



One
Gloucestershire

Transforming Care, Transforming Communities

SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH MENTAL DISTRESS

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in association with Plan4Sport Ltd.

Produced for Gloucestershire County Council,
Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and partners
involved in the Mental Health Cell . April 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Guide is to provide advice to professionals and volunteers who may be unfamiliar with mental health disorders in supporting people who may have a mental health disorder, and/or be in mental distress. This Guide principally focuses on the signs and symptoms of mental distress and panic attacks and the most effective means of support.

2. SIGNS OF MENTAL DISTRESS

Whilst differing mental health and personality disorders will carry their own specific signs and symptoms, people experiencing any form of mental illness can be expected to present at least some of the following:

- Extremes of Emotion
- Appearing Silent, Withdrawn or Distracted
- Panic/Agitation
- Eating/Appetite changes
- Sleep problems
- Alcohol and/or Substance misuse
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Decline in Personal Care

If a person presents with any of the following signs and symptoms, however, then they should be considered as being in a **Mental Health Crisis**:

- In a state of great emotional distress or anxiety
- Unable to cope or to be in control of their own situation, or to look after others in their care (if appropriate)
- Expression of suicidal thoughts

A recommended outline Script for supporting people experiencing emotional distress or significant mental health difficulties follows on the next pages.

3.1 SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN MENTAL DISTRESS OR IN CRISIS

Be Clear on Your Role

Your role will normally be to call people via the telephone or a video platform to check on their welfare and that they are managing and coping satisfactorily during the Coronavirus outbreak. The intent is to assure yourself that the individual is able to support themselves, with you signposting sources of support if necessary, rather than to take on direct responsibility for providing that support (unless they are in crisis). Equally, you are not responsible for taking on an ongoing personal rapport with the other person and thus reaching out to fewer other people. If you are in any doubt about this aspect of your role, please check with your Team Leader before commencing.

Some people you will be contacting may well be vulnerable and, potentially, be experiencing symptoms of pre-existing mental health or personality disorders, compounded by additional anxiety over the virus outbreak. The notes and script below will help you manage your way through a scenario where an individual appears to be in emotional distress or experiencing a mental health crisis. However, you are not expected to be a clinical or therapeutic expert and your role is, again, simply to check that they are managing safely and to offer meaningful coping strategies and reassurance. If the person is, in your judgement, not coping well and is at risk of harm, then you need to refer them for specialist support.

Before Assisting

- Get in as safe and comfortable environment as possible
- Be aware of your attitudes towards mental illness and learning disabilities so that you can set aside your biases
- Consider cultural, age, gender or faith issues (i.e. someone from a different faith or gender may be more comfortable talking to someone of like attributes)
- Make sure you have up to date knowledge of the Covid-19 crisis, and of the internal and external support agencies that are currently available and operational
- Be sure, as far as you can, that you are in an emotionally safe place to support other people
- If using a video platform:
 - Check that both you and the person you are calling have meeting numbers and (if required) passwords

- Check that your equipment is working satisfactorily
- Ensure that any part of you visible to the camera looks as you would wish to be seen; it is advisable to exclude children, pets and other possible diversions from the room
- Be conscious of your body language and facial expression; aim to appear warm, concerned, interested and confident.

Stage 1 - Approach and Assess

The aim of this stage is to set up a meaningful conversation about an individual's mental wellbeing and to assess whether there is an immediate risk of harm or to life.

