



Trauma

Explains what trauma is and how it affects your mental health, including how you can help yourself, what treatments are available and how to overcome barriers to getting the right support. Also includes tips for people who want to support someone who has gone through trauma.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

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What is trauma?

Going through very stressful, frightening or distressing events is sometimes called trauma. When we talk about emotional or psychological trauma, we might mean:

- situations or events we find traumatic
- how we're affected by our experiences.

Traumatic events can happen at any age and can cause long-lasting harm. Everyone has a different reaction to trauma, so you might notice any effects quickly, or a long time afterwards.

"I wish there was more awareness of trauma and the way it affects a person's thought process and behaviour. [...] Self-preservation behaviours can be greatly or misunderstood."

Going through further trauma can also cause you to start being affected by past experiences, or make existing problems worse. **It's ok to ask for help at any time** – including if you're not sure if you've experienced trauma.

If you've been affected by trauma, it's important to remember that you survived however you could and are having **common, normal reactions**. Find out more on our page on the [effects of trauma](#).

"I left home at 18 to escape my home life and was married very young and then divorced in my early twenties... I used alcohol, had very risky [...] relationships, was in a constant state of terrible anxiety, self-harmed and at times was very suicidal... but I did not have the vocabulary to describe this either to myself or others."

What experiences might be traumatic?

What's traumatic is personal. Other people can't know how you feel about your own experiences or if they were traumatic for you. You might have similar experiences to someone else, but be affected differently.

Trauma can include events where you feel:

- frightened
- under threat
- humiliated
- rejected
- abandoned
- invalidated
- unsafe
- unsupported
- trapped
- ashamed

- powerless.

Ways trauma can happen include:

- one-off or ongoing events
- being directly harmed
- witnessing harm to someone else
- living in a traumatic atmosphere
- being affected by trauma in a family or community.

Your experience of trauma might relate to parts of your identity, including if you've been harassed, bullied or discriminated against. If you've experienced trauma and identify as LGBTIQ+, our information on [LGBTIQ+ mental health](#) may be helpful for you.

"For me, the memories have always been like a song I get stuck in my head. They play over and over, and sometimes I remember the words and sing along, and sometimes it's just the instruments. But they never really go away, and sometimes it gets so loud, I can barely hear myself think."

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Some people use the term Adverse Childhood Experiences (also known as ACEs) to describe stressful or difficult experiences in childhood, including sexual, physical or emotional [abuse or neglect](#). Research has shown links between these types of experiences and both physical and mental health problems.

If you have been abused or neglected in childhood, the [National Association for People Abused in Childhood](#) is there to support you. Our pages on [abuse](#) also list organisations that can provide support with abuse that happened at any age.

[Read Mick's story: My cPTSD diagnosis](#)

Can trauma cause mental health problems?

Trauma can sometimes directly cause mental health problems, or make you more vulnerable to developing them. It is among the [potential causes](#) of all mental health problems. It can be difficult to tell which problems are being caused by trauma.

Some conditions are also known to develop as a direct result of trauma, including [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) and [complex post-traumatic stress disorder \(complex PTSD\)](#).

"Trauma sticks with you, even after the terrible moment has passed. It becomes a life sentence for a crime you didn't commit."

How you're affected may depend on other things too, such as:

- previous experiences of trauma
- other stresses or worries at the time or later on
- being harmed by people close to you
- whether anyone helped or supported you.

"My high functioning depression and anxiety is a result of childhood trauma that lay dormant from age 13 until it [was] triggered when I was 39."

If you told someone about what happened and they didn't listen to you or help you, this might have stopped you getting the support you needed or made you feel alone – which might have made the effects of trauma worse.

Different perspectives on trauma and mental health

There are various approaches to trauma and mental health problems. Some people find it helpful to receive a [diagnosis](#) because this feels validating or explains what they're going through.

Others feel this makes the focus of their problems more medical than is helpful, instead of recognising how any difficulties could be reactions to life experiences or ways of coping with adversity. They feel that it would be better for mental health professionals to focus on what elements of their life experience and environment may have contributed to their problems and address these, rather than locating the responsibility for their illness more in them as an individual.

Connecting with people who have also survived trauma can sometimes be particularly helpful, for example through [peer support](#) – including if you don't see your experiences in terms of medical problems or symptoms, or if mental health services have made things worse for you. Some people find it helpful to join groups that are part of a survivor's movement, such as the [National Survivor User Network \(NSUN\)](#).

However you prefer to think of your own experiences, we hope that you will find the information in these pages useful when considering different options for care and support.

"On the days my head gets too loud, I like curling up with a cup of tea. I make a nest with my blankets, grab my rabbit for a cuddle, and curl up in front of a film. I feel bad about writing a day off when I should be studying, or working, but I know if I don't give myself time, early on, then it'll just build into something worse, and harder to handle."

How could trauma affect me?

Trauma affects everyone differently. You might recognise some of the experiences listed below, and you might also have other experiences or reactions that aren't mentioned here.

This section covers:

- how our bodies respond to danger
- common mental health effects of trauma
- trauma and physical health problems
- how else might trauma affect me?

