



**Let's Talk Bereavement:  
A Self Help Guide**

Written by Kate King

## Let's Talk Bereavement – A Self Help Guide

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Let's Talk is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) Service.

Let's Talk is a free service from the NHS.

We offer short-term talking therapies to people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Our Self Help guides provide an introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy at Step 1 of our programme of support.

The authors have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information in this workbook. However, it is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. Evidence suggests that a self-help material is most effective when you are supported by an appropriately qualified clinician. We strongly advise that when using this workbook you stay in touch with your named clinician. If for any reason you are unable to reach them and you are feeling concerned about your mental health we recommend you go to see your doctor. Other agencies that can help you are listed in the back of this workbook.

For further information please contact:

Let's Talk

2gether NHS Foundation Trust

Rikenel, Montpellier, Gloucester, GL1 1LY

Website: [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk)

# **Let's Talk Bereavement and Loss**

## **Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**

## Introduction

The aim of this self-help guide is to tell you a little bit about bereavement, and is for anyone who has experienced bereavement, either recently or in the past. Most people who have lost somebody close to them will experience bereavement and our aim is to provide you with some relevant information about how you will be feeling emotionally following the death of a loved one, as well as some practical advice. There is also information for relatives and friends who wish to support a bereaved person.

Some of the information and advice contained in this document can also be used to help people experiencing other types of loss other than bereavement, including divorce, redundancy, loss of health. It can also be useful to people who are facing the loss of a loved one.

If you would like to talk to us in more detail then you can contact Let's Talk, Gloucestershire's free NHS IAPT (Improved Access to Psychological Therapy) Service. More information about this service can be found at the end of this guide. If you feel in need of immediate support please contact your GP.

### What is grief?

Bereavement is when we lose somebody we're very close to and for most of us this will be the most psychologically distressing experience we will ever face. Grief is a natural response to bereavement. It is the emotional suffering we feel when something or someone you love is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. Grief is generally associated with the death of a loved one, which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief,

however grief can also be experienced by other types of loss including -

- Divorce or relationship breakup
- Loss of health, limb or serious illness
- Loss of job – redundancy or retirement
- Loss of financial stability
- Loss of family home through selling, repossession, natural disaster, ie: flood, fire
- Death of a pet
- Loss of friendship
- Loss of family structure – ie: children moving out, emigration

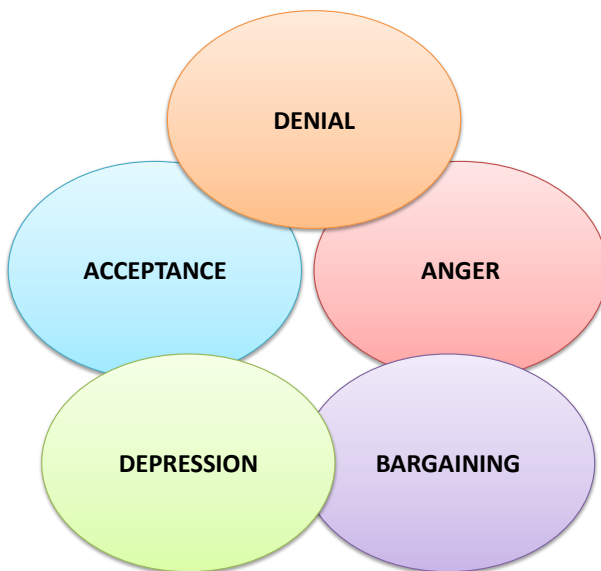
Many of us don't experience bereavement or loss until later in life and so have little opportunity to learn about death and about how people are affected by grief. Everyone will grieve differently; there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. How we react will be influenced by many factors including our immediate circumstances and how we cope with loss, our age and personality, if we have had previous experience of bereavement, and our cultural and spiritual background. However, whilst everyone's reaction to loss is a personal experience there are some common factors that many people share.

