



SEARCH AND RESCUE
How to manage your
mental wellbeing

Blue Light Programme





How to manage your mental wellbeing

This booklet is for anyone in the search and rescue service who wants to improve and maintain their mental wellbeing. It explains what can affect your mental health and gives practical suggestions about how to build resilience.

Contents

- 05 What is mental wellbeing?
- 08 What can affect my mental wellbeing?
- 10 Mental wellbeing checklist
- 12 What can I do to build resilience?
- 21 What support is available?
- 29 Izzy's story
- 31 Useful contacts



What is mental wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing describes your mental state – how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. Our mental wellbeing can change, from day to day, month to month or year to year.

If you have good mental wellbeing (or good mental health), you are able to:

- feel relatively confident in yourself
- feel and express a range of emotions
- build and maintain positive relationships with other people
- live and work productively
- cope with the stresses of daily life and manage times of change and uncertainty.

Mental wellbeing is just as important as physical wellbeing, and maintaining both is an important part of staying fit and healthy.

Everybody has mental health as well as physical health, and sometimes you're well and sometimes you're not well.

If you work or volunteer in the search and rescue service, it's especially important for you to look after your mental wellbeing.

Our research shows:

- ❶ Emergency services staff and volunteers are more likely to experience a mental health problem than the general workforce, but you are less likely to take time off work as a result.
- ❷ Almost 9 out of 10 of you say you've experienced stress and poor mental health while working or volunteering for emergency services.
- ❸ Staff and volunteers work hard to prevent mental health problems affecting your performance at work, but this can come at a large personal cost, impacting relationships and physical health.



What can affect my mental wellbeing?

We all have times when we have low mental wellbeing – when we feel sad or stressed, or find it difficult to cope.

If you work or volunteer in the search and rescue service, your mental wellbeing can be affected by factors like:

- exposure to traumatic events
- unpredictable work hours
- working in high pressure situations.

We train regularly together and attend call outs at all times of the day and night. Everyone is a volunteer and so therefore has other jobs too.



Your mental wellbeing can also be affected by other things in your life, for example, if you:

- suffer some sort of loss
- experience loneliness
- have relationships problems
- are worried about work or money.

Sometimes, there is no clear reason why we experience a period of poor mental health.

Staying mentally well

It's important to look after your mental wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, and not just after experiencing big, traumatic events. Staying mentally well by building resilience can reduce your chances of developing mental health problems like depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Mental wellbeing checklist

Because of the demands of being in the search and rescue service, it's important to make sure you manage your mental wellbeing in order to stay fit and healthy.



You can use the checklist below to identify factors that are affecting your mental wellbeing.

- ☐ I have someone I can talk to about my feelings.
- ☐ I have good friends I can trust.
- ☐ I sleep well most of the time.
- ☐ I eat healthily most of the time.
- ☐ I do some physical activity regularly.
- ☐ I make time for the things I enjoy.
- ☐ I do things to help other people.
- ☐ I feel I achieve things.
- ☐ I know how to relax.
- ☐ I know what affects my moods.
- ☐ I am kind to myself about who I am.
- ☐ I look after myself during difficult times.

If you were not able to tick many of these statements, you may want to look at what you can do to build resilience (see p.12) or get support (see p.21).

What can I do to build resilience?

There may be times or situations in your life that are more difficult than others. The capacity to stay mentally well during those times is called 'resilience'. Here are some ways you might be able to develop and strengthen your resilience.

Talk about the way you feel

If you are facing a difficult time, talking about the way you feel with someone you know and trust can often help.

Your colleagues, friends or family may be able to offer you practical help or advice and give you another perspective on what is causing your problems. Even if they can't help, often just talking something through and feeling that there is someone to listen and understand you can make you feel much better.



Build healthy relationships with people

Building and maintaining constructive relationships with people is an important part of staying mentally well. If you spend time around positive and supportive people, you are more likely to have a better self-image, be more confident and feel able to face difficult times.

If you do not have the social contact you feel you need, or experience feelings of loneliness because of your work patterns or for any other reason, this can also have a negative impact on your mental wellbeing.



Look after your physical health

If you have good physical health, you are more likely to have good mental health. Sleep patterns, diet and physical activity all have an impact on your mental wellbeing.

Sometimes it can be difficult to maintain regular sleep, diet and exercise patterns because of work or volunteer commitments. If this is the case, try to establish as much regularity as you can, or set time aside for yourself to look after your physical health after busy and stressful periods.

Do something you enjoy

Doing something you enjoy can improve your confidence and help you stay well. Make time to do things you like, whether it's cooking, seeing your friends or doing DIY.

