



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Supporting a constituent with a mental health condition

This guide provides you with what you need to know on mental health; how to support a constituent who is distressed and who has a mental health condition; and what action to take on how best to support the constituent. It also signposts you to local organisations that can provide professional help and support.

What do I need to know about mental health?

In the UK alone there are 1 in 4 people who will experience a mental health condition in any one year. Mental health is something we all have and exists on a spectrum that people move up and down on from good to poor mental health. Mental health is recognised as a psychological condition however there are social factors to consider that can make people feel anxious or which can exacerbate a mental health condition. Factors such as access to welfare, benefits, housing, and other forms of social deprivation can all impact on someone's health and given the types of issues you are likely to be presented with from constituents, it is inevitable that you will come into contact with people who have a mental health condition. To give you an understanding of the types of mental health conditions the most common forms are included below.

Anxiety disorder which is a normal human feeling we all experience when faced with a threatening or difficult situation. This could include panic attacks, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder or post- traumatic stress disorder.

Mood disorder is usually when people experience mood changes such as with depression or bipolar disorder. Most of us will be experience depression during some time in our lives but when it doesn't go away or interferes in daily life that it becomes a problem. It can also lead to people feeling suicidal if it is severe. Bipolar disorder involves severe mood swings that are far beyond what most of us experience in daily life.

Other psychotic disorders include hallucinations, and schizophrenia. People with these conditions will have a distorted awareness and thinking which can lead to stress; agitation; angry outbursts, irritability etc.; and

Eating problems such as anorexia, bulimia and binge eating are other types of mental health conditions, these are usually attributed to women more than men.

What support can I provide?

First and foremost it is not for you to diagnose or provide direct support to the person with a mental health condition. Your role should be to signpost them to other sources

of support. It is also important that your staff know what the boundaries are in the level of support offered. As with any constituent in distress, you should:

- Listen sensitively
- Use open questions and provide advice as a series of options rather than as a command
- Use a reassuring tone and display responsive body language
- Avoid focussing on negative options or languages
- Summarise the information exchanged between you and the constituent
- Don't be afraid to say no and be realistic about what you can do; and
- Acknowledge the person's anger even if unfairly directed at you

How can I suggest to a constituent that they need help with their mental health?

It may be difficult to suggest to someone that they need help from elsewhere but this will depend on how you communicate this to the constituent. You should suggest that they might benefit from talking to somebody else about their problems than suggest to them that they have a mental health condition. At least this way you are helping them to seek further help without being too personal or intrusive.

How do I help someone in distress?

If you feel that the constituent is in a great deal of distress or may be expressing suicidal thoughts or feelings you can:

Suggest contacting someone they know such as a carer; friend; or family member

- Offer the Samaritans contact details or other helpline phone numbers;
- Suggest that they contact their local GP; or
- You could suggest to the person to go to their Accident and Emergency department.

How do I help someone in a crisis, particularly if they are at risk of harm?

If you think that the constituent is at risk of harming themselves, or others, you should contact the emergency services by dialling 999.

You should explain to the operator that you are concerned about someone's mental health and their safety and the safety of others. They may at that point send an ambulance for the person and may ask for police assistance.

Signposting and local information

The best thing you can do for someone in distress is to signpost them to local organisations that could provide professional help. You should make sure that you have the contact details on hand to provide to the constituent.

GP Surgeries

Make sure you have a list of the local doctor's surgeries as a GP can often help people to access other specialist services and advice.

NHS 24

If the person is ill and feel it can't wait to see their GP they can call NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24. They work in partnership with local NHS Boards out-of-hours services to provide patients with health advice and help when GP practices are closed. Visit: <http://www.nhs24.com/>

Emergency 999

If you think you need an emergency ambulance you should dial 999.

NHS Inform

NHS Inform is a national health information service. It provides information on medical conditions, frequently asked questions and how to register with a GP. Open 8am - 10pm, 7 days. NHS Inform has useful information online on NHS Inform Mental Health Zone.

- Call: 0800 22 44 88
- Visit: www.nhsinform.co.uk/mentalhealth

Local Charities and Organisations

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) operates an information service from Monday to Friday between the hours of 2pm and 4pm. They can answer general mental health enquiries, advice on rights and signpost to local services. They do not provide medical advice, counselling, financial advice or representation, but can point you in the direction of someone else who may be able to help you. Call SAMH National Information Service on freephone 0800 917 3466. Alternatively, email: info@samh.org.uk.

The Samaritans offer free, confidential advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If the person is feeling distressed in a state of despair, suicidal or need emotional support they can:

- Call: 08457 90 90 90
- Visit: <http://www.samaritans.org/>
- Email: jo@samaritans.org

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phonenumber service for any individual who is experiencing low mood or depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to.

Breathing Space operates Mon - Thurs between 6pm and 2am and Fri - Mon between 6pm - 6am

- Call: 0800 83 85 87
- Visit: <http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk/>

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CABs) can provide support for many of the difficulties that can often be associated with a mental health problem, such as housing worries, financial problems, issues with benefits and employment issues. The nearest Citizens Advice can be found on their homepage:

- Visit: www.citizensadvice.org.uk