



## Information for mental health carers

**Help and advice for relatives and friends supporting people** using Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust mental health services



## What are mental health problems?

**Mental health problems affect one in four of us. They range from the worries we all experience as part of everyday life to serious long-term conditions. The majority of people who experience mental health problems can recover or learn to live with them, especially if they get help early on.**

There are various approaches to mental health and mental illness. Most health professionals in the UK agree on a similar set of clinical diagnoses and treatments for mental health problems. However, not everyone finds it helpful to think about their mental health this way. Depending on your traditions and beliefs you might have a different view about your experiences and how best to cope.

We use the phrase ‘mental health problems’, as many people have told us this feels helpful for them. Or you may feel that terms such as ‘mental illness’ or ‘mental health issues’ describe your experiences better, or are easier to explain to other people in your life.

## What is it like being a mental health carer?

Thousands of carers describe an impact on their own mental and physical health themselves due to the demands of being a carer. Many more are unaware of the support available to them.

**Here, carers share their own experiences:**

## What are the best things about your caring role?

“ Noticing the small things that I can do to improve their wellbeing and that I am able to provide them a secure environment.

I enjoy caring for my mum who has severe depression, she is my number one priority.”

## ...and what are the worst?

“ It is time consuming, difficult and extremely emotional. I feel that I am obligated and expected to be the carer at all times, whether I am mentally or physically able. Sometimes I resent the dependence on me. I then feel guilty for feeling this way.

Not knowing what mood you may come home to, and how to manage it.”

## How does it affect your day?

“Trying to manage someone else’s daily life - getting them up for work, motivating, etc.

I cannot plan ahead, the activities I can take part in depend on how the person I care for is on a particular day and the support that they need.”

## How does it affect your physical and mental health?

“Some days can be extremely difficult and can become overwhelming for me. I then become very emotional and suffer with stress and anxiety.

It’s hard to care about my appearance or the need to do exercise as I’m busy worrying about someone else.”

## So, how do you help yourself?

“I have gained knowledge and understanding on many topics that has been useful in my caring role and is also helping me to improve my own health. I like to try out new experiences and activities.

Being able to interact with others that understand the difficulties of caring has helped me to feel less isolated.”

## How did you feel when it first started?

“I felt overwhelmed and not sure where to begin to support them, worried that I had a part to play in it, and would probably need support myself.

I felt helpless, lost, stupid, guilty, and alone, with concerns and worries of not knowing what to do and say in fear of it being right or wrong.”

## When you got a diagnosis, did that help?

“At first I was relieved and felt this would help them to get the professional support that they needed. But having a ‘label’ can cause stigma and people presume that they will act or present in a certain way just because of their diagnosis.

Whilst it was good to know there was a name to what was causing the things going on, it didn’t really help me.”

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## Supporting the person you care for

Ask the person how you can help, and listen. Try to be non-judgemental. They might want to talk about it, or they might not. But just letting them know they don’t have to avoid the issue with you is important.

Spending time with the person lets them know you care, and can help you understand what they’re going through.

It can be distressing to see someone who you care about becoming unwell, but you don't need to be an expert on mental health to offer support. Often small, everyday actions can make the biggest difference.

Try to encourage the person you care for to let someone know how they are feeling. This might be a partner, family member or friend, or it might be their GP.

There are many resources available, either from the team that your friend or family member has contact with, from the Gloucestershire Carers Hub, or online. We have included some links to information and websites at the end of this leaflet.

**Mental Health First Aid England has produced this list 'Weekly wellbeing check-up' which some people might find helpful to monitor their mental health:**

## Where's my mental health today?

- **How do I feel today:**
  - Mentally?
  - Physically?

## Looking after my wellbeing

- Am I drinking enough water and eating a balanced diet?
- How did I sleep last night?
- Did I feel rested when I woke up?
- Is there anything I can improve?

## How's my thinking today?

- How are my thoughts making me feel?
- Am I having unhelpful thoughts?

## My stress levels

- How stressed do I feel?
- Am I using helpful coping strategies?
- Are they working?

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## If the person you care for becomes unwell

Carers often recognise early signs that someone's mental health is deteriorating and, where necessary, teams should provide information through documents, such as the Care Plan, about recognising when someone is becoming unwell.

You and your friend or relative may notice early warning signs that their mental health is getting worse. If possible, try to get help early.

If you feel signs of a relapse are present you should contact the most appropriate person for advice – who this is will depend on who is involved in your friend or relative's care. This may be their GP, their current care team, or the Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team.



A mental health crisis can mean different things. It generally means when someone's health worsens to the point where they need urgent help from professional services.

**You should not worry that you will be seen as 'making a fuss'. You are the person who may be most aware of a developing problem and staff should respect your opinion.**

**If you are requesting help, the following list can help you prepare what to say:**

**Situation:** Who is calling and why? Be clear about the situation.

**Background:** How has this come about and what has happened?

**Assessment:** What are the problems that you are worried about?

**Recommendations:** What do you feel would help?

**Decision:** Make a note of what was agreed and who will do what.

**If you feel in immediate danger, dial 999 and ask for the police.**

## If the person you care for is admitted

Most people with mental health problems are supported by our community teams, but occasionally they may be admitted to hospital as an inpatient.

