



Mental Health Guide for the Farming Community

Looking after the farm's
most important asset

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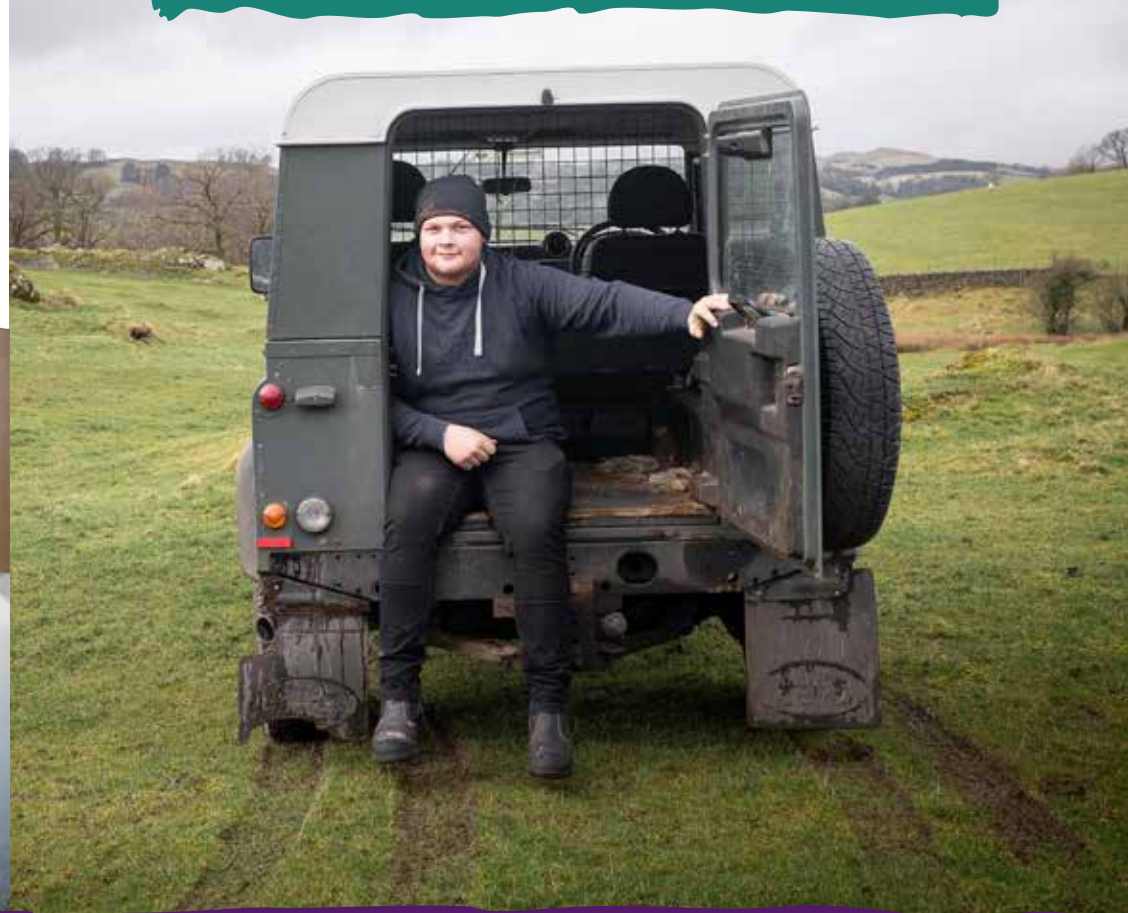


“Right now might feel messy or uncertain, but you don’t have to have it all figured out. Just keep going, one small step at a time.

Things can change. Support is out there, and so are people who care about you. However long it takes – you’re still here, and that means there’s still time, still hope, still you.

You’ve got this.”

Daniel



What is mental health?

We all have mental health

Mental health is just like physical health, most of the time we are well, but sometimes we have **ill health**.

But think about the last 24 hours – it's easy to list things that we have done for our physical health: slept, eaten, cleaned our teeth, cleaned a cut, but what have you done in the last 24 hours to look after your mental health?

