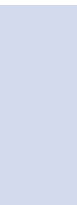
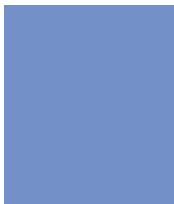
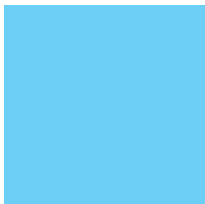


Mental Health & Wellbeing:

A Guide For Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual People



Introduction

We all have mental health, just as we have physical health and that means it's just as important that we look after it. Mental and physical health impact on each other, so in this guide, we'll be sharing some useful tips to help you to look after yourself day-to-day, as well as some things you can do when you're not feeling your best.

Our mental health can be affected by lots of different things and we know that for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, issues such as homophobia, isolation and discrimination can really start to take their toll, along with everything else life can throw at us.

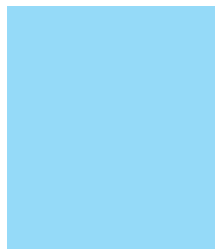
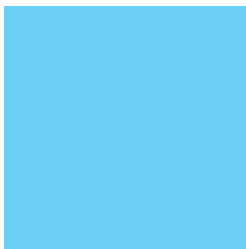
In fact, it's thought that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are at significantly higher risk of mental health problems, suicidal thoughts and deliberate self harm than heterosexual people.

So it's never been more important to get to know your mental health, learn how to take care of it and don't be afraid to ask for support, no matter what it is you're going through, you're not alone.



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What is mental health?

Mental health means striking a balance in all aspects of your life: social, physical, economic and psychological. Reaching a balance is a learning process and at times, you may tip the balance too much in one direction and have to find your feet again. Just as we are all individual and unique, so will the balance you need to achieve to feel at your best.

Mental health isn't just about mental illness and having good mental health means we reach a state of wellbeing, where we feel able to reach our full potential. We feel able to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday life, be productive and maintain positive relationships with friends, family and our wider community.

Our mental health has lots of different layers and one of the most important, is how we feel about ourselves. Having good mental health means we take care of ourselves, feel valuable as a person and don't set ourselves unreasonable and impossible goals and standards to live by, for most of the time.

We all have times when we don't feel great; we might feel low, angry, stressed out or anxious, but these feelings can and do, usually pass with time. However, for some of us these feelings can last a lot longer and become more intense, even developing into something like depression. This can happen to every one of us; mental health is everyone's business and the more you know about yours, the more you can look after it and notice when things aren't right.



What can influence my mental health?

There are lots of things that can influence our mental health, from internal factors like illness to external events such as experiencing homophobia. Most of the things that influence our mental health can be put into one of the following categories:

- Physical
- Social
- Environmental
- Psychological

We all go through ups and downs in life, and good mental health helps us to become more resilient and cope with things day-to-day.

Positive influences:

It's important to recognise that there can also be things that have a positive influence on our mental health, such as:

- Having a good balance between work and play
- Taking time out to get some good-quality relaxation
- Exercising regularly
- Doing the things you enjoy
- Eating a healthy diet to give you the nutrition you need
- Having a support network and being surrounded by people who care about you
- Being stimulated and challenged to help you reach your potential

More useful information:

NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth

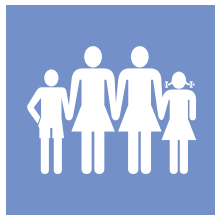
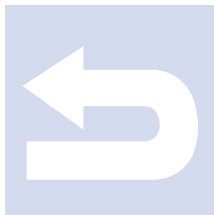
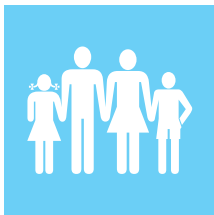
Negative Influences

Childhood and Past Experiences

If we experience some kind of trauma in childhood, it could make it more likely that we'll develop mental health problems in adulthood. Trauma can include experiences such as being abused (sexually, physically, or emotionally), being neglected, bullied, experiencing family problems or being exposed to violence. The things we experience as children may have a significant influence on our emotional, psychological and physiological development and even on the relationships we form in later life.

Meet James:

“I know that my childhood was an unhappy one. I wasn't looked after properly and my parents' relationship was often violent. From a young age I use to hide away and disappear into my own 'secret world' where I felt safe. I didn't realise until I was in my 30's that all of this had caught up on me; I'd isolated myself away from everyone and just couldn't cope with life...”



