the house the moment you get home from work to show you how much you were missed. This in itself is good for us.

Around the world, dogs are used to help people with conditions such as blindness and hearing problems. More and more though, they are also being used for therapy and to help people with mental health conditions. From issues such as stress, loneliness and sadness to conditions including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and PTSD, dogs can (and do) help.

Dr Steph Wenban is an in-house vet for Front of the Pack, a company that provides



specially tailored supplements for dogs. She explained why dogs have such a positive impact on our mental wellbeing:

*"A lot of mental health has been linked to low levels of dopamine, linking to low moods, and an imbalance of serotonin which is one of the chemicals in the brain that's been linked to depression," Dr Steph said.*

*"Playing and interacting with dogs has been shown to increase both of those hormones in the brain, so just by being around them, your brain chemistry changes."*

*"It also releases oxytocin which is the hormone of love. It's the same as if you get a hug from your mum, you get that same hormone release when you're playing with a dog which is quite incredible really," she added.*

Dogs are also increasingly helping people with psychiatric conditions including schizophrenia and compulsive disorders.

"This is actually a new thing in this country. Service dogs and support dogs have been around for a while but psychiatric support dogs is a reasonably new area."

"For a person with schizophrenia, a service dog might be trained to remind them to take their medication. For a severe agoraphobic who fears being inside their own home, these dogs are incredible; they can do things like turn lights on to help people feel more secure."

While it is relatively simply to train a dog to turn a light on, training it to recognise the signs of anxieties and precludes to our behaviours can take several years. Dr Steph explained that while intelligence is vital in service and therapy dogs, other traits are equally important.

"It's a perfect blend of intelligence, a friendly nature, being really outgoing but also being quite dedicated. In terms of breed, it really does depend on what you need the dog to do."

Owning a dog can work wonders for your mental health. Not only do they make you feel loved and needed, calm you down, and become a live-in best friend, the sense of responsibility that comes with having one can help provide a sense of purpose.

Aside from that, walking a dog gets you out of the house and (with most dogs, at least) taking them for a walk is a calming experience that provides some exercise, which can also help your mental health.

*"My dog massively helps me feel better! Working from home, I was rarely getting out but since having Oscar, I'm much more active and see others as we walk," said Anna Parker-Naples, a Business and Mindset Coach.*

By their nature, dogs are ideally suited to helping humans. As social animals, they love to be around people and often have an unfaltering desire to please.

"They're known for their loyalty and the joy that they get from being around us makes them very suitable for helping us, as well as their intelligence. Having a dog eases loneliness on both sides," Dr Steph said.

### **My dog looks after my mental health. How can I look after theirs?**

*"While the obvious considerations are good food, water at all times, shelter, worming, vaccinations and so on, in terms of considering the dog's mental health, something that gets overlooked quite a lot is walking.*

*A lot of people actually don't walk their dogs that often because they have a big garden. Even the smallest dogs will benefit from five or 10 minutes out of the house because it provides mental enrichment for them; new sights and sounds and smells and it's something a bit different to keep them stimulated."*

- Dr Steph Wenban

### **Cats**

Cats are often thought to be less friendly than dogs and have a reputation of being aloof and

disinterested. Many cats, however, love human contact and develop strong bonds with their owners.

Cats are better suited to households with less space, owners who are not as physically capable as the average dog owner and are generally easier





*Though dogs are generally able to help with a wider range of mental health conditions, cats are easier to look after*

to look after than their canine counterparts. They are normally calmer and make excellent lap animals, which can be therapeutic to the owner.

The act of petting a cat can dramatically lower stress levels, lowering blood pressure, calming breathing and slowing the heart rate, which means the furry felines are great for conditions such as anxiety.

Like with dogs, the act of spending time with your cat releases oxytocin in your brain, which creates a sense of calm and relaxation and has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety.

The purring of a cat not only shows that they're enjoying your attention, it also has health benefits.

Cats purr at between 25 and 50 Hertz, frequencies that have been shown to improve various things including bone density, pain relief and healing of muscles and tendons. It's

also the same frequency range that has some of the positive effects of meditation including stress relief and reduced anxiety.

*"Adopting a cat is basically like adopting a walking, meowing, sassy, stress reliever. Cats are shown to relieve stress in a number of different ways by simply being themselves," journalist Chelsy Ranard said in an article for The Catnip Times.*

*"An added benefit to having a cat is the feeling of companionship, and how that friendship positively affects mental health. Having a cat can help people with feelings of loneliness and provide purpose," she added.*

A Cats Protection and Mental Health Foundation study showed that 87% of people who owned a cat said it had a positive impact on their wellbeing and 76% said that they felt they could cope with everyday life much better thanks to the cat.

"I recently adopted three rescue cats and the benefit on my mental health has been enormous. As a burnout and Chronic Fatigue recoveree, my cats provide a huge distraction from simple stresses in my life that can trigger panic, they validate me as 'something to love' by the loyal dedication they show me and they bring joy and humour to my household, which I had previously struggled to find," said Katie Hoare, who works as part of Counselling Directory.

"When I go home, it's essential for me to switch off and watch a cat playing or doing something silly," she added.

While it's true that the effects cats can have on mental health conditions are less well-documented than those of dogs, cats may simply be a better choice for some as they can provide the same benefits to some mental health conditions like stress and anxiety, but are easier to care for and require less frequent attention.

## How can I keep my cat happy?

Cats are often happiest in their own company. While they enjoy human interaction, they generally prefer it on their own terms. Smothering cats with affection when they don't want it can make them less friendly towards you in the future.

As a rule, if a cat's head is down and they are sleeping, leave them be; they won't be happy if you interrupt their precious nap time.

Not all cats are house cats - some need time outside to explore which is something they naturally enjoy.

### Your choice

Your choice of pet is not limited to dogs and cats, but both can provide a wealth of mental and physical health benefits. However, if you are concerned about your mental health, it is best to speak to a doctor or therapist if you have not already done so. Pets can help with conditions, but they cannot fix them entirely.

## Please note:

While this article has clearly encouraged the benefits of owning a dog or a cat, we strongly discourage the purchase of any animal unless you are confident that you are capable of providing the care it needs.

You will need suitable living conditions and the financial stability to afford regular food, vaccinations and possible emergency vet bills.

Pets also need your time. If you're out of the house for long stretches every day, dogs in particular can struggle with loneliness. For most dog breeds, a certain amount of exercise is required, so please consider the prospect of regular walks.

If you are not allowed a pet in your property, please don't risk getting one – it isn't worth having to get rid of them.

For more guidance, please visit the RSPCA's advice and welfare page: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets>

## Pets in jets



In the USA, some airlines allow emotional support animals on aeroplanes in order to help owners who suffer from anxiety and depression. The latest high-profile flyer was a miniature horse called Flirty, and there has also been a kangaroo and a turkey.

The term "emotional support animal" is recognised in America but not here in the UK, and they differ to service animals like guide dogs, which are allowed on flights here.

There are calls for the laws in the UK to be changed, with the group that registers support pets, The Emotional Support Animal Registry attempting to get legal recognition so that UK-based flights must let support animals in aeroplane cabins.

They are currently campaigning for cats and dogs to be allowed first.

In the US, there has led to a steep increase in requests for "support pets" on America's United Airlines, rising by 75% to 76,000 in a year, according to the BBC.

But after a crackdown the airline says only cats, dogs and trained miniature horses can be brought into cabins, and anyone bringing them on board needs a doctor's note.

The animals also have to be small, "clean and well-behaved", and they can't have their own seat or eat from table trays.

## Send us your pet snaps!

Does your pet help your mental health? Have you got a cat or a dog that looks after you?

Next month, we'll feature a page of pet pics and how they help their owners.

It might be a cat that calms your anxiety, a dog that consistently brightens your day or even a horse that keeps you active. We want to see them and hear how they help!

Simply send a snap of your pet (with or without you in it too, it's your choice) and a short message about how they help you to [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk) and we'll do the rest.



**Place2Be** is a national charity providing in-school emotional support to children and young people. Founded in 1994, we've grown from supporting a handful of schools to working with over 600 schools nationwide.

**Every child  
deserves a  
place  
to be**

To find out how you can support us,  
visit [www.place2be.org.uk/support-us](http://www.place2be.org.uk/support-us)



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# Back to school

## How speaking out is still the best way to battle the bullies

By Alex Morrall

In the UK this month, over 10 million children will be donning their freshly ironed uniforms, lining up for that inevitable Facebook photo and heading back to school for another year of learning, socialising and ever-growing extracurricular activities (how many types of rugby can there be?).

The return to school should be an exciting time, full of optimism and eagerness to take on the new year.

However, for 22% of our young people it also marks a return to regular instances of bullying.

School should provide a safe and welcome environment for our children but with the rising magnitude of bullying both on-site and online, can we truly be assured as we wave them off in early September, that everything is being done to ensure friendship and education is all that awaits in the coming terms?

### The Facts of Bullying

School itself already incites feelings of anxiety and stress on many pupils, with rises in young people seeking counselling to manage study stress rising by 11% in two years.

Bullying, however, has a much greater psychological effect, with almost one



in five children having contemplated suicide because of bullying at school, a new study revealed - a harrowing statistic, with ethnic minorities, individuals with special learning needs and LGBT+ students being most affected.

Alongside the mental health impact of bullying is the educational consequences of such harassment, with 35% of bullied students missing school and 20% changing schools or becoming home-schooled because of it.

We want our young people to achieve their best throughout their education, reaching goals, surpassing

expectations and leaving a more well-rounded and mature individual.

However, the longevity of the consequences of bullying however extend far beyond the confines of the school fence and even beyond childhood.

Studies have shown the long-term damage experiencing regular bullying can have on the mind: People who have been bullied are at increased risk of health problems reaching into adulthood and over six times more likely to be diagnosed with a serious illness, smoke regularly, or develop a condition such as anxiety, depression or PTSD.

Because bullying takes place at such a formative age, we can no longer approach the issue with the notion that it will end at graduation and that freedom from school automatically means freedom from the consequences of bullies.

As much as the lessons we learn at school within the confines of the classroom define career aspirations and a sense of direction in life, so do the experiences outside of the classroom, through vital social interaction and communication development.

If bullying occupies a significant space within such a definitive time in a child's life its consequences on mental and emotional health can fundamentally change a person beyond childhood and into adulthood.

Just one small example of this is that those who have been bullied are more than twice as likely to have difficulties keeping jobs or committing to saving compared to those not involved in bullying.

### What Exactly is Bullying?

Frustratingly there is no legal definition of 'bullying', and thus each school operates to its own code of conduct in its response to bullying behaviours.

This makes classifying incidences problematic, as well as identifying appropriate action and prioritising safeguarding.

This, as well as the mounting influence of cyberbullying, adds further to the confusion surrounding bullying in schools. Over the last three years there has been an 87% increase in the number of Childline counselling sessions about online bullying.

What remains a constant in the identification of bullying is that it is a persistent and repetitive set of

behaviours intended to harm, upset or otherwise antagonise an individual or select group of peoples.

Such a broad definition encompasses a wealth of incidences, not just physical violence, verbal abuse or malicious exclusion but consistent text messages, social media attacks (trolling) and threats.

So, if the forms of bullying are so broad and ever changing, surely we need to change with it? Speaking to Aspire2, nationwide anti-bullying charity BulliesOut commented:

"There are now so many more ways in which people can be bullied. The introduction of technology has taken things to a whole new level and one which many were not prepared for or equipped to deal with effectively in relation to bullying. Bullying can now be a continuous problem for people to endure as it can continue 24/7."

### What Can We Do?

Now, it may seem common sense if cyberbullying is suspected or even reported to disengage all online activity, unplug everything and for parents to swiftly respond to in within the respective platform. This however rarely proves successful.

Social media nowadays is such a significant aspect to relationship building, organisation and communication that to simply remove it in an effort to stop bullying leads, more often than not, to increased feelings of isolation.

The face of bullying may have changed (it's more insidious and less visible now) but its nature remains the same; born from fear, insecurity and trauma and thus the encouraged response remains unchanged: talk about it.

A spokesperson for the Mental Health Foundation said:

**"Find a trusted person to talk to - ideally an adult. If you're a parent, then contact someone in authority at the place it's happening and inform them, because they are not always aware of bullying.**

**Also let your child know that you're willing and available to talk to them about it at any time. Let them know there is nothing wrong with them and that you are positively on their side and believe them. Don't give up - it's not OK."**

With conversation being the best weapon against bullying behaviours, The Diana Award Charity has taken to the web armed with hashtags and celebrity endorsements to push a fresh take on our ideas of bullying and provide free training in their anti-bullying ambassador programme.

