



**Let's Talk Low Mood:  
A Self Help Guide**

Written by Annett Collett

## Let's Talk Low Mood – 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 Low Mood and Depression**

## **Managing Depression Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this self help guide is to tell you a little bit about depression and low mood and to help you identify whether you may be experiencing symptoms of depression or low mood. It also includes a number of helpful steps you may wish to take to manage your symptoms and improve your wellbeing using cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

Anybody can be affected by Low Mood and Depression and levels of severity can vary considerably. You may find that after completing this self help guide, you wish to develop further strategies for improvement and to increase your understanding. To do this you can contact Let's Talk, Gloucestershire's free NHS IAPT (Improved Access to Psychological Therapy) Service. We will tell you more about this at the end of this leaflet.

If you feel in need of immediate support please contact your GP.

## **What is Depression?**

Depression is a very common problem; it can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age, education or cultural background and is no sign of weakness. In fact more than 15% of adults will get depressed at some point in their lives.

It is the term used to describe a condition that affects our mood, the way we feel, think and what we do.

Its main characteristics are feeling low, sad or numb and/or losing interest and pleasure in most things we do for a certain length of time.

People who experience depression may feel down in the dumps for large parts of the day, feel like crying or generally overwhelmed with things. They can also lose their motivation and interest to do things and may have very gloomy and negative thoughts about themselves, others or the future. Now and then we can all feel and think like that but we

generally speak of depression when those feelings last for most of the day for a prolonged period of time for at least 2 weeks.

### **Do I have Depression?**

Many people's experiences of depression are unique to them; however most will experience some of the following feelings, physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviours which are commonly associated with depression. Please tick the boxes that you feel apply to you.

#### **Emotions/ feelings**

- Sad, upset, numb, or despairing
- Unmotivated and little interest/enjoyment in things
- Flat or tearful and weepy
- Guilty or bad about yourself
- Alone or isolated even if you are in company
- Irritable and lack of patience

#### **Physical symptoms**

- Tired/ Lack of Energy/ Fatigued
- Restlessness or slowing down
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Poor concentration and/or memory
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Feeling worse at a particular time of the day – usually in the mornings

#### **Thoughts**

- Losing confidence in yourself and thinking that you are a failure
- Thinking that everything seems hopeless and will never change
- Thinking that you hate yourself

- Thinking that other people don't like you or might be better off without you
- Thoughts of suicide
- Expecting the worst

## **Behaviours**

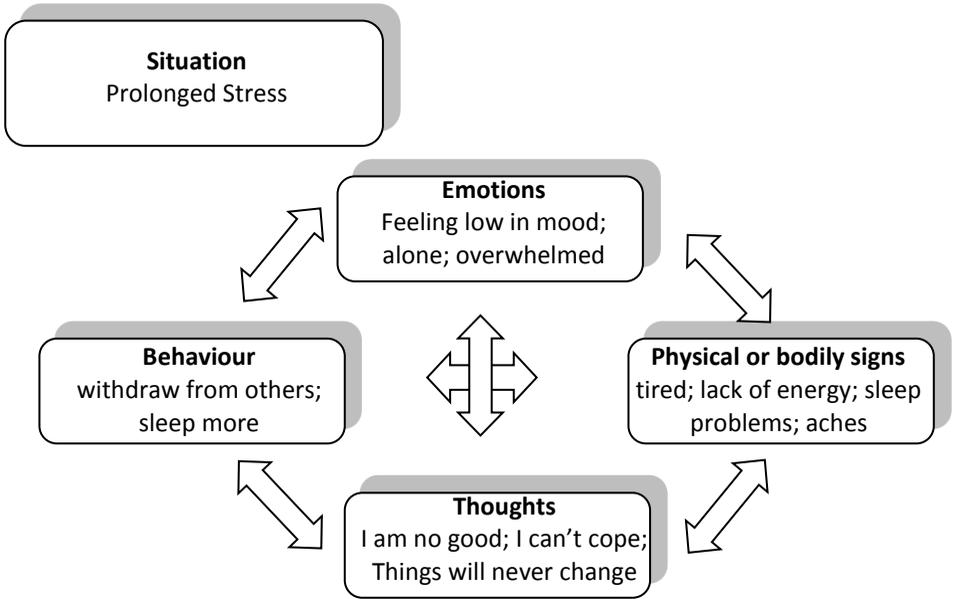
- Withdrawing from others and spending more and more time alone
- Doing less and less of the things that you used to enjoy
- Difficulties in dealing with work or relationships
- Struggling with doing everyday tasks
- Spending more time in bed
- Putting things off
- Struggling with making decisions

If you have ticked several of these boxes, and have been struggling with the symptoms for more than two weeks, you might be experiencing an episode of depression or low mood.