This booklet explores what to do when we notice our mental health starts to impact on our day-to-day living.

There is also advice on how to help someone who has ill mental health, and what you can do to support them.

There's a lot of advice, support and services out there. If you are finding it hard to cope, don't do it alone.



Finding it hard to cope?

If a warning light comes on in the tractor, you don't just ignore it. The tractor is too useful, and you can't do without it. It's best to tackle it before it stops working all together.

In the same way, sometimes we need extra support, and a warning light might show up as feeling:

- Overwhelmed
- Burnt out through long-term stress
- Always tired
- Struggling to manage our mood

Help can come in many forms and if you are finding it hard to cope, you might want to:

- Talk to a friend, a relative or a mate.
- Speak to someone you've never met, like RABI, or other helplines listed at the end of this booklet. You can talk to them about whatever's getting to you, in your own way.

RABI: 24/7 0800 188 4444

A listening ear, a source of help, and free counselling

- Contact your GP. Your GP can refer you to a range of support. Make it clear to the receptionist that you need to talk about your mental health.
- If you need help, and the GP is closed, call NHS 111, option 2.



If you feel you can't keep yourself safe any longer, or if you have done something to harm yourself – call 999 now.

Seeing the GP

It's really important you see the GP if you are finding it hard to cope. Your GP is there to help with your mental health as well as your physical health.

Before you go to the appointment plan what you are going to tell them.

Be open about how you are feeling, and if it helps get someone to come with you. [Docready.org](https://www.docready.org) is a website that helps you decide what you are going to say.

Some surgeries have an online form, so you don't have to wait on hold.



Coping Strategies

We all have different ways of coping when things are difficult. Some ways of coping can cause other problems, but spotting that they are negative coping strategies is a good first step:



“I was told to make time for self-care, I didn’t even know what that meant! It was explained and now I can find that time to look after me but the most important thing is that I keep talking.”

Negative coping strategies

- Drinking to excess / using drugs
- Over-eating / under-eating
- Over-working
- Over-exercising
- Self-harm
- Ignoring bills or decisions
- Gambling
- Spending money you don’t have

You might be doing these things as a way of coping with difficult situations or painful memories.

Deciding to just stop doing these things isn’t easy, and won’t solve the main problem. Talk to your GP about these habits and start to replace them with other coping strategies gradually.

Positive coping strategies

When you feel a strong urge to use a negative coping strategy, try replacing it with one of these instead:

- Take 10 long, slow breaths. Get outside or look out the window and notice what’s going on around you.
- Distract yourself with something you enjoy doing (more ideas later in the booklet)
- Text someone you trust and tell them how you are feeling
- Walk away for 10 mins, it can help clear your head if you are feeling frustrated
- Have something to eat and drink
- Go and see a mate just for the craic
- Nip out for a while to the pub / vets / supermarket to get out of your own thoughts for a while.

Stress, Low Mood and Difficult Thoughts

There's information here on some common topics. If any of these ring true for you, there's information about what to do about it at the end of each section.

- Stress
- Depression and low mood
- Anxiety
- Thoughts of suicide



Stress

Stress is a part of everyday life, it can be useful – it can help us take action and stay on top of work. But if our stress bucket becomes full it can also overwhelm us and make us question if we can cope.

Everyday things can flow into that stress bucket, like rain. But we have ways of coping that allow this stress to flow out, like holes in the bucket.



Too much stress - especially when we start to feel out of control - can really affect our mood, health and relationships. It can make us feel anxious, irritable, and affect what we think about ourselves.

Experiencing too much stress over a long period of time can also lead to burnout - a feeling of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Top Tips for tackling stress

If your stress bucket feels like it's always full to the brim, poke some holes in the bottom, and let the stress drain out. These ideas are ways to poke holes in your bucket.

Talk about it.

Don't think you are the only one, many farmers will be in the same boat, and some may have some good advice. Talk to friends, family or workmates.

Take care of yourself.

Make sure you take care of your physical health whilst you are coping with stress, by eating regularly, getting to bed at a decent hour and doing some exercise.

Have a breather.