This new approach is intended to appear in newsfeeds and inboxes across the country, encouraging the discourse to increase both online and in person.

The charity, formed in honour of Diana, Princess of Wales recognises the achievements and hardships of young people and has created a series of celebrity interviews about each star's experience of school and bullying.

Titled the '#Back2School' campaign, the movement has already inspired a multitude of other celebrities and the public to take to social media and post photos of themselves during their early school years captioned with their own personal advice to current young people.

Many encouraged speaking out if you are subject to or witness suspected bullying, trusting in those who care about you, and always being yourself

even under trying circumstances.

The campaign certainly seems to have struck a chord with many people and the response is an encouraging thing to see with the public and celebrities coming together to create a digital conversation of personal advice and success stories of overcoming shared adversities. BulliesOut's comment further on how to respond to bullying behaviour and the importance of opening up and speaking out:

**"Bullying is talked about more than it used to be and this needs to continue.**

**Bullying should be identified at the earliest opportunity and should be dealt with robustly and consistently. Those demonstrating bullying behaviour need to be aware of the consequences of their behaviour and those entrusted to deal with the issues need to be confident to ensure that people face those consequences... Our advice would always be to speak out about bullying and bullying behaviours.**

**We realise that this is never an easy thing to do, but it is essential for everyone to take on this advice and report bullying in order to demonstrate that this behaviour is unacceptable. The more we speak out about it, the harder it will become for people to behave as bullies or show bullying behaviour."**

School can be a scary place; a busy hubbub of new peers, teachers and increasingly challenging lessons. It can also be brilliant, with friendships, games and a wealth of knowledge to discover that, for the first time,



*Thanks to social media, bullying is now easier than it has ever been.*

doesn't come from a familial source.

Bullying is no new phenomena and so many of us have been privy to its debilitating nature. Parents and teachers have long been knowledgeable and vigilant to the signs and symptoms of bullying in its physical form - which seems to have far simpler solutions than its new virtual and invisible guise.

Its face may have changed but the response to it has not. As previously mentioned, it is vital to show that bullying in whatever form is never acceptable.

A solution as simple as unplugging the Wi-Fi may give comfort in the knowledge a child is no longer open to cyber attacks but what it also does is impede any effective discourse taking place, effectively making conversations impossible.

Campaigns like the Diana Award's have shown us that speaking out on platforms in which bullying can occur inspires an effective and emotional response from a huge diversity of people. The positive affirmations that we can put out into the digital world

in posts of advice or stories of our own give hope and strengthen our active presence in the fight against cyber-bullying.

We have to partake in the conversation and further impress upon our young people the effect of bullying and that it is neither acceptable nor unbeatable.

Through this new, personal approach, vulnerability is shared, shame and stigma are ignored and our fight with bullying both physical and digital is strengthened.

**The Diana Award** offers #Back2School advice and support online. You can also receive free, confidential support via text anytime of the day or night by texting 'DA' TO 85258

If you are a young person in need of mental health support, you can contact the free **YoungMinds** Crisis Messenger service by texting YM to 85258 or contact **Childline** by calling 0800 1111 for free.

Author and internationally acclaimed advocate for people with eating disorders, Hope Virgo writes a candid letter to her younger self about battling her anorexia in the first of several articles she will write for *Aspire2*.



## Together we can be a Survivor

*To my 13-year-old self,*

You will be coming up against some really nasty things over the next year. You will be put in horrible circumstances where you feel guilty, afraid and alone. You will feel trapped. I am not telling you this to scare you but to give you that inner strength that you so long for and you will need.

It is not your fault what happens. It will feel like it at the time, it will cause you to act in certain ways but you can be free from it. It will take time. You will react in ways that will hurt others but also hurt yourself so much. And I will be angry at you for so long. Angry that you caused me to lose so much of what I wanted out of life.

Aged 29, I opened this up to the justice system and felt completely let down - I was so angry at you! I felt like it was your fault for so long. I felt like you should have reported it when you were in hospital but you didn't.

I was angry at the way you painted pictures of us in diaries, showing us as easy people. I have only just realised that you were doing this to own your sexuality and who you were. You had no idea what you were doing you just wanted to feel something, feel in control, feel loved.

I was angry at you over the last year so many times, I resented not only you but the fact the abuser took charge of you. Took your sexuality when you were so innocent. I hate what he did to you and I hate what it has done to us for so long.

For the last 16 years it has controlled us. Controlled relationships, caused us to destruct so much. It is so frustrating that this all happened and you responded in this way. You called him a "twat" in your diary which the police said made us look like we were jealous and angry at someone. I don't even know what a healthy relationship is which is why there has been these weird power imbalances for so long.

I am ready to forgive you. It wasn't your fault what happened. And it wasn't your fault you acted in certain ways. I can see now you were just trying so hard to cope with it all. To cope with people getting close, people hurting you and to try and find out who you were. I wish it hadn't come to this.

I wish you had realised that you needed help sooner over the last year before you let so much slip in life. I know you built those walls around yourself to protect you and those you loved and I forgive you for that.

I forgive you and I forgive the abuser. It feels hard writing that down but I know together we don't want to fear things anymore. We will not let fear control us and our past take over who we are.

### **What I want you to know right now is this:**

You are loved and you deserve to be loved. You deserve to be treated like a princess and you don't need to panic when it happens.

You can let your guard down; you can risk letting people in because those who really care about you will love you no matter what.

You do not fear life anymore. You do not need to let your past dictate who you are as a person.

And the best thing of all when you are 29 you will 100% say "I love being alive." After a tough year of wanting to give up so many times you will find that joy, that passion, and you will help people along the way.

Stick with it and stay strong.

*Together we can fight it and be a Survivor.*

## About Hope

Hope Virgo is the Author of *Stand Tall Little Girl*, and an international award winning leading advocate for people with eating disorders.

Hope helps young people and employers (including schools, hospitals and businesses) deal with the rising tide of mental health issues which affect one in four people and cost employers between £33 and £42 billion annually. She has been described by Richard Mitchell, CEO of Sherwood Forest Hospital, as "sharing a very powerful story with a huge impact".

Hope is also a recognised media spokesperson, having appeared on various platforms including BBC Newsnight, Victoria Derbyshire, Good Morning Britain, Sky News and BBC News.

For four years, Hope managed to keep it hidden, keeping dark secrets from friends and family. But then, on 17th November 2007, Hope's world changed forever.

She was admitted to a mental health hospital. Her skin was yellowing, her heart was failing. She was barely recognizable. Forced to leave her family and friends, the hospital became her home.

Over the next year, at her lowest ebb, Hope faced the biggest challenge of her life. She had to find the courage to beat her anorexia.

Now, Hope dedicates her life to helping people with eating disorders. In her debut novel, *In Stand Tall Little Girl*, Hope shares her harrowing yet inspiring battle with anorexia.

You can find her on:

Twitter: [@HopeVirgo](https://twitter.com/HopeVirgo)

Instagram [HopeVirgo\\_](https://www.instagram.com/HopeVirgo_)

Website: [www.hopevirgo.com](http://www.hopevirgo.com)

To sign Hope's Dump The Scales campaign, which advocates that eating disorders aren't just about weight, click [here](#).

'Stand Tall Little Girl' is set to be released on 28 October 2019 and you can click [here](#) to preorder it now.



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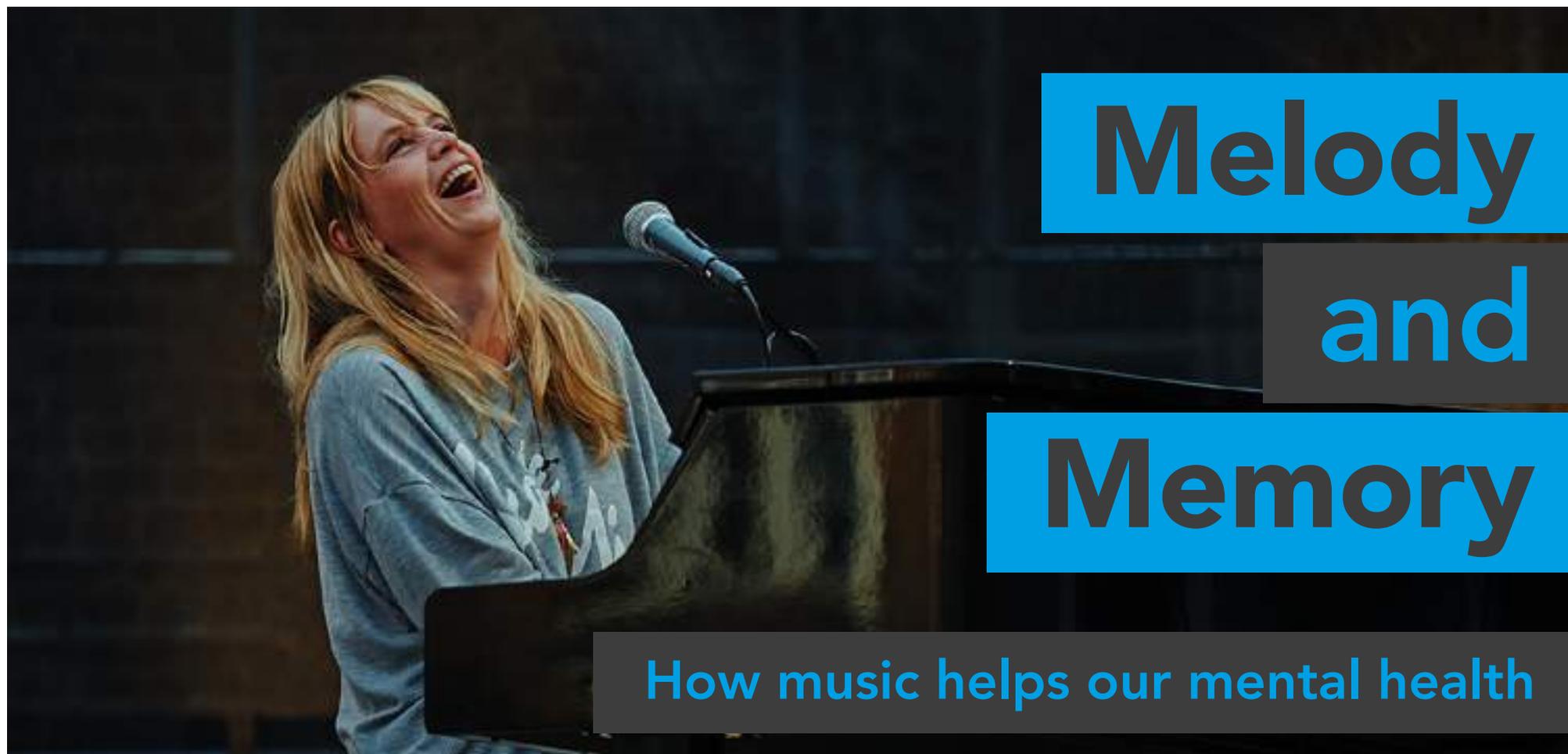
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# Melody

# and

# Memory

## How music helps our mental health

**Music is arguably the most universal art form there is. It's there for some of our best memories and comforts us in some of our worst. It's capable of evoking emotions, recovering forgotten memories and can even be used as therapy for conditions including PTSD and dementia. Aspire2 Senior Editor Sam Atkin explains why music is so good for our minds.**

Music helps us on a day-to-day basis, regardless of whether or not we have a mental health condition. All it takes is hearing a catchy chorus on your journey home, or an up-tempo song in the gym for it to work its magic. When we need a pick-me-up, most of us have a go-to track.

Music is so embedded into our lives that often we don't realise it's there. Think about walking around a supermarket – you might not notice it, but the music there is intentionally upbeat and familiar so that you subconsciously want to spend more time in the shop.

It's a proven mood-booster and though it can also evoke feelings of sadness, our mental wellbeing is generally improved by music.

Clare Maddocks is the PR Officer for the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT), and recently qualified as a music therapist. She says that the familiarity of music is what brings us such strong mental reactions to it.

*"There's a lot of research that shows that our brains build up what we call cognitive schemas which is how we recognise and remember music. We also attach autobiographical memories to it," she said.*

*"The idea of people using music as their own therapy seems to happen a lot, in terms of managing their own wellbeing day-to-day," Clare added.*

Music is also well-known to help with mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, addiction, psychosis and schizophrenia.

One way it does this is by releasing dopamine, known as the happy chemical, in our brains. Studies suggest that levels of dopamine are up to 9% higher when we're listening to music we enjoy.