- If not obvious already, introduce yourself by name, role and organisation and say why you are calling, i.e., *“Good Morning. My name is Phil Smith, I’m a Volunteer within the GL11 Social Community Hub and I’m calling to check that you are coping OK during the coronavirus outbreak”*
- Explain that, if it would be helpful, they are welcome to have a family member or friend to sit in during your conversation and to help them answer
- Ask: *“How are you feeling today?”*.
- If no response: *“I can understand that you may be feeling anxious; it is a very worrying time. What support do you feel you can source to assist you at the moment?”*
- If the person is still not entering into a meaningful conversation, attempt to see if the individual already has a diagnosis: *“Are you already getting help for these feelings”. “Have you got a diagnosis of a Mental Health Disorder? If you can tell me, I will be in a better position to give you some advice”*
- Remember that the person has a right to privacy and confidentiality; you cannot force them to tell you anything; the aim is to build up trust and help them to cope.
- Watch out for signs of emotional distress, and in particular for indications of **suicidal thoughts or self-harm**. If present, proceed as follows:
 - *“I am concerned about you for [describe behaviour/attitude that gives cause concern]. How long have you been feeling like this?”*
 - If you believe there is a risk of suicide or self-harm then ask: *“Are you having thoughts of suicide”* or *“Are you thinking about self-harming?”*. If Yes, *“Has this happened before and, if so, what helped you overcome those feelings then?”*
- If you remain concerned for the immediate safety of the individual, then seek clinical support (NHS Crisis Care Team) or contact the emergency services (999). Try to remain in contact with the individual until help arrives.

If there is no immediate risk of suicide or self-harm but the person is clearly in **mental or emotional distress** then, move to the **Listen** stage of this Guide (below)

Stage 2 – Listen

A person in distress can easily feel overwhelmed with worries and fears. The aim of this stage is to engage the individual in discussing how they are feeling and to assess whether they have additional support needs. The primary focus is on current thoughts, feelings and emotions, NOT on intrusive questions about what has happened to them.

- Keep your tone calm and soft
- Remind the person that you are there to make sure that they are safe
- Remain non-judgemental; you are not there to judge feelings or circumstances
- Help them to consider their most urgent needs, and how they could be met
- Ask one simple question at a time
- During the conversation, give small sounds of agreement and understanding to demonstrate empathy

- Useful thread to follow:
 - *Can you tell me a little more about how you are feeling today?*
 - If person says they feel (mentally) unwell: *“I’m sorry to hear that you feel that way; it must be very painful”*
 - To prompt further talk: *“You were saying that you felt....; can you tell me a bit more about that?”*

- If an individual is clearly in current **emotional distress** (or having a **panic attack**) and unable to converse, reassure them that this will pass and try either of the following **grounding techniques**:
 - *“Let’s try a breathing exercise. Breathe in for 5 seconds, Hold breath for 5 seconds. Breathe out for 5 seconds”*. Repeat 5 times, or until person is calmer.
 - *“Can you try and tell me 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste”* [Adjust if individual has a known sensory impairment]

By the end of this stage you should have a clear understanding of how the individual is feeling and of what additional support they need to be able to cope.

Additional Advice – Psychosis

If an individual is in an active state of psychosis, then they may be hearing, seeing or otherwise sensing things that you cannot experience (as they are not real). It is very important that no-one condones, contradicts or dismisses what they say they are experiencing (as they are real to that person). Instead, the emphasis should be on

telling them that you cannot see/hear etc what they can but do accept that their experience is real and distressing for them, and you want to help.

The vast majority of people experiencing psychosis will not become violent and are far more likely to be a danger to themselves than to other people. However, avoiding confrontation is crucial so that you are not perceived as a threat.

Stage 3 – Link

The aim of this stage is to help people cope with their problems and to provide advice on what people experiencing poor mental health can do to feel better. This support should usefully involve:

- **Encouraging Positive Coping Strategies**
 - Get enough rest
 - Eat as regularly as possible, and drink water
 - Do activities that help the person relax (e.g. walk, home-based exercise, yoga, singing, listen to music or watch archive sporting activities)
- **Specific Coping Strategies for Anxiety**
 - Suggest the use of calming breathing techniques (as per Page 4)
 - Promote a routine that involves exercise and healthy eating
 - Suggest relaxation and mindfulness apps
- **Keep in Contact with friends and loved ones**
 - Ask: *“How are you managing to keep in touch with people you care about”*.
 - If appropriate, suggest means of doing so (Facetime, WhatsApp, Zoom)
 - Offer **links to community groups** who can befriend people who are isolated.
- **Discourage Negative Coping Strategies**
 - Don't take (non-prescription) drugs, smoke or drink alcohol
 - Don't sleep all day
 - Don't isolate yourself from friends and loved ones
 - Don't neglect personal hygiene
- **Providing Accurate Information about Covid-19.**
 - There is a lot of disinformation about Covid-19, particularly online
 - Be prepared to offer factual information from a reliable source, and identify the source (i.e. BBC News, gov.uk website)
 - Share information on how to keep safe

Links to Mental Health Organisations

Some people may appreciate the support of an organisation or charity related to their particular mental health disorder or experience. Information on national and local organisations is included in the Gloucestershire County Council Mental Health Signposting Sheet which is attached at the end of this document.

