

The CASS Mental Health Guide.

Mental Health and Wellbeing.

WHAT IS
STRESS?



WHAT IS
ANXIETY?



WHAT IS
DEPRESSION?



Contents

- 1** What is Mental Health?
- 2-3** Contributing Factors
- 4-5** Common Mental Health Problems: Stress
- 6-7** Common Mental Health Problems: Anxiety
- 8-9** Common Mental Health Problems: Depression
- 10** Continuum of Mental Health
- 11** 5 Ways to Wellbeing
- 12** Stress Container Exercise
- 13** Grounding Techniques
- 14-15** Self Help Techniques
- 16-17** Having a Good Wellbeing Conversation
- 18-19** Safeguarding your own Wellbeing
- 20-22** Reducing Mental Health Stigma
- 23-24** Available Support
- 25-29** Signposting Index

What is Mental Health?

Mental health influences how we think, feel, behave and experience the world. We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. The term 'mental health' isn't positive or negative, but we often see it being used in a negative way. Just like our physical health though, our mental health can sometimes be good, sometimes we might need some extra care and support, or sometimes we might need support from a professional, like a doctor.

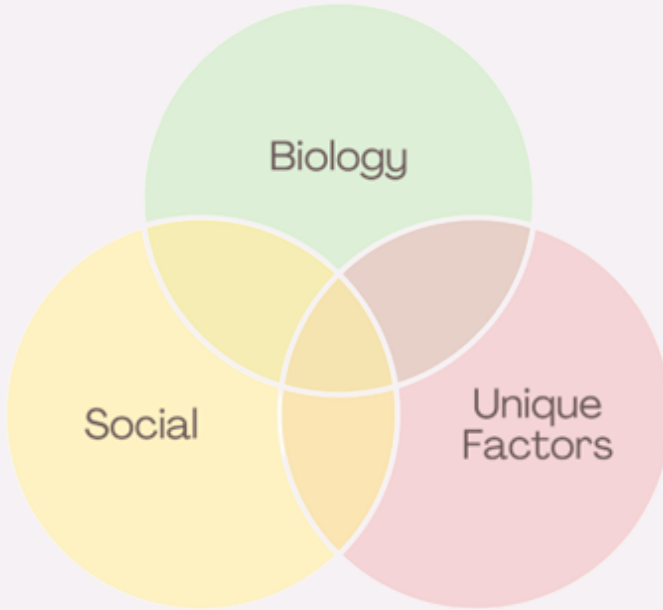
Mental health issues affect 1 in 4 of us at some point in our lives.

The term 'mental health' might not be one we use every day so when we see these words together we can have different ideas about what that means. However, people often use terms like 'stressed', 'anxious', 'sad' or 'angry'. If these feelings are overwhelming, last for a long time or are being fed by life events it's important to get the right support and advice.



What Affects Mental Health?

Our mental health has a range of contributing factors that interact with each other. This is different for everyone and changes over time.



Biology:

- The physical structure and chemicals in our brains
- Conditions such as autism or ADHD
- The quality of our sleep, nutrition or stimulation
- Hormones
- Medical conditions
- Genes: the 'on-off' triggers

Social:

- Early experiences: upbringing, learning about emotions, love and security
- Relationships with family, friends, our community, or at work
- Opportunities in education or employment
- Experiences of discrimination or privilege, exclusion or inclusion
- Access to resources like finances, housing, and health care
- Our environment, including safety, access to green spaces, and clean air
- Culture, including beliefs about 'wellness' and 'unwellness'

Unique Factors:

- How we interpret events, and our way of coping with them
- How we feel and express emotions
- Beliefs about self and place in the world
- Views and responses towards others
- Personal values, sense of meaning
- If we feel able to ask for help when we need it



Stress

Stress is tension which builds up in the body and mind in response to something happening in our lives. Feelings of stress usually fade but when stress lasts for a long time, it may harm your health.



What can stress look like?

Thinking:

- Lack of concentration
- Can't make decisions
- Unfocused
- Over thinking
- Viewing situations as worse than they are
- Over-generalising

Behaviour:

- Nail biting
- Snapping at people
- Reassurance seeking
- Smoking more
- Overworking
- Drinking more alcohol

Feelings:

- Anxious
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Lack of motivation
- Tense
- Worried

Physically:

- Change in sleep pattern
- Headaches
- Stomach upsets
- Change in appetite
- Heart racing
- Breathing changes

Stress

Stress may be related to:

- A physical health condition
- A stressful job or unemployment
- Financial difficulties
- Family or relationship issues such as a death or divorce
- Living somewhere you don't feel safe
- A new job, or moving house

It's good to tackle the cause of stress as avoiding problems can make things worse. Sometimes, however, you cannot change the circumstances and instead will have to focus on looking after yourself through the stressful situation.