*"We know that when we listen to music and when we participate, our brains respond in quite a positive way, whether*

*we're passively listening or actively engaging," Clare explained.*

*"It has a chemical effect in our bodies. We also know from physiological studies that it can affect our heart rate and our blood pressure," she added.*

Proof of the power that music has on our long-term memories comes from instances where you listen a song you haven't heard since you were younger, and you're instantly and vividly transported back to that time in your life.

*"That's why it's particularly effective for people with dementia because, although their short-term memory is bad, they maintain their longer-term memory for longer. It's evoking a memory and they're engaging with the longer-term memory of that song," Clare said.*

Though songs that we associate with unhappy memories can be difficult to listen to and alter our mood in a

negative way, Clare believes doing so can be cathartic.

*“Engaging in music can be quite an emotional thing and sometimes it can engage us in negative ways, but if you’re in therapy that’s part of the process, embracing that and working through it.”*

Though listening to music alone has benefits, the community aspect of experiencing it with others or playing music with your friends can be highly therapeutic.

Conditions such as depression and anxiety can make social interaction very difficult but involving music can make it easier.

*“It can be quite daunting if you have mental health issues to go out and be social and participate in social activities. But, with music, so much of it is non-verbal so it can take away that pressure and you can feel connected and unified with other people but in a way that feels a bit safer and more secure for you,” said Clare.*

*“Music really builds community and it does that, for example, when you’re at a concert and everyone is singing and you’re part of that - there’s something really quite magical about those kinds of moments.”*

The effects of music are so beneficial that the art form is used in clinical therapy.

Music therapy in its modern form began in the aftermaths of World War I and II when musicians played for soldiers experiencing physical and emotional trauma.

Since then, it has become established as a major form of psychological intervention and is used for a wide variety of conditions.

The therapy can involve participating in music in any form including listening, playing, watching, composing and improvising. It benefits people regardless of their age.

*“As music therapists, we work across the lifespan, which is evidence that music can really help anyone. It’s not discriminatory and it’s something that everyone can access on some level,” said Clare.*

In terms of aiding mental health conditions, Clare said that songwriting can be particularly helpful in expressing feelings that may be difficult to talk about in person.

*“Sometimes it’s easier to put down what you feel as lyrics,” she said.*

*“Sometimes it’s hard to have a conversation about how you’re feeling and some people find creating a song and having that end product that they can take away from the therapy can be really beneficial to their mental health.”*

Unplanned creativity can be helpful too. Improvisation may be daunting to some musicians at first but the act of making it up as you go along has a social aspect that can enhance the experience of playing.

*“The real power of improvisation is that it’s non-verbal. So, if you’re someone who has really severe depression and you haven’t got the energy to talk, or you maybe just don’t have the words, entering into something non-verbal and having the ability to just pick up an instrument and play – it’s amazing how much of your subconscious can come out, and how much you can express yourself without the need for words,” Clare said.*

While music therapy is not recommended as an alternative to speaking to a therapist or doctor or to conventional medication in the first instance, it is a great way for people with mental health conditions to express themselves, interact with others and improve their mindset and personal wellbeing.

*“There are so many different ways that music as therapy can help people,” said Clare.*

*“I’ve seen first-hand what it can do. I did a project where I went into a stroke*



*ward, basically just doing entertainment music for the patients, singing well-known songs and taking in drums and instruments.”*

*“I was really amazed when I did that to see people who’d had strokes who literally couldn’t speak but they could sing. I was fascinated by that and so curious about how that could work,” she explained.*

Music as an art form is something that almost all of us can feel a personal connection to. The extra helping of dopamine can make a good mood great and music can evoke nostalgia like nothing else. It has an effect on our wellbeing and mental health, and through music therapy, serious conditions can see dramatic improvements.

If you want to see how music can help you, you could ask to listen to music while working, or use some personal time to learn an instrument or go to a concert, or you could join an improv group. The possibilities are almost endless.

**You may also be interested in exploring music therapy. To find out more, visit <https://www.bamt.org>.**

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# The Rainbow Project

## Supporting LGBT+ Mental Health in Northern Ireland



Prevalence of mental health conditions is 25% higher in Northern Ireland than in England and LGBT+ people are more likely to have a mental health condition. Organisations like The Rainbow Project, which works with the LGBT+ community in Northern Ireland, are therefore vital.

### Northern Ireland's perception

The support of LGBT+ people in Northern Ireland is a complex, multifaceted and often maligned subject; frequently citing Northern Ireland as a place less progressive than its mainland and Republic counterparts on its treatment of the queer community.

Northern Ireland was the last part of the United Kingdom to legalise same-sex sexual activity and the last to end a lifetime ban on blood donations by men who have sex with men, with progress on LGBT+ rights being mainly achieved during direct rule by the Government of the United Kingdom or court action rather than local legislative reform.

But, in actuality, Northern Ireland decriminalised homosexuality a decade earlier and introduced civil partnerships six years before the Republic of Ireland

but was overtaken in the introduction of same-sex marriage.

Recently, marriage equality has become a real possibility as MPs voted through amendments to the Northern Ireland Executive Formation Bill which will see same-sex marriage legalised.

This looks to legitimising the thousands of gay, bisexual and transgender relationships which currently reside within Northern Ireland and a national progression in attitudes towards LGBT+ people.

This stereotypical and brash notion of the country as entirely intolerant is an inaccurate one and The Rainbow Project in Belfast is helping fight the stigma by supporting LGBT+ students as they embark on study with both their sexual and mental health.

### LGBT+ Mental Health

Just like anywhere, LGBT+ youth experience mental illnesses at a much higher percentage than the general population in Northern Ireland. Often attributed to a lack of understanding and the fact that many have suffered through homophobic, biphobic and/or transphobic abuse with little to no support during their formative years.

Due to the sensitive nature of LGBT+ treatment within Northern Ireland, mental health issues have a tendency to be hidden and untreated.

A 2013 survey of Northern Ireland's LGBT+ community found that "47% had considered suicide, 25% had attempted it, 35% had self-harmed and 71% had suffered depression" and with hate crimes also rising consistently each year since records began, the prevalence of queer support organisations and mental

health treatment are more important now than ever before.

### The Rainbow Project

The Rainbow Project is the largest LGBT+ organisation in Northern Ireland and works with the queer community in a multitude of ways to aid in the social, personal and mental development of young LGBT+ adults across the country.

Currently based in two locations; one in Belfast city centre and the other in Foyle, L'Derry, The Rainbow Project was established in 1994 by a group of volunteers who were concerned about the spread of HIV within the gay male population of Northern Ireland.

Providing counselling and health advice has given way to a large effort in the maintenance of LGBT+ mental wellbeing as well as sexual health. The organisation offers peer and social support groups throughout regional Northern Ireland, areas where LGBT+ may be lacking to provide information on personal, mental and sexual health.

The Rainbow Project also runs a 'befriending' project to tackle the feelings of social isolation and exclusion members of the queer community may experience as young adults in both regional and urban Northern Ireland.

This includes introducing people to new social experiences; both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+, offering an opportunity for individuals to make new and valuable social connections.

Additionally, The Rainbow Project offers free Personal Development Programmes that support LGBT+ young people in building their resilience in a safe and affirmative environment, developing skills, communicating and discussing a wealth of topics such as: mental and sexual health, relationships and intimacy, assertiveness and communication, body image and flirting, parenthood and coming out, homophobia and the law in a safe and welcoming environment.

### The future

The efforts of organisations such as The Rainbow Project and the progression of political support of LGBT+ equality and issues are encouraging signs for the future of the queer experience in Northern Ireland.

Greater classifications of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic crimes has led to an increase in reported crimes and under the legislation, the Government will be obliged to extend marriage equality to Northern Ireland and legislate for abortion by 21 October, unless devolution is restored.

The day the amendments were voted through (9th July 2019) has been hailed as a historic day for equality in Northern Ireland. The amendments to the Northern Ireland Bill - which were tabled by Conor McGinn MP (concerning equal marriage) - were voted through by 383 votes to 73; here is real, quantifiable evidence of LGBT+ progression in Northern Ireland in the past few months alone.

The Rainbow Project has been a leading LGBT+ voice for decades and still provides support and services throughout the country and when historic steps are taken in the interest of recognition and equality their hard work and dedication seems even more admirable as well as undeniably important.

## LGBT+ help

**The Rainbow Project** provide counselling for LGBT+ people at their centres in Foyle and Belfast. To access counselling just contact them via [info@rainbow-project.org](mailto:info@rainbow-project.org) or 028 9031 9030 (Belfast office) or 028 7128 3030 (Derry office).

**LGBT Foundation:** Helpline: 0345 3 30 30 30 [info@lgbt.foundation](mailto:info@lgbt.foundation) This Manchester-based charity offers a wide range of LGBTQ services plus a national helpline.

**Albert Kennedy Trust:** [contact@akt.org.uk](mailto:contact@akt.org.uk) Supports young LGBTQ+ people (16-25) who are made homeless or living in a hostile environment

**Bi Cymru/Wales:** [BiCymru@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:BiCymru@yahoo.co.uk) The all-Wales network for bisexual people and those who think they might be bisexual.

**Broken Rainbow:** Helpline: 0300 999 5428 Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experiencing domestic violence.

**Who we are**

Action Mental Health is a charity working across Northern Ireland since 1963 to enhance the quality of life and employability of people with mental health needs and promoting resilience and well-being to future generations.

For more information on our services and links to other organisations please visit [www.amh.org.uk](http://www.amh.org.uk)

**action  
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health**

# 5 Facts & Falsehoods: Autism

## 1. Autism is more common than you think.

More than one in 100 people in the UK are on the autism spectrum (700,000). No two people on the spectrum are the same and severity ranges from near-unrecognisable to an inability to be self-dependent and a lack of verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

## 2. Mental illness is more common in people on the autism spectrum.

People on the autism spectrum are more likely to develop mental health problems including anxiety, OCD and depression. It is thought that a vulnerability to stress likely explains why anxiety is so common in autistic people and roughly 40% have symptoms of at least one anxiety disorder at any time, according to the National Autistic Society.

## 3. There are different types of autism.

Autism is a spectrum condition, so it affects people differently. Terms used to describe types of autism include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), pervasive development disorder (PDD), Asperger syndrome, pathological demand avoidance (PDA) and high-functioning autism (HFA).

## 4. You can't always tell if someone is autistic.

While there are personality traits that are characteristic of autism such as lack of understanding of social cues, avoidance of eye contact, intense attention to detail, fixations on certain items or subjects and a strict following of personal routines, these are not present in all autistic people and the condition affects everyone differently.

## 5. Autism needs better support, understanding and awareness.

According to the National Autistic Society, 70% of autistic adults say they are not getting the help they need from social services. At least one in three autistic adults are experiencing severe mental health difficulties due to a lack of support. Only 32% of autistic adults are in paid employment. There needs to be a better understanding of the condition.

## 1. People with autism are rarely female.

Though it's true that the condition is more common in men and boys, women and girls can be autistic too. Research shows that there are 5.5 males to every female with the condition. However, autism is under-diagnosed in females, according to Gould and Ashton-Smith in 2011's "Good Autism Practice."

## 2. People grow out of autism in adulthood.

As the National Autistic Society puts it, "autistic children become autistic adults." Autism is not "curable" and does not simply go away.

## 3. All autistic people are geniuses.

As seen in the film Rain Man, there is a common stereotype that autistic people have 'special abilities', such as being outstanding at maths or music or having unnatural memory retention. It is commonly cited that around one in 10 people with autism have such gifts.

## 4. Everyone is a bit autistic.

Liking routines or being uncomfortable socially does not mean that you are autistic but rather that you may possess certain traits that are characteristic of autism. If you believe you or your child may be on the autistic spectrum, seek advice from a doctor or another specialist.

## 5. Vaccines cause autism.

There have been countless studies that prove that vaccinating your child does not cause autism. It is dangerous to risk your child getting a life-threatening condition on the falsehood that vaccinations are in any way linked to autism.