### **What are the feelings experienced after the death of a close relative or friend?**

The following model developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross helps explain the different emotions you are likely to experience as a result of your grief as highlighted in the diagram below.

These are perfectly natural reactions to grief and you will heal

over time. However, it is important to note that not everyone who grieves will go through all of these stages; and that's okay. Plus, you don't necessarily have to go through each stage in order to heal and if you do experience these stages it may not necessarily be in a fixed order and are likely to overlap. These stages highlight typical responses that many people experience when grieving, but it is important to remember that your response to loss will still be very individual.



## **Denial**

In the first few hours of grieving people generally feel stunned and experience a sense of disbelief; whilst we are accepting that our loved one has died there is disbelief that you will never see that person again. It is not unusual to feel like this even following a death that is expected. People often talk about the sensation of 'going mad' as they are not used to the raw and painful emotions associated with the early stages of grief. Denial protects us while we gradually come to terms with the loss.

It is often said that the emotional numbness experienced in the early days of grief helps you to get through all the important practical arrangements including informing family and friends and making funeral plans. However, not everyone finds it easy to cope during this period and needs practical and emotional support from those around them. It is also recognised that the funeral or memorial service is an occasion when the reality of what has happened sinks in, and whilst this is a distressing event it is also a way of saying goodbye to the person we love, and to be able to share this with family and friends.

## **Anger**

It is not unusual to experience an intense yearning to find the dead person even though you know that this is not possible. It is not uncommon to think you can 'see' your loved one wherever you go; it takes time to fully accept that they have gone forever. Guilt and anger are also common feelings: you might think you could have done more, or feel responsible in some way, or you may feel guilty if you experience a sense of relief as the person you love is no longer in pain. Feelings of anger can be directed towards doctors and nurses, family and friends, and even the person who has died, while we come to terms with the loss.

## **Bargaining**

When we anticipate or experience loss it is not unusual to start bargaining with ourselves as we will do anything to save our loved one. We become lost in 'What if's...' and 'If only I had...' statements. We yearn for life to go back to the way it used to be, to stop the accident or illness or from happening. We find ourselves living in the past trying to get rid of the hurt. Bargaining, whilst painful, helps us work through our feelings of despair as we gradually realize that in reality the person we lost is not coming back.

## **Depression**

Following bargaining our attention moves into the present as the reality sinks in and we experience strong feelings of emptiness and sadness. This is an appropriate response to loss and is your mind's way of allowing you to grieve. It is not unusual to withdraw from day-to-day activities and experience difficulties in concentrating. You may find you avoid places and situations that remind you of your loss or change the way that you relate to other people. In the early days it can be really difficult to talk about the person who died, and your experience of loss. It helps if you are able to recognise such unhelpful thoughts in order to cope more effectively. Some people also talk about becoming very agitated and active, as there is a need to keep busy. Agitation can sometimes amount to panic, and symptoms of anxiety, such as breathlessness, palpitations, dry mouth, tingling and dizziness. This can be interspersed with feelings of low mood and feeling vulnerable. Rather than fight these emotions, try and work with them as it is a natural part of the healing process and coming to terms with your loss.

## **Acceptance**

Acceptance is about acknowledging that your loved one has gone and isn't coming back. It's not about being 'okay' with the situation but accepting that we have to readjust to this new



reality; we must learn to reorganise roles, assign them to others, or take them on ourselves. The healing process can bring us closer to the person we loved; a new relationship begins where we learn to live with the loved one we lost. Acceptance is an experience and not an end point, we can never replace what we have lost, but in time you can make new connections and have new meaningful relationships.

### **When do people recover from bereavement?**

- Coming to terms with death is a very gradual process that can take considerable time. People usually find that gradually they are able to get on with their lives and think a little less about the person they have lost. Most people begin to feel like this within one or two years of the death of someone close to them. It may be difficult to deal with the death of a loved one but it is still possible to move on with life in spite of this.
- It is important not to feel guilty if you are beginning to build a life for yourself following a death. It is quite normal to begin to recover and start to rebuild your life, and is not in any way disloyal to the memory of the person who has died.

