

SAMARITANS
Cymru

Working with Compassion

A Toolkit for Wales



#WorkingWithCompassion

samaritans.org/toolkit

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Who is this toolkit for and how do I use it?

This toolkit has been designed to help people in Wales develop compassionate approaches at work and improve the interaction and outcomes between staff, customers, clients or service users.

In order to encourage compassion in the workplace, we have consulted with representatives from a diverse range of organisations, many of them frontline staff, from the police service to third sector organisations to job centres. We want to encourage a culture where people are confident to ask for help and give help to others when they need it. We must remove the stigma surrounding emotional distress.

This toolkit isn't just for the workplace; it has been designed to encourage you to act more compassionately in your own life, towards yourself and those around you. Acting with compassion has many benefits. It can improve your health, boost your wellbeing, and strengthen your relationships. Most importantly, compassion can change and save lives.

Working with Compassion has been designed to provide you with facts and information, alongside real tips and actions which can be used in your daily working life. This toolkit can assist you when talking to or helping someone who is experiencing poor mental health or emotional distress.

What is compassion and why is it important?

“ Helping a person will not necessarily change the world, but it can change the world for that person ”

Anonymous

Compassion is based on empathy, respect and dignity. While empathy is the ability to put yourself in the other person's place and understand their distress, compassion has the additional element of actively wanting to help them.

It is the ability to understand and sympathise with the emotional state of another person while having the motivation to help and prevent their distress.

The compassion shown to them can affect how people perceive their interaction with individuals and services and can make them feel valued and cared for. Most significantly, showing compassion – towards yourself and others – is a skill that can be learned. Acting compassionately does not require any specific resource, time or money. It just relies on you being able to relate to someone else's emotional state and crucially, wanting to support them. The most important thing to remember is that you don't need to be an expert to help someone experiencing distress. The most valuable thing is that they don't feel alone and that they know someone cares.

Many sectors, services and workplaces in Wales will interact with people who are experiencing emotional distress and it is important that we treat them with compassion. We need to recognise that they are not separate to us; we all encounter distress and 1 in 4 of us have poor mental health. We can draw on our own experiences so we act compassionately.

Consider:



Many of us have a good network of friends and family. The help they provide can include emotional and financial support. However, there are a significant number of us who don't have this; many people have very little or no social support and could be experiencing loneliness and isolation, which can seriously impact physical and mental health.



The people we engaged with acknowledged that many of us don't realise we are only a few pay packets away from severe financial difficulty or losing our homes. We may consider poverty as being separate to us. Poverty is highest among families with children and the risk of poverty is nearly three times as high for adults living in households with at least one non-worker compared to households where all adults are in work.

SOURCE: Poverty in Wales 2018 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Mental health and emotional distress in Wales

- Mental health problems affect **1 in 4 people**
- This includes **1 in 10 children and young people** – around 3 children in every average-sized classroom
- More than **1 in 10 women** experience mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year after childbirth
- Between **300 and 350 people** die by suicide each year in Wales; this is around 3 times the number who are killed in road accidents
- Suicide is the most common cause of death for **men aged 20–49**
- Self-harm is a growing problem in Wales with approximately **5,500 emergency admissions** to hospital each year

SOURCES: Office for National Statistics (ONS) / Mental Health in Wales: Fundamental Facts 2016 (Mental Health Foundation)

Most of us will know someone – whether it’s ourselves, a family member, friend or colleague – who lives with a mental health problem.

There is often some confusion when we talk about mental health. Some people think that mental health is the same as mental health problems; talking about mental health may make them think of specific conditions such as depression or bipolar disorder.

In fact, we all have mental health, in the same way that we all have physical health. Just as we can have poor physical health, we can also have poor mental health. While this is not the same as having a mental illness, going through a period of poor mental health can increase our risk of developing one.

Mental health can also be described as emotional health or wellbeing. These terms broadly relate to how we feel about ourselves and those around us, our ability to make and maintain friendships and relationships and our ability to develop emotionally.

There are times throughout life when we are presented with difficult situations, challenges or a mental health problem, and these may leave us feeling distressed and struggling to cope.

Emotional distress and suicidal feelings

Who's at risk?