How our bodies respond to danger

When we feel stressed or threatened, our bodies release hormones called cortisol and adrenaline. This is the body's automatic way of preparing to respond to danger, and **we have no control over it**.

This can have a range of effects, which are sometimes called:

- **freeze** – feeling paralysed or unable to move
- **flop** – doing what you're told without being able to protest
- **fight** – fighting, struggling or protesting
- **flight** – hiding or moving away
- **fawn** – trying to please someone who harms you.

Studies have shown that stress signals can continue long after the trauma is over. This might affect your mind and body, including how you think, feel and behave.

"Four years on it's still problematic, viewing the world as a threat, constant hypervigilance, sleep problems etc which then lead onto deeper personal issues."

Common mental health effects of trauma

These are some common effects of trauma that you might recognise:

- **Flashbacks** – reliving aspects of a traumatic event or feeling as if it is happening now, which can happen whether or not you remember specific details of it. To find out more, see our information on [flashbacks](#).
- **Panic attacks** – a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's response to danger, stress or excitement. To find out more, see our information on [panic attacks](#).
- **Dissociation** – one way your mind copes with overwhelming stress. You might feel numb, spaced out, detached from your body or as though the world around you is unreal. To find out more, see our information on [dissociation and dissociative disorders](#).

"I feel my emotions more intensely [...] because I think I have what I like to call emotional flashbacks. I feel emotions in the present that I couldn't or didn't want to/know how to feel in the past when I am triggered."

- **Hyperarousal** – feeling very anxious, on edge and unable to relax. You might be constantly looking out for threats or danger. To find out more, see our information on [anxiety](#).
- **Sleep problems** – you might find it hard to fall or stay asleep, feel unsafe at night, or feel anxious or afraid of having nightmares. To find out more, see our information on [sleep problems](#).
- **Low self-esteem** – trauma can affect the way you value and perceive yourself. To find out more, see our information on [self-esteem](#).

"I learned a lot of new vocabulary on my journey... things like triggers and flashbacks seemed such powerful words that I couldn't begin to imagine how they could be applied to me... but I now know how subtle these things are too."

- **Grief** – experiencing a loss can be traumatic, including someone dying but also other types of loss. Many people experience grief as a result of how trauma has changed their lives. You might feel that trauma has caused you to miss out on some things in life, which can also lead to feelings of loss. To find out more, see our information on [bereavement](#).
- **Self-harm** – hurting yourself as a way of trying to cope. This could include harming parts of your body that were attacked or injured during the trauma. To find out more, see our information on [self-harm](#).
- **Suicidal feelings** – including being preoccupied by thoughts of ending your life, thinking about methods of suicide or making plans to take your own life. To find out more, see our information on [coping with suicidal feelings](#). You can also contact Samaritans 24/7 on [116 123](#) or jo@samaritans.org.
- **Alcohol and substance misuse** – a way you might try to cope with difficult emotions or memories. To find out more, see our information on the mental health effects of [recreational drugs and alcohol](#). You can also access confidential advice about drugs and alcohol on the [FRANK website](#).

"[Things that trigger me include] a change in the look on someone's face, a particular tone of voice, the way my name is spoken... I was not aware until very recently how impactful these tiny things could be and change me from a functioning adult into a fearful child."

For tips on coping with the effects of trauma, see our pages on [helping yourself now](#) and [helping yourself long term](#). For information on particular mental health problems you might be experiencing, see our [mental health A-Z](#).

Feelings of self-blame

People who go through trauma sometimes feel as if they are to blame. This can cause very strong feelings of shame or guilt, **even though it wasn't your fault**.

Reasons for feeling self-blame include the following:

- It can be one way your mind tries to make sense of what has happened, and to avoid overwhelming feelings of [anger](#), [grief](#) or betrayal.
- It's how you've survived in an unsafe or stressful situation, such as living with someone who's harmed you.
- You wish you could have done something differently at the time, even though you couldn't have.
- Someone else blamed you for what happened or acted like it was your fault.
- You were made to feel responsible for someone else's actions, even though they had power over you (sometimes called **transfer of responsibility**).

Even though self-blame can be very hard to cope with, it can be a way your mind tries to protect you, so it might take time and support to be able to start feeling differently. You might feel confused or overwhelmed if someone else says it wasn't your fault, although hearing this can also be a relief.

"There's also an inherent sense that you did something wrong – either that you caused what happened to you, or that you should be dealing with it better."

Trauma and physical health problems

Studies suggest that trauma could make you more vulnerable to developing physical health problems, including long-term or chronic illnesses.

This might be because trauma can affect your body as well as your mind, which can have a long-term impact on your physical health. You might also have been physically harmed during the trauma. Having a physical illness or disability can also make you feel stressed and anxious, which might make it even harder to cope with trauma.

If you're experiencing physical symptoms, it's a good idea to see your GP so they can check you over and help you access the right kind of treatment and support.

"Trauma impacts every single part of your life, from your relationships and ability to trust others to your sleep. It's an intensely physical thing – you feel nervous constantly and jump at the slightest noise or movement, and it can even prevent you feeling pleasure during sex."

How else might trauma affect me?