Being depressed may be a difficult experience for you as it can affect different areas of your life and can make you feel and behave very differently to normal. This can be an unsettling experience. You may feel helpless and alone and think that there is nothing that can be done that could ever get you out of this dark hole. It may also affect your confidence in your ability to cope with whatever life may throw at you and can change the way you behave.

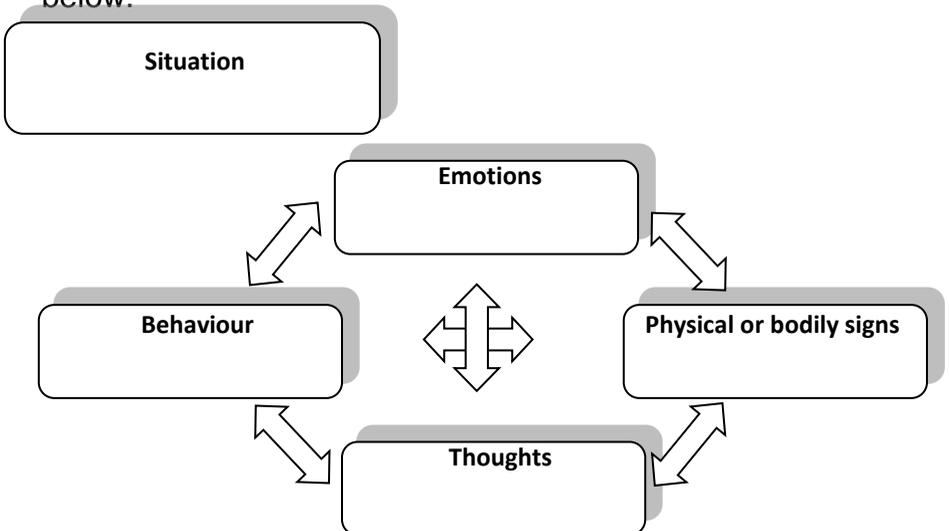
As you can see being depressed can affect your feelings, your body, your thinking and behaviours. We know that these areas are all interlinked and influence each other. This is known as a vicious cycle.

Take a look at the following example:



A vicious cycle of inactivity, low mood, isolation, fatigue and negative thinking can feel like it is spiralling beyond your control.

Has a similar cycle happened to you? Try and fill out yours below.



## What causes Depression to develop?

We all have the capacity to experience symptoms of depression from time to time and it is usual to feel some of these things now and then. This is especially true when we have lost someone close to us. Then these symptoms are part of a normal reaction to loss and should resolve with time.

We know that depression can follow as a **reaction** to difficult **life events** such as:

- **Loss:** The death of a loved one, a relationship breakdown; miscarriage, the loss of a job; or a beloved animal can all trigger an episode of low mood/depression
- **Stress:** Caused through too many or too little demands either at work and/or at home; stress caused through job insecurity, unemployment or money worries can also lead to feeling depressed and low
- **Life changes and transitions:** such as leaving school, getting married, moving house, the arrival of a baby or retirement, can also be experienced as demanding and require adjustment which can cause low mood for some time
- **Relationship difficulties** or being bullied or isolated
- **Physical health:** especially when suffering with a chronic illness, experiencing substantial or prolonged pain or having been diagnosed with a life threatening illness

Often there is more than one factor responsible for developing depression. However sometimes there may not be an identifiable trigger at all and it seems as though depression comes “out of the blue”. This can sometimes be difficult to understand and may make the experience of depression for the person feel worse.

Even if we are not able to identify a particular trigger or cause there are still things that can be



done to help you to gain more control and make changes to the way you feel.

## **What maintains my Depression?**

### **Behaviour**

We know that when people feel depressed they can also lose interest and motivation to do things as everything can just feel too overwhelming. One way of dealing with this is to withdraw from others, to stop doing daily tasks and even things that used to be enjoyed and instead perhaps withdraw into bed or in front of the TV to rest for prolonged periods of time. This can bring some relief in the short term. However in the long term the more inactive we become the more depressed we can feel.

Inactivity not only deprives us of feelings of pleasure, achievement and closeness with others, it also provides us with more time to be critical about ourselves and to worry about our problems. At the end of the day we may then conclude that we have wasted time which can lead to yet more negative thoughts and will make us feel worse. In addition we will have less and less positive things to look forward to which again will affect our mood and thinking. Thus the vicious cycle is created and maintained.