If the person you care for is admitted to an inpatient unit and agrees, this is called informal or voluntary admission. This means that they can leave if they choose to.

If a person is very unwell, needs urgent treatment for a mental health problem and there is a risk of harm to themselves or to other people, then they may be detained and treated without their agreement.

The Mental Health Act is the main piece of legislation that covers people's assessment, treatment and rights.

Your friend or relative can make a plan for themselves about what they want to happen if they are admitted, if they want and are able to. They may like to involve you in this.

Normally you will be able to visit but sometimes a person may choose to refuse visitors. If you're unable to see the person you care for, staff should explain why.

With permission from the person you care for, staff may discuss the treatment plan with you. But you can always raise any concerns or worries you may have, with staff on the ward.

## Discharge planning

As soon as the person you care for is admitted as an inpatient, the team will start assessing their needs and planning their discharge.

Before they leave, the people involved in their care will develop a discharge care plan with them, addressing their needs. If the person you care for agrees, you may be part of this meeting.

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## Sources of information, advice and support

### **GHC Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

 **0300 421 8313**

 [experience@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:experience@ghc.nhs.uk)

### **GHC Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy Team**

 **01452 894 540**

 [SpiritualCare@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:SpiritualCare@ghc.nhs.uk)

### **Gloucestershire Carers Hub**

 **0300 111 9000**

 [carers@peopleplus.co.uk](mailto:carers@peopleplus.co.uk)

 [www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk](http://www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk)

## Gloucestershire Young Carers

 **01452 733 060**

 [mail@glosyoungcarers.org.uk](mailto:mail@glosyoungcarers.org.uk)

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

## Gloucestershire Self Harm Helpline

 **0808 801 0606**

 [www.gloucestershireselfharm.org/parents-friends-professionals/](http://www.gloucestershireselfharm.org/parents-friends-professionals/)

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## Caring for someone with mental health problems

**The UK mental health charity Mind** has lots of factsheets and advice for carers, families and friends: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/)

**UK mental health charity Rethink** has a carers hub: [www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/](http://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/)

**The UK Mental Health Foundation** is a source of information and self-help resources: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/looking-after-your-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/looking-after-your-mental-health)

**The UK carers organisation Mobilise** has a guide to mental health caring: [www.mobiliseonline.co.uk/carers-guide-to-mental-health-caring](http://www.mobiliseonline.co.uk/carers-guide-to-mental-health-caring)

Depending on the type of mental health problem your loved-one is experiencing, they may choose to put together a **Wellness Recovery Action Plan**:

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/WRAP.pdf](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/WRAP.pdf)

**Reading Well Books on Prescription** are books recommended by health professionals. They may be prescribed or borrowed from any Gloucestershire Library. Books have been carefully selected and are designed to cover a range of mental health conditions.

[www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/libraries/library-activities-and-services/health-and-well-being/](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/libraries/library-activities-and-services/health-and-well-being/)

**If the person you care for is admitted:** UK mental health charity **Rethink** has produced a comprehensive guide for carers of people admitted as an inpatient. This has information about the different types of inpatient settings, what they are like, how you can prepare, things to take in for the person you care for, visiting and involvement while they are there, and preparing for coming home again: [www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/going-into-hospital-for-carers-friends-and-relatives/](http://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/going-into-hospital-for-carers-friends-and-relatives/)



## Dealing with a problem

**NHS 111:** Confidential health advice and information on non-emergency situations.

 **111**

**GHC Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Teams.**

 **0800 169 0398**

The number is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Occasionally, callers may be asked to leave their name and number on an answerphone. In these circumstances, staff will return the call within one hour.

**Gloucestershire Adults and Children's Social Care Services** - out of hours (emergency only)

 **01452 614194**

**Gloucestershire Police:** non-emergency advice.

 **101**

**Samaritans**

 **116 123**

**Shelterline - Housing advice helpline:**

 **0808 800 4444**

**Refuge** - for women experiencing domestic abuse:

 **0808 200 0247**

**Respect** - for men experiencing domestic abuse:

 **0808 801 0327**

**Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service**

 **01452 726 570**


 [support@gdass.org.uk](mailto:support@gdass.org.uk)

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

## Your experience

Your views are important to us. If you need advice or have feedback on a community hospital in Gloucestershire or on our community health and adult social care services, you can contact one of the advisors from our service experience team. All enquiries are completely confidential.

**You can contact us between 9:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday.**

 **0300 421 8313** (answerphone available outside office hours)

 [experience@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:experience@ghc.nhs.uk)

 [www.ghc.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/give-us-views](http://www.ghc.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/give-us-views)

### **Service Experience Team**

Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust, Edward Jenner Court, 1010 Pioneer Avenue, Gloucester Business Park, Brockworth, Gloucester, GL3 4AW

For general enquiries or if you would like further information, additional copies or would like to receive this leaflet in another language, large print or on audio format, please contact the Trust Communications Team at Edward Jenner Court, 1010 Pioneer Avenue, Gloucester Business Park, Brockworth, Gloucester, GL3 4AW. You can email us at [ghccomms@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:ghccomms@ghc.nhs.uk) or call us on **0300 421 8100**.