Things you could try to help yourself include being more active, talking to friends or family, making time for self-care, avoiding unhealthy habits like relying on alcohol or caffeine. Anything you enjoy that takes your mind off your situation can help.

If nothing seems to help you should seek support from your GP or a mental health service. There are lots of options, such as guided self-help or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Some GPs in Bristol offer Social Prescribing for stress, which involves access to art, exercise or cooking sessions.



Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. It's normal to feel worried sometimes, but some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety affect them all the time in their daily lives.

What can anxiety look like?

Thinking:

- Viewing situations as worse than they are
- Using 'should' statements
- Jumping to conclusions
- Focusing on the negatives

Behaviour:

- Panic attacks
- Pacing
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Nail biting
- Trouble concentrating

Feelings:

- Nervousness
- A sense of dread
- Restlessness
- Worry
- Stress

Physically:

- Dizziness
- Rapid heartbeat
- Tense muscles
- Difficulty sleeping

Anxiety

It's not always easy to know why people become anxious, it can be caused by a combination of things, including:

- A chemical imbalance in the brain which affects moods
- The genes you inherit from your parents
- Stressful or traumatic experiences such as domestic violence, child abuse, or bullying
- Having a painful long-term health condition, such as arthritis
- Drug or alcohol misuse

However many people develop anxiety for no apparent reason.

Anxiety can have a serious effect on your daily life, but there are several treatments that can help including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and in some cases medication.

You may find that going on a self-help course, being more active, cutting down on cigarettes, alcohol or caffeine, or some of the other tips in this booklet help.

If not and your anxiety is affecting how you live your life, it may be time to speak to your GP.

Depression

Depression is a low mood which lasts for a long time. Most people have times when they feel down, but when you're depressed you feel unhappy for weeks or months rather than a few days and find it hard to enjoy things you used to.



What can depression look like?

Thinking:

- Black and white thinking
- Low self esteem
- Generalisation
- Ignoring the positive

Behaviour:

- Lack of motivation
- Neglecting hobbies
- Wanting to be alone

Feelings:

- Apathetic
- Low mood
- Feeling worthless
- Hopelessness

Physically:

- Feeling tired
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleep pattern
- Aches and pains

Depression

Sometimes life events, such as bereavement, losing your job, or even having a baby can cause depression.

People with a family history of depression are more likely to develop depression themselves. But many people become depressed for no obvious reason.

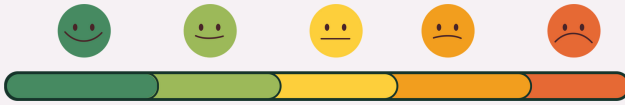
Depression is fairly common and affects all people regardless of sex, race or age.

It is important to see a doctor if you think you may have depression. If it is mild your doctor may suggest waiting to see if it improves on its own, or with some self-care. This could include physical activity, giving up smoking, eating well or going to a self-help group.

Talking therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) are often used for depression that isn't improving. You may also be prescribed antidepressants.

For moderate to severe depression a combination of talking therapy and antidepressants is often recommended.

Continuum of Mental Health



-  **Healthy, good mental health.** Regular sleep, coping well with stress, normal mood changes, happy to socialise, good self-confidence and self-esteem.
-  **Reacting, feeling some stress/distress.** Irritable, impatient, forgetful, more anxious or sad than usual, difficulty sleeping, reduced socialising.
-  **Poor mental health, significant impact on day-to-day life.** Lasting feelings of sadness, anxiety, or stress, very reduced socialisation, significant sleep issues.
-  **Mental ill-health, severe impact on day-to-day life.** Extremes of negative emotions lasting for a long time, emotions and feelings are having a serious impact on day-to-day life, relationships, family and work.

If this describes how you are feeling it is time to speak to your GP and get some extra help.

5 Ways to Wellbeing

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing are research backed ways we can look after our wellbeing. They will look and feel different for everyone and there are lots of organisations in this booklet which can support you with this.

Connect

Good relationships are important for your mental health.

Be Active

Do what you can. Even a small amount of activity is good.

Keep Learning

Bring learning into your life.

Take Notice

Or remember the simple things that give you joy.

Give

Your time, your presence or even a smile.