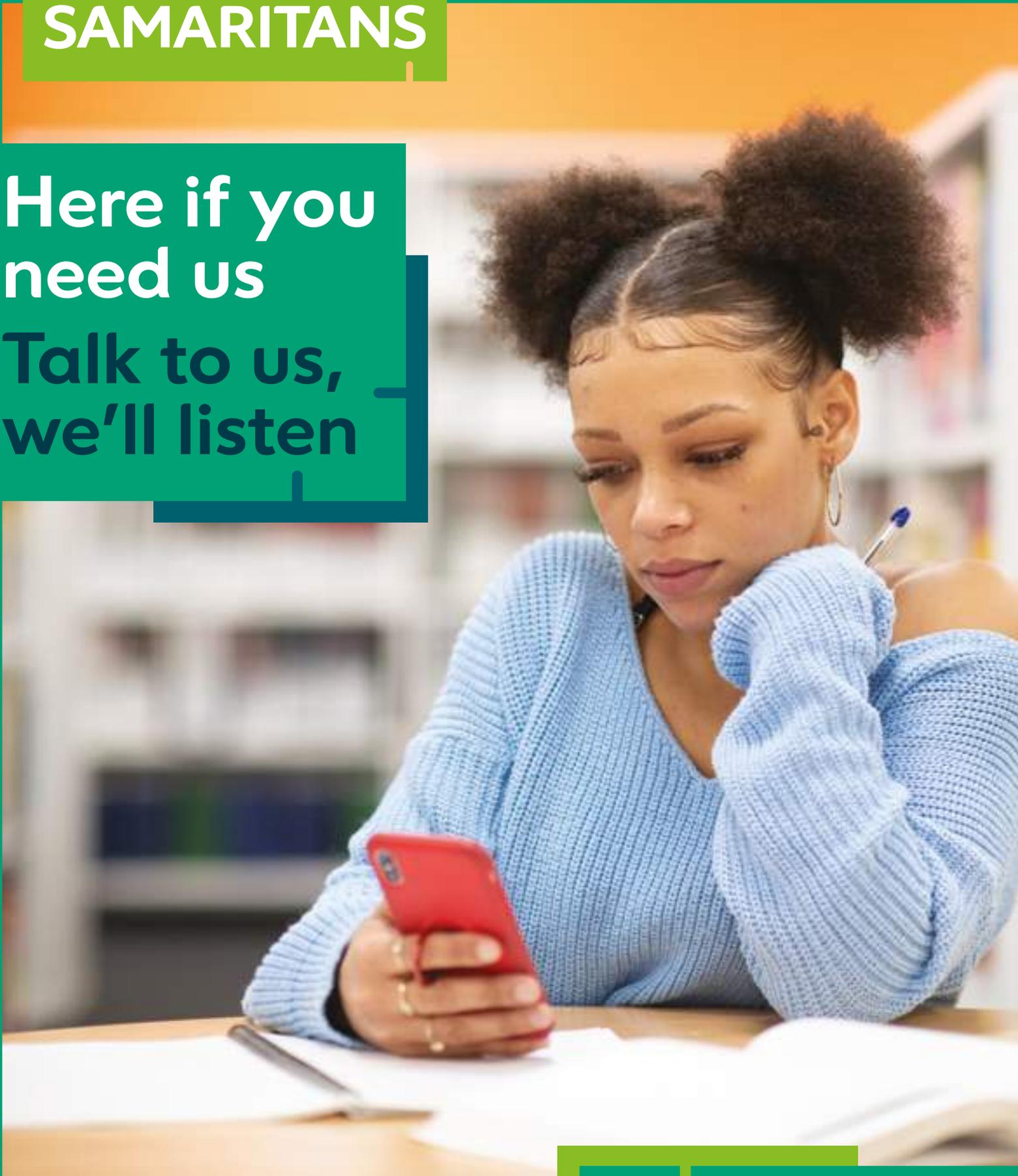
*"There is no link between autism and vaccines. It is irresponsible to suggest otherwise, when research has proved over and over again that this is a myth," said Tim Nicholls, Head of Policy at the National Autistic Society.*

*"All of us have a role to play in this - and a responsibility to prevent the spread of damaging and hurtful misinformation about autism," he concluded.*

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# Psychedelic hope for treatment-resistant PTSD sufferers

By Tom Watson

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is described by Mind as a type of anxiety disorder which you may develop after being involved in or witnessing, traumatic events. Symptoms of PTSD include amongst other things: increased anxiety and emotional arousal, avoidance and numbing and re-experiencing of the traumatic event.

The condition was first recognised in WW1 veterans as shell shock, however a wide range of non-militaristic traumatic experiences such as serious accidents, bereavement, finding you have a life-threatening illness, childhood neglect and miscarriages can be traumatic and result in PTSD.

According to PTSD UK, one in two people will experience trauma at some point in their life with 20% of those going on to develop PTSD. As you might imagine, these figures are significantly higher amongst those who have experienced active military service in a combat zone.

The Guardian reported in 2018 that former military personnel who were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan were more likely to report PTSD symptoms; 9.4% versus 5% in who did not participate in the conflicts. Ex-serving military personnel deployed in combat roles had higher rates of PTSD at 17.1% compared with 5.7% in support roles.

What's more, in 2018 ITV reported that 71 military personnel and veterans took their lives in 2018, over one third of which were known to have suffered from PTSD (more than double the total of 11 soldiers killed fighting the Taliban in 2013-2014).

According to the NHS, the main treatments for PTSD fall into two main categories. Those being psychological therapies (including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and group therapy), and medication.

These treatments help many people, but there are those who are currently classed as having treatment-resistant PTSD. According to Psychiatric Times, two-thirds of PTSD suffering veterans who complete cognitive-processing therapy or prolonged exposure therapy retain their PTSD diagnosis. Until recently there has been little hope for those classified as treatment resistant. However, there may be something positive for such sufferers to look forward to: MDMA.

## So, what is MDMA?

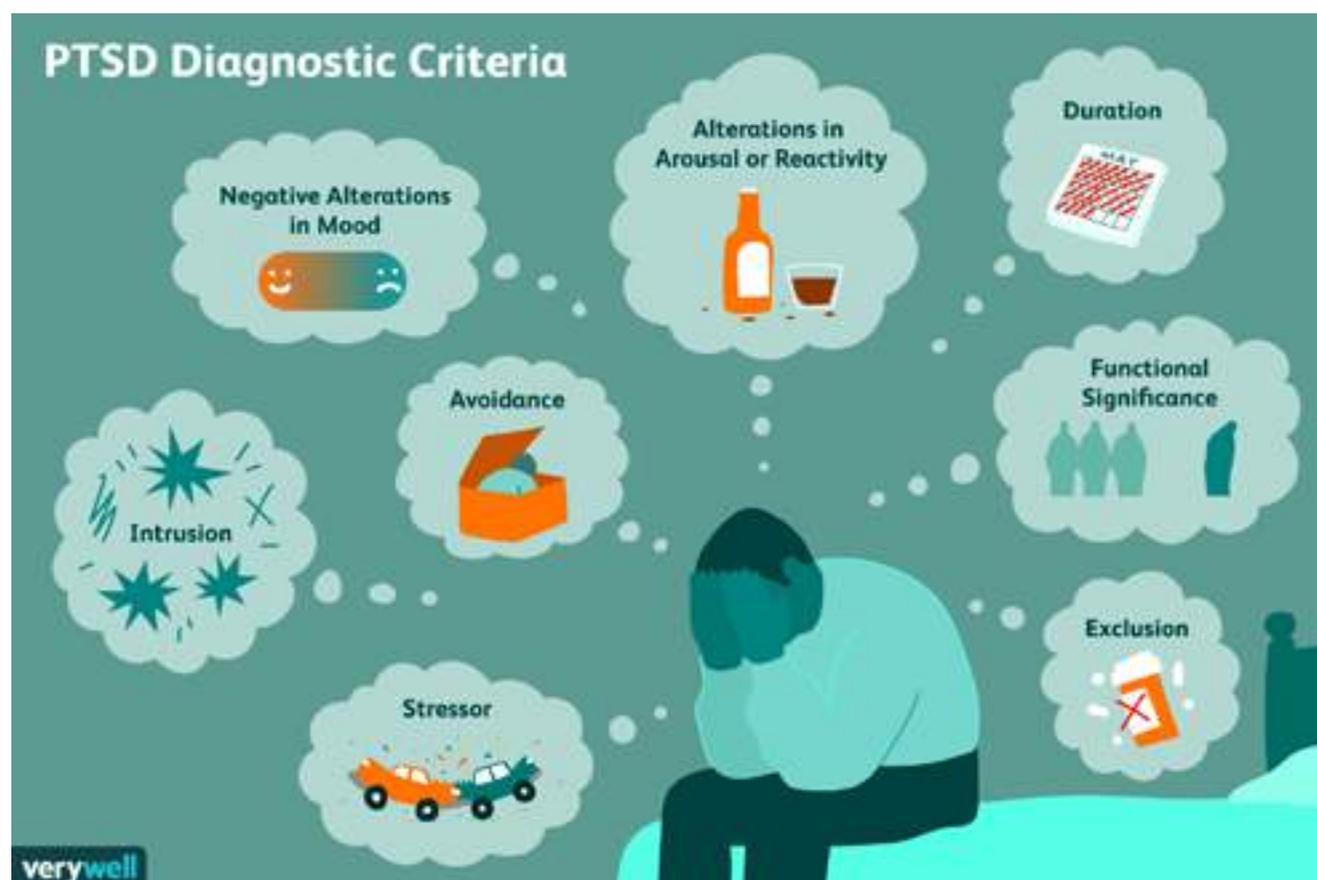
MDMA's full name is 3,4-methylenedoxy methamphetamine and for a while it went by the name empathy, however you would probably recognise it by the name ecstasy.

A psychoactive drug, MDMA is known to boost emotional empathy (hence why that's one of its many names), MDMA had been used widely in the USA by marriage and relationship counsellors before it was criminalised in 1985. Recent studies have shown the effectiveness of MDMA in the treatment of treatment-resistant PTSD.

The reason it seems to work so well is that it reduces blood flow to and therefore activity in the amygdala and the hippocampus. Reduced activity in these areas of the brain dampens emotions, allowing PTSD sufferers the ability to remember their traumas and take control of the emotions so the experiences can be stored in memory correctly without the intense and negative emotions.

It is believed that PTSD is caused by the overwhelming emotions and terrifying feelings of a memory resulting in the inability for an individual to process it in such a way that the emotion is separated and the memory itself is stored more like a record of what happened.

If you or someone you know is suffering from PTSD it is important to stay positive as it appears that MDMA use for treatment-resistant PTSD is on the way. In the meantime, **please do not try to self-medicate**, there are risks associated with street ecstasy and it is important to have appropriate psychiatric care.