There's always plenty to do on the farm, and sometimes it's a good idea to get out and do something different, whether it's for a couple of days, or a couple of hours.

Switch off.

Try to do something you find relaxing. Whether it's taking the kids swimming, watching the telly, or reading a book, allow your mind to focus on something else.

You can read more about how to deal with stress here.

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/stress/

There are also **organisations** that can **help** you with some of the **practical problems** farmers face.

RABI

**0800 188 4444, open 24/7
or email: help@rabi.org.uk**

RABI provides financial support, practical care and guidance to farmers, farmworkers and their dependents. You can also talk to a counsellor for free.

FCN

**03000 111 999 or
help@fcn.org.uk**

FCN provides practical and pastoral support. If you need support, with anything – including if you are behind with your paperwork, an FCN volunteer will come and visit you.

Look for other places at the back of this booklet.



Depression and low mood

Depression is low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your day-to-day life.

We all have times when we feel low, sad, numb or down. These feelings usually pass, however, if your low mood is **interfering with your life**, the feelings **don't go away after a couple of weeks**, or if they **keep coming back**, it could be a sign that you're experiencing depression.

At one end of the spectrum, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn't stop you leading your normal life but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At the other end of the spectrum, depression can be life threatening because it can make you feel suicidal.

When it becomes difficult to manage a period of low mood and we notice that it's impacting on our daily life it is important to get some help.

What depression can feel like:

- Lack of self-esteem
- No motivation
- Irritable
- Angry
- Guilty
- Can't concentrate
- No energy
- Changes to eating habits
- Disturbed sleep / can't get out of bed
- No enjoyment in anything
- Aches and pains that have no cause
- Thinking about suicide or death
- Pulling away from friends and family
- No sex drive
- Can't make a decision
- Drinking more, or drinking alone

“We get good at stepping over another hurdle, be it a dead beast or another financial blow, and just moving on, even when we sometimes really just want to give up.”



What you can try

Try talking to someone you trust

- It might feel hard to start the conversation, you could try 'everything feels very hopeless, I can't see a way through it.'
- If talking to someone you know feels impossible, talk to a stranger, and call a helpline.
- Talk to other people who have experienced it.
- There are websites, called forums, where you can type how you are feeling, and other people will write back with advice. You can read what others have already written on the forum too. Details are at the back of the booklet.



RABI: 24/7
0800 188 4444

Try 'mindfulness'

- This just means instead of letting your mind focus on the 'what ifs,' stay in the here and now. Focus on your breathing and what is happening this minute. There are apps you can try, such as Mindfulness, or search for a mindfulness video on YouTube.

Take care of yourself

- Keep your SHED in order, and get the basics right. Sleep, Hydrate, Exercise and have a good Diet – S.H.E.D. and as an extra bonus, take care of your hygiene.

Try something new

- Anything from new food, a new skill, a new route in the fells, or make a new friend.

