

A Manual For Me

Surviving and thriving
as an LGBTQ+ person



Thank you



Many thanks to our community member volunteers who helped us create this toolkit. Their insight and feedback has been invaluable.

Thanks to Nic Saunders, Kristina Mullan and James Banner-Rall.



Please note:

This document contains worksheets you can print off and use. It also contains weblinks and information sources. You will only be able to access the weblinks if you are viewing the document online.

Why a “toolkit”?



The fact that many LGBTQ+ people experience poor mental health, and are at much higher risk of suicide and self harm is why we wanted to devise a ‘toolkit’ with some ideas and exercises: to help people plan for times when they start to struggle with mental health. This could include times when people might be thinking about suicide.

It is designed so you can pick and choose which bits look like they might be useful and has been created with input from a range of people, including community members. Use it to begin to experiment with building your own ‘manual for me’ - using yourself and your habits and preferences as a guide to what keeps you safe and well.

The toolkit has pages to help you think about who you might have in your life you can speak to, what basic things you can do to keep yourself feeling OK and some tips and tools to help you feel more in touch with what is going on in your body and in your mind.

The toolkit is not designed to be used when you are at ‘crisis point’. If you are currently experiencing thoughts of suicide, please remember:

- You are not alone.
- It may not feel like it now, but you are needed in this world.
- The world is a better place with you in it.

If you need help now, you can call the Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org. Other sources of support can be found on the back pages of the toolkit.

This booklet has been produced with input from LGBTQ+ people in Scotland. We are very grateful to those who shared their experiences and their expertise with us, including: Nic, Kristina and James.

About this toolkit

We all experience a wide range of emotions, thoughts and feelings throughout our lives. These will inevitably be both positive and negative.

Sometimes people's thoughts might also include thinking about suicide (sometimes called 'suicidal ideation'). Suicide can be seen as a 'taboo' in our society, but suicidal thoughts are actually quite common - around 1 in 5 of the general population experience them. For some people, the thoughts 'come and go'; others feel like these thoughts are 'always there'.

The exercises in this toolkit are designed to help you take a minute to pause and think about what you might want to put in place to support your own mental health and wellbeing.

Our Community

There are things the LGBTQ+ community face that can sometimes make life feel overwhelming or unmanageable. Shame can be a big factor that impacts on mental health. There are also numerous things that can make reaching out for help difficult, such as complex relationships with family or with healthcare professionals.

External pressures can also lead to internalised homophobia and feelings sometimes known as 'minority stress'. 'Minority stress' is the result of someone experiencing stress based on their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Allowing ourselves to stop and try and work out how we're feeling, or how our thoughts are impacting us, can be useful. We've included a range of different ways of doing this, as different things work for different people and there's no 'one size fits all'. Also, sometimes what 'works for us' can change and we might want to try something else – so building our own personal 'toolkit' can help with that.



Does this really help?

Please see below for the story that a community member who worked with us to create this toolkit wanted to share. They tell about what they've used and what has worked for them and how they've built up their own toolkit over the years - and that it really can help.

Nic's story

"Over the years I have tried and tested a plethora of things that have and haven't supported my mental health.

I struggled with suicidal ideation on and off since i was 13 years old; it came to a head at the age of 24 when I attempted suicide. It is on reflection and through recovery that I understood what I needed; and what prevented any further attempts, no matter how 'loud' the suicidal voices were.

I tried meditation which worked at some points, but not all the time. I found that 'kinesthetic mindfulness' was what fit me best eg. chopping, preparing and cooking a meal, which would engage all my senses and quieten the chatter in my mind.

If I am having an anxiety attack or am experiencing a traumatic flashback, I allow my body to do what it needs to do. This could look like rocking back and forth or hiding under my kitchen table to alleviate the overwhelm that comes from feeling that the spatial world is just too much.

When I'm out and about and my anxiety is high but I'm not quite panicking, I use the '5,4,3,2,1' method to ground myself. 'Mini-achievements' were something I did instead of a 'gratitude list' because I like to re-frame things in ways that make sense to me. As I was doing them I started to feel proud of myself and noticed that little moments of success were significant, especially on hard days.