The effects of trauma can last for a long time, or come and go. You might find you have difficulty with day-to-day aspects of your life, including:

- looking after yourself
- holding down a job
- trusting others
- maintaining friendships or relationships
- remembering things and making decisions
- having sex or experiencing a sex drive
- coping with change
- simply enjoying your leisure time.

In some cases trauma can have a serious impact on your ability to work.

See our pages on [how to be mentally healthy at work](#) for information on how to cope. Our legal pages on [discrimination at work](#) can provide information about your rights in the workplace.

"It took ages for me to start feeling safe. I'd be out in public with mates, and a car would backfire, or a stranger would shout something to a friend just a bit too loudly, and I'd be halfway into a panic attack before I'd even realised it had begun. I'd have to sit close to any exits, so I'd always have an escape route."

How can I cope right now?

If you feel suicidal

Our page on [suicidal feelings](#) includes [practical tips on what you can do right now](#) to help yourself cope. If you don't feel able to keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help:

- call 999 or go to your nearest [Accident and Emergency \(A&E\)](#) department
- call Samaritans on freephone 116 123 (open 24 hours a day)
- ring your GP or out of hours service for an [emergency appointment](#)
- contact your [Community Mental Health Team \(CMHT\)](#)
- use our '[I need urgent help](#)' tool.

"I never feel safe, so building a sanctuary or finding a relaxing place to visit alone (such as a little bench in a park) can really help [me] feel secure."

Trauma can cause strong feelings and difficult experiences. While it can take time and support to be able to cope, there are things you can try that might help with what's happening right now.

"I write... I find it helps to put the memories and flashbacks in to words. It makes them feel less frightening and overwhelming."

Here are some ideas that you could try to see if they work for you. Different things work at different times for different people, so try to be kind to yourself if some things don't help. Over time, you might develop your own tips to add to this list too.

If you're having flashbacks

What you could do to get through it:

- tell yourself that you are safe
- touch or hold an object that reminds you of the present
- describe your surroundings out loud
- count objects of a particular type or colour.

See our page on [self-care for PTSD](#) for more tips.

If you're having panic attacks

What you could do to get through it:

- breathe slowly in and out while counting to five
- stamp on the spot
- taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum
- touch or cuddle something soft.

See our page on [panic attacks](#) for more tips.

If you're feeling dissociative or spaced out

What you could do to get through it:

- chew a piece of ginger or chili
- clap your hands and notice the stinging sensation
- drink a glass of ice cold water.

See our page on [self-care for dissociative disorders](#) for more tips.

If you're feeling anxious, frightened or on edge

What you could do to get through it:

- make yourself a hot drink and drink it slowly, noticing the taste and smell, the shape of the mug and its weight in your hand
- take ten deep breaths, counting each one out loud
- write down everything you can think of about where you are right now, such as the time, date, colour of the walls and the furniture in the room
- take a warm bath or shower – this can help change your mood by creating a soothing atmosphere and a distracting physical sensation.

See our page on [self-care for anxiety](#) for more tips.

"Certain smells trigger me, such as alcohol or a certain colour. So for sensory grounding I make sure that I use non-triggering things."

If you're feeling sad, depressed or lonely

What you could do to get through it:

- wrap up in a blanket and watch your favourite TV show
- write all your negative feelings on a piece of paper and tear it up
- listen to a song or piece of music you find uplifting
- write a comforting letter to the part of yourself that is feeling sad or alone
- cuddle a pet or a soft toy.

See our page on [self-care for depression](#) for more tips.

If you want to self-harm

What you could do to get through it:

- rub ice over where you want to hurt yourself
- stick sellotape or a plaster on your skin and peel it off
- take a cold bath.

See our page on [helping yourself cope with self-harm](#) for more tips.

"Music always helps me. Lying down with my headphones on and blocking out the world is the best way [for me] to stop panic/overthinking."

You can find more examples of tips and suggestions on the [PODS](#), [First Person Plural](#) and [Cwm Taf](#) websites.

The One in Four website has some [self-care tips](#) which are particularly aimed at people who have been raped or sexually abused, and may also be helpful for coping with other types of trauma.

"Journalling helps me process stuff when my hands let me. I had a lot of flashbacks when [my] hubby passed [...] so I wrote it out [...]. Didn't matter what I wrote [...] just meant I could say to my head, you wrote it down, you don't have to keep going over it to remember it... You can choose what to do with it later, shred it, burn it safely [...] whatever feels right in the moment."

How can I cope in the long term?

Coping with the effects of trauma can feel difficult or exhausting, but there are lots of things that could help. This page has some suggestions for you to consider:

Get to know your triggers

Certain experiences, situations or people might seem to trigger reactions like flashbacks, panic attacks or dissociation. These can include reminders of past trauma, such as smells, sounds, words, places or particular types of books or films.

Some people find things difficult on significant dates, such as the anniversary of a traumatic experience. Particular seasons or times of year might also be hard for you, such as the Christmas period.

Recording your moods in a diary could help you spot patterns in what triggers difficult experiences, or notice early signs that they are beginning to happen.

"Keeping a note of the positive things that happen each day in a notebook [helps], even if I've had a bad day."