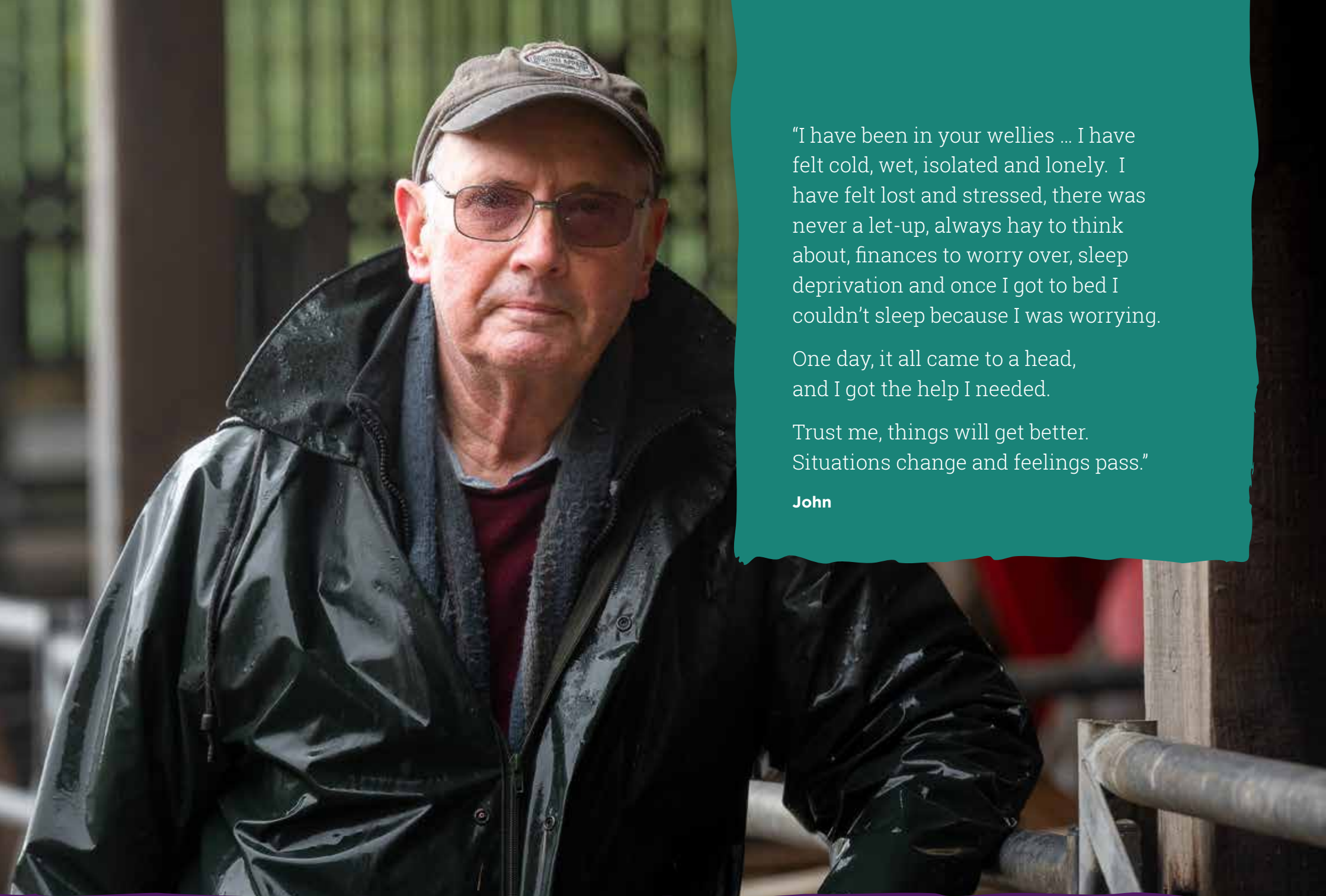


Keep a diary of your mood

- This can help you work out if certain days, or times of day, make a difference to your mood. Or if certain people, places, or situations make it worse.
- Use your phone to voice record a note if a diary isn't practical.

Be creative

- If being creative lifts your mood, make time for it, especially when things are feeling difficult.



"I have been in your wellies ... I have felt cold, wet, isolated and lonely. I have felt lost and stressed, there was never a let-up, always had to think about, finances to worry over, sleep deprivation and once I got to bed I couldn't sleep because I was worrying.

One day, it all came to a head, and I got the help I needed.

Trust me, things will get better. Situations change and feelings pass."

John

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to an unknown situation, it can motivate us to protect ourselves, or get away from danger. It's something anyone might feel.

But, when it feels **overwhelming, prevents us from doing everyday things** or **happens most of the time**, that's when it can become a problem.

Anxiety can cause physical feelings, such as:

- A headache
- Racing heartbeat
- Faster breathing
- Lightheaded or dizzy
- A weight on your chest or in your stomach
- Sweaty hands
- Disturbs your sleep

It can affect our thoughts too:

- It can also stop us doing things we used to do, like going out, eating certain foods, etc
- It can make us think the worst is going to happen
- It can make us feel tearful or angry



What can you do?

Talking helps. Sometimes it's good to talk about what's causing it, or to talk about what you can do when the feeling of anxiety starts. Talk to someone you trust, or if you would rather talk to a professional, try counselling.