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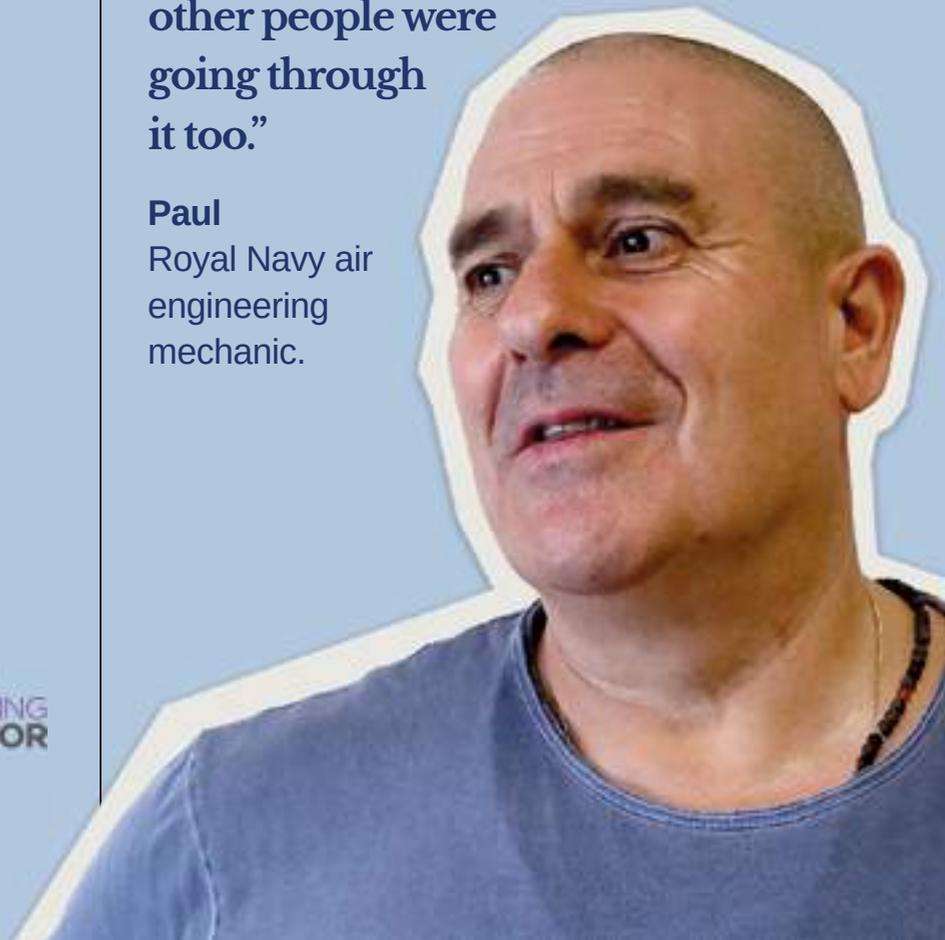
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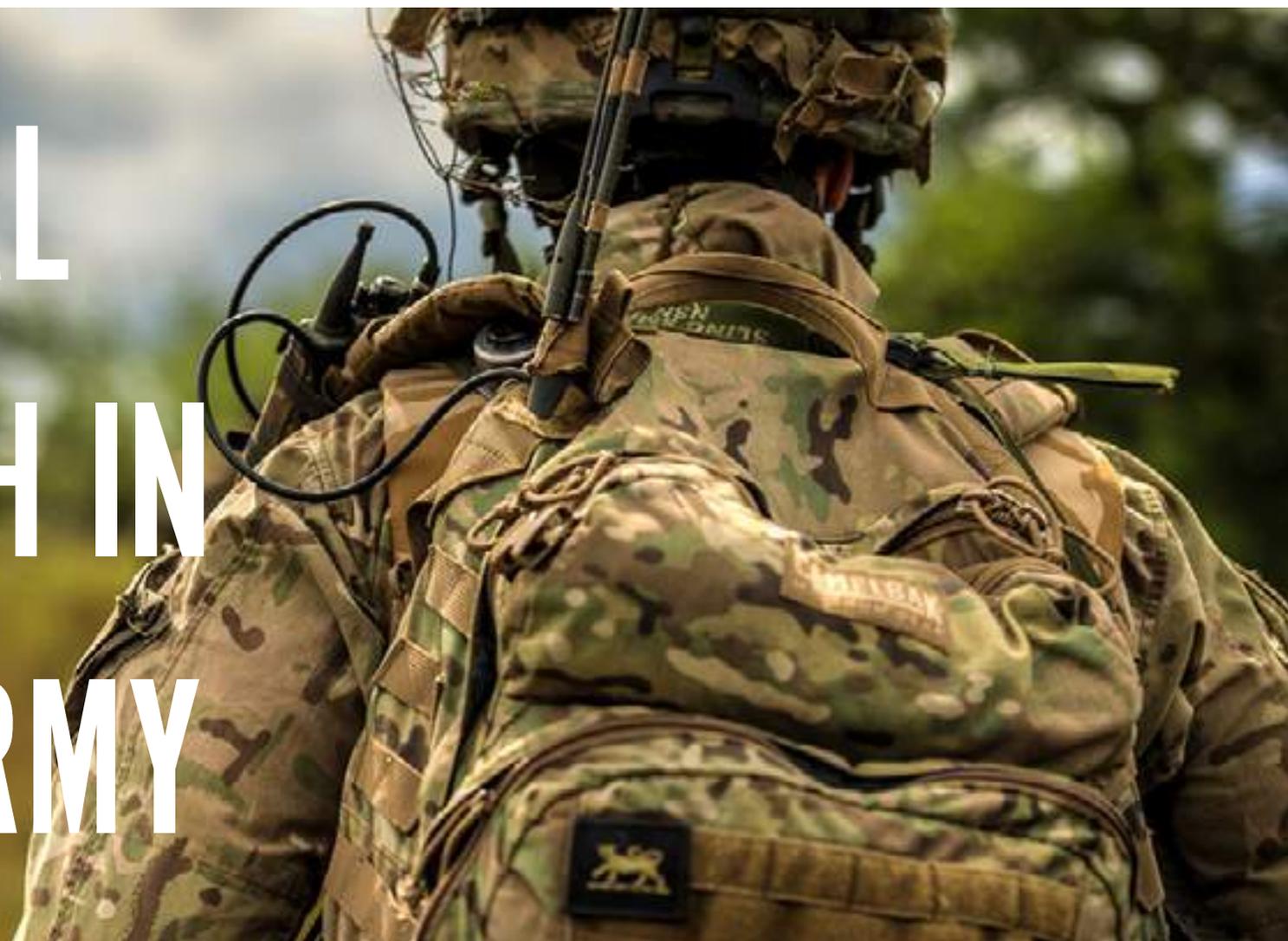
I owe Combat Stress so much – it gave me my life back.

I used to think I was the only one in the world who felt like I did. But at Combat Stress I found that other people were going through it too.”

**Paul**  
Royal Navy air engineering mechanic.



# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE ARMY



It has been suggested that military personnel in the UK do not receive the mental healthcare they need, and a report by The House of Commons Defence Committee in February called it a scandal.

However, it's difficult to reliably find out what it's really like for serving forces personnel struggling with their mental health.

Here, we aim to shed some light.

In this new monthly section, **Aspire2** will publish the accounts of a serving infantryman in the British Army, in order to learn more about how mental health is dealt with in our Armed Forces.

These accounts come from a soldier who wishes to remain anonymous.

This month, Para A describes the first eight weeks of military service.

***"You are about to read my account of my time in The British Army. I am a serving soldier in one of, if not the most elite force in The British Army, The Parachute Regiments."***

*"In this account, I will give you an insight to what soldiers actually think and feel while we are serving in the military as, to a member of the public, I'm sure you imagine a set of highly polished boots, a maroon beret, and a stare that turns people cold. But there is a lot more to me than just that."*

*From now on you will know me as Para A, and you will hear from me in this newspaper every month.*

*Before I begin, I just want to say that I do not have any negative feelings towards my regiment, and in a sense I enjoy what I do and that the country looks to people like me when we are in times of conflict. Under no circumstances do I bring the Parachute Regiment into disrepute." - Para A*

## Weeks 1-8

“ We find ourselves in a very confusing time for the average infantryman, being told by society ‘its okay to be different, its okay to speak up and say you’re struggling and that you need help’.

Yet you begin your training to be one of the most elite soldiers in The British Army, and it goes back to the old school way of thinking; from the days of our grandfathers with a whole lot of ‘man up and get your job done, you’re a soldier.’

My mental health issues may just have to wait. After all, I can't show I'm weak, can I?

The first week began slow paced and quite relaxed. Nevertheless, coming off ‘civvie street,’ this was a massive jump to what we were used to. New surroundings, bedding, smells, the walls, even the ceiling I stared up at night was different. But this I will just have to get used to, right?

I was a lucky one, I knew how to iron and use the washing machine, but most

people at the age of 18 and 19 didn't have a clue. Being the old age of 25, I could understand this may be a stressful time for them, and on the first night I remember laying staring at that strange ceiling and hearing the sound of whimpering coming from the man next to my bed.

Week two began. The days became longer, the work got harder and our corporals and the training team that overlooked our 'progression' started to become less tolerable of our 'mishaps' (they did not use the words 'progression and mishaps').

Late nights became the norm - ironing, hallucinating, cleaning, ironing...wait, did I iron that already?

As the workload increased, and the pressure started to build up, you started to forget about how you actually felt. Auto pilot was built for the RAF, surely?

People I started training with were practicing their marching towards the office door one last time to sign the papers to go to home and never return.

It was the 'norm' to see the average 'crow' (recruit) crying on their own when they thought no one was looking and for this, I was glad, as I had some sort of 'okay' signal to let go from time to time.

There are two instances I will talk to you about.

One night in week five, which I am not ashamed of at all, I was up at 4:30am. I opened my locker, put my head in the hung-up clothes, which made sure all the light was blocked out and

gave me the signal that no one was looking, and I stood there and cried. Thinking of home, thinking of all the things I should be doing at 4:30 in the morning instead of being stood there, and cried.

Once my moment was up, it was time to move on. I made sure no one saw my weakness and I was the next one to practice that final march to the office. The next time was not until later in week 27.

People tell you all the time that The Army breaks you down to build you up to be exactly how they want you. It sounds normal for The Army to do that. People from the public expect that and you're probably reading this thinking 'well, you knew what you were getting yourself into.' I totally understand you, but please remember the line 'you're still my little baby boy.'

No matter how old you get or how much you change, you always expect your mother to turn to you and say 'you're still my little baby boy.'

The second time came when my family came to see me at my base, and after the parade and show we put on for them, I was allowed to go home for a bit of normality (what's that?). It wasn't until after all this, and the almost three-hour journey home that my mother walked into the kitchen with me, stared at me and said:

"(Para A), you've changed, you're not you anymore."

The changes within me that she'd referred to started when she would try and engage in conversations with me.

Before, I was excited to talk to my mum and tell her everything I had done and having what is generally considered a normal conversation.

However, my replies became precise, constrict and to the point. 'Does that answer your question?' springs to mind.

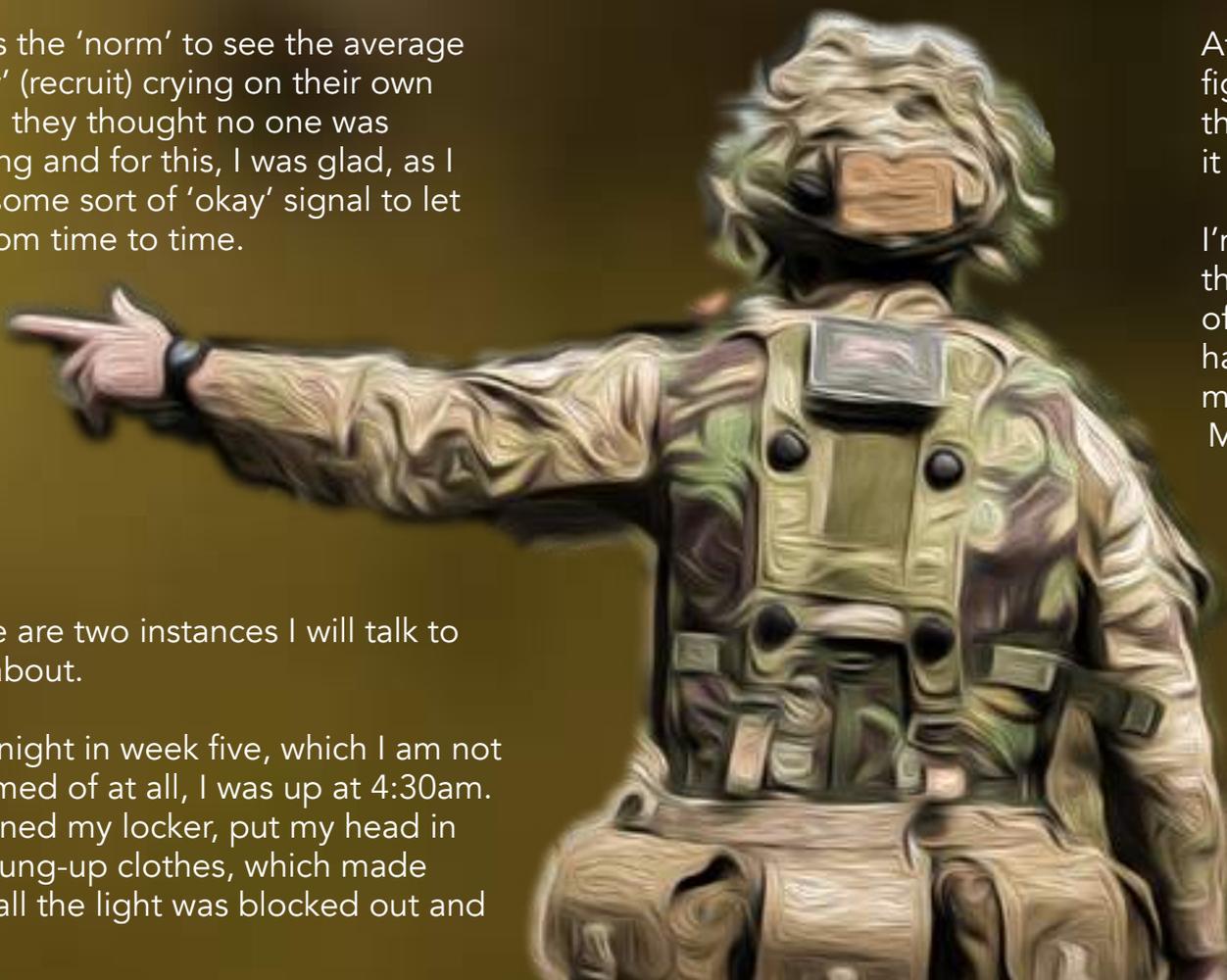
I was in this state of mind for a solid six-month block, as I had no clue when I was at work and when I was not.