Anyone can experience emotional distress and suicidal feelings. These feelings can have a varied range of causes. Similarly, there is no single reason why people take their own lives. However, there are risk factors and high-risk groups who are more likely to experience emotional distress or suicidal feelings. These groups include:

- Young and middle-aged men
- People with a mental health problem
- People with a history of self-harm
- People experiencing loneliness and isolation
- People in contact with the criminal justice system, including prisoners
- People with a history of alcohol and substance misuse
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community
- Specific occupational groups, such as doctors, nurses, veterinary workers, farmers and agricultural workers
- Those bereaved by suicide
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ)

SOURCE: Talk to Me 2, the Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Strategy for Wales 2015-20 (Welsh Government)

Poverty and suicide

In Wales and the United Kingdom, there is a connection between poverty and suicide:

- Suicide rates are 2 to 3 times higher in the most deprived areas
- compared to the most affluent
- Admissions to hospital following self-harm are 2 times higher in
- the most deprived areas compared to the most affluent
- Suicide risk increases during periods of economic recession
- People who are unemployed are 2 to 3 times more likely to die
- by suicide than those in employment

SOURCE: Socioeconomic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour – Finding a way forward for Wales (Samaritans Cymru)

Myth-busting: Knowing the facts

Mental health problems, emotional distress and suicide are often misunderstood topics. It's important to know your facts; it can help you to understand others and show compassion towards them.

Myth: Mental health problems are really rare.

Fact: Mental health problems affect 1 in 4 people. Someone you know is likely to have experienced a mental health problem.

Myth: If a person is serious about killing themselves then there is nothing you can do.

Fact: Often, feeling actively suicidal is temporary, even if someone has been feeling low, anxious or struggling to cope for a long period of time. This is why getting the right kind of support at the right time is so important.

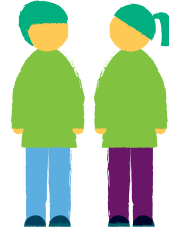
| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Myth: Talking about suicide is a bad idea as it may give someone the idea to try it.</p> | <p>Fact: Suicide can sometimes be seen as a taboo topic in our society. Often, people feeling suicidal don't want to worry or burden anyone with how they feel and so they don't discuss it. By asking directly about suicide you give them permission to tell you how they feel. People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it is to be able to talk about what they are experiencing. Once someone starts talking they've got a better chance of discovering other options.</p> |
| <p>Myth: People who threaten suicide are just seeking attention and shouldn't be taken seriously.</p> | <p>Fact: People who say they are feeling suicidal should always be taken seriously. It may well be that they want attention, in the sense of calling out for help, and giving them this attention could save their life.</p> |

SOURCE: Myths about suicide (Samaritans)

Emotional distress: Spotting the signs

It's not always possible to identify people who are going through emotional distress or experiencing suicidal feelings.

However, there are certain signs that may indicate someone is in poor mental health:



- Lacking energy or appearing particularly tired
- Appearing more tearful
- Not wanting to talk or be with people
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- A change in routine, such as sleeping or eating more or less than normal
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Appearing restless and agitated
- Not liking or taking care of themselves or feeling they don't matter
- Being untypically clumsy or accident-prone
- Becoming withdrawn or losing touch with friends and family

Sometimes people say things which might help you recognise they are struggling to cope:

- Making leading statements, such as "You wouldn't believe what I've been through" or "It's like the whole world is against me". People sometimes say these things in the hope you will pick up on them and ask what they mean so that they can talk about it.
- Negative statements about themselves, such as "Oh, no one loves me" or "I'm a waste of space", even if it sounds like they are joking.

Mental health crisis: What is it and what can I do?

A mental health crisis is when someone needs urgent help. When an individual is going through a mental health crisis, they may be experiencing:

- Suicidal feelings or self-harming behaviour
- Extreme anxiety or panic attacks
- Psychotic episodes (such as delusions or hallucinations)
- Behaviour that seems out of control, and may endanger the individual or others



In the moment, you may feel it is difficult to remain calm when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis and you may find it alarming. However, it is important to remember that acting compassionately can go a long way in guiding someone in distress. Have confidence in your ability to help them – it could save a life. Remember, you don't need to be an expert.

Here are some simple, important tips to remember when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis.

1. Communication

Communication is key. Make sure you focus entirely on the individual and show that you're listening. Our listening tips can help with this (see page 17). The most important thing is to show that you care and make sure the individual doesn't feel alone.

2. Urgency

If you encounter an individual who is experiencing a mental health crisis and you believe they are at risk of acting on their suicidal feelings and hurting themselves, you should call the emergency services on 999 and ask for an ambulance.