### **What can you do when facing the loss of a loved one?**

If you have the opportunity then it is important from an emotional and practical viewpoint to talk things over and prepare for the death of the person you are close to.

- Make sure you give yourself time to say all the things you would want to say.
- If your relative or friend is able to talk about their funeral plans, make sure there is time to discuss their wishes.

- From a practical viewpoint, assuming it's okay with your relative or friend, discuss the practical things that you will need to start managing including jobs and sorting out finances.

### **What can you do to help yourself following bereavement?**

- Directly after bereavement consider if you want to see the body of the dead person. For some, this can be very painful, but it can lead to regret later on if you decide not to see the dead body. There is no right or wrong answer. You have to follow your feelings at that time.
- Funeral arrangements need to be considered and if possible seek support from someone when arranging them. Don't feel pressured into a funeral that is too expensive for your budget. Try and think about what you really want to do, and whether you are able to respect the wishes of the deceased, if they were discussed prior to their death.
- Following the early days of bereavement it is not unusual to feel agitated and have a need to keep active, but don't be tempted to make major changes in your life, such as selling your house, moving away from family and friends, changing jobs etc until you have given yourself time to adjust to the death. Making big changes in the early stages can lead to regret later on.
- Do not enter into new financial arrangements without proper advice. Talk to a friend or family member.
- Look after your health; you may be more prone to illness during the early days of loss. Try and eat a balanced and healthy diet and allow yourself time to rest so that your mind and body can heal. You may want to consider

vitamin supplements if your appetite is poor and you're not sleeping well.

- Try to avoid turning to alcohol to help you through this difficult period.
- Physical activity is a healthy way of coping with your loss; from gentle activities, including a stroll in the local park, or pottering around the garden, to more vigorous sports such as running, hiking or playing team sports.
- Talk to friends and family about how you feel and try not to bottle things up. If you don't feel listened to or have no one to talk to, go and see your doctor and ask for help. An organisation like Samaritans ([www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)) has a 24 hour help line, should you feel the need to talk to somebody anonymously at any time of the day – 08457 90 90 90. Alternatively an organisation like Cruse, specifically provides support for people experiencing grief (see under Useful Contacts).
- Keep up contacts and relationships. It's very easy to let these slip so keep in touch with family and friends, invite people to visit and accept invitations. As time moves on and you're feeling a bit stronger think about new activities such as joining a club or class.
- Anniversaries, such as birthdays, Christmas, anniversary of the death, are emotionally important times and you may find that doing something special to mark these occasions can help. Plan in advance how you wish to remember these occasions.
- If you feel you are stuck or not coping well then contact your doctor to discuss this in more detail. Other

organisations that you may also find useful are listed at the end of this document.

- **Memory Box** – You may want to treasure some of the positive memories of the person you have lost and sometimes it can help to keep special things connected with the person who died in a special place, such as a memory box. This can be added to over time and shared with others if you choose to. You can keep items safe in a personalised box, e.g. decorated shoe box or biscuit tin, or buy a memory box. This type of activity can be very helpful for children who have lost a parent or sibling.

### **Supporting other people who are grieving**

If you are supporting somebody following bereavement, which could be either family, friend or work colleague, the following suggestions may help you and them -

- Don't avoid someone who has been bereaved; instead be there for them, either by telephoning them, arranging to meet them, or sending a letter/email.
- People who have been bereaved may want to talk about the person who has just died and you can help by simply listening and being there for them; giving them the time and space to grieve. Alternatively they may just need distracting for a bit and so you could take them out and talk about other things.
- Create an environment that allows the bereaved person to show their feelings, and where they can be themselves.
- Grief can be a long journey and how long a person needs to grieve is a very personal and individual experience. There is no set time in coming to terms with their loss.