After those six months, I started to figure out how to actually manage that 'switch off' button but even then, it took me a good two or three days.

I'm quite confident in saying that in those first eight weeks, two-thirds of the lads I started my troop with had left due to the mental strain and mental health impact it had on them. Maybe they were the lucky ones that had the right idea?

However, those eight weeks weren't the hardest. In fact, they were just an introduction to what was to come. ”

**Read more of Para A's story in next month's *Aspire2*.**



# COPING WHILE THEY'RE AWAY

*Para A has described how difficult it can be for troops mentally... but what about their loved ones at home? And what about those they would otherwise spend every day with?*

*Para A's partner explains her personal experiences.*

“ Having a partner in the forces isn't anything new. For hundreds of years men and women have left their other halves at home for extensive periods of time to fight for their country. However, that doesn't mean that the struggle isn't very real and different for every relationship.

I personally can't pinpoint what is harder; not being able to do 'the usual couple things' due to being in different parts of the country, or when deployments come around and there is a constant state of worry.

Actually, I can tell you what the hardest part is: the feeling of isolation.

For most couples, their partner is their best friend, their go-to person. Mine is just the same. However, there are times where communication isn't possible, and you can't always just pick up the phone and vent about your day. That's the part that sucks.

You listen to your friends talking about their relationships and how they're 'bored of seeing their partner every day' or how 'when he leaves the toilet seat up, it's infuriating' and you just know that they aren't appreciating what is right in front of them.

So then you go back home and think about how much you miss them, how much you would love to just see their face and be able to rant about your day or be able to tell them off for leaving the toilet seat up like your friends do. But you can't.

So, instead, you get wound up and you cry. You cry about the silliest of things, a whole rainbow of emotions from sadness and worry to laughing while you cry about the best memories that you fixate on.

However, that's not to say that I wouldn't go through it time and time again just to see his face whenever I can, not that I have much choice really! But it's worth it.

So, how do we cope with this huge range of emotions that hits like a train at random points during the day?

It took me a while to get a grip on things and figure out what works for me. But in a surprising twist of fate, I've hopefully cracked it.

It's important to remember that crying and feeling hurt is normal, and there must be times where you let yourself get upset. Time is an enemy when your partner is away. It drags and sometimes the days feel like they're never going to end. But what I found is that the cliché 'surrounding yourself with loved ones' actually helps.

Being alone with your own thoughts during these times is a real-life nightmare. On a similar note, filling your time and making sure you get to bed at a good hour is probably the best advice.

From personal experience, I struggle the most when I am laid in bed awake and my mind runs away with itself, connecting all sorts of imaginary dots. Making sure the days are filled with

productivity such as work or studying, down time with friends and family and for some like myself, burning off steam in the gym is a life saver. All because it allows me to turn my brain off before it can have those crazy thoughts!

Having a partner in the forces is hard. Very hard, at times. But there's no reason as to why the emotions should dictate your life during these periods.

Distance really does make the heart grow fonder and I can tell you from personal experience, there's no better feeling than seeing them again!

”



# Art and Poetry

Each month, Aspire2 will feature artworks, poetry and other artistic expressions inspired by or created about mental health. We aim to feature works by renowned and upcoming creatives alike.

Have you got art or poetry created about or inspired by mental health?

Aspire2 are looking for content for next month's Art and Poetry section. If you would like to contribute, we would be delighted to feature your work.

Email [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk) and show us your talent!

## The Scream

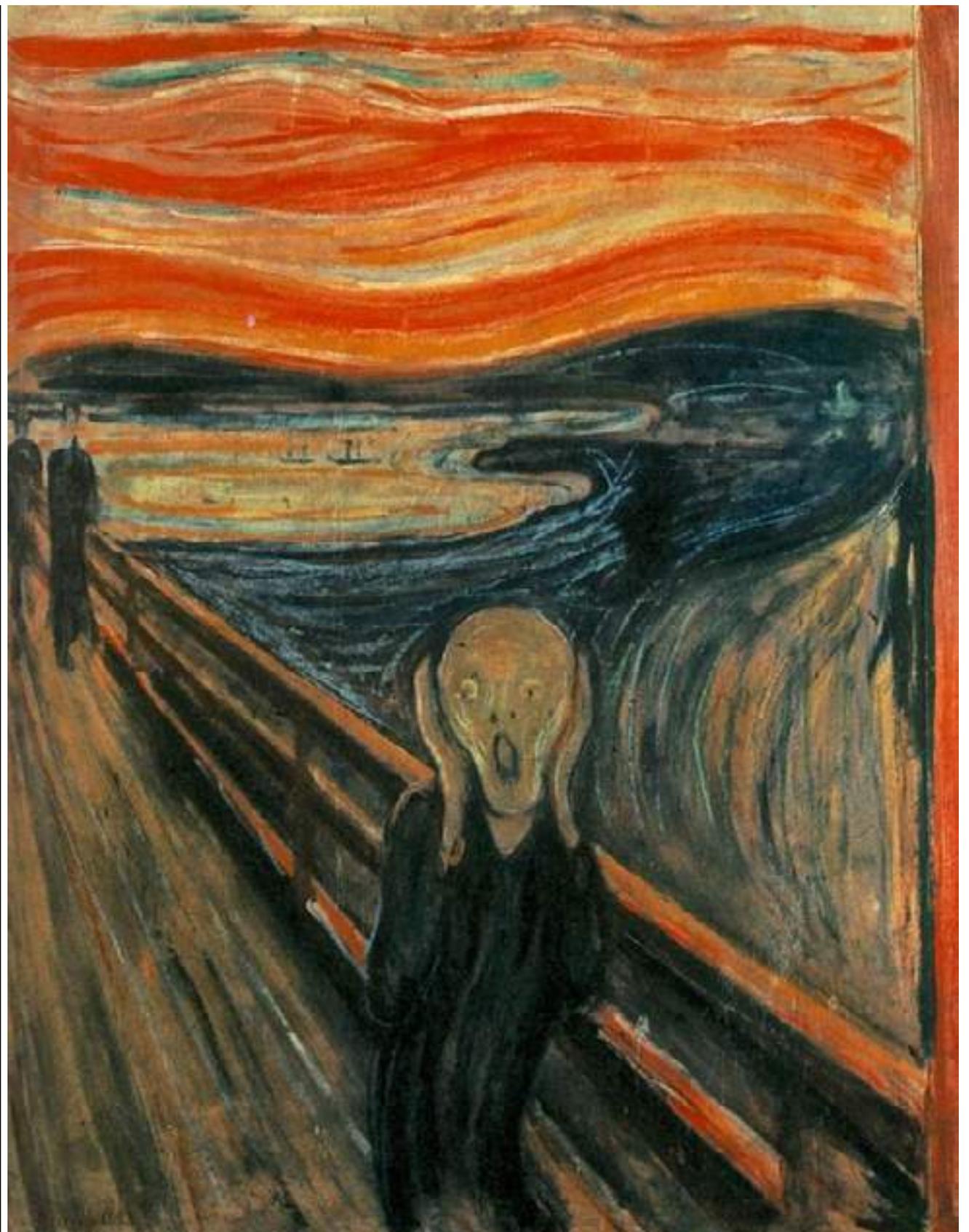
by Edvard Munch

Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is one of the world's most recognisable works of art and was created following a mental breakdown that he described in his diary:

*"I was walking along the road with two of my friends. Then the sun set. The sky suddenly turned into blood, and I felt something akin to a touch of melancholy. I stood still, leaned against the railing, dead tired. Above the blue black fjord and city hung clouds of dripping, rippling blood. My friends went on and again I stood, frightened with an open wound in my breast. A great scream pierced through nature."*

The Norwegian expressionist painter was known to write about his struggles with mental health which included suicidal thoughts, depression, hallucinations and agoraphobia. It is also presumed that he had bipolar disorder and psychosis and in 1908 he was placed in psychiatric care after shooting off two joints of his ring finger on his left hand.

To date, *The Scream* is one of the most iconic paintings ever and has been widely interpreted as "representing the universal anxiety of modern man."



## i think it's brave

by Lana Rafaela

i think it's brave that you get up in the morning even if your soul is weary and your bones ache for a rest

i think it's brave that you keep on living even if you don't know how to anymore

i think it's brave that you push away the waves rolling in every day and you decide to fight

i know there are days when you feel like giving up but  
i think it's brave  
that you never do



**Depression**  
Unknown artist



**Oh, hello**  
by [\\_minimalista](#) on Instagram

If you keep your eye on depression, and then back away. Spacing yourself farther and farther, but all the while watching depression shrink in the growing distance. When that tiny speck of sadness vanishes from sight completely, it's at that precise moment your periphery will catch hands reaching up from behind you to cover your eyes, and you will hear a small voice whisper: 'guess who.'

by [shane\\_koyczan](#) on Instagram.

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## PYLON: Performance piece explores psychosis and schizophrenia

Around 1 in 100 people will suffer an episode of schizophrenia at some time during their life. Artist James Paddock aimed to demystify the condition and break the stereotypes of the condition in his latest mixed media installation, which debuted in London in September.

The Southampton-based artist collaborated with sound and video designers David McDiarmid and Richard Gott to produce an immersive installation delving into the narrative of one young woman's journey during an intense incidence of psychosis.

Mixing sculpture, projection, visual recordings and immersive sounds, PYLON aimed to provide an experience that demystifies the living conditions of someone with psychosis by placing the audience within the experience and exposing them to the symptoms of auditory and visual hallucinations.

Speaking to Aspire2 about his objectives for the piece, James explained:

"My aim for the PYLON mixed media installation was to try to counter the public's perception of psychotic episodes, which is probably fuelled by bad press. I wanted to convey that the 'voices' heard by psychotics are not necessarily, violent or aggressive."

"I have found that if I have a calm relationship with my 'voices', then they are gentle and caring back. If any person is screamed or shouted at then it's more likely that they will be unpleasant back. I find once such a gentle relationship is formed with the deeper parts of the mind where 'voices' come from, the 'voices' can want to heal and want a better world."

"People don't realise that 'voices' or that part of the brain can be very clever and caring... I'm hoping that people who experienced PYLON came away with a different and positive understanding of psychosis and in particular, schizophrenia," he said.

Hearing voices is still heavily stigmatised, often used in the media as a plot device for antagonism or employed as a comedic device to add a manic flare to a certain character. Through PYLON, James approached the conversation in a new and unexpected way.

"I always seek to produce artworks that bring about a different angle on contemporary conversations," he said.

James exercised his freedom of expression by showing subjects that are often overlooked or underrepresented. Schizophrenia strikes most often in people in their late teens and early twenties and using youth as a lens through which to view the condition brings a fresher perspective - one often missed in conversation.

With teenage angst and depression often taking up much of the discussion around young mental health, schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders often go unexplored.

The performance's sound design used special audio techniques such as binaural sounds (multiple resonant frequencies playing at once to create a 3D effect) to convey an accurate psychotic experience to the audience.

James joins a rich history of artists who explored schizophrenic characteristics in either their work or their personal life.

These include Syd Barrett, Vincent Van Gogh, Louis Wain and Yayoi Kusama, one of the most famous contemporary artists alive today.

James was awarded Arts Council funding to develop PYLON, which was exhibited at A-side B-side Gallery in London from 4 – 10 September 2019 as his first London solo exhibition.



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service users, national and local charities and organisations a platform to be heard.

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Contact [sam@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:sam@aspire2.org.uk)

# Making Meditation in the Kitchen

How a fresh outlook on cooking could be the key to a more nourished and mindful life.

By Alex Morrall



No secret is made the restorative qualities of food, the benefits of a balanced diet and the satisfaction of treating yourself to a 'bit of what you fancy'.

Hollywood icon and all-round public do-gooder Mae West famously remarked 'too much of a good thing can be wonderful' among other musings.

These ideas may inspire images of indulgence; chocolate cake for dinner, a late-night fry up or literally anything covered in cheese.

Cheese is brilliant, I cannot and will not deny that. But if I were to refer not to Mae West but instead another noteworthy (albeit less deliciously bawdy) philosopher with similar sentiments, Hippocrates (yes him) and his translated mantra "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food," the concept of nourishment becomes one of self-preservation and not gratification.