Feeling Isolated

As human beings, we are social creatures and feeling isolated can have a big impact on our mental health. It's important to recognise that you can still feel isolated and alone even if you're surrounded by people; the crucial part is about feeling connected to others around you. It's thought that older LGB people are one of the most isolated groups in our society, which could also mean their risk of developing mental health problems is one of the highest. There can still be some stigma around loneliness, perhaps because in our society there can be an emphasis on being self-sufficient and independent. However, prolonged isolation can have a serious impact on our mental health, causing negative thought patterns and making us less resilient to illness.

Meet Anna:

“I've always been quite an open person, but feeling lonely was one of the things I just couldn't bring myself to admit to other people, I felt ashamed. I've got a good life from the outside I have a nice house, I have a lot of hobbies, but I feel so isolated from everyone else. It feels like everyone is surrounded by family, going out for family meals, celebrating together and I'm stuck at home on my own. It's now turned into a cycle where I'm isolating myself away from people even more... I never thought it'd end up like this.”

Negative Influences

Internalised Homophobia

Internalised homophobia is a hatred of our own sexual orientation. It often occurs when we have been taught that being straight is the 'norm' and seeing or hearing negative things about being lesbian, gay or bisexual. Being aware of our own sexual orientation, we might believe those negative things about ourselves, even if they don't fit. Internalised homophobia can be experienced in many different ways and has the potential to cause a lot of distress. Feeling hatred and disgust towards a part of yourself can damage confidence, self esteem, in some cases lead people to self harm and at its worst, lead people to attempt to take their own lives. People can and do overcome internalised homophobia, with many opting for counselling as a way of exploring the positive side of their sexual orientation.

Meet Tom:

“It took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that my feelings weren't going to change. For years I resented the fact that I felt different; I felt disgusted in myself every time I saw a guy I was attracted to. I tried to end it twice and came close to trying it again quite a few more times since. I'd end up having risky sex as a way of punishing myself and luckily things didn't end up as bad as they could've done...”

Discrimination, Homophobia, Biphobia and Abuse

Approximately 3 in 5 LGB people have experienced a mental health problem in the last 5 years compared to 1 in 4 of the general population, in any one year. The experiences of discrimination, homophobia and biphobia in society and possible rejection by friends, families and others, such as employers, means that some LGB people experience more problems with their mental health than others.

Meet Deena:

“It started when I noticed all my friends had been given an invitation addressed to them and their partners; I was the only one who was different. It's not always the things strangers shout at you in the street; it can come from the people you know...they're the most hurtful. It's things like when friends in the pub make homophobic comments and then try to say they're only having a laugh. Well I don't find it funny, none of it, and as much as I try to stop it, I can feel it grinding me down...”

The LGF can advise you on your rights and how to report a hate crime. Call us on 0845 3 30 30 30.



Negative Influences

Significant Life Events

We all have them; some are wonderful and some are painful, but life would be pretty boring without them! A significant life event can be anything from moving house, to starting a new job, from welcoming a new life into the world to saying goodbye to a loved one. Perhaps one of the most significant life events many LGB people might go through, is coming out those first few times. We know that you don't come out just the once, but those first few times for a lot of us are memorable; whether for good reasons or bad. For some people, even seemingly positive events, such as starting a new job can have a negative impact on mental health due to heightened stress levels.

Meet Katherine:

“I noticed the effect of coming out on my mental health before I'd even done it! All those sleepless nights worried what people would say, planning for the worst possible outcomes and added to that just wanting to be straight like all my friends took me to a pretty dark place. Looking back, I can see I had nothing to worry about, but there was always that fear at the back of my mind.”



Poor Physical Health

For some of us, having a long-term physical health condition can impact on every area of our lives; our relationships, how much we socialise, self esteem and work being just a few examples. Living with a serious physical health condition can also affect our mental health, perhaps because of some of the things we might feel, such as angry, isolated, scared and out of control. For some, treatment of the illness can be stressful, cause a lot of pain, and some medications can also affect how you feel emotionally. There are also certain physical conditions, such as an underactive thyroid, which can affect the way the brain works and can in some people, directly cause depression and/or anxiety (we advise you speak to your GP if you are concerned).