I'd say to people using this toolkit to try things out, explore how it feels when using them and that it's ok of something doesn't work for you. The thoughts might try to punish you, but know that not *everything* fits into your way of being; and listen to your body when something feels right. It's all part of the exploration of yourself and continuously expanding your "manual".

This is all part of the process of being the courageous human being that you are. Your existence in this world is needed and wanted even on the days when you want to escape your pain, and all the thoughts in your mind are telling you otherwise. Thank you for being you."

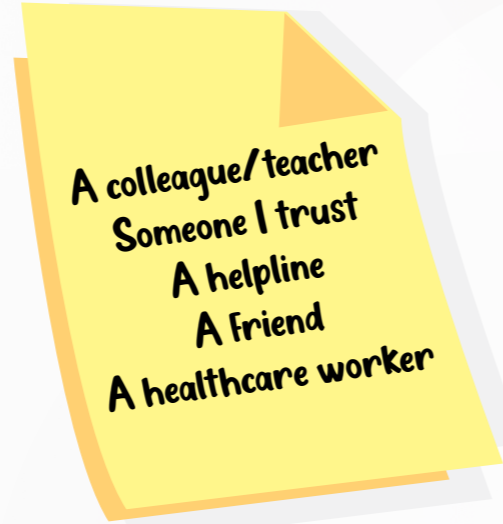


My contacts

Talking to or connecting with someone you feel you can trust can be really important to help you feel safe. Telling someone what you are feeling can feel like a really big step but it can be really helpful if you are able to.

It might be a friend, a colleague or a health worker. If speaking to someone you know feels like too much, you could try speaking to or emailing someone on a helpline and see how that feels for you - **see pages 22-23-24** for contact details.

Making a list of contacts might be helpful, so you can come back to it if you need to - print this page and note some below, or in a notebook, if you would like to:



How am I feeling today?

Our bodies are always 'in the present'. When we feel overwhelmed or distressed, taking a moment to pause and connect to how our body feels - whatever sensations, good or bad - can help us connect to the present moment.

The past can sometimes evoke memories that can cause distress; thinking about the future can cause anxiety. Learning to be '**in the body**' in the here and now can help us have a rest from ruminating, or 'spiralling' thoughts'.

You might find it useful to work through the questions below and answer them in your head or by writing them down.

What am I aware of right now?

... in my body

... my breathing

... my feelings

... my thoughts

... my behaviours

The basics

There are some links in the next few pages to things that might help you 'bolster your basics' - to stop and think about what's going on for you. You might also like to take a look at some self-care tips [in this article](#).

• Sleeping

Has your sleeping pattern changed? Are you waking earlier or later than usual, or finding it harder to fall asleep? Are you often tired? You might find it useful to keep a sleep diary to help you monitor any changes - here is a link to a [template Sleep Diary](#) from the NHS.

• Eating

Are there any changes to your appetite? Are you eating more than usual? Less than usual? Trying to eat regularly and staying hydrated can help how you feel more than you might think. Food and mood are linked - see [this page](#) on the Mental Health Foundation's website for some info.

• Connecting with people

Are you seeing less of people? You might socialise online or in person - have you stopped having contact with the people you usually enjoy being with? Have you stopped doing hobbies that you usually enjoy? Is there someone you trust you can reach out to? Maybe they could come and see you if you're not feeling up to socialising.