Counselling

RABI Free counselling arranged directly with RABI. Call their 24/7 helpline 0800 188 4444 or email: counselling@rabi.org.uk. A counsellor will call you to arrange it within 24hrs.

You can talk to a counsellor in the NHS for free, the GP can refer you, or you can fill out the form and refer yourself.



North Cumbria:

www.cntw.nhs.uk/services/nctalkingtherapies/



South Cumbria:

<https://www.lscft.nhs.uk/talkingtherapies>

Help via Text

You can talk to a volunteer via text, just text 'Shout' to 85258 and they will text with you for as long as you need.



"It's a difficult thing for us farmers to say we need help sometimes. We are always 'grand' or 'it'll be reet,' even when we are not OK."

Jacob

Thoughts of suicide

Thoughts of suicide are a common response to difficult life events – a lot of people will have them - around one in four of us during our lifetime, and one in fifteen of us will have thoughts of suicide, every year.

If you have depression, anxiety, or feel really stressed, you might have thoughts of suicide. But remember, **suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.**

By getting some practical help, you will get through this. Having these thoughts doesn't make it inevitable that you are going to take your own life, and we know that **these thoughts will pass.**

If you are having thoughts of suicide, focus on keeping yourself safe for now.

First of all, it's important to see your GP.

It's OK not to be OK.

As well as seeking help from the GP, you could try:

- Try ways to distract yourself that allow the feelings to pass (more information later in the booklet)
- Make a safety plan – there's one in this booklet
- Call a helpline or someone you can trust
- Limit alcohol and drugs, as they can make it worse
- Remove things from your house that you could use to harm yourself, or make accessing them more difficult
- If you can, go somewhere you feel safe
- Remind yourself of why you want to live, write a list, or find a photo, or hold an object that reminds you.

If you can no longer keep yourself safe because the thoughts of suicide are becoming overwhelming, or if you have already done something to harm yourself – **call 999 right now.**

Thoughts of suicide do pass and there are things that you and other people can do to make your situation better. **There is hope.**

Read more about having thoughts of suicide on our website



Keeping you safe

To keep you safe, we strongly recommend you make a safety plan. It helps you deal with the thoughts of suicide before they become to overwhelming and will help to distract you and keep you safe. There's one at the end of this booklet. You might want someone who knows you well, someone you trust to sit down and help you make your safety plan.



Firearms

You might be worried about speaking to your GP about your mental health, or having thoughts of suicide, in case you lose your gun license. But getting help is the right thing for you to do.

The Police Licensing Firearms Team handles these situations with care, sensitivity and on an individual basis. They will talk to you, as well as your family, colleagues and possibly your GP. And there are a range of actions they may take once they have gathered as much information as they can.



You can read more about **Firearms** here. Scan the QR code or google 'Cumbria police firearms mental health'.

"Keep talking. It can be a dark, lonely and scary place when you feel like this, but you are not alone, there is help out there."

Mark



Worried about someone?

You might have noticed that someone you care about doesn't seem themselves, or is struggling to cope with stress, depression or anxiety. You might even be worried they are having thoughts of suicide.

If you are worried about someone then reach out.

You can send them a message, pop in for a chat, invite them out for a drink, or pick up the phone. Feeling like someone cares can really make a lot of difference. And the conversation you start might even be a lifesaver.



Here are some top tips when starting a conversation:

- **Give them your full attention.** Doing something side by side can make it easier to start a conversation, but if you are too focused on a task, they will get the message that you are not really interested in what they are saying.
- **Ask them open questions**, that need more than a yes or no answer, like 'how are you?' or 'how long have you felt like this?' rather than closed questions like 'you're alright, aren't you?' Are there any events or deadlines coming up that might be adding extra pressure?
- **Listen to their answers**, and don't be afraid of silence. Give them time to answer, think, and answer some more.
- **Show that you are listening** with how you are sitting or standing.
- **Don't try to fix their problems.** But you **could** ask if they want help to work out a solution or plan, or ask, 'what can I do to help?'