Meet Jack:

“When I was diagnosed with HIV eight years ago, everything seemed to spiral out of control. Even though I could carry on with life as normal, it felt like I had my future planned out in front of me and it looked completely miserable. I had to start depending on other people too, telling me what to look out for, tablets I needed to be taking. Even though the physical symptoms were manageable, the impact it had on me mentally was huge. The best thing I did was meet other positive people and saw how they just get on with things.”

Negative Influences

Drugs and Alcohol

There is a close relationship between substance abuse (illegal drugs, legal drugs, alcohol) and mental health, with people abusing substances being more likely to develop mental health problems and vice versa. This is particularly true for LGB people, we're just as likely to have a substance misuse issue as we are to have a mental health problem.

People use substances for all kinds of reasons, but what they may have in common, is that most forms of substance abuse can give a temporary feeling of wellbeing, whether that's a feeling of control, relaxation or alertness, it may even provide an escape from feelings such as internalised homophobia. If you want some support around drugs and/or alcohol, then please see our 'Useful Contacts' section at the back of this guide.

Meet Susanne:

“I'm not sure how long it took me to realise I had a problem, I just remember being in work one day in a meeting, physically shaking and knew that having a bit of coke at the weekends had gone way too far. I was annoyed at myself for being the one who got hooked, my friends seemed to be able to take or leave it, but I quickly realised I couldn't do it. If you've ever had a panic attack, you'll know how much of a wake-up call that was for me.”

Other issues

This is by no means a definitive list of the things that can influence our mental health, just some examples which you have hopefully found useful. Sometimes there's no obvious cause or reason for experiencing problems with our mental health. There's been research to suggest that certain conditions, such as depression may even be hereditary. Even if we do have an idea of what's impacted on our mental health, they are not always things we can control, understand or come to terms with straight away. Life can have its ups and downs to say the least, and some things may leave their mark on us more than others, but this isn't a sign of weakness; recognising it and asking for support can even be the thing that makes you stronger.

Meet Sabina:

“The last few years have been one thing after another. It felt like every time I picked myself up, I was knocked back down again. I've always been independent and didn't like people knowing I wasn't OK. One day a friend asked me what was going on, everything just came out and it felt like a weight had been lifted.”



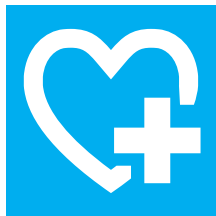
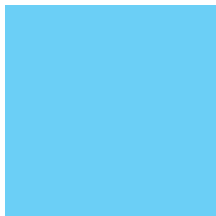
What about my physical health?

As we've discussed earlier in this guide, physical and mental health are inextricably linked and the best way to achieve good overall health and wellbeing, is to take care of both. Having poor physical health can actually increase the risk of mental health problems, for example; the rates of depression are doubled in those people with diabetes, hypertension, heart failure and heart disease.

Mental health problems such as depression are also thought to increase the risk of developing conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke and even irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). So, whether you have good mental health or not, looking after your physical health could be one of the most life-changing things you can do and it doesn't have to be complicated.

Making just a few small changes to your lifestyle can make a bigger difference than you think and sometimes even just looking after ourselves that little bit more can increase confidence and self esteem.

Over the next few pages, we've made some suggestions to help get you started.



Try to be active daily

It's suggested we should aim to get at least two and a half hours of moderate intensity exercise throughout the course of the week and this should be doing something that increases your heart rate and makes you sweat! Fitting exercise into your daily routine (such as by cycling or walking to work) can make it feel more manageable and being more active can also be a great way to relax and reduce stress, as it boosts our 'feel-good' chemicals called endorphins. Being active on a daily basis can also reduce the risk of some diseases, such as coronary heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. It can also help us to maintain a healthy weight, keep us fit and supple and even reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. If you want more information visit www.nhs.uk/livewell

Eat your way to better mental health

Good nutrition is essential to our mental health, as it gives us some of the things we need to manage and even prevent mental illness. The main thing to remember when trying to improve what you eat, is to take everything in moderation; aim to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and try to drink the recommended 8 glasses of fluid a day. If you need healthy meal ideas, try the internet for recipe websites and even your local library should have a selection of cook books.

If you want more information visit www.nhs.uk/livewell

What about my physical health?

