

# PdOC Guide to: Finding help for mental health problems in Cambridge

In the UK, approximately 25% of people experience a mental health problem each year. If you are, or think you might be, experiencing mental health problems then you're not alone. Just like with physical health problems, we often need support and treatment to help us deal with mental health problems. This PdOC Guide describes some options for getting help in Cambridge.

Having mental health problems isn't your fault and it isn't a sign of weakness or failure. It doesn't mean you are 'crazy'. Mental health problems are part of being human. But this doesn't mean you should struggle on your own or ignore them. You wouldn't ignore it if you had sprained your ankle and you wouldn't feel like you had to cure your own tonsillitis. So, if you are experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings that are getting in the way of your life, please do consider getting qualified help.

There are many kinds of mental health conditions (for a useful A-to-Z see [here](#)). Two of the most common are anxiety and depression but there are many others. Stress, and experiencing difficult emotions due to tough situations, aren't necessarily mental illnesses but there is also plenty of help and support available if you are suffering with these.

Getting help for mental health problems might mean you have to take some time out of work, e.g. to see a doctor or counsellor. You shouldn't feel bad about this. Looking after your health is more important than work. You are entitled to have time off work to attend medical appointments, which includes counselling etc. If you don't feel comfortable telling people that you have a mental health problem then you don't have to – it is enough just to say you need to go to a medical appointment.

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## Emergency/crisis support

If you feel you are in immediate danger of harming yourself or taking your own life, please either:

- Dial 999 or go to your nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department – [Addenbrookes Hospital](#)
- Go to see a GP
- Call [Cambridge mental health crisis support](#) – the number is 111, then select option 2 – free from most landlines and mobiles

If you're not in immediate danger but your difficult thoughts and feelings seem overwhelmingly crushing right now, you can contact the [Samaritans](#), a (secular) charity providing listening and befriending in crisis or despair.

If you are based in the Clinical School, you can also contact one of their [mental health first aiders](#) who can help you in a crisis.

## Online information and resources about mental health

There's a lot of info on the internet and it can be overwhelming. Two great places to go for info about mental health are [Mind](#) (a mental health charity) and [NHS Choices](#). The Mind website has descriptions about all [types of mental health problems](#), with videos/[blogs](#) about how it really feels to struggle with these. Watching these might help you to put a name to a what you are suffering and know that you are not alone.

## Help and support within the University

The [Staff Counselling Service](#) is a free support service for all staff employed by the University. If you're employed by a College then you might also be able to use the service for free (click [here](#) for more information). The service can provide 8 to 10 sessions of one-to-one counselling to talk through difficult things you are going through. To use the service you need to fill in a [Pre-Counselling Form](#). Once they receive your form, the counselling service will contact you to arrange an initial meeting within three weeks. This will give you a chance to explain what you are struggling with. If the counsellor thinks the counselling service can help you then they will put you on the waiting list to see a counsellor each week for 8 to 10 weeks. They might also tell you that a different type of help would be better for you. The waiting list to get counselling after the initial meeting can be quite long, but urgent cases can be prioritised. The counselling service will not tell anyone else that you are coming for counselling.

If your mental health difficulties are linked to your work (either you think they are caused/made worse by your work or they are making it difficult for you to work, or both) then you can contact the [Occupational Health Service](#). They can discuss with you whether any adjustments to your work could help you cope better/recover, and recommend these to your department (if you want them to). You can refer yourself to the service or be referred through your department (called a Management Referral). If you self-refer then your department will not be told that you are using the service.

## Going to see your doctor (GP)

If you think you might have a mental health problem, it's a good idea to talk to a GP (local doctor). They can help you get an accurate diagnosis and find the right help/treatment for you. Making an appointment to see your GP can seem like a big step and a lot of effort, but it's an important part of looking after yourself and you deserve that. If you aren't registered with a GP service, you can find your local one [here](#).

Before you go to see the GP, it's helpful to do a bit of preparation. You'll need to explain to them what you are suffering and how it's affecting your life. Don't think that if you're well enough to leave the house and go to work then you aren't deserving of help. If your mental health difficulties are preventing you from doing and enjoying what you normally do then they matter. Think about the questions you want the GP to answer (e.g. 'Do I have depression?') and what help you would like (e.g. 'I want to see a specialist.'). Don't be afraid to say these things. If all this preparation seems too hard, just go anyway! Hopefully the GP will give you the answers that you need. But if they don't then arrange to see a different GP.

Your GP might refer you to a specialist mental health service for an assessment. This is especially likely to happen if you have a more complex mental health problem like bipolar disorder, psychosis, etc. Waiting lists for these services can vary a lot, but don't let that put you off. If the waiting list is long then that's all the more reason to get on it now! Your GP might suggest you try taking medication, like anti-depressants or mood stabilisers. If you'd like more information about medication for mental health problems, the [guide to medication on the Mind website](#) is a good, reliable source of info. Your GP might also suggest some things you can do to help yourself (although if you're reading this then you might have already tried that). Or they might suggest you try counselling or refer you to the IAPT service (see below).

## Self-referral for NHS psychological/talking therapies

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies ([IAPT](#)) is a national NHS programme to help people access evidence-based talking therapies for things like anxiety and depression. In Cambridge this is accessed through the [CPFT Psychological Wellbeing Service](#). If going to see your GP feels too hard, you can refer yourself online, or by phone, e-mail or post. You will have an initial assessment appointment (either on the phone or face-to-face) to discuss what is the right treatment option for you. Please note that IAPT generally cannot prescribe you medication, so if you feel this is what you need then IAPT is probably not the right option for you.

## Further information

A more detailed [guide on finding help for mental health problems](#) can be found on the Mind website. This includes a lot more detail than we can give here, about things like other free or low-cost types of support, or paying for private therapy.

If you have questions or comments about the information in this guide, please contact [welfare@pdoc.cam.ac.uk](mailto:welfare@pdoc.cam.ac.uk).