3. Signpost

If an individual needs urgent support for their mental health crisis, but you believe there is no immediate danger to their safety or the safety of others, the following steps will help:

1. If possible, ask the individual (or a family member or friend) if they are already in touch with their local mental health services. If they are, they will be able to access their local crisis team (known as a CRHT). The individual may already be aware of this or could already be in contact with their CRHT team but you should encourage the individual to call them.
2. If possible, advise the individual (or a family member or friend) to make an emergency GP appointment. Individuals can access this service by contacting their local GP surgery.
3. Encourage the individual to call a listening service, such as Samaritans. There are helplines available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and they can be very helpful to someone who is going through a difficult time.

If you're talking to someone experiencing a mental health crisis who may benefit from calling Samaritans, you can tell them the following information:

Samaritans

Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year, to listen and offer support to anyone is struggling to cope.

They offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever's getting to you. You don't have to be suicidal to contact Samaritans.

Their national freephone number is **116 123**. Samaritans also have a freephone Welsh Language Line on **0808 164 0123** (please visit [samaritans.org/wales](https://www.samaritans.org/wales) for opening times).

For information about other listening services and organisations, please see page 21.

This information has been supported by advice on Crisis Support from Mind (2018). Further support and advice can be found at [mind.org](https://www.mind.org)

Acting compassionately: Conversation tips

If you feel that someone is struggling to cope or experiencing emotional distress and don't know how to tackle a difficult conversation, there are some things you can do to help them open up.



You might feel that you don't know how to help them because you don't know what to tell them or how to solve their problems. Perhaps you just feel a lack of confidence when having a difficult conversation; this is completely normal. However, it's important to remember that the simple act of talking and listening to someone is powerful in itself and can significantly help someone in distress.

Open questions

Often people want to talk, but wait until someone asks how they are. Questions that help someone talk through their problems instead of saying 'yes' or 'no' are the most useful. Instead of closing the conversation down into a yes or no response, open questions encourage the other person to keep talking.

Questions like:

- **When** "When did you realise?"
- **What** "What else happened?"
- **Where** "Where did that happen?"
- **How** "How did that feel?"
- **Why** be careful with this one as it can make someone defensive. "What made you choose that" or "What were you thinking about at the time" can be more effective.

At Samaritans, we call this style of conversation active listening. With active listening, although you actually do some talking, you're really acting as a sounding board. Whatever you say doesn't influence what the other person has to say. It just helps them talk.

Find out how they feel

It sounds obvious, but remember to ask how the person is feeling. Sometimes people will talk you through all the facts of what happened, why it happened and what actions they are thinking of taking, but never say how they actually feel.

Revealing your innermost emotions – anger, sadness, fear, hope, jealousy, despair and so on – can be a huge relief. It sometimes also gives clues about what the person is really most worried about.

Check they know where to get help

If someone has been feeling low for some time it's probably a good idea for them to get some support, whether it is through talking to their GP or getting some practical help.

Useful questions you might ask them include:

- "Have you talked to anyone else about this?"
- "Would you like me to direct you to some help?"

Respect what they tell you, don't pressure them

If the individual doesn't want help, don't push them. Sometimes it's easy to want to try and fix a person's problems or give them advice.

It's usually better for people to make their own decisions. Help them think of all the options, but leave the choice to them.

Being there for them in other ways, like helping with practical things, can also be a great source of support.

If you say the wrong thing, don't panic

There is no perfect way to handle a difficult conversation, so don't be too hard on yourself if it didn't go as well as you had hoped. If you have shown compassion and made sure the person knows they are not alone and how to access further support, you will have made a real difference.

Look after yourself and talk to someone too

Hearing someone else's worries or problems can affect you too. Take time for yourself to do the things you enjoy. If you need to talk, find somebody you trust to confide in.

Acting compassionately: Listening tips

Samaritans volunteers are trained to be good listeners, but this is a skill we can all learn.

The simple act of listening is powerful and can make a huge difference. When people feel listened to, it can save a life.



#1

Show you care

Focus on the other person, make eye contact, put away your phone.

Life can be extremely busy and in this age of constant digital connectivity, multi-tasking has become the norm. To really listen to somebody, you need to give them your full attention, maintain eye contact and be engaged.

“Giving someone your undivided attention is a non-verbal way of showing them how much you care. It has an amazing effect. I try to remove anything from my line of sight that could distract me and I really focus on learning something new about the person who is talking to keep me engaged.”

#2 Have patience

It may take time and several attempts before a person is ready to open up. This may not be achieved in your first conversation but it could be helpful in building up a compassionate interaction.