Confide in someone

Lots of people who go through trauma find it hard to open up to others. This might be because you're unable to share what has happened or can't remember it clearly. But you don't need to be able to describe the trauma to tell someone how you are currently feeling.

It could help to talk to someone in your life who you trust, or a professional such as a GP or a trained listener at a helpline. You may feel more comfortable opening up to people you know than professionals, or you may find it easier to approach a professional (such as your doctor). There's no right or wrong way round.

You can find details of helplines on our pages on [useful contacts for trauma](#), [useful contacts for PTSD](#) and [helplines and listening services](#). For more about talking to your doctor, see our [Find the Words guide](#).

"Some days are just as they used to be when I get lost and frightened and hideaway from everyone and everything, but even on those days I feel I have enough within me now to know that they will pass."

Give yourself time

Everyone has their own individual response to trauma and it's important to take things at your own pace. Try to be gentle and patient with yourself.

"I refer to my bad days as a 'write off', and on those days I forgive myself for not participating in daily activities. I accept that my mind and body need to just rest and do nothing."

People who go through trauma can sometimes feel pressure from those around them to 'move on' but it is important to recognise that coping with trauma often takes time and is not a straightforward or linear process.

Stages of trauma recovery

While coping or recovering after trauma is different for everyone, you might find you go through some distinct stages. These are often thought to include:

- **Coping and stabilisation.** This can include finding ways to cope with strong feelings and difficult experiences - our page on [helping yourself now](#) has lots of tips you could try. You might also need support with other issues like [money](#) or [housing problems](#). You might move in and out of this stage at different times.
- **Working through the effects of trauma.** This can involve acknowledging how you've been affected and grieving for what you've lost or missed out on. Some people find it helps to talk about what happened, while others may find other ways of working through their trauma more helpful than talking. What works will be personal to you.
- **Reconnecting with your life.** This might mean being less affected by your experiences, although they might still bother you sometimes. It could also mean you feel more hopeful about the future or can enjoy your life more.

Whether or not you find it helpful to think in terms of these stages, it's important to remember that it can take time and support to be able to cope and there are likely to be good days and bad days.

"Learning to sew and recently to crochet... has brought me into contact with others with the same interests in environments where I can feel safe... it helps me to focus and stay still, as well as producing something which is beautiful."

Learn ways to relax

- **Explore ways of managing stress.** It can help to think of ways to manage pressure and build your emotional resilience. See our pages on [how to manage stress](#) for more information.
- **Try some relaxation techniques.** Learning to relax can help you look after your wellbeing when you are feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed. See our pages on [relaxation](#) for tips you could try.
- **Spend time in nature.** Being outside in green space can help you feel more in touch with your surroundings. See our pages on [nature and mental health](#) for more information.

"I have to be patient and trust in my recovery. It won't happen overnight. I've learned that I need to find ways to relax, whether it be mindfulness, reading, gaming or becoming invested in a new television series."

Make a self-care box

You could put together some things that might help you when you're struggling – a bit like making a first-aid kit for your mental health.

For example:

- favourite books, films or CDs
- a stress ball or fiddle toy
- helpful sayings or notes of encouragement
- pictures or photos you find comforting
- a notebook and pen to write down your thoughts
- puzzles or colouring books
- a soft blanket or cosy slippers
- a nice-smelling candle or lavender bag.

"When life is hectic me-time is crucial. Pacing yourself when having 101 things to do. Remembering to keep yourself safe by having a nap [or] time out - [you] can't do everything all at once."

[Read Matt's blog about how drumming helped him cope with trauma from childhood sexual abuse.](#)

Try peer support

Peer support brings together people who have had similar experiences, which some people find very helpful. To find peer support, you could:

- contact Mind's [Infoline](#) or a [local Mind](#) to see what support there is in your area
- ask your doctor or healthcare team
- try an online peer support community, such as Mind's [Elefriends](#)
- find a local support group through an organisation such as the [National Survivor User Network \(NSUN\)](#), [Together UK](#) or Rethink
- contact an organisation specialising in trauma, such as those listed on our [useful contacts](#) page, to see if they offer trauma-informed peer support.

For more information, see our page on [peer support](#).

If you're seeking peer support on the internet, it's important to look after your online wellbeing. See our page on [how to stay safe online](#) for more information.

It can also be helpful to see if your local area has a **recovery college**.

Recovery colleges offer courses about mental health and recovery in a supportive environment. You can find local providers on the [Mind Recovery Net website](#).

"[I] dye my hair to give myself a fresh look. I always make a happy playlist and just dance around the house in my pyjamas [...]. The tiny things which make me happy have helped me get myself back into work."

Find specialist support

You might find it useful to contact an organisation that specialises in advice and support for coping with trauma, such as [ASSIST Trauma Care](#).

It could also be helpful to find an organisation with expertise in the particular type of trauma you have experienced. For details of specialist organisations, see our pages on [useful contacts for trauma](#) and [useful contacts for PTSD](#).

If you've gone through domestic violence, the Freedom Programme might be helpful for you. Find out more on the [Freedom Programme](#) website.