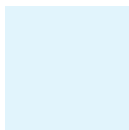
Smoking

Stopping smoking is probably one of the best things you can do for you health, no matter how many cigarettes you smoke per day. You'll save money, feel fitter and it'll stop you from ageing prematurely. If you're worried about stopping smoking because it helps you cope with feelings such as stress, then your local smoking cessation service will be able to help, there are more details on where to find them on the NHS 'Live Well' website pages: www.nhs.uk/livewell

Alcohol

Alcohol works by depressing brain function and drinking too much can have a serious impact on your mental health. There's no getting away from it; those of us who drink heavily are far more likely to suffer from a mental illness and alcohol can even intensify existing mental health problems. The government advises that we should not regularly drink more than the daily unit guidelines of 3-4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2-3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of wine). 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week. If you're concerned about how much you're drinking, see the NHS 'Live Well' website for more information on drinking guidelines:

www.nhs.uk/livewell



Drugs

Whether legal or illegal, abusing a substance can have serious consequences for both your physical and mental health. The extent of this depends on many different factors, from what you're taking to the current state of your mental health, but in most cases, you'll be putting your health at risk in one way or another. It's thought that more LGB people use substances than the wider population and there is help out there if you want it, see our 'Useful Contacts' page for more details.

Sexual Health

Sexual health is an important part of our physical and mental health and overall wellbeing. It's important to look after your sexual health, whether you're a gay or bisexual guy or a lesbian or bisexual woman and know where to get checked out and what the risks are. Sometimes when self esteem and confidence is low, we might use sex as a way of helping ourselves to feel better. It's also thought that experiencing things like internalised homophobia, using drugs and excessively drinking can lead us to take more risks with the sex we're having, which can have lasting consequences. If you want to know more about taking care of your sexual health, visit www.lgf.org.uk and check out our women or men's pages.



What kind of things might I feel if I have a mental health problem?

Mental health problems can affect each person differently, but most conditions each have some common symptoms. If you're concerned about some of the things you're feeling, always speak to your GP so they can point you in the right direction. This information isn't designed to label or diagnose anyone, but it could help you to get a better understanding of just some of the things people experience with certain mental health problems.

Please remember that people can and do recover from mental illness. If you recognise some of the feelings on the next few pages, it doesn't mean you'll feel that way forever; there's lots of help and support out there to get you back on your feet. Remember, we all have ups and downs, good days and bad days, but if you're concerned that what you're feeling is more than that, then please don't suffer in silence.



Depression

We all have down days, but what sets it apart for the 2 in 3 of us, who identify as LGB, who have depression at some time in our lives is that it can seriously affect our quality of life and symptoms tend to last for at least two weeks. Here are just some of the common symptoms:

- Feeling agitated and restless
- Experiencing feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness
- Changes to sleep, either sleeping too much or very little
- Feeling tired and lethargic
- Being unusually irritable or impatient
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- You may experience physical aches and pains



Anxiety, Panic and Phobias

Anxiety is something we all experience once in a while, particularly in situations that we find threatening or difficult. However, when anxiety becomes a problem, it doesn't go away and it can make day-to-day tasks a real challenge. Phobias tend to be a fear of something that isn't dangerous that causes feelings of anxiety and can stop you from doing things. For example, those with agoraphobia experience a fear of being around other people and this may mean that they avoid leaving the house. There are many different types of anxiety, including panic attacks, general anxiety disorder and phobias but these problems can have certain symptoms in common, which often include physical changes too, and these include:

- Feeling constantly worried
- Unable to relax
- Feeling irritable
- Catastrophising (thinking that the worst will happen)
- Tense muscles which sometimes cause headaches
- Rapid breathing which can make you feel light-headed
- Nausea and sickness
- 'Churning' or 'butterflies' in your stomach
- Panic attacks (unexpected, intense period of anxiety that last for no longer than 10 minutes, can experience shortness of breath and feeling that you're going to die)



Stress

Twelve million adults see their GP with mental health problems each year, much of it being stress related. We all experience stress at different levels in everyday life; it can help to keep us motivated and get things done, but too much stress can become problematic and have a negative impact on our health. If your body is under too much stress, you might notice some of the following symptoms:

- Chest pains
- Changes in your appetite (loss of, or increase in)
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Restlessness
- Changes to sleep; either sleeping too much or very little
- Tense muscles and cramps
- Feeling sick or dizzy
- Change in sex drive



Bipolar Disorder

Or manic depression, as it used to be called, causes extreme mood swings, usually from overactive and excited behaviour (mania) to periods of deep depression, often with stable periods in between the two. Sometimes someone with bipolar might go for months or even years without experiencing one of these mood swings.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is one of the most commonly misunderstood mental health problems. It's often associated with people being violent or dangerous, when in fact this is rarely the case. Each person's experience of schizophrenia can be very different, and there are various types of the condition, which can make it difficult to diagnose. Most commonly however, people with schizophrenia tend to experience jumbled thinking/confusion, along with hallucinations and/or delusions and can become withdrawn.