Bolstering the basics

Connecting with people

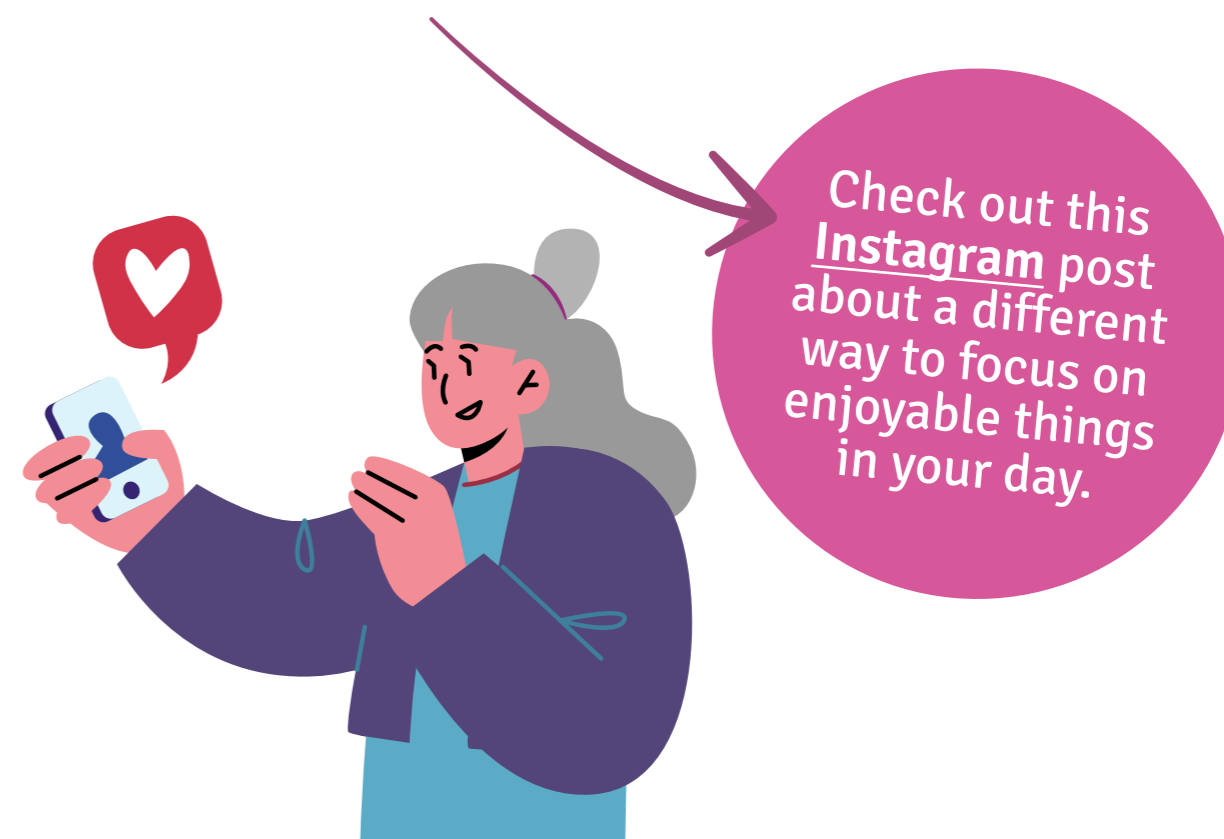
LGBT Health and Wellbeing also run lots of different social activities and events - you can [browse them on our website](#) and you can contact us in advance if you'd like one of the staff or volunteers to look out for you, welcome you on the day, introduce you to people and help you feel safe and comfortable.

Movement

Are you getting exercise or being active? How are your energy levels? Very low energy might be something to note; or feeling 'not able to keep still' might be a sign for you.

Is there exercise or physical activity that you enjoy? Can you take a walk with a friend or agree to do some exercise or a sport together? Sometimes even just getting up from the couch or bed and cooking something or doing a few gentle stretches can help you feel a bit better. Moving in whatever way suits you can be a good way to release tension.