“We are a community that learns to get on with it and pull ourselves together. That's what I tried to do, but I felt angry, sometimes I just didn't understand why.”

If they are having thoughts of suicide:

- Try not to panic, take a deep breath.
- Thoughts of suicide don't always lead to action, and with help and support their thoughts will pass.
- Ask them if they have made a plan of how, where or when they would end their life. It's OK to ask this and will help you know how urgently you need to act.
- Reassure them that there is help for them, whether it's financial or farming help, or help for them.
- Most importantly, be there for them. Keep encouraging them to get help. Keep the conversation going. Keep checking in. Knowing someone cares can make all the difference.

What to do if someone is having thoughts of suicide

Thinking about suicide

- Encourage them to see their GP.
- Encourage them to make a safety plan.
- Encourage trying something to lift their mood.
- Put helpline numbers and SHOUT's text line in their phone.
- Keep checking in with them and don't be afraid to ask about thoughts of suicide.

They have made a plan of how, when or where they are going to end their life

- Encourage them to make an emergency appointment with their GP, and offer to go with them.
- If the GP practice is closed contact NHS 111, Option 2, and tell them to explain what's happening to them, including their thoughts of suicide. NHS 111 can connect them with local mental health services.
- Encourage them to make a safety plan, and help them do it if you feel you can.
- Put helpline numbers and SHOUT's text line in their phone.
- Keep checking in with them until they are connected with other support.

In an emergency

- If they are afraid they can't keep themselves safe then sit with them while they call NHS 111, Option 2, or go with them to A&E.
- If they have already made an attempt call 999, or take them immediately to A&E.
- If they have plans in place to end their life, and they have gone missing, call 999 immediately. Explain your concerns.



Help and support

Farming Organisations

Farming Community Network: www.fcn.org.uk

03000 111 999 or 01788 510866 help@fcn.org.uk

A charity and voluntary organisation that provides practical and pastoral support to farmers and farming families through difficult times. If you need support, with anything – including if you are behind with your paperwork, an FCN volunteer will come and visit you.

YANA: www.yanahelp.org

0300 323 0400 (10-1pm Monday-Friday) helpline@yanahelp.org

YANA is there to help anyone who is feeling low, involved with agriculture or rural business, or if you are worried about a member of your family, colleague or friend.

The Farmer Network Ltd: www.thefarmernetwork.co.uk

01768 868615 / info@thefarmernetwork.co.uk

The Farmer Network is an independent, not for profit membership organisation providing help and support to farmers, their families and businesses across Cumbria / Yorkshire Dales, whatever the challenge.

Field Nurse www.fieldnurse.co.uk

admin@fieldnurse.co.uk

Field Nurse employs registered nurses to attend auction marts to offer free physical and mental health advice as well as blood pressure checks.

Financial Support

The Addington Fund: www.addingtonfund.org.uk

01926 620135 enquiries@addingtonfund.org.uk

The Addington Fund has five areas: disaster relief on farms when animal welfare is at risk, retirement homes for farmers, affordable rural homes for young agriculturists, essential goods for farm workers and a young entrant's scheme to bring first generation farmers into the industry.

Forage Aid: www.forageaid.org.uk

07967 219991 forageaid@gmail.com

Sources forage and bedding from donations and pledges from within the farming community, then distributes it to farmers after suffering the effects of extreme weather or an Act of God.

RABI: www.rabi.org.uk

0800 188 4444, open 24/7 or email: help@rabi.org.uk

RABI provides financial support, practical care and guidance to farmers, farmworkers and their dependents. Every application is treated on its own merits and handled with compassion and discretion. Their mission is that no member of the farming community should ever face adversity alone. They also arrange counselling, see below.

NFU: www.nfuonline.com

0370 845 8458

NFU is a membership organisation that offers support to farmers on a range of topics such as land, employment, legal issues, agriculture, planning, environment, company, transport, health and safety and rates.

Free Talking Therapy

RABI

Free counselling arranged directly with RABI. Call their 24/7 helpline 0800 188 4444 or email: counselling@rabi.org.uk.