For more information about Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia visit the MIND website www.mind.org.uk



Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

We can all obsess about and become fixated on things from time to time, but when it spirals into an overwhelming impulse to think or do something, it can quickly take over your life. OCD is a type of anxiety disorder, because of its three main parts:

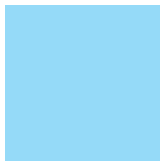
- 1 Thoughts that make you feel anxious (obsession)
- 2 The anxiety you feel
- 3 The things you do to reduce your anxiety (compulsions)

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is one of the most effective treatments for OCD as it looks at how we think and how this affects what we do.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is another type of anxiety disorder that can develop following exposure to traumatic events such as being the victim of violent homophobic hate crime or being in a car crash. PTSD usually manifests itself in flashbacks, panic attacks and feeling extremely on edge and aware. The symptoms of PTSD can be immediate, but in some cases may only start to occur up to six months later.

For more information about OCD and PTSD, visit the Anxiety UK website at www.anxiety-uk.org.uk and click on 'Get Help'.



Eating Disorders

(anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge eating)

Eating disorders are not just about food and eating; they are primarily about the control of feelings and emotions. Problems can begin when food is used to cope with stressful and painful feeling and situations, often without the person realising what they are doing. Some people may experience what we would call 'disordered eating' where there's an irregular pattern of eating and can include things like starvation or exercising obsessively they may not fit into a category of an eating disorder, but it's important to seek help nonetheless. If you're concerned about eating disorder or disordered eating, check out the B-eat website at www.b-eat.co.uk

Psychosis

Anyone can be affected by psychosis, but it's more likely to occur in late teens and early 20's.

Psychosis is a mental health problem where there is a loss of contact with reality and generally accepted ideas and thinking. The first time this happens, it can be very difficult for you to describe or understand what is happening, which can cause confusion and distress. People can and do recover from psychosis and a quarter of people will never experience another psychotic episode after recovering from their first. For more information about psychosis visit the Rethink website www.rethink.org and click on 'About mental illness'



Other things I might feel & experience

Self Harm

Approximately 4 in 10 LGBT men and women have made at least one attempt to self harm, with numerous studies finding that lesbian and bisexual women are even more likely to intentionally harm themselves. People might harm themselves in many different ways, not just through cutting or scratching. There are three main types of self harm:

- Deliberately harming yourself to cause physical injury (e.g. burning, pulling out hair, self-poisoning)
- Putting yourself in dangerous or risky situations (e.g. dangerous driving, having lots of unprotected sex)
- Self neglect (e.g. not eating properly, neglecting personal hygiene)

Self harming is a coping mechanism that people use to deal with feeling of deep distress, so telling someone to stop, without replacing harming with a safer coping mechanism can be dangerous. If you're concerned about self harming, visit the National Self Harm network website at www.nshn.co.uk. If you have seriously injured or harmed yourself, then you should attend the nearest A&E department at your local hospital.

For further information:

- National Self Harm Network: www.nshn.co.uk
- Speak to your GP who can talk to you about treatment options and support

Suicidal Thoughts

For some people, their levels of distress become so painful, that life just doesn't seem worth living anymore. Common feelings associated with suicidal thoughts can include hopelessness, guilt, shame and even the feeling that people may be better off without you.

LGB people are twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts and make attempts, possibly because of things such as internalised homophobia or being the victim of a hate crime. If you're feeling suicidal, you may have noticed yourself becoming more withdrawn and distancing yourself from others. You may be fearful of opening up to people in case what you say scares or worries them, or because you feel they won't understand. There are people out there who you can talk to, who won't judge you or dismiss your feelings. You may be at a point where you feel sure that this is what you want, or that it's the only choice you have left, but things *can* get better, they *can* change.

Speaking to your GP

Even if you're experiencing suicidal thoughts, you might not be considering hurting yourself. Whether you are or not, your GP will be experienced in dealing with these issues and will be able to find you some support. We understand that it can be difficult to reach out to your GP, particularly if you're feeling vulnerable, so it may help to write things down beforehand for them to read, or to take someone with you for support.