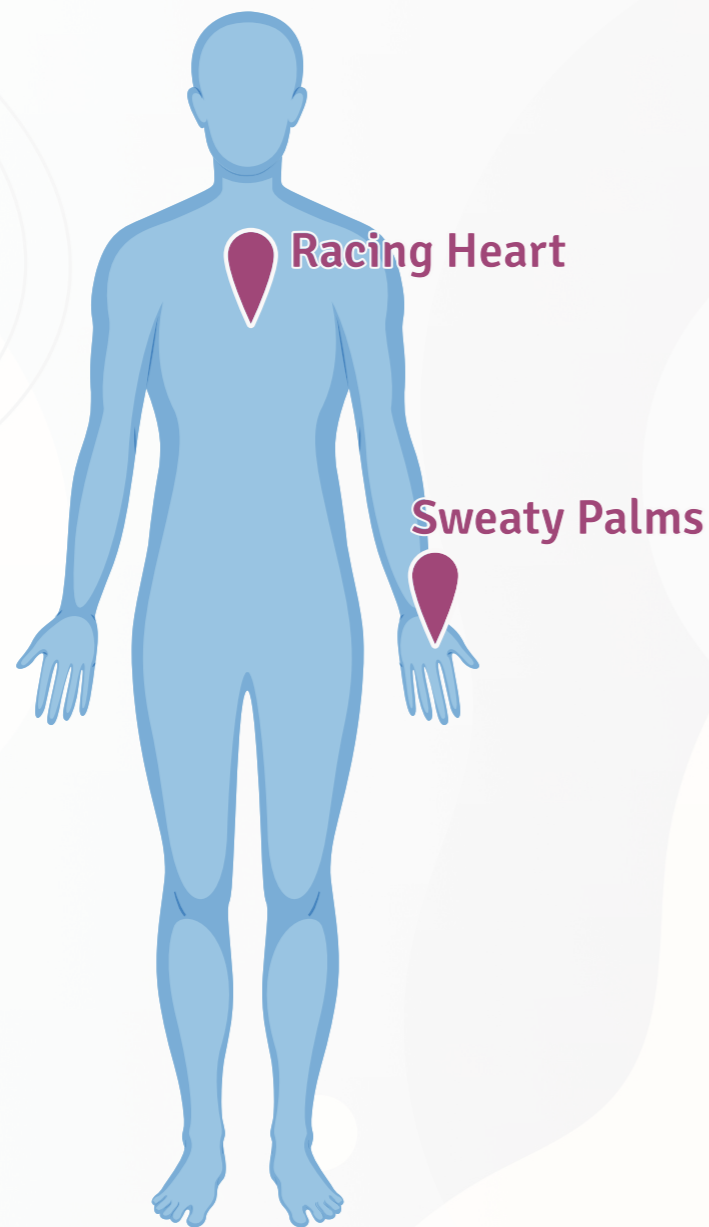
Again, [take a look at what LGBT Health and Wellbeing offer](#) in case there's something you'd like to join - we offer basketball and yoga and we're adding new activities all the time. You could even think about setting up a group of your own through our [Community Groups programme](#).



How we feel

Physical reactions occur because our survival instinct causes our brains to release more adrenaline. The extra adrenaline can lead to physical responses such as sweating, increased heart rate, feeling tense, going red, dry mouth, feeling dizzy, and more.

Try to take a minute to think about some situations that make you anxious. Use the template below to write any physical reactions you might have so that they are less scary in the future.



Other symptoms might include:
Not wanting to go out. Problems sleeping. Being irritable. Overthinking.
Temper outbursts. Not eating. Over eating.

Beyond the basics

What else can help?

Mindfulness and meditation

You have probably heard people talk about mindfulness and meditation or maybe have already tried it or use it yourself. In essence, it is about the idea that what we think, can powerfully affect how we feel and what we do. When we feel stressed or tense we may become aware of sensations in our body, like breathing faster, having an upset stomach, headaches, tension in the chest or wanting to avoid things or 'run away'.

At the same time as noticing if we have physical 'patterns' when we feel stressed, we might also notice patterns of negative thinking that can impact on our mood.

Mindfulness can teach us 3 things that can be helpful:

1. Paying Attention
2. Slowing down
3. Practising kindness

Practising mindfulness can help us connect with our body. It does this by helping us find 'anchors' in our body, to ground and steady us. We can do this quickly and easily by, for example, **bringing our focus to, or connecting with the sensation of, our feet on the ground or the feeling of the seat we are sitting in. This simple step can help us connect with the 'here and now' - to start to become aware of our thoughts, our body and our reactions.**

The next pages suggest a few exercises that can help you practice this. You might already be familiar with them or have tried them before; or they might be new to you—see what works for you.

Short mindfulness exercises

One...