- Everyone grieves differently and in their own way – there is no ‘normal’ way.
- Contact the person at difficult times, i.e.: anniversaries.
- If you feel that the person grieving is ‘stuck’ and not coping well, don’t be afraid to encourage them to seek help including a visit to their GP. *There are also some useful contacts that can be found at the end of this leaflet.*
- Offer practical support, e.g.: help with shopping, caring for children.
- If a friend or family member has experienced the death of someone from suicide make sure they don’t suffer alone in silence. An organisation called Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) specifically provides emotional and practical support, as well as helping to break the isolation of those bereaved by the suicide of a close relative or friend. *Their contact details can be found under Useful Contacts.*
- Children and young adults can experience grief in different ways to adults, organisations such as Winstons Wish and Compassionate Friends offer practical support and guidance to children, young adults and their families. *Their contact details can be found under Useful Contacts.*

## Practical areas that need addressing following a death

When someone dies there are **three things you must do in the first few days** following the death, these include **obtaining the medical certificate** in order that you can register death. **Register the death within five days of the death** and you will then be given the necessary documentation in order that the funeral can be arranged. And, finally, **arrange the funeral**. These are all discussed in more detail as follows

- When someone dies at home a doctor must be called to sign a medical certificate. If the death was sudden then the doctor will have to talk to the police who will report it to the coroner. A post mortem examination may be arranged and if so, a death certificate will be provided by the coroner.
- When somebody dies in hospital, the doctor will give you a medical certificate. A post mortem is only needed if the death is unexplained.
- Once you have the medical certificate (signed by a doctor) you must take it to the Register office and register the death within five calendar days. You can go to any register office but it is best to use the one in the area where the person died, otherwise the process can take longer. The registrar will issue a death certificate and either an Order for Burial or Certificate for Cremation so the funeral can take place. This document needs to be given to the funeral director. It is recommended you obtain several copies of the death certificate as you may need them for banking, insurance and pension purposes.
- A funeral director can be chosen before or after you have registered the death, and they will advise on the procedures for the funeral. The funeral can only be

arranged when you have the necessary documentation from the Register office including a copy of the death certificate and either an Order for Burial or Certificate for Cremation.

The following are a list of additional administrative duties that will need to be sorted -

- Contact your local Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to arrange pension and other entitlements. You may be eligible for funeral payment or widow's payment. The Directgov website [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) provides information about benefit entitlement.
- Inform the tax office about the change in circumstances.
- It is also recommended you contact all service providers that are no longer needed, including DVLA, Passport service, TV Licencing, Local Authority for council tax, water rates and utility providers, e.g. gas, electric, telephone.
- You may choose to write an obituary for the local or national newspapers.
- If there is a will contact the solicitor and the executors will make sure it is carried out. If there is no will, contact the Probate Registry, website [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk), for an application to administer the 'estate'. If you are unsure about anything related to the will contact your local Citizens' Advice Bureau who will be able to assist and advise.

## **What further help is available?**

You can contact **Let's Talk** on 0800 073 2200.

**Let's Talk** is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapy service (IAPT). This service provides support using CBT for common difficulties such as depression and anxiety.

Grief is a natural reaction to the death of a loved one and it is important to allow yourself time to grieve. Some people find it helpful to have external support during this process.

In some instances, some of us can experience prolonged grief so a therapy such as CBT, which focuses on the 'here and now' and uses specific techniques to help you identify, understand and manage your difficulties. This is an action-oriented form of therapy which will help you to manage reactions to your grief by working through the different stages usually experienced as part of the grieving process using both cognitive (thinking) and behavioural techniques (doing) to cope more effectively with the healing process. This may be a more appropriate form of therapy if you feel you are struggling to move on from your loss.

Some people may choose to have therapy very soon after the loss of their loved one, and for other people it can be 6 months to a year or more. There is no set pattern or restrictions for pursuing therapeutic support.