If you need urgent support

If you are in a crisis, whether you've harmed yourself or feel like doing so, then you need to go to the A&E department at your local hospital. There you will be able to speak to someone and decide what the best way will be to keep you safe, which may include a stay in hospital.

Helplines

There are a number of helplines you can contact who offer listening and support to people in distress. If you feel anxious or unable to talk to friends or family, then a helpline can be a useful place to go to for support. Here are a few useful contacts:

Samaritans:

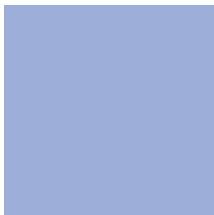
0845 7 90 90 90 (24 hours a day, 364 days a year)

Papyrus: (for young people)

0800 068 41 41 (Mon-Fri 10am to 5pm and 7pm to 10pm and Weekends 2pm to 5pm)

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation:

0845 3 30 30 30 (10am to 10pm, 365 days a year)



When should I ask for help?

You should ask for help as soon as you feel you need it, even if you've coped alone for a long time, it's never too late. There are lots of people out there who can help, no matter how big or small your problems might seem. When your mental health worsens, you might start to feel like isolating yourself away and withdrawing from the people around you.

One of the common symptoms of many mental health problems is experiencing a lack of interest in the things you used to enjoy, which could mean that you're spending more and more time alone.

It may help to speak to someone you trust, first and foremost. They might be a friend or a relative or even your GP. Being open about how you're feeling might feel intimidating, but the one thing you can be assured of is that you're not alone; everyone needs a helping hand at one time or another and it's not a sign of weakness.

If you're planning on speaking to your GP or another health professional about what you're feeling, try to be as honest as possible with them so they can find the best type of support for you.

Sometimes the biggest stigma around mental health can come from ourselves, whatever you might tell them, the chances are they will have heard it before.

Visit www.time-to-change.co.uk to read more about stigma and read stories from people who live with a mental health problem.

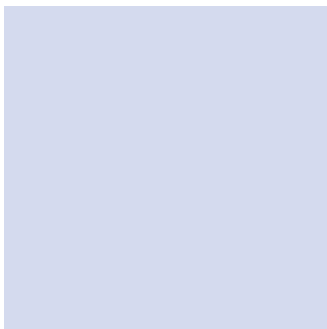


Your GP

Your GP may be the first person you talk to if you're concerned about your mental health or overall wellbeing. They can let you know about support on offer, refer you into services and talk to you about medication options if it's appropriate. Some LGB people struggle talking to their GP for fear of being judged. You can always ask to see a different GP at your surgery, or if you'd like to register somewhere new, visit the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk or pick up a copy of the Yellow Pages.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Service

IAPT is an NHS programme, providing services for people who are experiencing depression and/or anxiety. Most areas now have a dedicated service, offering cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and guided self help. You may need your GP to refer you to your local service, or in some cases you can self refer. Visit the IAPT website at www.iapt.nhs.uk and click on the region you live in for more information.



Voluntary Sector Services

There are many charities like The LGF who offer mental health and wellbeing support, through services such as counselling and support groups. If you're after a specialist service, such as one for LGB people, women, young people or for a particular issue, you may be able to find a local organisation who can offer this. Otherwise, it's always worth speaking to someone like The LGF as we can let you know about what's available near you if you're struggling to find something suitable.

Primary Care Mental Health Team (PCMHT)

Your local PCHMT are part of the NHS and offer assessments and psychological treatments for people experiencing common mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, low mood and stress. You may need to be referred to the service by your GP, but in some areas you can contact them directly yourself. They offer a number of different forms of support, including; cognitive behavioural therapy, counselling, guided self help and often other wellbeing services such as support groups. For more information about your local service, visit the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk or speak to your GP.



Counsellor / Psychotherapist

You may recognise that a certain problem or experience, either past or present, is impacting on your mental health. We all go through ups and downs, but sometimes if we've been through something particularly difficult; it can be beneficial to talk things through. There are lots of different types of counselling and psychotherapy on offer, which you can access privately, through the NHS or through voluntary services such as The LGF.

Your counsellor won't tell you what to do, make judgements or give you answers, but will listen and give you a safe and confidential space in which to explore and understand your feelings.