- Change your posture and bring your attention to your breath.
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4; pause; breathe out through your mouth for a count of 6; pause. Repeat.
- Really bring your attention to your 'out-breath', make sure it's longer and really think about emptying your lungs.
- Don't pause for too long in between breathing in and out, just enough to create a nice rhythm
- In this way, you switch on your 'rest and digest' parasympathetic nervous system. (a network of nerves that relaxes your body after periods of stress or danger. When you feel safe and relaxed, it also helps with other bodily functions like digestion.)
- Even a few breaths will have an impact; a few minutes will create a strong soothing effect.

Two...

- Make sure your feet are flat on the floor.
- Put your right hand underneath your left armpit (imagine you are trying to hold your heart) and your left hand on the top of your right arm.
- Take a few deeper breaths and then breathe normally.
- Stay like this for about five minutes.



Kindness and self-compassion



We experience many thoughts every day. It is thought that a high proportion of our thoughts (especially those about ourselves) are both negative; and repetitive.

So it's not surprising that we can have real difficulty showing kindness to ourselves, even if we find it easy to be compassionate to others. We have to 'build up' our self-compassion. Below are links to a couple of ideas that you can practice to help you start trying to be more kind to yourself...

Would you ever speak to a friend who was struggling, the way you speak to yourself?

Feel free to celebrate 'mini-achievements'

Sometimes seemingly small things are the most we can do in the moment. If you're feeling really low, getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, showering or treating yourself to a coffee are all 'mini-achievements' to acknowledge—they show you value yourself as someone worth looking after.

Gratitude practices

Some people find keeping a 'gratitude diary' or something similar helpful, where they note things they have been grateful for each day. You could even begin by noting just one thing below; you might want to try and note a different thing each day, or add to the list - it can be anything at all, no matter how small - a person, place, moment, idea.

I am grateful for...

What else might help?

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all connected. Therefore, if we can try and change some of the ways we think, this can impact on how we feel; and what we do. Equally, changing our behaviour can affect we feel and think.

Distraction techniques

Distraction is a commonly used, simple and straightforward 'tool' that can help us manage our thoughts. It is based on the concept that we can only 'attend to' one thing at a time—so it might as well be something pleasant.

Distraction techniques can help you to focus on something else when you're in a panicked, anxious or distressed state. Although it may seem like a difficult thing to do, it can become a useful and healthy way of coping with the situation.

Think about positive ways you can distract yourself and note them down—music, a podcast, reading, watching some favourite 'comfort TV', going for a walk, messaging a friend.



You are not your thoughts...

We all live with an 'inner critic' that can have a huge impact on our thoughts and emotions; and how we feel about ourselves and our lives.

Write it down/get it out

A really simple way to start to get these thoughts out of our head and create a space of separation, is to write the thoughts down on paper.

You can be as creative as you like with this - if words are difficult, you can draw or make something to express how you are feeling. This can be the first step to realising you can 'step away' from what's going on in your own mind.



Thought records

At times when we are feeling overwhelmed everything can feel like a 'messy blob'. Exercises like the ones talked about here can offer us a way to start to untangle what's going on for us. It can help us start to see our thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours more clearly.

By using tool or approaches like 'get it out' and other things like thought records (see the next page for an example) we can begin to become more aware of what is going on for us.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1... exercise

People often find the '5,4,3,2,1...' exercise useful. This technique gets you to use all of your five senses to help get 'back to the present'. See **page 15** for an outline of how to use it.

Thought record template

Where were you?	Emotions or feelings?	Negative automatic thought	Evidence that supports that thought	Evidence that doesn't support that thought	Alternative thought	Emotions or feeling

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise



5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 Grounding Technique



5
Things you can see



4
Things you can touch



3
Things you can hear



2
Things you can smell



1
Things you can taste

Start by sitting comfortably; close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths - in through your nose (count to 3) and out through your mouth (count of 3).

5 - things you can see (you can look within the room and out of the window)

4 - things you can feel (the softness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair; is there anything in front of you that you can touch? A table perhaps?)

3 - things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside; things in side your room that you might only hear when you are quiet and still)

2 - things you can smell (hopefully nothing that smells bad!)

1 - thing you can taste (you can keep something to eat handy if you know in advance you're doing this exercise; you can also leave your chair for this one; when you taste what you have chosen, take a small bit and let it move round your mouth for a couple of seconds; really enjoy the taste)

Check in with how you're feeling before and after these exercises...

