


How to find safe and effective mental health care

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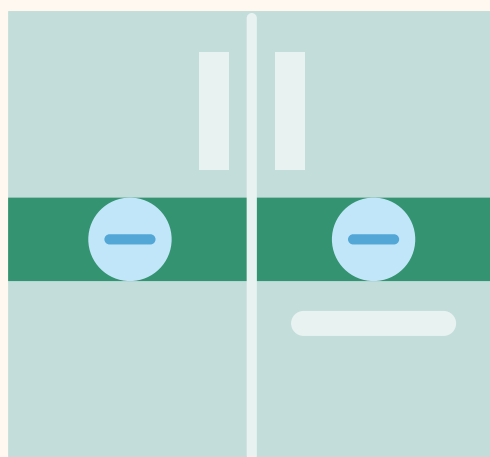


If you are in crisis, or at risk of harm to yourself or others, please follow the resources below.

Emergency Information

If you or someone you are concerned about are feeling suicidal, experiencing suicidal thoughts or at risk of harming themselves or others, please dial 999 for emergency services. If you are with someone who is a risk to themselves or others, **do not attempt to take them to hospital yourself, wait for an ambulance.**

EMERGENCY



If you are struggling and in need of support, or you are in crisis/distress, please follow the link to safe services and support:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/>

OR

Call Samaritans on **116 123**

Introduction



Getting help when we are in need, and finding the right kind of support is something we all deserve. Getting access to healthcare services can be daunting, especially navigating the systems and services when you are struggling. This document is a guide to help you find safe and effective mental health care and support, for yourself, or for others.

In this guide, we will cover:

- What's the difference between a counselling, psychotherapy?
- How do I understand what services and support I am needing?
- How do I find safe places and good practitioners to help me?
- Quick Tips and pitfalls.

This guide is for people who are looking for mental health care outside of the NHS due to the current strain on services and wait times we are experiencing. This information does not take away the importance of using the NHS services available to you. This information is designed to provide you will all the tools to get the help, support and care you need and to provide you with the options to choose an approach which works for you.



What is the difference between all these different kinds of mental health care?

Counselling involves speaking to a trained practitioner, about what you're experiencing, what challenges you're facing and look at your problems with someone to help you view them. These can be one on one, or in group settings, or with partners or family members such as couples counselling. Often people who practice this are referred to as counsellors.



Psychotherapy is the use of therapeutic techniques, methods and approaches to help people discuss, and find solutions to problems and experiences in their life. This can include therapies such as Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT). These sessions can also include different mediums such as using art (including but not limited to, music, drama, art design such as drawing, painting, using clay/play dough), in what is called Art Therapy. Practitioners of these methods can have many different titles such as Psychotherapist, Art Therapist, Systemic Therapist and more.

The key difference between these two types of care, is counselling is focused on discussing your experience and looking deeper at yourself and your health; while psychotherapy involves using different methods and therapies to help patients with these challenges or conditions as well as the parts of counselling as mentioned above. Some of these forms of mental health care are available through the NHS, but there are increasingly more options and access to health services privately.



These services and forms of care are often seen as only for the most severe of circumstances or problems. This is not the case. Help is available to anyone and everyone. Whatever you're going through, there is someone and somewhere for you to get support, help and care.

All these care environments should be with trained, accredited and supervised professionals.

Unfortunately, within the United Kingdom, we do not currently have the protections and protected titles to distinguish the qualified and accredited safe practitioners from those who are not. This is problematic as it is important for you to get safe and effective care you can trust, and is going to help you feel better and manage what you are going through. In the coming sections, there is information and links to websites which hold registers of recognised professionals who are safe to use. This will help to ensure you find safe and effective support that meets your needs and health circumstances.

What kind of care do I need? How do I figure out what kind of support and services would best help me?

Understanding the nature of your challenges is thankfully, in large part, not your responsibility. As one doctor put to me, “it would be so great if you knew how to do lots of these things yourself; however, you’re not a doctor, so it’s simply not your job.” You are not solely responsible.



Understanding your present challenges and issues are best kept simple. What are you feeling? Is there anything you’re thinking is not right at the moment? What kind of changes or challenges do you want to overcome and manage?