Ending the Conversation

Ending the conversation is an important part of the experience for both the caller and the call recipient. You need to be very conscious that your role is not to be available as a personal ongoing source of support. Instead:

- If you sign-posted any support, check that they know to contact organisations or other sources of assistance
- Explain that you will only use any personal information that the caller has given you with their permission; it will not be passed to any other person or organisation unless essential to safeguard their wellbeing.
- The “Goodbye” should be meaningful and purposeful; *“Thank you very much for your time and I hope you’ve found this call helpful”*

After Assisting

- Make any necessary notes about what you have agreed to do, including any follow up contact
- Don’t be surprised if you feel inadequate or frustrated that you cannot help everyone with all of their problems. Remember that it is not realistic or possible for you to do so; your role is to do what you can to help people help themselves and to identify any support required
- Assisting people in distress can be emotionally draining; consider how best you can support your own self-care:
 - Think about what helped you to de-stress in the past, and what you can do now to relax
 - Take the time to eat, rest and relax
 - Try to keep reasonable working hours, and make sure you have time for members of your family group and friends
 - Minimise your intake of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and non-prescription drugs
 - Talk with friends, loved ones or other people you trust for support

Do's and Don't's

An aide-memoire of “Do's and Don'ts” is shown in the table below:

Do's	Don'ts
<p>Be Honest and trustworthy</p> <p>Respect people's right to make their own well-informed decisions</p> <p>Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices</p> <p>Make it clear to people that, even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future</p> <p>Respect privacy and keep personal details of the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate</p> <p>Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age and gender</p>	<p>Don't exploit your relationship as a helper</p> <p>Don't ask the person for any money or favour for helping</p> <p>Don't make false promises or give inaccurate information</p> <p>Don't exaggerate your role or skills</p> <p>Don't force help on people or be pushy</p> <p>Don't ask intrusive questions</p> <p>Don't pressure people to tell you their story</p> <p>Don't judge the person for their actions or feelings</p>

3.2 ONE PAGE SUMMARY GUIDE SCRIPT

Approach:

- “Good Morning/Afternoon, my name is {name} and I am (Role and Organisation). I am calling to check that you are coping OK during the Coronavirus outbreak”
- “How are you feeling today?” “I can understand that you may be feeling anxious; it is a very worrying time. What support do you feel you are able to access?”
- [If in **Distress**] “Are you already getting help for these feelings?”. “Have you got a diagnosis of a Mental Health Disorder? If you can tell me, I will be in a better position to make sure you have the right source of support”.
- “I am concerned about you for [describe behaviour/attitude that gives cause concern]. How long have you been feeling like this?”
- If a risk of **suicide or self-harm** then ask: “Are you having thoughts of suicide” or “Are you thinking about self-harming?”. If Yes, “Has this happened before and, if so, what helped you overcome those feelings then?”