- Which ones have been useful?**
- Which might you use again?**
- Add them to your 'toolkit'...**

Print me out and fill me in

Safety Plan

Some people who have had thoughts of suicide find it useful to create a 'Safety Plan'.

A Safety Plan can help you think through the things that you feel keep you safe, or help you when you're starting to struggle.

There's no 'right way' to create your own plan, but we've linked to a couple of examples below to help you think about what you might include if you want to create one.

[Staying Safe](#) - find videos and information on creating your own Safety Plan.

[Download a Safety Plan Handout](#) to print out.



"A Safety Plan is like putting on your 'emotional seatbelt'"
City of Edinburgh Council
Trauma Lead

What else might help?

There are places you can contact listed on **page 22** of this toolkit.

On this page, we've noted some things that might be useful if you're calling a helpline or a source of support - it can be hard to know what to say in those situations, so (only if useful) feel free to take a look below for some ideas.

Contacting a suicide crisis line

On the phone:

"Hi, I'm calling because I need some help. I'm going through some things that are tough and it sometimes feels like I can't take it anymore. It's so bad there are times I think about suicide."

"Hi. Things are really hard right now. I'm thinking about killing myself."

Texting:

"I need help. My life is bad right now and I'm thinking about suicide."

"I've been thinking about killing myself. Can you help me?"

(Source: Centre for Suicide Prevention, Canada, 2016)

Contacting an LGBT helpline

"Hi there, I'm calling to see if you can help me. I identify as LGBTQ+. I've been feeling really bad and would like to talk to someone about it."

"Hi. I'd like to talk to someone about some issues I have around my identity. Can you help me?"



Appendix

Images on pages 9 and 16 of this booklet and the appendix pages are used with permission from, and created by, our [See Me Proud](#) Champion and volunteer Kristina Mullan. We've included them to give you some extra ideas of exercises you might like to use or try out. Many thanks to Kristina.

What works for me?

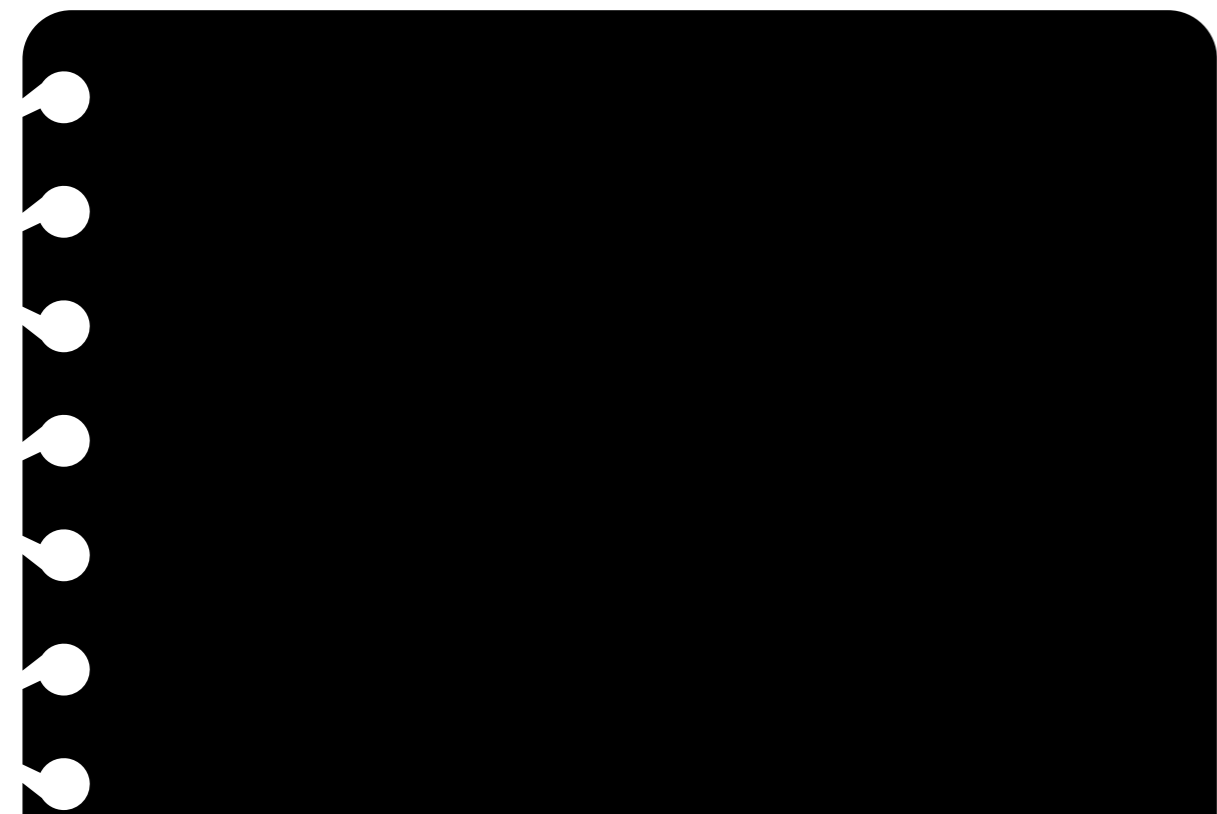
This is a space to make a note of the techniques that you like, that work or that you have come up with yourself, which help you support your wellbeing.