Look after your physical health

Looking after your physical health can make a difference to how you feel emotionally. For example, it can help to:

- **Think about your diet.** Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can make a difference to your mood and energy levels. See our pages on [food and mood](#) for more information.
- **Try to do some physical activity.** Exercise can be really helpful for your mental wellbeing. See our pages on [physical activity](#) for more information.

"Exercise helps me a lot. I swim, run and do yoga, and it means I can control some of the restless energy from having to constantly be on alert."

- **Try to avoid drugs and alcohol.** While you might want to use drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings, memories or physical pain, they can make you feel worse in the long run. They can also make other problems worse, such as difficulty sleeping. See our pages on [recreational drugs and alcohol](#) for more information.

See our pages on [improving and maintaining your mental wellbeing](#) and [how to increase your self-esteem](#) for more suggestions. Or you can read [Rhiannon's blog about how sea swimming has helped her mental health](#).

Trauma and sleep problems

Lots of people who've gone through trauma have problems sleeping. You might find it hard to fall or stay asleep, feel unsafe during the night, or feel anxious or afraid of having nightmares.

Some people find it helps to:

- **Keep a light on.** If you can't sleep in complete darkness, it might help to keep a light or bedside lamp switched on.
- **Comfort yourself.** For example, you could curl up in a soft blanket or cuddle a pet or soft toy.

- **Play soothing sounds.** If silence makes it harder for you to sleep, you could try listening to something as you fall asleep – for example music, nature sounds or people talking (such as on podcasts).

See our page on [coping with sleep problems](#) for more information.

What treatments could help?

The UK Psychological Trauma Society (UKPTS) has a **list of dedicated NHS and private psychological trauma services** in the UK. You can find out more on the [UKPTS website](#).

This page is about treatments that may help with the mental health effects of trauma.

Everyone has their own response to trauma. The treatment you are offered will depend on your particular symptoms and diagnosis (if you have one) and on your own unique needs. What helps is different person to person, and can change over time, so keeping an open mind and exploring different options can be useful.

This section covers:

- talking therapies
- arts and creative therapies
- medication
- crisis services
- accessing treatment

Talking therapies

There are different types of talking therapies but they are all designed to give you space to explore difficult feelings and experiences with a trained professional.

Different people find different types of therapy helpful for trauma – there isn't one tried and tested approach. Research has shown that the relationship you have with your therapist is particularly important, regardless of the type of therapy they practise.

"I learned through therapy that I actually probably did survive because I used those coping behaviours, [which] were damaging, but they were the only ones I knew at the time."

Types of therapy some people find helpful include:

- **Body-focused therapies**, which address [how trauma affects your body](#) as well as your mind. You can find information on some of these types of treatments on the [Chiron Association for Body Psychotherapists](#), [Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute](#) and [Somatic Experiencing Association UK](#) websites.
- **Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)**, which involves making rhythmic eye movements while recalling a traumatic event and is most commonly used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Find out more on the [EMDR UK & Ireland](#) website.

- **Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy**, which is a form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) specifically adapted for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Find out more in [our pages on CBT](#).
- **Cognitive analytic therapy (CAT)**, which looks at how past events and relationships can affect how you think, feel and act, bringing together ideas from several different therapies. Find out more on the [Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy \(ACAT\)](#) website.
- **Schema therapy**, which helps address unmet needs and difficult beliefs about yourself. This can include working through the effects of trauma. Find out more on the Schema Therapy Institute website.

Find out more on our pages on [talking therapy and counselling](#), including [tips on how to get the most from therapy](#). You can also read more about [what to expect from therapy for trauma](#) on the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website.

If you're giving evidence in a criminal trial

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has published guidelines for vulnerable witnesses, which includes anyone giving evidence about rape or sexual assault. They advise that having some forms of therapy before providing a statement or giving evidence could affect the witness's evidence and the chances of a successful prosecution.

This doesn't mean you can't have any talking therapy, but it could help to get information on this from an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA). The Survivors Trust has [a list of ISVAs](#) on its website. You can also speak to [Victim Support](#), which is a charity in England and Wales that aims to help victims and witnesses of any crime.

[Read Sue's story: How EMDR helped me](#)

Arts and creative therapies

Arts and creative therapies are treatments which involve using arts-based activities like art, music or drama in a therapeutic environment, with the support of a trained professional. You don't need to have done these activities before, or have any particular skills or knowledge.

Some people say they find these sorts of therapies helpful because they provide ways of addressing painful feelings and difficult experiences without using words. This can include experiences of trauma. Find out more on our page on [arts and creative therapies](#).

Medication

Some people find medication helpful in managing mental health problems that may be linked to trauma. Which type of drug you are offered will depend on the specific mental health problems or symptoms you're experiencing.

Before you decide to take any medication, you should make sure you have all the facts you need to feel confident about your decision. For guidance on what you might want to ask your doctor about any drug before you take it, including your right to refuse medication, see our information on [psychiatric medication](#).

"A lot of my trauma centers around my gender and how other people perceive me. Finding good, supportive mental health professionals has really helped me understand how and why certain things affect me in specific ways."