Learning something new, or taking up a new hobby, can also boost your confidence and occupies your mind in a positive and active way. If you want to try a new hobby, think about what you are good at, or things that you have always wanted to try. You can find information about volunteering organisations and local groups, clubs or classes at your local library, in local newspapers or magazines, or online.

Set yourself a challenge

Set yourself a challenge that you can realistically achieve. This doesn't have to be anything particularly large but should have meaning for you. For example, you might decide you are going to write a letter to your local paper or start going to a regular exercise class. You will feel satisfied and proud of yourself when you achieve your goal, and feel more positive about yourself as a result.

Relax

It's important to make time to relax, even if you don't feel under stress. This may mean going away for the weekend, spending an evening doing something you like, or even just taking a five-minute break to look out of the window. Learning a relaxation technique, such as breathing exercises, yoga or meditation, can also help you relax and reduce stress levels.

Identify mood triggers

Knowing what affects your moods can help you take steps to avoid or change the situations that have a negative impact on you. Even if you can't change the situation, knowing your triggers can help you remember to take extra care of yourself during difficult times.

For example, you may realise that eating certain foods or seeing a certain person has an effect on your mood. Or you may tend to experience a particular mood at a particular time, such as in winter.

Keeping track of your moods in a mood diary can help you work out what affects your mental wellbeing and recognise changes in your mood that would be difficult to spot otherwise. You can create your own mood diary, or there are lots to choose from on the internet (see 'Useful contacts' on p.31 for some examples).



Look after yourself during difficult times

Everyone has times when they face challenging situations and find it difficult to cope. If you are experiencing a difficult time, or are unwell, it's important to look after yourself and try and get through.

Be careful not to put too much pressure on yourself to carry on as normal. You may need to take a break from your usual responsibilities, for example reducing your social activities or workload. Take small steps and don't expect too much of yourself. Try to get enough sleep and eat regularly. If you are finding it difficult to cope on your own, don't be afraid to ask for help. For example, you may need time off work or help with day-to-day tasks, such as cleaning or childcare.

Stay safe. If your feelings become overwhelming, and you have suicidal thoughts or you think you may self harm, remember that you can pick up the phone at any time of night or day and talk to the Samaritans (see 'Useful contacts' on p.31).



Learn to accept yourself

One of the most important steps in maintaining mental wellbeing is to learn to accept yourself. If you value yourself, you are more likely to have positive relationships with other people and find it easier to cope with difficult times in your life.

Here are some tips to help you increase your self-esteem:

- Try not to compare yourself to other people.
- Don't strive for perfection.
- Acknowledge your positive qualities and things you are good at.
- Learn to identify and challenge unhelpful thinking patterns.
- Use self-help books and websites to help you change your beliefs.
- Spend time with supportive people.
- Be assertive – don't allow people to treat you with a lack of respect.
- Engage in hobbies that you enjoy.



What support is available?

You may find that, despite your best efforts, you are unable to maintain your mental wellbeing on your own. In this case, you might want to seek professional help to address whatever is affecting you.

Mind Blue Light Infoline

We have a confidential Blue Light Infoline for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families. Our team can look for details of help and support in your area.

Call 0300 303 5999*

Text 84999

Email bluelight+info@mind.org.uk

*9am–6pm, Mon to Fri,
calls charged at local rates



Search and rescue organisation

Find out if your search and rescue organisation has any specialist support services, for example:

- counselling, support or advice services
- occupational health unit
- information on dealing with trauma or PTSD
- peer support groups.





Practical help

If there is a particular situation that is affecting your mental wellbeing, the best thing to do is to seek specialist practical help to resolve the problem. Having someone professional who is familiar with your type of situation can see it objectively and usually get to the root of the problem more quickly. For example, if:

- someone close to you has died and you are struggling to cope, you may want to talk to a bereavement counsellor, or contact an organisation like Cruse Bereavement Care
- you have legal, money or housing problems that are causing you stress or anxiety, you may find it useful to talk to your local Citizens Advice.

See 'Useful contacts' on p.31 for organisations that may be able to help.

Peer support

Peer support means talking to people who have been through similar experiences, for example, in a support group, online forum or website.

Peer support can be a useful source of support and understanding. But remember, if you're accessing peer support online, think carefully about what information you want to share – you don't always know who you're talking to.

You can get details of peer support groups that might be relevant to you by contacting the Mind Blue Light Infoline. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.31.)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment, using techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga. It has been shown to help people become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, so that instead of being overwhelmed by them, it is easier to manage them. Be Mindful has more information and details of local classes around the UK. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.31.)

Talking treatments

If you are facing problems that are affecting your mental wellbeing, and you can't resolve these yourself, you may find a talking treatment helpful.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of therapy that aims to identify connections between your thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and to help you develop practical skills to manage them. It has been shown to be particularly effective for low self-esteem and anxiety-based conditions.