Make a list of other people in your life that you know you can reach out to. This is often easier to do when we are in a good 'mental space' and can help when you need it.

Then note down things that help make you feel better. A specific episode of a show, drawing, or a place that you enjoy visiting.

People I can talk to



Suggested strategies/self-help

There are many different techniques you can try and not all of the techniques will work for you. They are here as a guide and you might find that they work better for you once you add your own twist to them. It is important to find ones that you feel comfortable doing and remember that like all things in life, mindfulness techniques need to be learned before they can be fully effective. This should be done at a time when you are calm and able to focus. Take 15/20 minutes each day to go through the strategies, make a note of how they make you feel and the effect they have on your physical and emotional state.

Coping Statements

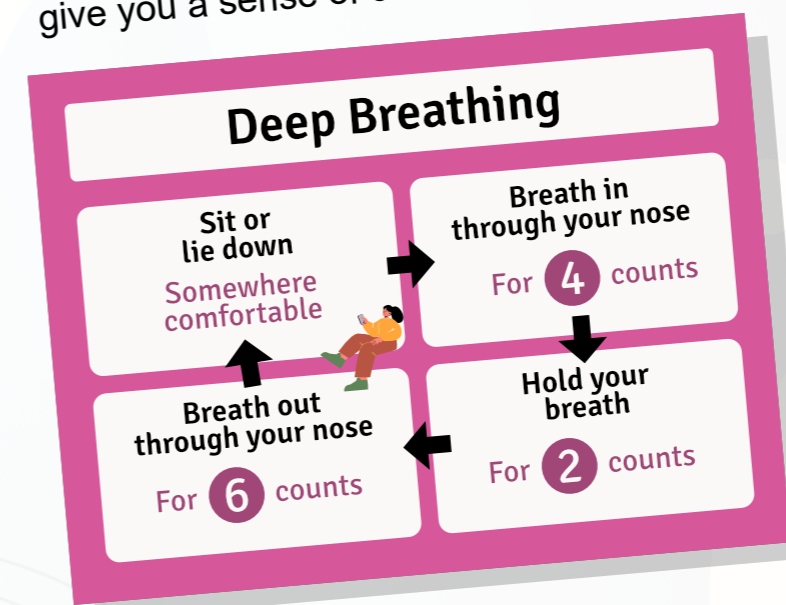


Positive Thoughts



Mindfulness

Deep breathing and relation techniques can help to regulate your body's response to anxiety, bring you back to yourself and give you a sense of control



Proof

Carry something that proves you survived (e.g. a photo of something good that has happened)>



Helpful resources

Below are links to a range of resources that you might find useful or interesting. The pages following this one also have links to sources of support and helplines.