It opens up a conversation to explore the therapeutic qualities of food and its creation. Perhaps we can shift our outlook on food from the consumption to the preparation as a so called 'medicine'?

Cooking can be great for calming the mind, decompressing and managing feelings of depression and anxiety as well as boredom and hunger.

All leisurely activities have the capacity to provide mental respite, gardening, running, yoga etc, from which you might experience a phenomenon referred to as 'flow'; a state of concentration and engrossment so encompassing time and worries are temporarily forgotten in place of a singular rewarding activity. Essentially, going for a run to 'clear your head' is, in fact, entirely possible. What is often overlooked is the potential within a kitchen for personal care and psychological maintenance. Cooking, in its base form, is a manipulation of the classical elements

of fire, water, earth, and air and is an entirely primitive practice at heart.

Humans need to eat and on the whole, we all prepare food for our own consumption, from toast and jam eaten in Exeter to fattoush salad in Beirut.

But the world has sped up, meals are eaten at keyboards, and the daily ritual of peeling vegetables, stirring soups or kneading bread has been replaced by piercing plastic, turning dials or tapping an app.

Are we losing touch with what it is to truly nourish ourselves? Possibly - not only physically but emotionally. For what a microwave meal lacks in nutrition and ceremony it also lacks in mindful activity and fulfilling enterprise.

**So, here's how to turn the kitchen from laborious battleground to a daily meditation capsule:**



Feelings of anxiety and depression can make us feel detached, 'out of it' and meds can create a zombie-like feeling particularly as the day draws to a close.

The kitchen's many processes force the mind into the present, the open activeness essential for the application of mindfulness.

Following the steps of a new recipe or creating an old favourite requires a presence from the cook to commune with the food; in essence tethering us to the minutia of process and grounding us temporarily in the activity.

Feeling a ball of flour and water blossom into a smooth supple dough or whipping cream from milky pools to snowy alpine peaks requires our uninterrupted mental capacity. I like to think of these as the moments you definitely don't want the phone to ring.

It teaches us patience and tenacity with a reward at the end that gifts

the feelings of accomplishment and purpose. Is it just dinner? Yes of course it is just dinner, but it is your dinner, you made it and every process in preparing it required your engagement and attention. If that doesn't qualify as nourishing self-care nothing will.

In the 13th century, Japanese Zen master Dogen wrote "Instructions for the Tenzo," or head cook.

He reveals his philosophy of how to "cook" - or refine - your entire life. In one succinct instruction, he says "When you boil rice, know that the water is your own life."

So what has that to do with mindful cooking? Well, if we take the idea of food as life (not an original concept but a solid one), it demands a respect and active cognitive engagement, it is the most important thing at that moment, it is your singular purpose at that particular time and eclipses all else.

Other processes that offer such

meditative moments could include: the grinding of spices, feeling cool water from a faucet flow through your hands onto vegetables as they're washed, watching for the exact moment an amber caramel begins to burn or even simply stirring a risotto and allowing yourself to get lost staring into the undulating pool of starchy rice.

It is entirely personal which activities work best for you and personally speaking, the whipping of viscous egg whites to cloud-like meringue is one I highly, highly recommend.

Whether we enjoy cooking or not, novice or professional, the principles of mindfulness and meditative practice apply to pretty much anything. That of openness, presence in the experience and a grounding devotion to an activity.

All I'm saying is, if these things can all be cultivated within our own kitchens and lead to a happier eating life then happy cooking – regardless of the final result.



## Events and Fundraising

### Members Day 2019

This year, our Members Day takes place on Saturday 9 November at the Holiday Inn, Regents Park in London. Members will need to register online at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) or call us on 0207 840 3132 to do it over the phone. It is free for members and e-members are expected to make a £10 contribution. The day will include inspiring speakers, workshops, awards and lunch.

### Bath Half Marathon

This fundraising sporting event takes place on 15 March 2020. Its £10 to sign up for a place with us and we ask people raise a minimum of £175 sponsorship.

## Advice and Support

We provide over 200 expert mental health services in England. These can help you or someone you know with everything from advocacy, to housing to criminal justice and secure services, as well as nursing care and carer support, among others. You can also access over 140 of our local support groups which are run by people with experience of mental illness. Each one offers a welcoming, non-judgemental space in which you can talk openly about your experiences and receive support. Please go to our website at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) to see what services and groups are in your area or call us on 0121 522 7007.

### Our Advice Line Appeal

Every year, our advice team of only seven advisors responds to over 7,500 calls, emails and web messages from people living with mental illness and those who care for them. Currently, we're unable to answer over half of all calls that come in to us. With your support, we can provide the same high level of support to many more people, and even improve the quality of the service further. Please give today to support this much needed service and all our work to help people severely affected by mental illness. Thank you so much.

### Advice and Information Service (RAIS)

Our RAIS service offers practical help on a wide range of topics such as The Mental Health Act, community care, welfare benefits, debt and carers' rights. We also offer general information on living with mental illness, medication and care.

Tel: 0300 5000 927 (Opening hours 9:30am-4pm, Monday to Friday)

Email: [RethinkMailbox@rethink.org](mailto:RethinkMailbox@rethink.org)

Our goal is to make sure everyone affected by severe mental illness has a good quality of life.

To find out more about future events, the work we do and support we provide, visit:

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Here at the Mental Health Foundation, we believe that the best way to deal with a crisis is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Statistics show that depression is now the leading cause of disability worldwide. Your fundraising helps us to conduct projects like PEP, our peer education project which gives young people the knowledge they need to safeguard their mental health.

Our flagship community event is called **Tea & Talk** which encourages people to have open conversations about their mental health with their friends, family, colleagues or people in their local community over a cup of tea and a treat.

It is our 10-year Tea & Talk anniversary this year and we are hoping to make it bigger and better than ever! To date we have raised £194,601.84 through our Tea & Talk campaign over the past 10 years, and that was only possible because of our amazing supporters.

This year we are celebrating our anniversary by hosting a series of competitions with some incredible prizes.

We are putting all participants who raise over £150 through hosting a Tea & Talk in October into a prize draw and selecting three winners to win prizes including a year's supply of Tetley tea, a year's supply of Yorkshire tea and an incredible tea basket from Fortnum and Mason.

We are also hosting a competition where supporters can send pictures of their bakes on social media and a judge will determine the top five bakes. We also have some lovely tea-related prizes for the winners of this competition!

We encourage everyone to hold a Tea & Talk, whether it be hosting your own afternoon tea, having a bake off at work or holding a themed tea party. We have a free downloadable pack which you can sign up for [here](#).

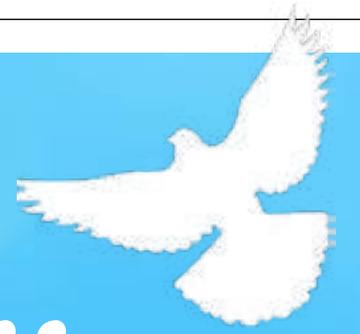
Once you have signed up for a pack, just follow the [step by step guide](#) to host your own Tea & Talk and raise money and awareness for the Mental Health Foundation.

**We hope you join us for a cup of tea soon!**

**TEA  
& TALK**  
Mental Health Foundation



# A letter from the editor...



If you represent a company that has done something to help the mental health of your staff or the general public, or if you are interested in doing so, **we want to work with you.**

## Why Should You Advertise with Aspire 2?



With mental health within the professional space becoming an openly discussed topic, we're offering companies the opportunity to build awareness further by advertising with us.

Good mental health in the workplace is essential, and we at Aspire2 feel that published advertisements through our online newspaper are a responsible and effective way of starting vital conversations.

We'll promote your company's social corporate responsibility towards the education and implication of mental health issues and an understanding within staff teams and the professional space as a whole.

At Aspire 2 we aim to represent, educate and discuss a wealth of mental health issues and news and your inclusion in our newspaper would reflect your company's proactive stance on such important discussions and topics that resonate universally.

We hope to include you in our coming issues and look forward to promoting your company's presence within the mental health community.

To enquire about advertising, please contact Peter at [peter@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:peter@aspire2.org.uk)





**I'm Charlotte, 18, from the West Midlands in the UK and I'm a brand ambassador for Aspire2.**

I spend a lot of my time with my family and friends and going on holiday. One thing I love doing is writing, and I have my own blog, Timetotalk, where I have been posting since February, when I set it up.

My blog is based on mental health, which I am passionate about, and I suffer with anxiety which I openly talk about on the blog.

Talking so openly helps me improve my own mental health and also allows me to help other people.

I am a brand ambassador for Aspire 2, which I love doing because I'm able

to help other people who suffer with their mental health and it also helps me personally feel less alone.

Having the opportunity to do this allows me to help Aspire2 grow and use my platforms to spread the awareness of the company.

In the future I would love there not to be a stigma surrounding mental health. It should be something we talk about like having a cold. If I can do more to spread more awareness, I'd take the opportunity with open hands.

If you want to check out my blog, visit [realtimetotalk.wordpress.com](http://realtimetotalk.wordpress.com)



**Hi everyone! I'm Tiegan, I'm the Social Media and Marketing Executive at Aspire2!**

**Each month I'll be giving updates on the work I do at Aspire2 and spreading the inspiring stories and amazing work of our brand ambassadors.**

**If you'd like to get involved as a brand ambassador, email me on: [Tiegan@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:Tiegan@aspire2.org.uk)**



**As the Media and Marketing Executive, I get to approach people all around the UK and the World. Charlotte has contributed to the growth of our social media, she is always great at coming up with different ideas on creating awareness! It's great to see her passion and her worth ethic is lovely!**

Since starting my role with Aspire2, I have been promoting the work we do and increasing our following on social media.

I reach out to people to create more awareness of the company and general mental health. I feel that social media can be a cruel place at times, so hopefully I inspire our followers and sign post people to services that will benefit them.

I couldn't be happier in the work I do, especially knowing that it's going to have a positive impact on people.

I recruit brand ambassadors who are as passionate about mental health as I am; it's lovely to see how many people want to get involved and share their own stories!

If you think you have what it takes to become a brand ambassador feel free to contact any of our social media pages or email me at:

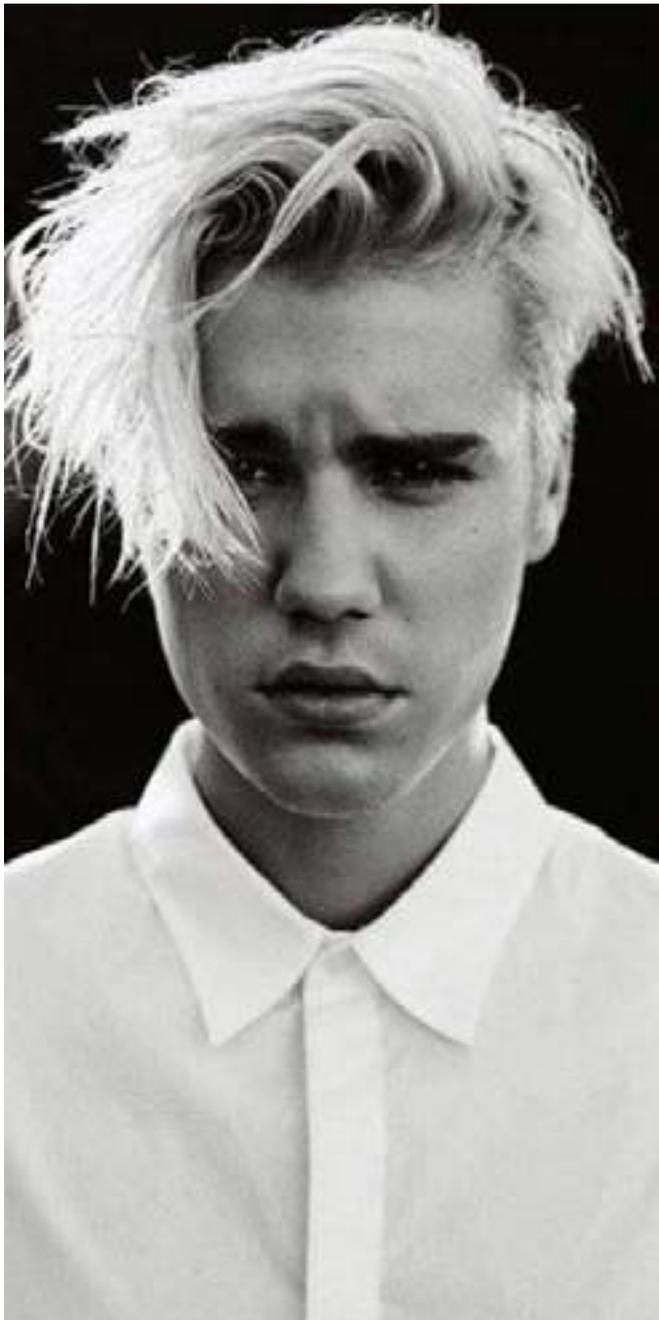
[tiegan@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:tiegan@aspire2.org.uk)

**Tiegan's quote of the month**

**"Don't judge people for the choices they make when you don't know the options they had to choose from"**

**Follow us on social media!**





## Justin Bieber: "Sometimes it can get to the point where you don't even want to live anymore."

Vocalist Justin Bieber has published an Instagram post about how he became "the most hated person in the world," following childhood stardom and a string of bad decisions.