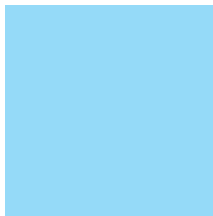
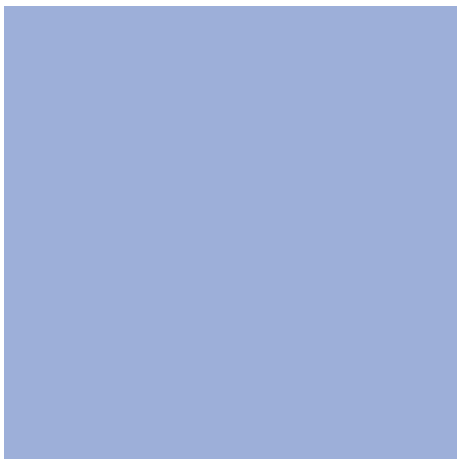
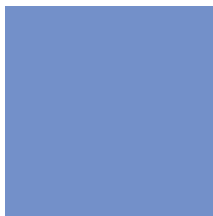
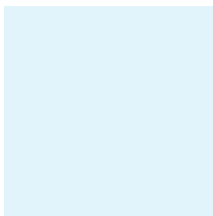
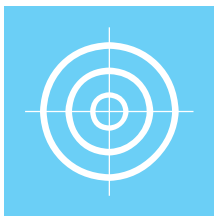
We recommend checking out the Counselling Directory website www.counselling-directory.org.uk if you're looking for a private counsellor in your area.



Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT)

As part of the NHS, you will usually be referred to your local CMHT by your GP, if you're experiencing severe and enduring mental health problems and would benefit from some more intensive support.

Each CMHT is usually made up of a team of different professionals, including; psychiatrists, social workers and community psychiatric nurses.



How can I help myself?

Taking some small, simple steps to improve your wellbeing can be just the thing to keep you on your feet.

Connect

Make connections with the people around you, whether it's friends, family, colleagues or people in your local community. Feeling a sense of belonging and having support networks are really valuable things to invest some time in developing.

Be Active

Find something you enjoy; whether it's going for a walk, swimming, joining a class or gardening. It can improve your health, fitness and self esteem all in one go!



Take Notice

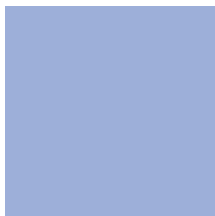
Notice the things around you, how you feel and take the time to appreciate what matters to you. Try taking a walk through crunchy leaves on an autumn day or going for a coffee with a friend. Savouring the simplest of things can feel really satisfying in such a hectic world.

Learn

Try something new or rediscover an old hobby. Setting yourself a challenge or even just having a go at something different can help you feel more confident.

Give

It doesn't have to be material items. Give your time; volunteer, be there for a friend, thank someone for holding a door open for you. Giving even the smallest of things can feel incredibly rewarding and connects you with the people around you.



How can I help someone who is struggling with their mental health?

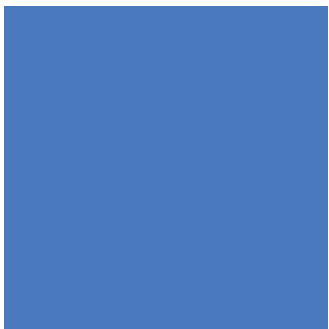
Supporting someone you care about can be tough at times, especially if you don't know what to do for the best. They're lucky to have you, but it's important that taking care of them doesn't then start to have a negative impact on your own wellbeing. Here are a few helpful ways to maintain a good balance:

- Share the load; try not to take on the sole responsibility for someone's care or support. Ask a friend, relative or local support service for help
- Even if you can't see or understand why that person is struggling with their mental health, they can't help how they feel. They might not be able to see things from the same perspective as you





- It's fine to feel frustrated! Don't feel guilty for feeling this way, make sure you have an outlet for these feelings so they don't impact on your wellbeing
- You can't force someone into seeking help, they have to do it in their own time
- If you have serious concerns about someone's safety, don't keep it to yourself. If they're threatening to harm themselves, always take it seriously. Urge them to go to A&E at their local hospital if they're in a crisis



Speaking from experience...

With approximately 2 in 5 LGB people living with a mental health problem, who better to share some tips and experiences for looking after your mental health...

“Speaking to my manager was a breakthrough for me after trying to hide things for so long. I was lucky that they were so understanding; they let me leave early for appointments and it was good to just get some reassurance.”