[Self-harm Network Scotland](#) online portal for information and resources for people who self-harm and people who care for someone who is self-harming and people who work in this area

[Mental Health Foundation - Crisis Care](#) is about what to do in a crisis, or if you or someone else is thinking about suicide.

[Mind UK's guide to talking about suicide](#) has some helpful information and support.

[Mind UK's list of helplines and support](#)

[Sign up to LGBT Health and Wellbeing's e-news - including our Mental Wellbeing newsletter.](#)

[Scottish Recovery Network](#) - promoting and supporting mental health recovery.

Contact us

LGBT+ Helpline Scotland



LGBT+ Helpline Scotland
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (12-9pm)
Sunday (1-6pm)

📞 0800 464 7000
✉️ helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk
🌐 www.lgbthealth.org.uk

Our helpline staff are trained and knowledgeable on lots of topics, including suicide and self-harm.

Telephone 0800 464 7000

- Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 12pm-9pm
- Sunday: 1pm-6pm

You can also email the helpline at: helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk or use online 'live chat' via our [website](#) during the helpline opening times.

Counselling

Our counselling service offers up to 11 sessions (plus an initial 'intake appointment'). You can self-refer using the [form on our website](#). Initial Appointments usually happen within 4 to 8 weeks. You are then matched with a counsellor within 12 weeks.

If you have questions about the counselling service please contact admin@lgbthealth.org.uk.

Mental wellbeing support

We also have an [LGBTQ+ Mental Wellbeing service](#). This service can offer up to 6 one-to-one sessions to support mental wellbeing. People are usually seen 4 to 6 weeks after contacting us.

Sessions can help with things like managing anxiety and stress, as well as providing a safe space for people to talk through their issues around sexuality, gender identity or mental health.

Contact admin@lgbthealth.org.uk for more info or to arrange a session.

Crisis contacts

If you need to talk to someone now, you can contact these organisations:



Samaritans

Free 24/7 confidential non-judgemental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Call **116 123**

Email jo@samaritans.org



NHS24 Mental Health Hub

Free 24/7 listening support, advice, guiding you to further help if required.

Call **111**



Breathing Space

Free and confidential mental health helpline, offering advice for people 16+.

From 6pm to 2am Monday to Thursday; and from 6pm Friday throughout the weekend to 6am Monday.

Call **0800 83 85 87**



HopelineUK

For people under 35 years of age having thoughts of suicide.

Call **0800 068 4141**

Email pat@papyrus-uk.org

Text **07860039967**



Edinburgh Crisis Centre

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need to talk to someone, you can contact the Crisis Centre by phone, text or email:

Call **0808 801 0414**

Email crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

Text **0797 442 9075**



Glasgow Crisis Services

Crisis services are available for patients who are already known to the Community Mental Health Services.

The service is open:

- Monday to Friday, 8pm – 9am
- Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, 4:30pm – 9am

The an out-of-hours Community Psychiatric Nurse service which can be accessed directly: call 0845 650 1730.

For more information on Greater Glasgow and Clyde local crisis services, please see [this link](#).

LGBTQ+ helplines



LGBT Health And Wellbeing

Phone: **0800 464 7000**

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays (12-9pm)

Sundays (1-6pm)

Email: helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk

Livechat: lgbthealth.org.uk



LGBT Foundation

Call **0345 3 30 30 30**

Weekdays: 9am-9pm

Sat and Sun: 10am-5.30pm

Email helpline@lgbtfoundation.org.uk



Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline

Call **0800 0119 100**

10am-10pm every day

Email hello@switchboard.lgbt



Galop

Call **0800 0119 100**

10am-10pm every day

Email hello@switchboard.lgbt

lgbthealth.org.uk

Registered office

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

Duncan Place Community Hub
4 Duncan Place
Edinburgh
EH6 8HW

Glasgow office

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

The Adelphi Conference Centre
12 Commercial Road
Glasgow
G5 0PQ

Campaigns

The Scottish Government [Suicide Prevention Action Plan](#)

[United to Prevent Suicide](#) campaign

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We welcome the entire diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, including non-binary, queer, intersex, asexual people and all identities under the LGBTQIA+ community. This includes those questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

lgbthealth.org.uk

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