Crisis services

Crisis services can be helpful if you're going through a mental health crisis. For example:

- **Samaritans** are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call [116 123](tel:116123) (free from any phone), email jo@samaritans.org or [visit some branches in person](#). You can also call the Welsh Language Line on [0300 123 3011](tel:03001233011) (7pm–11pm every day).
- **Local support services** may be available in your area, including day services, drop-in sessions or issue-specific support.
- **Crisis teams** can support you at home during a mental health crisis.
- **Crisis houses** offer intensive, short-term support to help you manage a mental health crisis in a residential setting (rather than in a hospital).

For more information, see our pages on [crisis services](#).

"I finally managed to get some good therapy appropriate for my needs. Cognitive Analytical Therapy - 24 weeks of one-to-one with the NHS."

Accessing treatment

Here are some ways you could access treatment and support:

- **Your GP.** For advice on preparing for a GP appointment, see our [Find the Words guide](#).
- **Self-referral.** Some areas run services which you can contact directly to refer yourself for talking therapy. Your GP might give you details, or (if you live in England) you could try the [online IAPT service finder on the NHS website](#). Our page on talking therapy and counselling includes [more information about IAPT](#).
- **Specialist organisations.** See our [useful contacts](#) page for organisations that may offer therapy or other support for particular types of trauma or be able to put you in touch with local services.
- **Local trauma services.** Some organisations offer free or low-cost trauma therapy. [Your local Mind](#) may have information about services in your area.
- **Private therapists.** Finding a private therapist is another option some people choose to explore. Find out more on our page on [finding a therapist](#).

"In my experience, understanding the how and why makes me feel empowered to be able to adapt my behaviour or environment to make it much less stressful and anxiety inducing."

The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) – which produces guidelines on best practice in health care – recommends treatments for particular mental health problems rather than for trauma overall. This could affect what treatment you're offered on the NHS.

To find out about treatments for particular conditions, see our [mental health A-Z](#).

Trauma-informed care

Some mental health services are starting to follow an approach called trauma-informed care. If a service says it is trauma-informed, this means all staff should follow principles such as:

- understanding how trauma can affect people, including how mental health problems can be reactions to trauma
- asking sensitively about past trauma, and offering appropriate support if you disclose it
- being aware of the potential for mental health services to cause harm if delivered without trauma awareness
- understanding your strengths and recognising what has helped you survive and cope
- being trustworthy, transparent and involving you in your care.

"For abuse by religious cult, I found SilverCloud online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy the most use. It covers all aspects of being better: rationalising, self-care, journaling, small improvements."

What if I'm not offered the right type of treatment?

NHS bodies must follow the NHS Constitution when making decisions about treatment. This includes providing care and treatment that is appropriate to you, meets your needs and reflects your preferences. If your mental health problems relate to trauma, this should include receiving trauma-informed care.

If you don't feel like you are offered treatment that is right for you, you could talk to the provider and explain this to them. If that doesn't work you could [make a complaint](#).

If receiving the wrong kind of care has caused you harm you might have a claim for [clinical negligence](#). For this you would need to show that a healthcare professional failed in their duty to take care of you, and you experienced damage or loss as a result of that failure.

For more information on accessing treatment and how to get help if a treatment has harmed you, see our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#), [complaining about health and social care](#) and [clinical negligence](#).

If you're finding it hard to access support, our page on [overcoming barriers](#) has some suggestions that could help too.

How can I overcome barriers?

This section has information about:

- what barriers you might face when seeking help
- how you can overcome these barriers.

What barriers might I face when seeking help?

Seeking help with the effects of trauma can be difficult, and you might sometimes face barriers to getting the support you need and deserve. For example:

- **You may not be able to talk about what happened.** This may bring up very strong feelings or trigger reactions like panic attacks, dissociation or suicidal feelings.
- **You may not know if it was trauma.** For example, you may not remember what happened, or know how to understand your experiences.
- **You may have had bad experiences of seeking help.** For example, if people didn't listen to you or help you, or you've been harmed by poor healthcare.

"From a very early age I recognised that things didn't always 'add up' but it took many years and until very recently... I am 58... for me to put many of the pieces of my history together... particularly in relation to the impact on me."

- **You may need to explain things to multiple people.** You may talk to several healthcare professionals before you can access the right support. This could mean you're asked the same questions a number of times.
- **Professionals don't always understand trauma,** which might mean they don't understand your strengths or what's helped you survive. For example, you might feel that your coping mechanisms are being judged or criticised.
- **Other people may not understand.** For example, family or community members may be hostile or critical of people seeking help with trauma or their mental health, or may deny or dismiss what you're going through.
- **You may have tried something that hasn't helped,** which can feel really discouraging.
- **Coping with trauma can sometimes feel too difficult.** There might be times when you feel like you can't cope or it all just seems too hard.

If you're unhappy with how professionals are treating you, **you can complain.** Our guide to [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) has more information, and see our legal pages on [complaining about health and social care](#).

If you've been abused by health and social care professionals, our [abuse resource](#) lists organisations that can help.

How can I overcome these barriers?