If your problems stem from early life experiences you might find that other talking treatments, such as person-centred therapy, psychodynamic therapy or interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT), can help you address these experiences more thoroughly.

If you want to try a talking treatment, your GP can provide information and refer you to a local service. However, waiting lists for talking treatments on the NHS can be long, so you may prefer to seek therapy or counselling privately. Private therapists will charge a fee, but some offer a reduced rate for people on a limited income. (See BACP, BABCP and UKCP in 'Useful contacts' on p.31 for a list of accredited private therapists.)


Medication

If you are unable to resolve any difficulties you are having yourself, and your feelings develop into a mental health problem, such as PTSD, anxiety or depression, you may be offered prescription medication by your GP. These drugs don't cure mental health problems, but aim to ease the most distressing symptoms.

Your GP should talk you through the potential advantages and disadvantages of taking any psychiatric medication and discuss possible alternative treatments.

What helps me is being honest with how well I'm coping and getting support when I need it.





When I've had
problems with my
mental health or
wellbeing, the most
helpful thing has
been the team's
acceptance of me.

Izzy's story

I have been a member of Mountain Rescue since 2000 and am now deputy team leader and also a team medic. Mountain rescue is something I have been committed to longer than any other job I've had.

I suffered from mental health problems for many years and since before I joined Mountain Rescue. I spent a lot of time sectioned in hospital to keep me safe. The turning point for me in my treatment was when I spent a year at a residential therapeutic community in 2008.

Mountain Rescue can be quite stressful as at times we deal with difficult situations including casualties who have taken their own lives. However, I have found that it has had a positive impact on my mental wellbeing because I am in a situation in which I have control and am able to do something positive to help. We work closely together as a team and being part of that gives me a sense of self-worth and builds my self-esteem.

When I've had problems with my mental health or wellbeing, the most helpful thing has been the team's acceptance of me.

I've been able to speak to colleagues about how I was feeling, and they were aware because at times I have been absent from the team. Many colleagues in the team are also friends, so it felt natural to talk to them about it.

No one judges me and they all trust me to do a good job. To my team mates, my mental health problems were never an issue; except when I was unwell, and in those situations they would offer support because they cared about me. They see me as someone who is equally part of the team and defined by what I do there, not by any mental health problems.

My advice to those who are having problems with their mental health or wellbeing would be to be as open as possible about what you are going through – it is not anything to be ashamed of. Try all avenues for help and support and keep trying until you find something that works. It can be a long, hard battle but you can come through it.

Useful contacts

Mind Blue Light Infoline

0300 303 5999

(Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, local rates)

text: 84999

bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk

mind.org.uk/bluelight

Confidential Infoline for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families. Our team can look for details of help and support in your area.

Be Mindful

bemindful.co.uk

Information, and details of local mindfulness courses and therapists.

Bereavement Advice Centre

0800 634 9494

bereavementadvice.org

Support for people who have been bereaved.

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

0161 705 4304

babcp.com

Lists accredited therapists.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

01455 883 300

itgoodtotalk.org.uk

Practitioners in your area.

Citizens Advice

03444 111 444 (England); 0344 477 2020 (Wales)

citizensadvice.org.uk

Confidential advice on a range of issues.

Cruse Bereavement Care

0844 477 9400 (national helpline)

helpline@cruse.org.uk

cruse.org.uk

Bereavement charity offering online, telephone and face-to-face support.

Direct.gov.uk

direct.gov.uk/en/employment

Information about employment rights and services, and career advice.

Mood diaries

moodpanda.com

moodscope.com

medhelp.org/land/mood-tracker

mappiness.org.uk

Some examples to try. There are many more available.

Samaritans

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

Chris, PO Box 90 90

Stirling, FK8 2SA

24-hour helpline: 08457 90 90 90

jo@samaritans.org

samaritans.org

Emotional support for anyone in distress.

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

020 7014 9955

psychotherapy.org.uk

List of registered practitioners.

This is a shortened version of the original text.
For the full online version, visit mind.org.uk/BlueLightBooklets

Give us your feedback

Email bluelight@mind.org.uk if you have any feedback on this booklet.

References available on request

Published by Mind 2015 ©2015

To be revised 2018

We're Mind,
the mental health charity.

We won't give up until everyone
experiencing a mental health problem
gets both support and respect.

mind.org.uk/BlueLight

bluelight@mind.org.uk

 @MindCharity #mybluelight

 Mind

We're a registered charity in England
(no. 219830)

Funded by



Cabinet Office



Health & care
information
you can trust

The Information Standard



Certified
Member