## **Other Self-help Guides in the Let's Talk Service**

Let's Talk Panic

Let's Talk Low Self Esteem

Let's Talk Health Anxiety

Let's Talk Social Anxiety

Let's Talk OCD

Let's Talk PTSD

Let's Talk Bereavement and Loss

Let's Talk Negative Thoughts

Let's Talk Getting Active

## **Useful websites**

Let's Talk website: [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk)

Moodometer:

<http://www.2getherinclusion.nhs.uk/themoodometer.php>

Living Life to the Full website: [www.lltf.com](http://www.lltf.com)

MoodGym: <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome>

You can access our website on [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk) where you will find more information relating to the problems you are experiencing currently. The website also has links to other Self Help Guides which you may find useful, including *Let's Talk Sleep, Gaining Control of your Life – Self-help workbooks for managing depression and anxiety of which you can access with the help of one of our therapists.* Alternatively you can speak to your GP who can refer you to Let's Talk.

### **Useful Contacts**

#### **Bereavement Advice Centre**

Helpline: 0800 634 9494

[www.bereavementadvice.org](http://www.bereavementadvice.org)

Ryon Hill House, Ryon Hill Park, Warwick Road,  
Stratford upon Avon, CV37 OUX

*Supports and advises people on what they need to do after a death including registering the death and finding a funeral director through to probate, tax and benefit queries.*

#### **British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP)**

Tel: 01455 883316

[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park,  
Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4HB

*This service will be able to provide you with a list of counsellors in England & Wales.*

#### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

PO Box 800, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 2RG

*They provide face-to-face support, telephone helpline support, and practical advice.*

## **Carers' UK**

Adviceline: 0808 808 777

Tel 0207 7378 4999

[www.carers.org.uk](http://www.carers.org.uk)

Email: [adviceline@carersuk.org](mailto:adviceline@carersuk.org)

20 Great Dover Street, London, SE1 4LX

*Provides information, advice and support.*

## **Compassionate Friends**

Tel: 0845 123 2304

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

53 North Street, Bristol, BS3 1EN

*Support for parents following the death of a child at any age.*

## **Child Death Helpline**

Helpline: 0800 282 986

[www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)

*Freephone service for anyone affected by the death of a child.*

## **London Friend**

Bereavement helpline: 0207 403 5969

[www.londonfriend.org.uk](http://www.londonfriend.org.uk)

86 Caledonian Road, Islington, London, N1 9DN

*Promotes the social, emotional & physical wellbeing to lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender (LGB&T) people. Helpline is available 7.30pm to 9.30pm every Tuesday*

## **Miscarriage Association**

Tel: 01924 200 799

[www.miscarriagesassociation.org.uk](http://www.miscarriagesassociation.org.uk)

c/o Clayton Hospital, Northgate, Wakefield, WF1 3JS

*Provides support and information for those suffering the effects of pregnancy loss. Helpline available from Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 4.00pm.*

## **National Association of Widows**

Tel: 0845 838 2261

[www.nawidows.org.uk](http://www.nawidows.org.uk)

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 48 Queens Road, Coventry, CV1 3EH

*Provides support and advice for widows and widowers.*

## **NHS Choices – your health, your choices**

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

*Information about conditions, treatments, local services and healthy lives.*

## **NHS Direct**

Tel: 111

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

*Health information and advice*

## **PALS (Patient Advice & Liaison Service)**

[www.pals.nhs.uk](http://www.pals.nhs.uk)

*Provides information and advice about local NHS services and support organisations and helps sort out any problems with NHS services.*

## **Samaritans**

Tel: 116 123

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

*Confidential support for anyone in a crisis.*

## **Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

Helpline: 0844 561 6855

[www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

The Flamsteed Centre, Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire,  
DE7 5GU

*Provides helpline and support for people affected by suicide.*

## **Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society**

Tel: 0207 436 5881

[www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)

28 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LY

*Supports anyone affected by the death of a baby and promotes research in reducing the loss of babies' lives.*