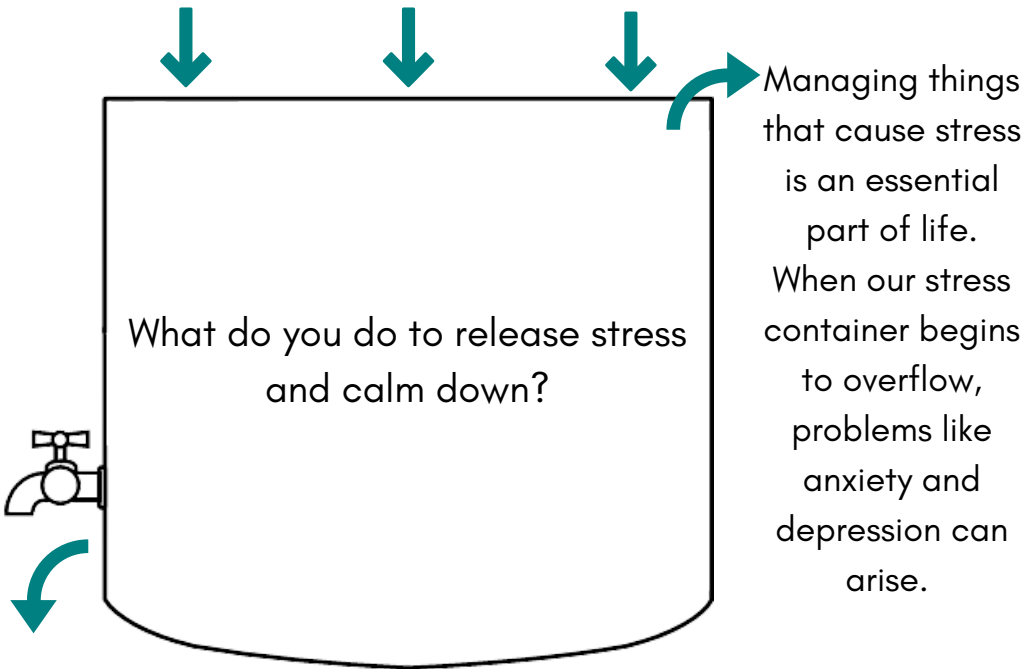


Stress Container Exercise

Life provides us with a variety of stressors, large or small, which fill up our stress container.

The size of our containers reflects ability to cope with stress, and this can vary and change depending on life circumstances.

Stress flows into the container



Healthy coping methods release stress through the 'tap' and stop the stress from over-filling the container

Grounding Techniques

These can help you calm your mind and stop negative thoughts building up.

5 Things: Make a list of:

5 things you can see
4 things you can hear
3 things you can feel
2 things you can smell
Then focus on one thing.



Distractions:

Shift your attention from negative thoughts by doing something else: tidy up, go for a walk, watch a film, get creative, do something for someone else, bring to mind a positive event or outcome.

Breathing:

Calm breathing is helpful in reducing stress or anxiety levels, at any age and at any time. Breathe in deeply through your nose until it feels like your belly inflates, then slowly breathe out through your mouth.

4-7-8 Breathing Exercise:

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold it in for 7 seconds and breathe out for 8 seconds and repeat.

Self Help Techniques

Reframing Unhelpful Thoughts

It is natural to feel worried sometimes, but anxious thoughts can also be unhelpful. If you notice an unhelpful thought, try to catch it, then take a step back and examine the situation. Ask yourself 'Are there any other possible outcomes that I haven't considered?' or 'What would I say to a friend who was thinking this way?'. You can also see if you can change the thought to a neutral or positive one.



Gratitude

Try to end each day by thinking about its best parts, maybe by writing a few lines in a journal. Noticing and recording the things that went well can help your mind to form new, positive associations.



Managing Worry

Writing down worries can help to get them off your mind. If your worries are taking over your day, you can try to manage this by setting aside 'worry time', perhaps 15 minutes per day to write things down and try to find solutions. Once you have caught your worries, ask yourself 'is there anything practical I can do about this? If so, you could try to make a plan of action. If not try not to dwell on it too much - find ways to shift your focus, distract yourself, relax or clear your mind.



Having an Effective Wellbeing Conversation



Create a welcoming space where people can work together

Take a warm and interested approach

Show that you're giving your full attention

Reflect and summarise to show you're listening and understanding

Positive body language
(body position, eye contact, tone of voice)

Be patient

Ask open questions
e.g. 'how does that make you feel?'