Time is key when listening to someone. The person sharing shouldn't feel rushed, or they won't feel it's a safe environment. If the other person has paused in their response, wait. They may not have finished speaking. Remember it might take them some time to formulate what they are saying, or they may find it difficult to articulate how they are feeling. Effective listening is about trusting the other person.

"Once a person pauses I count to three in my head. This gives them time to elaborate further if they need to. It also shows you are thinking about what they are saying which will hopefully give them confidence to keep talking."

#3 Use open questions

Use open questions that need more than a yes/no answer, and follow up with questions like "Can you tell me more?" (See page 15 for further suggestions).

An open-ended question means not jumping in with your own ideas about how the other person may be feeling. These questions are objective and require a person to pause, think and reflect and then hopefully expand.

"I try to remember to ask one open-ended question a day. Asking an open question demonstrates that you want to listen to the person and that you care."

#4 Say it back

Check you've understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution.

Repeating something back to somebody is a really good way to reassure them that they have your undivided attention and you can check to see that you're hearing what they want you to hear, not putting your own interpretation on the conversation.

"You are asking someone if you have understood them properly. They will know you are paying proper attention to them, and you care about what they are saying."

#5 Have courage

Don't be put off by a negative response and, most importantly, don't feel you have to fill a silence.

It can feel really intrusive and counter-intuitive to ask someone how they feel. You'll soon see if someone is uncomfortable and doesn't want to engage with you at that level.

You will be surprised at how willing people are to open up and how, sometimes, it is exactly what somebody needs to be able to share what is going on their mind.

"Being listened to can help people to be brave enough to talk about what is really bothering them, it helps them to feel that they, and what they are going through, matter."

Samaritans wants to encourage people to listen to the really important things their friends, family and colleagues need to tell them, and to devote some time and attention to being better listeners.



Show you care

Focus on the other person, make eye contact, put away your phone.



Have patience

It may take time and several attempts before a person is ready to open up.



Use open questions

That need more than a yes/no answer, and follow up eg 'Tell me more'.



Say it back

To check you've understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution.



Have courage

Don't be put off by a negative response and, most importantly, don't feel you have to fill a silence.



[samaritans.org/shush](https://www.samaritans.org/shush)



Signposting: Useful contacts and helplines

Below is a list of useful contacts and helplines. You can suggest or even write these down for people who you think may need support so they know how to get help when they need it.

Please note that the listed opening hours are for the helplines. For opening hours for online chat or email, please encourage people to visit the listed website.

Samaritans

Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year, to listen and offer a safe space to talk whenever things are getting to you.

Freephone: 116 123

This number is FREE to call and will not show up on your phone bill

Freephone: 0808 164 0123 – Welsh Language Line

This number is FREE to call.

Please visit samaritans.org/wales for opening times.

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: samaritans.org/branches to find details of the nearest branch.

Opening hours: 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

Addiction

Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline (DAN 24/7)

A free and bilingual telephone drugs helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol.

Freephone: 0808 808 2234

Text: DAN to: 81066

Website: dan247.org.uk

Opening hours: 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

Benefits and rights

Citizens Advice Wales – Adviceline

Impartial advice on rights and responsibilities across Wales

Telephone: 03444 77 20 20

Website: citizensadvice.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Bereavement

Child Bereavement UK

Child Bereavement UK supports families when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.

Freephone: 0800 028 8840

Email:

support@childbereavementuk.org

Website: childbereavementuk.org

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people. They offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies and work to enhance society's care of bereaved people.

Freephone: 0808 808 1677

Website: cruse.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Carers

Carers UK

Carers UK is a national charity for carers which offers support to those who need help with looking after a friend or family member.

Freephone: 0808 808 7777

Website:

carersuk.org/help-and-advice

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Children and young people

MEIC

MEIC is the Wales helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25, who are struggling to cope.

Freephone: 0808 802 3456

SMS Text: 84001

IM/Online Chat: meic.cymu

Website: meiccymru.org

Opening hours: 7 days a week, 8am – midnight

Childline

Childline is there to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through.

Freephone: 0800 1111

Online chat: childline.org.uk

Website: childline.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

SNAP Cymru

SNAP Cymru provides information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, special educational needs or disabilities.

Freephone: 0808 801 0608

Website: snapcymru.org

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Debt

Step Change

Debt advice for people in the UK.

Freephone: 0800 138 1111

Online support:

stepchange.org/Debtremedy

Website: stepchange.org

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Dementia

Wales Dementia Helpline

The Wales Dementia Helpline is there to support those living with dementia and their carers.