## **The Way Foundation**

Tel: 0870 011 3450

[www.wayfoundation.org.uk](http://www.wayfoundation.org.uk)

Suite 35, St Loyes House, 20 St Loyes Street, Bedford, MK40 1ZL

*An organisation for people who have become widows or widowers at a young age.*

## **Terence Higgins Trust**

Helpline: 0845 122 1200

[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

314-320 Grays Inn Road, London, WC1X 8DP

*Website promoting health, sexual healthy and mental wellbeing for those affected by HIV and AIDS.*

## **Victim Support**

Support line: 0845 303 0900

[www.vicimsupport.org.uk](http://www.vicimsupport.org.uk)

Hannibal House, Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre, London, SE1 6TB

*Victim Support is an organisation which offers support and practical help for people who have experienced trauma.*

## **Winstons Wish**

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Tel: 01242 515157

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

email: [info@winstonswish.org.uk](mailto:info@winstonswish.org.uk)

Cheltenham House (3<sup>rd</sup> floor), Clarence Street, Cheltenham

Gloucestershire, GL50 3JR

*Provides support & guidance to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK.*

## **Suggested Reading**

### **What to do after a death in England or Wales (Leaflet DWP1027)**

A practical guide advising on what has to be done and who can help you.

[www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1027.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1027.pdf)

### **Which? What to do when someone dies (Paul Harris)**

Which? Consumer Guide, 2004

*A guide to practical arrangements that need to be implemented following a death.*

### **On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross & David Kessler)**

Simon & Schuster (2005)

*A deeply empathic and accessible guide for those in grief, designed to help readers normalise their lives and find the courage to continue.*

### **Through grief: the bereavement journey (Elizabeth Collick)**

Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986

*A sensitive account of the stages of grief, showing that while there is no way round it, there is a way through.*

### **All in the end is harvest (Agnes Whitaker)**

Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984

*Published in association with CRUSE, an established source of inspiration for those who suffer grief, with edited extracts of prose and poetry that have been of help to the bereaved.*

## **A Grief Observed (C.S. Lewis)**

Faber, 1996

*The author provides an honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death and faith in the midst of loss.*

## **Facing grief – bereavement and the young adult (Susan Wallbank)**

Lutterworth Press, 1991

*This frank, sensible and compassionate book examines in detail the particular needs and experiences of young adults.*

## **Bereavement**

Help the Aged advice leaflet

[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

## **Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide (Christopher Lukas & Henry Seidon)**

Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2007)

*"Silent Grief" is a book for and about "suicide survivors" - those who have been left behind by the suicide of a friend or loved one.*

## **Other Self-help Guides in the Let's Talk Service**

Let's Talk Panic

Let's Talk Low Self Esteem

Let's Talk Health Anxiety

Let's Talk Social Anxiety

Let's Talk OCD

Let's Talk PTSD

Let's Talk Bereavement and Loss

Let's Talk Managing Negative Thinking

Let's Talk Managing Negative Behaviours

## **Useful websites**

Let's Talk website: [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk)

Moodometer:

<http://www.2getherinclusion.nhs.uk/themoodometer.php>

Living Life to the Full website: [www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com)

MoodGym: <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome>



**Other helpful contacts:**

**The Samaritans:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Call on 116 123; 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Mind:** [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Info line: 0300 123 3393

**Mental Health Helplines Partnership:** [www.mhhp.org.uk](http://www.mhhp.org.uk)

**The Royal College of Psychiatrists:** [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info)

***Community Health Trainers, Gloucestershire***  
*(Community Health Trainers offer support, information and guidance to people who want to make changes to their lifestyle whatever their faith or culture)*

**Email:** [gloshealth.trainers@independencetrust.co.uk](mailto:gloshealth.trainers@independencetrust.co.uk)

**Website:** [www.gloshealthtrainers.nhs.uk](http://www.gloshealthtrainers.nhs.uk)

**Telephone:** 0845 863 83 23