Wellbeing Conversations: Open Up VS Close Down

It's not always easy to know how to have a good conversation about how someone is feeling, but most of the time, any conversation is better than none at all. Here are some examples of what helps us to open up and what makes the conversation close down:

Open up



- Asking questions
- Being open and warm
- Giving time and space to talk
- Showing genuine care and consideration
- Eye contact
- Empathy
- Lack of judgement

Close down



- Telling me about their own issues
- Giving advice that hasn't been asked for
- Saying a problem isn't that bad
- Telling me what I'm doing wrong
- Interrupting
- Making the issue feel unimportant

Looking after your own wellbeing

Supporting others can be challenging. Making sure that you are also looking after your own wellbeing can mean that you have the time and energy to help someone else. Some ways that you can do this are:

Take a break

If you're feeling overwhelmed, or the support you are offering is taking a lot of time and energy it can be helpful to set aside some time for yourself to do something you enjoy, no matter how small.



Talk to someone you trust

It is ok for you to talk about how you're feeling. It is important to be aware of how much information you are giving and any details that need to be kept confidential, but having someone to share your feelings with can help you feel supported too.



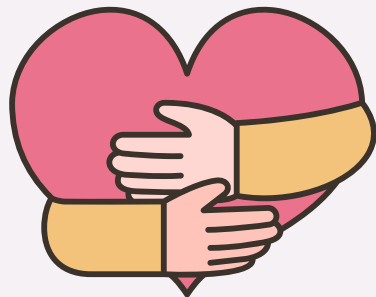
Set boundaries and be realistic about how much support you can give

Your support can be valuable, but it is also up to the person to support themselves. Small and simple things such as listening and being there will help a lot, and you do not have to take on the role of a professional.



Share your role with others if you can

It's often easier to support someone if you're not doing it alone. It's ok to encourage other support, such as a GP or friends and family. You can use the guides in this pack to help signpost to other services as well.



Reducing Mental Health Stigma

The stigma that still exists around mental health and wellbeing can lead to misunderstandings or harmful stereotypes about people who are living with mental health issues. This can result in people not seeking the support that they need for fear of being labelled or excluded. Here are some small changes we can all make in our own lives to reduce this stigma, and become more inclusive and welcoming.

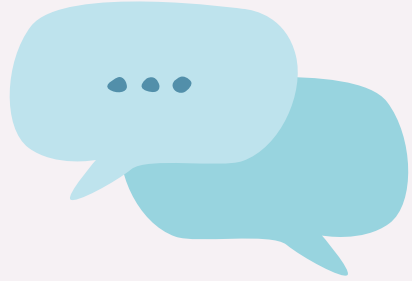
Choose your words carefully

What we say, and how we say it matters. Avoid using words such as 'crazy' or 'mental' in conversation. Making small changes to the way we talk can make a big difference in reducing the stigma around mental health over time.



Try to avoid using mental health diagnosis as casual descriptions of someone's behaviour

For example, describing someone who is very organised as 'OCD', or someone who is experiencing a natural change in mood as 'bipolar'.



Start positive conversations

Having positive conversations with your friends, family members and colleagues can normalise mental health and wellbeing and could prompt people to ask for support if they need it.



BREAK
• the •
STIGMA



Remember that people are more than their mental health or diagnosis

Identifying someone with a description such as 'depressed' or 'schizophrenic' suggests that their diagnosis defines them. Instead, use expressions such as 'people living with depression' or, 'a person who experiences mental health problems'.



Speak out

One of the best ways to end stigma is to speak up if you notice it. This can be really difficult, but it can make a huge difference. You could try checking what the person has said, and asking them to explain, or telling them what you would like to be different e.g. 'I would like you to stop describing people as psycho'.



What kinds of support are available?

Visiting a GP (doctor) or healthcare worker

Your GP can refer you to mental health services in Bristol, some of which are run by the NHS and some by charities.

- You don't have to be physically ill to visit a GP. If you are upset, stressed or unable to cope it is a good idea to see a GP.
- A GP can speak to you about your feelings and find out what support you need.
- If you are nervous about making an appointment you can take a family member or friend along with you.
- Writing down what you want to say beforehand or asking the doctor's surgery for a translator if necessary will help make the appointment easier.

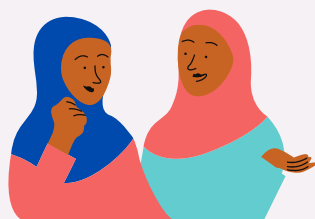
Peer Support

Support groups where you can share your experiences of mental wellbeing with other people going through similar things.



Talking Therapy

One on one support, like counselling, helplines or advice services.



Self-Guided Support

Guided support you might do independently. For example, through a website or journal.



Activities for Wellbeing

Social activities where you can learn new skills and meet others.