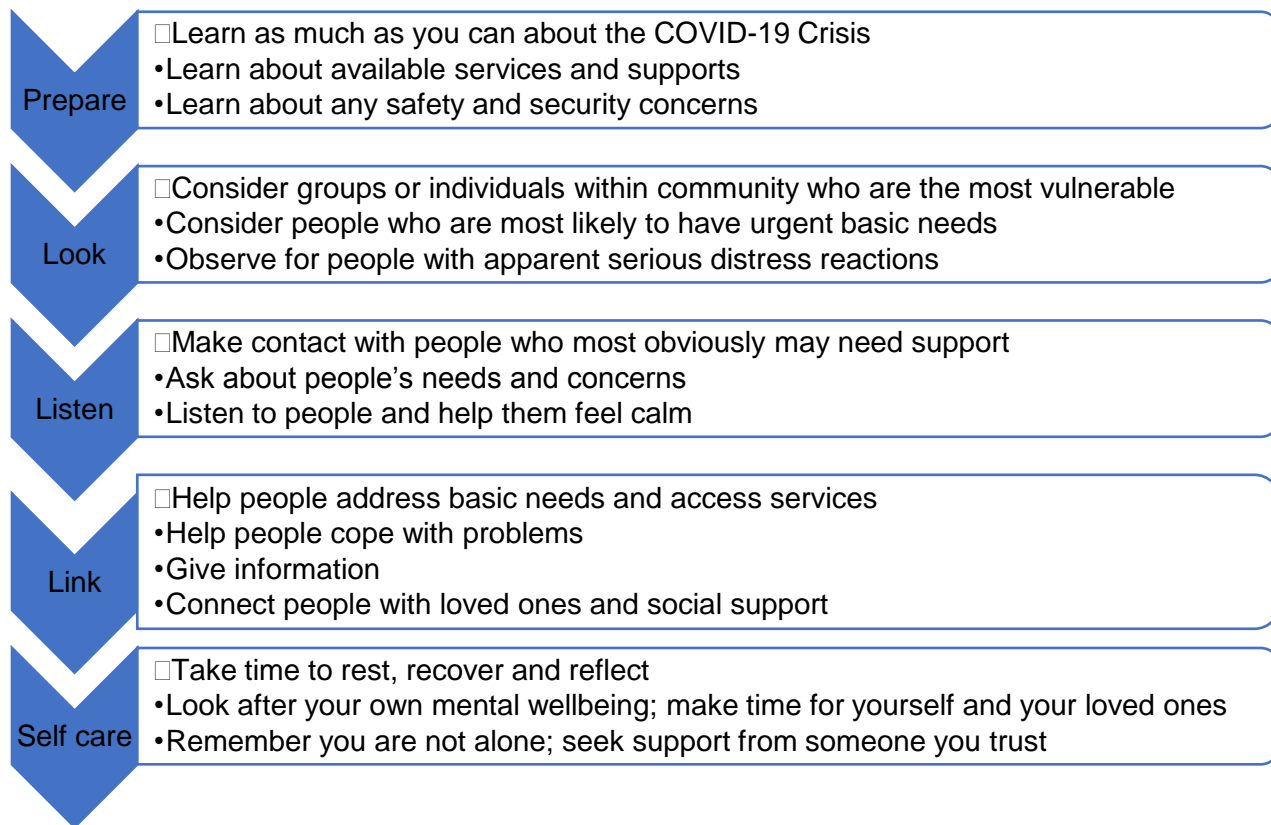
Listen:

- Can you tell me a little more about how you are feeling today?
- If (mentally) **unwell**: I’m sorry to hear that you feel that way; it must be very painful
- To prompt: “You were saying that you felt...; can you tell me a bit more about that?”
- “How are you keeping in touch with family and friends?”
- If in current **emotional distress** (or having a **panic attack**), try either of the following **grounding techniques**:
 - “That must be very distressing for you, let’s see if I can help:”
 - “Let’s try a breathing exercise. Breathe in for 5 seconds, Hold breath for 5 seconds. Breathe out for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times, or until person is calmer”.
 - “Can you try and tell me 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can hear and 1 thing you can taste” [Adjust if individual has a known sensory impairment]

Link:

- “If it’s OK with you, I am going to suggest some things that I hope you will find helpful”. Refer to advice on Page 5 of this Guidance
- [If follow-up agreed] “As we discussed, I will pass your details on to [source of support]”. Check that person has noted correct details of any organisation you have suggested would be helpful.
- [End] “Thank you very much for your time and I hope you have found this call helpful”

3.3 Process Overview



4. SUMMARY

It is quite normal for people who have not experienced a mental health or personality disorder, either personally or within their family group, to be nervous or even afraid when interacting with someone experiencing a mental health crisis. Principally this is because there is a fear of the unknown, fueled by stigma. In reality, there is no need to be nervous. We all experience changes in our mental wellbeing, as we do with physical fitness, and most people can and do recover from mental illness with the right clinical interventions and, crucially, social support.