The singer was discovered aged just 13 and after an initial period of stardom, he became infamous after several arrests and public scandals. He says he became a heavy drug user and abused his personal relationships. More recently, he has been open about his mental health struggles.

"I made every bad decision you could have thought of and went from one of the most loved and adored people in the world to the most ridiculed, judged and hated person in the world," Bieber said in the Instagram post.

"It's hard to get out of bed in the morning...when it feels like there's trouble after trouble after trouble."

"Sometimes it can even get to the

point where you don't even want to live anymore. Where you feel like it's never going to change."

"It's taken me years to bounce back from all of these terrible decisions, fix broken relationships, and change relationship habits," he wrote.

The singer highlighted the pressures put onto child celebrities and the effects they can have on their later lives.

"There is an insane pressure and responsibility put on a child whose brain, emotions... decision making aren't developed yet. When you add the pressure of stardom it does something to you that is quite unexplainable," Bieber wrote.

Increasingly, we are seeing celebrities talk about their mental health and their feelings in general. We hope that this leads to a more compassionate society where mental health is openly discussed.

## Ariana Grande: "My depression and anxiety have been at an all-time high lately"

Singer Ariana Grande has revealed she was forced to cancel meet-and-greets with fans on her world tour as her depression and anxiety has been at an "all-time high,

Grande was set to meet fans before a show in Antwerp in Belgium as part of her world tour but had to cancel following a "handful of panic attacks."

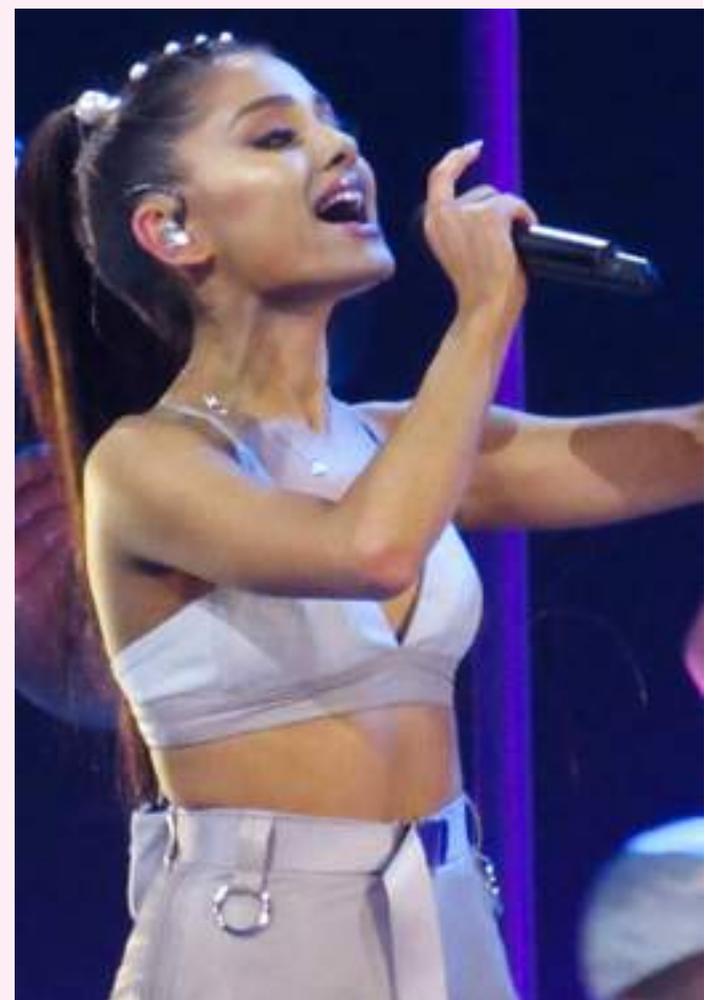
"Time for some honesty. My depression and anxiety have been at an all-time high lately. I have been giving you all I've got and trying to push through as hard as I can and mask it," she said.

"Today has been an extra rough one.

After a handful of panic attacks, I feel like the wisest decision would be to not do soundcheck party or [meet-and-greet] today and preserve my energy for the show."

"I wish I had control over these attacks but as anybody with anxiety or depression understands, sometimes you can only operate on its terms and not your own," she added.

Grande has been vocal about her mental health since the terror attack at her show in Manchester two years ago and revealed via an image of a brain scan that the resulting PTSD has had physical effects on her.





## All Blacks star puts his mental health above playing at the Rugby World Cup

New Zealand flanker Liam Squire turned down his place in his national team's Rugby World Cup squad in order to take care of his mental health.

Squire spoke to the New Zealand manager and decided that it would be best for him to sit the tournament out.

"After what has been a really tough year for me mentally and physically, and after speaking with people I trust on whether I should make myself available

again for the All Blacks, I felt I wasn't ready just yet physically or mentally for the pressures of test match rugby," Squire wrote on Instagram.

"I have never been one to speak a lot publicly so I hope people can respect my privacy and decision on this and I can move forward and keep enjoying my rugby."

"For me mental health is a lot more important than playing rugby," he said.

## Little Mix's Jesy Nelson on her severe depression and suicide attempt

Singer Jesy Nelson has described how online bullying has affected her mental health and led her to try and take her own life.

On her new BBC Three documentary, *Jesy Nelson: Odd One Out*, Nelson explained that online trolling targeted at her began in 2011, when Little Mix first appeared on *X Factor*.

"I had about 101 Facebook messages in my inbox, and the first one that came up was from some random man, saying: 'you are the ugliest thing I've seen in my life, you do not deserve to be in this girl band. You deserve to die'," Nelson said.

"It became the worst time of my life. I wasn't just known as one of the singers in Little Mix, I was known as 'the fat, ugly one,'" she said.

Nelson said her mental health "spiralled out of control" in 2013 as a result of continued online abuse and that she was in a state of deep depression, which led her to try to take her own life.

"I was sat in bed crying, thinking, 'this is never going to go, I'm going to feel sad for the rest of my life, so what is the point in being here?'," Nelson said.

"The only way I can describe the pain is like constantly being heartbroken. I remember going to the kitchen and I just took as many tablets as I could. Then my ex, who was with me at the time, he woke up and was like, 'why are you crying?' I kept saying, 'I just want to die,'" she explained.

Now, Nelson says she is "a lot happier and mentally stronger."

"Back then I just thought everyone hated me but no, actually, they're doing it because they feel bad about themselves. So now when I look at trolls being nasty, I feel a bit sorry for them. The only way I can understand it is that being nasty makes them feel better in themselves. I didn't have the mindset to think like that back then – I wish I did," Nelson said.



One in two people have experienced bullying. If you are being abused online and feel like you need to talk to someone about it, you can join [Ditch The Label's](https://ditchthelabel.org) campaign and speak to someone anonymously. Visit [ditchthelabel.org](https://ditchthelabel.org)

If you feel like you want to die, we urge you to talk to someone:

**Samaritans:** Call 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Papyrus:** Call 0800 068 41 41 – Monday to Friday 10am to 10pm, weekends 2pm to 10pm, bank holidays 2pm to 5pm or text 07786 209697 or email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)



**Read something that you'd like to talk about?  
We want to hear from you!**

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Our 'Letters to the Editor' section will be your opportunity to speak about mental health, your experiences, your opinions on our stories, share your frustrations, praise breakthroughs, celebrate successes and more!

If you'd like to get involved, email our editorial team on:

[editor@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:editor@aspire2.org.uk)

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**Let's talk about mental health!**



# Toxic Brexit

By David Jones

Let's straight away put the debate about leave, remain, new referendum, general election to one side because I simply do not care anymore. After three years of listening to this debacle I have become disillusioned, bored, angry, stressed and quite frankly pissed off at the entire 650 members of parliament who have turned the UK into a world laughing stock.

Not only that, but Brexit has had – and will continue to have – a negative impact on our mental health. Brexit anxiety has become a real thing in people whose entire lives will be changed by our withdrawal from the EU. And after we have left the EU, vital medications used to treat mental health conditions could become more difficult to procure.

For some unknown reason only known to themselves, our elected MPs and the current government have decided to turn what was quite simple and straight forward, a 'referendum vote', into a quagmire of madness and now a daily dose of incredible ineptitude.

They have divided the nation, turned families, friends, neighbours, work colleagues on each other with their ridiculous political positioning for nothing more than self-centred egotistical self-importance and delusional stances on 'alleged principles'.

How can 650 elected members of Parliament, 'The Mother of all Parliaments' be allowed to bring the UK onto its knees in self-humiliating terms. If the reports and predictions are right, we are heading for a self-made



recession that could be as brutal as 2008.

How dare these elected politicians take a nation's citizens for fools? This, by the way, includes every single political party, North, South, East or West. They are destroying the very principles of freedom, choice, liberty, fairness and equality by reasons of self-promotion.

The Brexit referendum took place in 2016 and members of the public duly cast their vote using 'lawful democratic means' - the ballot box.

Three years on and you have an ex-Prime Minister, John Major stating he will seek Judicial Review on the current Prime Minister over Brexit. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, actually speaking out as though anyone is actually interested in what they are saying, continued spin, more lies and drivel from 'yesterday's politicians.'

Now listening to these parliamentarians will seriously damage your health and cause you stress, anxiety and clinical depression. We have members of the public actually fighting each other on the streets of Whitehall over Brexit. It's a free-for-all charade that now includes the Scottish Courts, High Court and now the Supreme Court. Wouldn't it be ironic if it ended up in the European Courts? It couldn't, could it? MPs actually voted for a law that would

force the current PM to write a letter to the EU demanding an extension (three months of more drivel and bullshit) - have these MPs forgotten the 2016 act of parliament allowing the vote in the first place and the law triggering article 50? All these MPs are playing 'psychological warfare' and using the country as the battleground, causing hate, division, fear and mental ill health.

When it cannot get any worse, (trust me it will daily), how do you resolve the insanity they have brought upon the nation, brought into your life and all whilst earning a nice pay packet?

### What's the answer?

It's actually quite simple and straightforward - when the UK holds a general election, don't vote for any of the current drivel ever again.

Sack every single one of them. Only then will the public take back control of 'the people's mother of all parliaments', after all it belongs to the UK not a bunch of self-egotistical clowns.

They have abused the nations trust, your trust, abused your sanity, abused the principles of democracy for their own self-interests, it's a scandal of incompetence that Lord Sutch would be proud of.

They do not deserve your vote, your trust, your time or your patience.

# How you can help us:

Aspire 2 depends solely on capital raised through advertising, donations, grants, and sponsorship.

## Donations

We gratefully accept any and all donations. No amount is too big or too small and your money will be reinvested into the company to raise awareness of mental health.

To donate, click [here](#).

## Advertising

If you would like to advertise your company or product on any of our media services then an advertising package can be found that would benefit both parties.

## Sponsorship

If you would like to sponsor Aspire 2 we would be delighted to discuss this with you in more detail. Sponsorship packages are offered in the following areas and can be for periods of one, three or five years:

- The Company as a Whole
- Sponsorship of the entire website or one page of the website
  - Social Media Sites or one social media site
  - Sponsorship of the Online Digital Newspaper
- Sponsorship of Events, Road Shows, Mental Health Choir, Award Ceremony
- Sponsorship of the Newspaper Publication, Distribution, Competitions & Prizes
  - Sponsorship of Radio Station & Recording Studio
  - Office Running Costs

To enquire about advertising or sponsorship, contact Peter at [peter@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:peter@aspire2.org.uk)

## There's light in the tunnel

### Aspire2 Mental Health Media & Events

Hargrave House  
Lavender Grove  
York  
YO26 5RX

Phone: 07504 635123  
Email: [support@aspire2.org.uk](mailto:support@aspire2.org.uk)  
[www.aspire2.org.uk](http://www.aspire2.org.uk)