Keeping a daily diary can help you to find out how you currently use your time and whether you have a balance of activities that give you pleasure, achievement and closeness to others. You may wish to use a diary that looks like this one.

Rate your mood at the beginning and end of the day as well as how much Achievement (A) and Pleasure (P) you got from the things you did, on a scale from 0-100%							
	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Mood (1-100%)							
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							
Mood (1-100%)							

What have you noticed? Is it too much work, not enough play and time for yourself or is it too much time filled with activities that don't make you feel good, or too much spare time to dwell on your problems? Inactivity, withdrawing from others or spending too much time on one thing for example rest or work, are factors that keep the "vicious cycle" of depression going.

### Thoughts

Research has also shown that the way we think plays a



vital role in maintaining depression. We know that our thinking changes when we are depressed and a key symptom of depression is an **increase** in negative thoughts about ourselves, the world around us and the future.

It seems as though we view everything through dark spectacles which taints how we see things and interpret situations. In fact when we feeling low, we start to believe that the way we see things is true and treat those negative thoughts like facts. This in turn increases our feelings of depression.

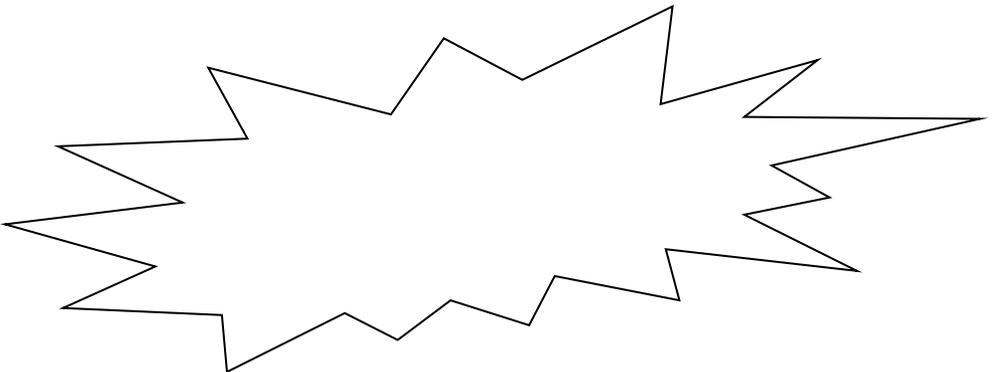
Have you noticed any such critical or gloomy thoughts about yourself?

(i.e. “I am not able to cope” “I am rubbish at everything” “I am boring” “No-one likes me”)

or about the people and world around you or the future?

(i.e. “People don’t care” “Others are doing much better than me” “things will never get better” “the world is a cold and unforgiving place” “what’s the point”)

Write your typical thoughts down here:



Have you noticed that these negative thoughts can be quite extreme, unreasonable and unrealistic? When we are depressed we are more likely to fall into certain patterns of negative thinking for example:

*Negative Thinking Patterns: (Do some of these look familiar to you?)*

**Jumping to negative conclusions:** Drawing a negative conclusion when there is little or no evidence to support it. EG: thinking the worst i.e. “My husband is late – he has had a car accident”

**Exaggerating the negative and/or ignoring the positive:** Thinking that things are much worse than they really are and focusing on the negative and ignoring positive or good events EG: having made a small mistake at work and fearing dismissal even though your boss may have just praised a job that you have done well.

**Mind reading:** Thinking that we know what others are thinking about us and that this is always negative. EG: “I bet they think I am a loser”

**Over generalising:** Expecting that when something has gone wrong once or twice, that it will always go wrong EG: “I failed my driving test, I will never get my licence”

**Taking things personally:** Blaming yourself for anything unpleasant, and taking too much responsibility for things that are not under your control such as other people’s feelings or behaviours. EG: a friend passes you on the street but doesn’t say “hello” we may think we have upset them, when maybe they just didn’t see us.

Now we know that we can all think like that occasionally but are usually able to “shake” those thoughts off quickly. However when we are depressed, thinking like this happens

more frequently and it's harder to fend-off those thoughts which make us feel worse. This creates another vicious cycle.

## **What steps can I take to overcome my depression?**

In the section above we looked at the vicious cycle of inactivity and negative thinking that keeps us feeling depressed. Now we will look at some practical things that you can do to change the way you feel.