“I know people don't like hearing it, but exercise really helped me. At times it was hard to keep it up when I felt low, but it's made such a difference to my confidence.”

“Having a good work, life balance is really important to me; I know the warning signs to look out for when I'm getting really stressed so I know I can do something about it.”

“As much as you might want to, try not to close yourself off from other people. Let them be there for you, talk to them about what's going on, you might be surprised by who's gone through something similar.”

“Because of the family I grew up in, I thought having a mental illness was a sign of weakness. I fought and fought against getting help because I was so ashamed, until one day someone I really admired told me about their struggles. It really opened my eyes...”

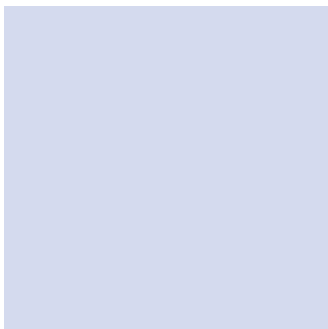
“I keep a list of useful contact numbers on my fridge in case I’m going through a crisis, it helps to know there are people I can call who can help.”

“The first time I spoke to my GP about feeling depressed, she assumed it was because I’m a lesbian. I really wish I would’ve changed GP sooner, because now I have a good one, I can see what a difference it makes.”

Wellness Star

Achieving a balance in life can be tough going, especially if you're juggling lots of different things. Our Wellness Star can help you to identify how much of a balance or imbalance you have and highlights any areas that may need some more attention, to help you to improve your overall wellbeing.

On the star are ten aspects of life that contribute to us feeling well. Along each line, rate how you feel about that aspect of life by marking somewhere between 1 and 10, with 10 being very satisfied and 1 being not satisfied at all. There isn't a right or wrong way to score each point; the more positive you feel, the further towards the outside the mark should be. Once you've done this, you'll then need to link the points up so you end up with the outline of a star. You can then use this to see where there are any dips (perhaps an area of your life that needs more attention) or any pronounced spikes (where something is going well). It may even be useful to do this exercise every few months so you can see if anything has changed.



I'll draw this out for you!



Mental Health & Wellbeing Support at The LGF

Counselling

One-to-one, relationship and creative therapies to LGB&T people, from our Community Resource Centre in central Manchester.

We also provide telephone counselling for under 25's. Contact **counselling@lgf.org.uk** or **0845 3 30 30 30**

Support for depression, anxiety, stress and low mood

Free one-to-one sessions with a mental health worker for Manchester residents, who identify as LGB&T from our Community Resource Centre in central Manchester.

Contact: **helpline@lgf.org.uk** or call us on **0845 3 30 30 30**

Befriending

Our Befrienders can support LGB&T people from across Greater Manchester, to reduce their isolation, build confidence and reconnect with their community.

Contact: **befriending@lgf.org.uk** or call us on **0845 3 30 30 30**

Support & Social Groups

A range of free groups for LGB&T people, who may be feeling isolated and want to meet new people in a friendly, supportive space. Contact: **groups@lgf.org.uk** or call us on **0845 3 30 30 30**

Helpline

10am-10pm 365 days a year. Whether you're looking for information, support or just someone to listen, we're here when you need us. Call us on **0845 3 30 30 30**.

Pop in and see us!

If you'd prefer to talk to someone face-to-face, you can now pop-in and see us at our Community Resource Centre at Number 5, Richmond Street, Manchester, M1 3HF. Monday – Friday between 10am and 8pm. No appointment necessary.

For more information about these services and how we can support you, visit **www.lgf.org.uk**

For more information about mental health and services in your area

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/livewell

Useful information about a variety of health topics, from mental health to alcohol. Also features a directory of services in your area.

Royal College of Psychiatrists – www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Online mental health resource for the public and professionals. Contains useful factsheets about treatments and the roles of different mental health professionals.

Start2 www.start2.co.uk

Online wellbeing resource aimed at prevention and recovery through creativity.

MIND – www.mind.org.uk, Infoline: 0300 123 3393

National mental health charity providing support and advice to anyone with a mental health problem

If you're looking for support in your area, call us on 0845 3 30 30 30, speak to your GP or visit www.lgf.org.uk/mentalhealth

We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay and bisexual people can achieve their full potential.

This guide is available in large print by calling **0845 3 30 30 30** or email **info@lgf.org.uk**



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