If you're facing barriers like these, here are some things that could help:

- **Write things down.** This could help if it's too hard to say things out loud or you don't want to repeat them.
- **Take it one day at a time.** There might be good days and bad days. Try to focus on each day at a time and set yourself small, achievable goals.
- **You can choose what you share.** What you tell people about your experiences is up to you.
- **Tell people what sort of support you would like.** For example asking someone to listen and not give you advice.
- **Ask professionals about their expertise.** You can ask if they have specific training and experience of working with trauma, and about anything else that concerns you.

- **Show people this information.** It may help them to learn more about trauma.

"I was very damaged by a counsellor who was very well meaning but treated me like a guinea pig with her questioning and at times brutal approach."

- **You can try therapy whether or not you can open up.** Some people think you can only get help from a therapist if you feel ready to open up, but this isn't true. Therapists who understand trauma should support you and give you coping skills, however much you do or don't share.
- **Ask what choices you can make.** For example, you might be able to request a therapist of a particular gender, or choose to sit facing the door if that feels safer for you. See our information on [getting the most from therapy](#) for more suggestions.
- **Focus on how you're feeling now.** Whether or not you remember or understand what happened, you can seek help with how you're affected and what's happening for you now.
- **Trauma affects everyone differently.** The support you need is also individual to you. You might need support with any type of trauma, after any amount of time.
- **Connect with people who've been there too.** Getting support and encouragement from people who've been through something similar can be really helpful. See our pages on [peer support](#) for more information.

"I spoke to some other survivors and realised they felt the exact same way. Talking to them was brilliant. It made me realise that while my behaviour had changed, I was just coping the way I could, that we all were."

- **Explore any alternatives.** Our pages on treatments and therapies could give you more options to discuss with your doctor. There may be something you haven't tried yet that could be helpful.
- **Talk to Mind.** We're here for you. Our [Infoline](#) can help you explore options for support near you, and we have [local Mind branches in England and Wales](#) who provide a range of services you may be able to access.
- **Find an advocate.** An [advocate](#) can help you express your views and wishes, and help you access the support you need and deserve.

If you've tried something and it hasn't helped, **try to be gentle and patient with yourself.** Coping with the effects of trauma can be really difficult and can take a lot of time and energy, but many people find that when they have the right combination of treatments, self-care and support, it is possible to feel better.

How can other people help?

This section is for people who wish to support someone who has gone through trauma.

It can be really hard if someone you care about is struggling with the effects of trauma, but there are lots of things you can do that might help.

This section has some suggestions for ways you can support them while also looking after your own wellbeing. These include:

- listen to them
- learn their triggers
- try not to judge
- don't take over
- respect their privacy
- help them find support
- look after your own mental health

Listen to them

You might be unsure of what to say or do if someone talks to you about trauma. It could help if you:

- **Give them time.** Let them talk at their own pace – it's important not to pressure or rush them.
- **Focus on listening.** Try to respect what they are choosing to share, rather than asking lots of questions.
- **Accept their feelings.** For example, allow them to be upset about what has happened.
- **Don't blame them or criticise their reactions.** You might wonder why they didn't do something differently, but they survived however they could at the time.
- **Use the same words they use.** People vary in how they prefer to describe their experiences. For example, it's their choice whether to talk about being a 'victim' or 'survivor' of trauma.
- **Don't dismiss their experiences.** For example, don't tell them not to worry about things or that it could be worse – this isn't usually helpful to hear. Try to remember that people can't choose what they find traumatic or how they're affected.
- **Only give advice if you're asked to.** They might prefer to simply hear that you believe them and are there for them.

"Accepting that I can show my vulnerability without fear of reprisal or punishment has been a big step... to do this I have had to explain to those closest to me how vulnerable I am... and many times when I appear to be the exact opposite."

If someone talks to you about trauma, **they might seem unemotional or casual** even though they're talking about stressful or upsetting events. They might even smile or laugh.

This can seem strange or confusing, but in fact it's very common - it happens because trauma can cause such strong feelings that your mind may 'cut off' or [dissociate](#) from your emotions.

Hearing about trauma can be really hard, whether or not someone shares specific details. For example, you might feel upset or angry about what they've told you. Our [useful contacts](#) are here to support you too, and you can read more about [looking after your own mental health](#) further down this page.

Learn their triggers

It might help to ask if any situations or conversations might trigger flashbacks or difficult feelings. For example, they might be particularly distressed by loud noises or arguments. Understanding their triggers could help you to avoid these situations, and feel more prepared when they have reactions such as flashbacks.

Tips on helping someone who is experiencing a flashback

Flashbacks are vivid experiences in which someone relives some aspects of a traumatic event. It can be hard to know how to help during a flashback, but you don't need special training to support someone who is having one. It could help if you:

- try to stay calm
- gently tell them that they are having a flashback
- avoid making any sudden movements
- encourage them to breathe slowly and deeply
- encourage them to describe their surroundings.

Our pages on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) explain more about [what flashbacks are](#) and [tips for coping with flashbacks](#).

Try not to judge

If you've not gone through trauma yourself or you feel differently about shared experiences, it can be hard to understand why your friend or family member can't seem to 'move on'. It's understandable to wish things could improve, but it's important not to blame them or put pressure on them to get better without the time and support they need.