### 1. Becoming more active

As previously mentioned feeling low and not wanting to do anything can make it very difficult to engage with things. However “opting out of life” gives us only short term relief. Often we will put off things until we are feeling better. But the longer you wait, the worse it gets. We know that the sooner you do something the more motivated you will get. It's a bit like pumping water with an old fashioned water pump. Before the water starts running you will have to pump hard but as soon as it flows it gets easier.

From the diary you completed, you may already have an idea of the activities you are missing at the moment. Begin by making a list of the things that you want to do and put them in an order of how difficult you would find them right now:

most difficult:

medium difficulty:

easier:

When feeling low, making decisions about what to do can also be difficult. Writing a daily plan can be really helpful because it

structures your day. Try to include something pleasurable to look forward to as well.

Try to be specific about how, when and what you want to do and start with the easiest first.

When we don't feel good about ourselves, it's difficult to notice when we have done something well. Use your diary to rate the achievement and pleasure you got from your activities.

At the end of a day or week review how it went. What worked for you? What didn't? What changes would you like to make?

Remember recovering from depression can be difficult at times so REWARD YOURSELF regularly!

### Top tips to becoming more active again:

- 👍 Choose activities that are rewarding for you
- 👍 Try and have a balance of activities that give you pleasure and/or achievement and also opportunities to be with others like friends or family
- 👍 Start with the less difficult activities first i.e. going out with a group of friends might be just a little too much right now but contacting on person by phone for example may be easier to do
- 👍 Break activities down into smaller chunks i.e. cleaning the house can be split into different tasks or rooms at a time and where this is not possible set yourself a realistic time limit i.e. doing the ironing for 15 min.
- 👍 Try to incorporate some physical exercise that you enjoy into your daily plan as this produces endorphins which make us feel better and can help to improve sleep

Becoming more active helps you break the vicious cycle.

## 2. Solving difficult problems

In our daily lives we are continuously faced with all kinds of problems. When depressed problems can feel so overwhelming that we find it difficult to make sense of and tackle them. In those situations it might be helpful to use the following problem solving technique:

What is the problem?

Identify possible solutions (*ask yourself how I have solved a similar problem in the past; what would I advise a friend or what would a friend advise me to do? Try and think of as many alternative solutions as possible even if some of them may seem a little silly. List the pros and cons of each*)

Make a decision and choose the best three solutions

Break your solutions down into manageable steps

Try out your first solution and review what worked/what didn't and then go to the next solution if needed.

Being able to tackle problems will increase your confidence in your ability to cope.

### 3. Challenging negative thinking

We know that the way we think determines how we feel. In other words our feelings in a given situation come from how we interpret the situation and the thoughts we have about it. When we are depressed we are prone to more negative thinking. You may have already recognised some of those negative thinking patterns for yourself.

We will now look at some steps that you can take to make changes to the way you think with the following process:  
**“Catch** *negative thoughts* – **Challenge** *negative thoughts* – **Change** *negative thoughts*”

The first step is to notice and identify your negative thoughts. In order to do this you might find it helpful to keep a diary of your feelings and thoughts in certain situations.

Take a look at the following example:

Can you see how these thoughts could lead to these feelings?

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Feelings</b>	<b>Thoughts</b>	<b>Balanced thoughts</b>	<b>New Feelings</b>
A friend had promised to phone but didn't	Sad Hurt Depressed	She probably thinks I am boring and has something better to do. No-one really likes me.		
Your example:				

You can challenge these thoughts by asking yourself the following questions:

- Can you identify any of those negative thinking patterns: i.e. *I am taking things personally because she hasn't phoned. I assume it's because I am boring and I am jumping to a negative conclusion that no-one likes me.*
- Is there a possibility that these thoughts are not 100% true? i.e. *Last time we spoke to each other we had a*

*really good chat and she told me how much she valued my opinion.*

- If a friend was in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell him/her? I.e. *I would say, don't worry she is probably just busy.*
- Have I been in this situation before and thought the same thing and found later that my thoughts weren't entirely correct? i.e. *yes, the last time she didn't ring was because she had left her mobile at work but she texted the next day.*
- Is there an alternative explanation? i.e. *She may have had to work longer or got held up in traffic.*

Now that you have asked yourself those questions look back at your answers. Can you find a more balanced thought, for example , *"I'm pretty sure the reason for her not ringing me has nothing to do with her thinking I am boring because I haven't got any evidence which would suggest this"*. and write this in the fourth column entitled "Balanced Thoughts" in the table above

How would you feel now? Write this in the last column entitled "Feeling" in the table above.

Changing the way we think takes time and practice. However becoming aware of unhelpful thoughts and balancing those with more helpful/realistic thoughts can really make a difference to the way you feel. Give it a go. Keeping a thought diary can assist you with this and gives you the time and space to break the vicious cycle of negative thinking.