This Guide has provided a framework which provides a simple way of identifying and addressing the immediate needs of those in crisis. However, the overall advice has to be: treat anyone in distress as a fellow human being, treat them with respect and dignity and show the empathy we all deserve.

For those who wish to develop their awareness, a Supplementary Brief Guide on the more common Mental Health and Personality Disorders is available.

MENTAL HEALTH SIGNPOSTING SHEET

For individuals in a high level of emotional distress or mental health crisis

Local

Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team

Tel: 0800 169 0398 | If immediate danger to life call 999 | www.ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/crhtt/
 For 11 year olds and up | 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
 An increased level of care for those with mental health conditions or experiencing emotional and psychological distress
 Minimised face-to-face contact – use of telephone, text and video-based technology

National

<p>Samaritans Tel: 116 123 Email: jo@samaritans.org www.samaritans.org/ 24/7 listening support via email and phone call</p>	<p>Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) Tel: 0800 58 58 58 www.thecalmzone.net/ A leading movement against suicide Helpline and webchat – 7 hours a day, 7 days a week</p>	<p>Stay Alive App www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/stay-alive-app/ An app for those at risk of suicide or those worried about someone else</p>
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If a person is already being supported by specialist mental health services, they should contact the relevant team

Further information can be found on the Gloucestershire Health & Care NHS Foundation Trust (GHC) website:

General information about GHC - www.ghc.nhs.uk/ | **What GHC do** - www.ghc.nhs.uk/a-z/
Coronavirus information and how services are affected - www.ghc.nhs.uk/coronavirus/

For individuals seeking help with anxiety, low mood or depression (NOT in immediate crisis)

Local

<p>IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) – Let’s Talk Tel: 0800 073 2200 www.ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/letstalk/ The service provides support for mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, OCD and phobias</p>	<p>Community Advice, Links, Mental Health Support (CALMHS) Tel: 0345 8638323 01452 317460 Text: 07812 067087 www.independencetrust.co.uk/CALMHS/about Offering those with moderate to severe mental ill health 1:1 support, personal support plans and signposting to other services Phone, video call, text or email Accepting referrals</p>	<p>Community Wellbeing Service Cheltenham & Tewkesbury - 0300 365 6463 Cotswold - 01452 528491 Gloucester - 0300 131 0024 Forest of Dean - 01594 812447 Stroud & Berkeley Vale - 0345 863 8323 Connecting people to local services, organisations and groups that can help improve general wellbeing and meet wider social needs For anyone over 16 living in Gloucestershire, or registered</p>	<p>Mental Health Matters Tel: 0808 145 4507 For adults 18 and over 24 hour phone and web chat for emotional support and signposting to services They are experiencing high demand currently – if unable to get through first time then advised to</p>	<p>Alexandra Wellbeing House Email: admin@sgmind.org.uk www.sgmind.org.uk/the-alexandra/ Gloucestershire Telephone Wellbeing Support Weekly telephone calls plus safety and support planning using 5 Ways to Wellbeing Accepting new referrals from NHS Teams and 3rd sector organisations</p>
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For children and young people seeking help with low mood, anxiety or depression (NOT in immediate crisis)

Local		
<p>School Nurse Tel: 07507 333351 www.ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/school-nursing/ For 5 to 19 year olds ChatHealth is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 4.30pm for 11- 19 year olds who may want to discuss a health issue</p>	<p>Young Gloucestershire Tel: 01452 501008 www.youngglos.org.uk/young-people/mental-health For 11 to 25 year olds Counselling by phone and via online chat Emergency Support packages to existing clients Connect – the alternative education programme Detached youth work - for vulnerable Online activities</p>	<p>TIC+ (Teens in Crisis) Tel: 01594 372777 Text: 07520 634063 www.ticplus.org.uk/ For 9 to 21 year olds Counselling by phone, online text chat or video chat</p>

For children and young people seeking help with low mood, anxiety or depression (NOT in immediate crisis) CONTINUED