Don't take over

If you're worried about someone, it's understandable to want to help them improve things or to feel frustrated if they disagree about what to do.

But traumatic experiences usually involve being powerless or having control taken away from you. So if you pressure them or tell them what to do, this might add to their feelings of powerlessness.

Instead, try to encourage and support them to make their own choices.

"Accepting support from those closest to me has been tough [because] I always had to be the strong one."

Respect their privacy

Don't share details of what they've gone through unless you have their permission. For example, they might not want you to tell mutual friends or family members about what has happened to them.

This doesn't mean keeping everything to yourself and not getting support. Our [useful contacts for trauma](#) and [useful contacts for supporting someone else](#) have some suggestions of where to turn.

Help them find support

If they want you to, you could help them find further support. For example:

- You could look through the list of relevant organisations in our pages on useful contacts for trauma and [useful contacts for PTSD](#).
- Our pages on [supporting someone who is self-harming](#) and [supporting someone who feels suicidal](#) can help if someone you care about is harming themselves or struggling with thoughts of suicide.

See our page on [helping someone else seek help](#) for more suggestions, including what you can and can't do [if someone doesn't want help](#).

Look after your own mental health

It's important to remember that your mental health matters too. Our pages on [supporting someone else to seek help](#), [how to cope when supporting someone else](#), [managing stress](#) and [maintaining your wellbeing](#) all have lots of information and tips on how to look after yourself.

Support options for you

A traumatic event can have a major impact not just on those who lived through it, but also on people around them. If you experience [symptoms of post-traumatic stress](#) or other [effects of trauma](#) while supporting someone else (sometimes called [secondary trauma](#)), it might help to try some of the tips from our pages on [helping yourself with trauma now](#) and [helping yourself long term](#).

It's also a good idea to [talk to your GP](#) about how you're feeling, and ask if they can offer you any treatment or support.

Useful contacts

Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
 - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
 - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 455 6453, legal@mind
 - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

Advocacy and activism

National Survivor User Network (NSUN)

nsun.org.uk

Independent, service-user-led charity for people with experience of mental health issues. Provides information, networking opportunities and peer support.

Counselling and therapy

Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapists (ACAT)

acat.me.uk

Information about cognitive analytic therapy, including a list of accredited therapists.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

bacp.co.uk

Professional body for talking therapy and counselling. Provides information and a list of accredited therapists.

Chiron Association for Body Psychotherapists

body-psychotherapy.org.uk

Information about body-focused approaches to therapy.

EMDR UK & Ireland

emdrassociation.org.uk/

Professional association of EMDR clinicians and researchers in the UK and Ireland. Provides extensive information about EMDR.

Schema Therapy Institute

schemainstitute.co.uk

Information about schema therapy.

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute

sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org

Information about sensorimotor psychotherapy, including a directory of therapists.

Somatic Experiencing Association UK

seauk.org.uk

Information about somatic experiencing, including a directory of therapists.

Information, helplines and support

ASSIST Trauma Care

assisttraumacare.org.uk

Information and specialist help for people who've experienced trauma or are supporting someone who has.

Developing Open Dialogue

developingopendialogue.com

Information about the Open Dialogue approach to mental health.

First Person Plural

firstpersonplural.org.uk

Support and information for people with complex dissociative disorders and their family and friends.

FRANK

[0300 123 6600](tel:03001236600)

talktofrank.com

Confidential advice and information about drugs, their effects and the law.

Freedom Programme

[01942 262 270](tel:01942262270)

freedomprogramme.co.uk

Free support programme for people affected by domestic violence.

Mind Recovery Net

mindrecoverynet.org.uk

Publishes information on recovery colleges, including a searchable list of providers.

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)

[0808 801 0331](tel:08088010331)

napac.org.uk

A charity supporting adult survivors of any form of childhood abuse. Provides a support line and local support services.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

nice.org.uk

Produces guidelines on best practice in healthcare.

NHS Service Finder

nhs.uk/service-search

Searchable database of NHS services in England.

One in Four

oneinfour.org.uk

Advocacy service, counselling service (available over Skype and in several languages) and information for people who have experienced sexual abuse.

Positive Outcomes for Dissociative Survivors (PODS)

[0800 181 4420](tel:08001814420)

pods-online.org.uk

Information, support and resources for people with dissociative disorders.

Rethink Mental Illness

[0300 5000 927](tel:03005000927)

rethink.org

Provides support and information for anyone affected by mental health problems, including local support groups.

Samaritans

[116 123](tel:116123)

samaritans.org

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

jo@samaritans.org

24-hour emotional support for anyone who needs to talk.

The Survivors Trust

[08088 010 818](tel:08088010818)

thesurvivorstrust.org

Lists local specialist services for survivors of sexual violence, including advocates and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs).

Together UK

together-uk.org

Supports people with mental health problems, including through peer support.

UK Psychological Trauma Society

ukpts.co.uk

Forum for professionals to share ideas and knowledge about trauma, including a list of dedicated NHS and private trauma services in the UK.

Victim Support

[0808 168 9111](tel:08081689111)

victimsupport.org.uk

Provides emotional and practical support for people affected by crime and traumatic events.