Signposting Index



Crisis Services

For those who need urgent help.

If you or anyone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis you can call 111 for community mental health support or visit your local A&E.

If someone's safety is at risk always call 999.

Samaritans


 116 123  www.samaritans.org

NHS Crisis Teams

Provide quick support for people who are experiencing a mental health emergency.

North Bristol Crisis Team  0117 4147170

Central Bristol Crisis Team  0117 3547257

South Bristol Crisis Team  01275 796209

Mental Health Directory

Well Aware

Provides information on a wide range of organisations including support groups, community groups, events and activities in Bristol.

☎ 0808 808 5252 🌐 www.wellaware.org.uk

PALS

A free, confidential service for people using NHS mental health services. They can guide you through the different support available and help you with questions or concerns.

☎ 0800 073 1778 ✉ awp.pals@nhs.net

Bristol Independent Mental Health Network (Bristol IMHN)

Provides a space for people with lived experience of mental health to discuss their experiences.

🌐 bristol.imhn.org

Bristol Mind

Peer support groups, face to face and online, and befriending. Includes groups for LGBTQIA+ people and Women of Colour.

Emotional support: 0808 808 0330

Information and advice: 0117 980 0370

✉ info@bristolmind.org.uk 🌐 bristolmind.org.uk

Changes

Peer support groups, face to face and online, and befriending for people suffering from mental distress.

☎ 0117 941 1123 ✉ info@changesbristol.org.uk

🌐 changesbristol.org.uk

Rethink

Provides a community support service to help those living with mental ill-health, as well as advice on mental health issues.

☎ 0117 903 1805/1 ✉ bristol@rethink.org

🌐 www.rethink.org

Second Step and Bristol Wellbeing College

A range of support for people with mental health issues, including free wellbeing courses.

☎ 0117 909 6630 ✉ reception@second-step.co.uk

🌐 www.second-step.co.uk

VitaMinds

A free talking therapy service designed to support individuals by providing the tools needed to get things back on track.

☎ 0333 200 1893 🌐 www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk

Nilari

BAME-led community charity providing counselling, social care support, and advice and advocacy.

☎ 0117 952 5742 ✉ nilaari@nilaari.co.uk

🌐 www.nilaari.co.uk

Off the Record

Offers support for 11-25 year olds around mental health. Includes specialist groups for young people including LGBTQIA+, Muslim women, Black and Minority Ethnic young people.

☎ 0808 808 9120 ✉ hello@otrbristol.org.uk

🌐 www.otrbristol.org.uk

FFLAG

Support for LGBTQ+ people and their friends and families.

☎ 0300 688 0368 ✉ admin@fflag.org.uk

🌐 www.fflag.org.uk

Age UK Bristol

Information and advice, housing support, courses, telephone befriending, meet ups and social activities.

☎ 0117 929 7537 ✉ advice@ageukbristol.org.uk

🌐 www.ageuk.org.uk/bristol

Womankind

Helpline, online chat, counselling and group support for women and non-binary people struggling with their mental health.

☎ 0345 458 2914 or 0117 916 6461

✉ info@womankindbristol.org.uk

🌐 www.womankindbristol.org.uk

Talk Club

A community supporting mental fitness for men, in Bristol and online.

🌐 talkclub.org

BlueBell

Supporting parents' mental health during pregnancy and within the first two years after birth through services including drop ins, 1:1 counselling and support groups.

☎ 0117 922 0746 ✉ hello@bluebellcare.org

🌐 bluebellcare.org

WECIL (The West of England Centre for Inclusive Living)

Provides a helpline, advocacy, advice and support for people living with a disability, including a specialist service for young people.

☎ 0117 947 9911 ✉ hello@wecil.co.uk

🌐 wecil.co.uk

This leaflet was designed and produced by the Community Access Support Service (CASS), a pioneering programme that ran from 2016 to 2023 and worked with community, equality and faith groups to improve access to mental health support. CASS was delivered by a partnership between Knowle West Health Park, Southmead Development Trust and Wellspring Settlement on behalf of the NHS.

For local support with health and wellbeing, get in touch:

South Bristol: Knowle West Health Park

☎ 0117 377 2255

✉ info@knowlewesthealthpark.co.uk

🌐 www.knowlewesthealthpark.co.uk

North Bristol: Southmead Development Trust

☎ 0117 950 3335

✉ info@southmead.org

🌐 www.southmead.org

Inner and East Bristol: Wellspring Settlement

☎ 0117 304 1400

✉ info@wsb.org.uk

🌐 www.wellspringsettlement.org.uk