### **How this might affect my life**

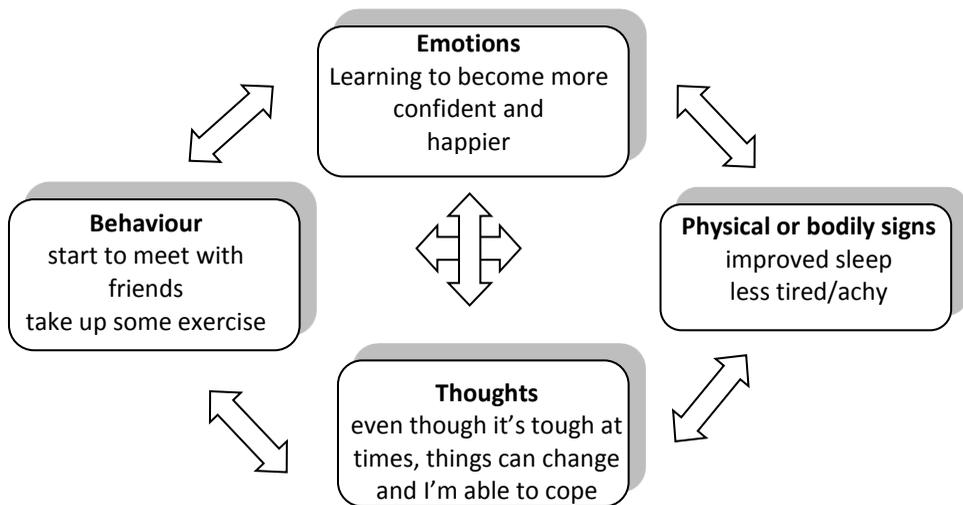
Noticing the symptoms and understanding how depression affects your life is the first step towards recovery. Making changes to the way you think and what you do, will take time.

You may need to practise the self-help exercises in this guide for a while before you feel any benefit. However we do know that depression can affect different people and different areas of one's life for example work and relationships to various degrees. If you still find that your mood is not lifting and you struggle with going to work or looking after yourself or others you may like to access further help from Let's Talk.

### Can Depression be treated?

Yes. The national Institute for clinical excellence (NICE) who publishes guidelines for treatments in the NHS recommend CBT for the treatment of Depression. CBT can help you understand and manage the “vicious cycle” of depression. It can help to explain how unhelpful behaviours and unhelpful thoughts can impact and maintain low mood and depression. But more importantly CBT teaches practical ways of how to change those unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

At Let's Talk we aim to help you develop more positive ways of behaving and thinking. For example:



## **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 Therapies (IAPT) service. We offer courses and one to one work where we can guide you in developing strategies like the ones discussed here, and we also offer CBT with a qualified therapist. CBT focuses on the 'here and now' and uses specific techniques to help you manage your symptoms. CBT encourages you to work on tasks between sessions to help you achieve your goals.

You can access our website on [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk) where you will find more information about your difficulties, and also our leaflets and questionnaires that we would like you to complete before you phone us.

The website contains other self-help guides for example "Improving sleep", "Managing unhelpful behaviours", and "Managing negative and unhelpful thinking using Cognitive Behaviour Therapy", as well as our workbook "Gaining Control of your Life – A self-help Workbook for managing Depression" and "Gaining Control of your Life with a baby"

If you suffer from anxiety you may find the self-help guide "Managing Stress and Anxiety using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques" helpful as well.

Alternatively you can speak to your GP, who can refer you and also give you a copy of the 'Introducing the Let's Talk Service' leaflet, which has our questionnaires on it.

## **Useful Books on Prescription**

Let's Talk can provide you with a book prescription to take to your local library. You can then choose from a range of self-help books to borrow, which provide helpful information and step by step self-help techniques for managing common conditions, including depression and anxiety. These include:

*Overcoming Depression*. P. Gilbert (Constable and Robinson 2000)

*Mind over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think*. D. Greenberger and C. Padesky (Guilford Press)

*Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: A Five Areas Approach* (third edition). C. Williams (CRC Press)

## **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 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

## **Other helpful contacts:**

**Depression Alliance:** [www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)  
Call on 0845 123 23 20 to request their information pack or  
email: [information@depressionalliance.org](mailto:information@depressionalliance.org)

**“Your Space”** (Local support group for people suffering with  
anxiety and depression)

To contact email: [yourspaceglos@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:yourspaceglos@yahoo.co.uk)

**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