Freephone: 0808 808 2235

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Disability

Scope

Scope provide free, independent and impartial information and support on issues that matter to disabled people and their families.

Freephone: 0808 800 3333

Email: helpline@scope.org.uk

Website: scope.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Eating disorders

BEAT

BEAT offers support and information relating to eating disorders.

Helpline

Freephone: 0808 801 0677

Email:

help@beateatingdisorder.org.uk

Youthline

Freephone: 0808 801 0711

Email:

fyp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Studentline

Freephone: 0808 801 0811

Email:

studentline@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Gambling

National Gambling Helpline

The National Gambling Helpline provides confidential advice, information and emotional support to anyone experiencing problems with gambling.

Freephone: 0808 8020 133

Live chat: gamcare.org.uk

Website: gamcare.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Health advice

NHS Direct Wales

Telephone: 0845 4647

Website: nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Housing and homelessness

Shelter Cymru

Housing and homelessness charity offering advice and information.

Telephone: 0345 075 5005 (Wales)

Website: sheltercymru.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Care & Repair Cymru

Care & Repair Cymru is a national charitable body and actively works to ensure that all older people have homes that are safe, secure and appropriate to their needs.

Contact your local Care & Repair

Telephone: 0300 111 3333

Website: careandrepair.org.uk

Learning disabilities

Mencap

The Learning Disability Helpline is the free helpline service offering advice and support for people with a learning disability, and their families and carers

Freephone: 0808 808 1111

Email: helpline@mencap.org.uk

Website: mencap.org.uk

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm

Mental health

C.A.L.L. (Community Advice & Listening Line)

C.A.L.L. offers emotional support and information on mental health and related matters to the people of Wales.

Freephone: 0800 132 737

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Mind

Mind provides information on a range of topics including: types of mental health problems, where to get help, medication and alternative treatments and advocacy.

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Text: 86463

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Website: mind.org.uk

Opening hours: Monday – Friday, 9am–6pm (except Bank Holidays)

Military

Veterans' Gateway

Veterans' Gateway is the first point of contact for veterans/military personnel and families seeking support.

Freephone: 0808 802 1212

Text: 81212

Website: veteransgateway.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Older people

Age Cymru

Age Cymru Advice is committed to being the foremost information and advice service to older people in Wales.

Freephone: 08000 223 444

Email: advice@agecymru.org.uk

Website: ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Opening hours: Monday – Friday, 9am–5pm

The Silver Line

The Silver Line is a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people.

Freephone: 0800 4 70 80 90

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Relationships

Relate Cymru

Relate provide Relationship Counselling for individuals and couples, Family Counselling, Mediation, Children and Young People's Counselling and Sex Therapy. They also provide friendly and informal workshops for people at important stages in their relationships.

Information line: 0300 003 2340

Email: enquiries@relatecymru.org.uk

Website: relate.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Sexuality

LGBT Cymru Helpline

The LGBT Cymru Helpline offers general information, advice and confidential support in many areas of life and around various issues that LGBT people, their family, and friends might experience.

Freephone: 0800 840 2069

Email: line@lgbtcymruhelpline.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Sexual or domestic abuse

Live Fear Free Helpline

For those who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence and/ or violence against women, or are worried about a friend or relative.

Freephone: 0808 80 10 800

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Live chat: livefearfree.gov.wales

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Men's Advice Line (men only)

A confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence.

Freephone: 0808 801 0327

Email: info@mensadvice.cymru.org.uk

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Domestic Violence Helpline

The Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

Freephone: 0808 2000 247

Opening hours: 7 days a week,
24 hours a day

Victims of crime

Victim Support

Victim support offers help for victims of crime, witnesses and their families and friends.

Freephone: 0808 168 9111

Website: [victimsupport.org.uk](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Opening hours: 7 days a week,
24 hours a day

Refugees and asylum seekers

Migrant Help UK

Migrant Help UK supports asylum seekers, refugees and victims of human trafficking and modern slavery.

Freephone: 0808 8000 630

Website: [migranthehelpuk.org](https://www.migranthehelpuk.org)

Opening hours: Please visit the website

Samaritans in Wales

Samaritans has branches across Wales which run their vital emotional support service and reach out into their local communities.



Samaritans Training

Each year, we deliver training to hundreds of organisations throughout the UK. Our expertise stems from 60 years of listening and supporting vulnerable people. To find out more about Workplace Training options for your organisation, you can view or download our brochure at samaritans.org/training (we offer a range of pricing options for all sectors).