National		
<p>Childline Tel: 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk/ Childline counsellors available online or on the phone from 9am – midnight</p>	<p>Mix Tel: 0808 808 4994 www.themix.org.uk/ For under 25 year olds UK's leading support service for young people Support with mental health, money, homelessness, finding a job, relationships and drugs</p>	<p>Young Minds Tel: 0808 802 5544 – parents helpline www.youngminds.org.uk/ Online information and advice to support children, young people and their parents</p>

For individuals seeking support in their community to support their wellbeing

Local		
<p>Change, Grow, Live (CGL) Tel: 01452 223 014 www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-recovery-service-gloucestershire Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service Appointments by phone and email</p>	<p>Gloucestershire Carers Hub Tel: 0300 111 9000 Email: carers@peopleplus.co.uk www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk/ Offering information, advice and guidance to carers 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday</p>	<p>Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) www.gdass.org.uk/ A service to reduce the level of domestic abuse and improve the safety of victims and their families Contact should be made using the online referral form</p>
<p>Gloucestershire Self Harm Helpline Tel: 0808 801 0606 Text: 07537 410 022 www.gloucestershireselfharm.org/ For people who self harm, their families and carers Telephone, web chat and text support 5 – 10pm daily</p>	<p>MHELO (Mental Health Experience Led Opportunities) Tel: 01452 234003 www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk Mental health user led support on Facebook</p>	<p>The Cavern Tel: 01452 307201 www.kftseekers.org.uk/cavern Support and advice available everyday from 6pm to 11pm or a live chat is available on the website</p>

For individuals seeking basic self-care tools and resources to help them look after their emotional wellbeing		
National		
<p>Every Mind Matters www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/ Expert advice and practical tips to help people look after their mental health and wellbeing</p>	<p>Five Ways to Wellbeing - NHS www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/ A wide variety of useful links about mental health</p>	<p>Head Talks www.headtalks.com/ Aims to inspire and engage those interested in mental health and wellbeing. Subscribe to the newsletter.</p>
<p>Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk/ Information to support mental health, including how to look after mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak</p>	<p>Mind www.mind.org.uk/ Providing a wide range of information and resources to support mental health problems people are facing at this time</p>	<p>OCD UK www.ocduk.org/ Supporting those with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in the UK</p>
<p>Rethink Mental Illness www.rethink.org/ Offering an online hub to provide practical support information during Coronavirus outbreak</p>	<p>Sane www.sane.org.uk/ A leading UK mental health charity to improve the quality of life for anyone affected by mental illness</p>	<p>Time To Change www.time-to-change.org.uk/ Changing attitudes to mental health in the workplace, in communities and with children and young people</p>

Other useful links:

Your Circle - www.yourcircle.org.uk/ | **Glofamilies Directory** - www.glofamiliesdirectory.org.uk/kb5/gloucs/glofamilies/home.page
Gloucestershire Community Help Hub - www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershires-community-help-hub/
Looking After Your Wellbeing - www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health/advice-on-covid-19/looking-after-your-wellbeing/

Author details

Dr Richard Castle is a Chartered and HCPC-registered Psychologist who has considerable practical experience in the management of the aftermath of collective trauma events, most recently following the Grenfell Tower Fire (2017) where he co-ordinated volunteer groups delivering street and neighbourhood PFA services and provided linkage between local community groups and the Authorities. He is a licensed Mental Health First Aid England Instructor and is experienced in delivering both Psychological First Aid and volunteer emotional support sessions. Richard lives in Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Further Information

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Plan4Sport is a Consultancy which specialises in supporting National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB's) across the UK in a range of areas, including strategic planning, developing and supporting people in the areas of mental health and wellbeing and equality, education and training. Our team of specialists have a combined total of 60 years of experience, gained from working closely with Local Authorities, the voluntary sector, National Governing Bodies of sport, their Boards and staff teams, clubs and leagues (both professional and amateur), equality stakeholders across the UK and the education sector. Plan4Sport has three core areas of work; Developing and supporting people in the areas of mental health, personal and organisational wellbeing; Training and education; Equality and Inclusion.

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