If you’re struggling to find out what you’re needing, avoid searching google for symptoms, or the nhs website for certain conditions as those can be very alarming, and often misleading. Again, you’re not a doctor or psychologist, it’s not your job. Charity websites such as Mind (Mind.org.uk), and the Scottish Association for Mental Health or SAMH (Samh.org.uk) are great ways to explore what you’re feeling at the moment and find resources to help you cope and take care of yourself. These can also serve to give you information on what kind of care and support may suit your needs.

How do I find someone to see? What are the pitfalls involved?

It is important when going to get mental health care and support, to find safe and professional practitioners. Sadly in the last few years there has been a massive uptick in so-called therapist and counsellors, as in the U.K. and other countries, we do not have protected terms for these kinds of care, or they are very limited. This means anyone can call themselves a psychotherapist or a counsellor. So, it is very important you check whether the person you're looking at seeing is qualified, and accredited.



There are several institutions and organisations who accredit and supervise these types of care for professionals.

These organisations have tools on their websites to search for practitioners and the kinds of services you're looking for, making it easier to find a safe and professional place to get support.

Some of these organisations in the U.K. are:

- The British Psychological Society (BPS): <https://www.bps.org.uk/>
- The U.K. Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP): <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/>
- The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP): <https://www.bacp.co.uk/>
- Health & Care Professionals Council (HCPC): <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/check-the-register/>

If you're seeking psychological and mental health care, please search for a practitioner through one of these websites. (Please see links to each organisation).

Quick Tips & Pitfalls.

- **There are no silver bullets.** There is an awful lot of misinformation and overwhelming amounts of information and ignorance about on mental health nowadays. Whether it's social media mental health influencers who aren't mental health professionals, mental health information lacking context, or accuracy; people trying to impact others with disinformation and spreading of information to suit a narrative or their status; or companies and organisations trying to sell products and services. It is more important than ever to remind yourself that sadly we are all complex creatures with nuanced experiences, which often require comprehensive and, crucially, effective solutions. It's unlikely we will find means to better care for ourselves and get the support we need from a miracle do-dad, special tea, or *one amazing thing you simply absolutely should, have, need or must do to "fix" yourself or make all your problems go away.*
- **Be mindful of the content you consume online regarding mental health and well-being.** There are now more than ever, an overwhelming number of mental health influencers (rather than mental health professionals) and mental health content online which although can sometimes be interesting to read, can cause a lot of hurt. Whether it's influencers who promote products, courses or treatments which are not safe or can be harmful in unintended ways; incorrect information, whether that's intentional or not, and information that lacks context or validity (particularly in terms of current research and practice) or simply the information doesn't apply to you. This can make online content even more overwhelming, upsetting, and anxiety inducing, whether its relevant to you or not. Additionally, scrolling through mental health content which isn't relevant to you, can create its own stress and worry. Be mindful of you who consume content from and how you consume it.

- **Social media posts are not therapy.** As simple as it sounds, it's all too easy for us to search for something that we feel we need when we're experiencing negative emotions, stress or are distressed with something we're experiencing/have experienced. It is understandable to look for answers and something to soothe you. However, this can often lead to consuming content which, as said above, can have negative impacts, and may make you feel worse. If you're needing help and support, reach out for it, and avoid scrolling for it.
- **There is always support out there, find what's right for you.** It's okay to feel like the person you are seeing for mental health care isn't the right person for you and your needs. It's normal, and a part of the therapeutic process. If you feel intimidated to change or try to find someone else, that's normal, but you can do it. Finding a practitioner is a personal and experiential process, where you follow your needs, your feelings and your experience of that person. You are entitled and deserve to find the care experience you want, and find care and support that you need from someone you trust, feel safe around, and want to work with.



If you are looking for informed, evidence-based content online, and you are going to be on social media lots, I recommend reading or watching Dr Sophie Mort (@_drsoph), Dr Emma Hepburn (aka @thepsychologymum), Dr Emma Cotterill (@empowerpsychology) and Dr Faye Begeti (aka @the_brain_doctor). They are all on your usual social media platforms.