Kooth www.kooth.com/rabi

Kooth offers free text-based counselling online, for those under 18.

Qwell www.qwell.io/rabi

Qwell offers free text-based counselling online, for those over 18.

Shout: text SHOUT to 85258

Chat with a counsellor via text message.

You can self-refer to the **NHS counselling** service too. More information here:



North Cumbria



South Cumbria

24/7 support

SHOUT Text SHOUT to 85258

Samaritans 116 123

Papyrus (for Under 35's) 0800 068 4141

Silverline (for over 55's) 0800 4 70 80 90

NHS 111 (Option 2) for anyone in crisis

Online Support Forums

You may need to make an account to join the forum, but it's quick and easy to do.

Side by Side sidebyside.mind.org.uk

Mind's online community

SANE www.sane.org.uk/how-we-help/sane-community

SANE's online forum



My safety plan

Making my situation safer

- **Suicide Plans:** Do you have a plan for ending your life? Could you make it harder to access items you need, for example by removing them from your home?
- **Alcohol/Drugs:** These can worsen your emotional state and increase impulsive behaviour.
- **Environment:** Are there people, places, or times that affect you negatively? Does your online or social media use help, harm, or support you?

- **Past History:** Have you previously made a suicide attempt? What have you learned from past attempts, and how could this help keep you safer?

Find out more about safety plans at www.every-life-matters.org.uk or scan the QR code



My warning signs

- What feelings or thoughts, especially of hopelessness or feeling trapped, come before thoughts of suicide?
- Are these thoughts increasing in intensity or frequency?
- Have you noticed changes in behaviour, such as drinking more, isolating, increased self-harm, recklessness, or other unhelpful coping habits?
- Could people close to you recognise these signs and help you notice them?
- Do you know what triggers these feelings—such as certain events, times of year (like anniversaries or winter), relationship issues, or life events that leave you feeling out of control or helpless?

Lifting my mood

The first step in managing emerging thoughts of suicide is knowing how to lift your mood. Think about what works for you, be realistic, and remember different things help at different times. Some people are good distractions even if you wouldn't talk to them about your feelings—include them in this part of your plan. Also be aware of people or places that worsen your mood or that you need to avoid.

- Creative: draw, colour, make a playlist, bake a cake
- Physical: go for a walk or run, hit the gym, go for a ride
- Productive: make lists, declutter, garden, write yourself a letter
- Relaxing: meditate, have a bath, listen to music, spend time with a pet, game, watch a favourite movie
- People & places: meet a friend, play sports, visit a museum, or go to a faith centre

Writing your Safety Plan

Many people will have thoughts of suicide – and for the vast majority of people these thoughts will pass. A safety plan helps keep you safe during a crisis by outlining practical steps you can take. It can help you find hope when all feels lost, even if it's just a small glimmer.

- Make your safety plan before you reach crisis point.
- Ask someone to help you write your plan.
- Keep your plan with you, on this form or your phone.
- If you list someone as support in this plan, tell them and, if possible, share a copy with them.

My distractions

If your thoughts of suicide are getting stronger—and you can't lift your mood or talking hasn't helped—it's important to take further steps to keep yourself safe.

Studies suggest these thoughts are often strongest for 15–30 minutes. Focus on getting through this time minute by minute. Stay safe for now and don't act on the urges. This is where your safety plan matters. Use distractions and activities to help you. Find what works for you, such as:

- breathing exercises
- physical actions such as hard exercise, flicking rubber bands on your skin or a cold shower
- positive affirmations
- games on your phone
- your hope box



You may be overwhelmed, but it is so important to remember these feelings will pass.

My reasons for living

It's important to remember that alongside reasons for dying, there are also reasons for living. Include these in your plan as reminders to stay alive—written notes, photos, or meaningful objects.

These might be people or animals, commitments, future plans, or hope that things can change. Some people create hope boxes, virtual or physical, filled with reminders of what matters to them and items that soothe or distract.

My informal support

If you're struggling to lift your mood and thoughts of suicide remain or increase, contact safe, trusted people or organisations you feel comfortable talking to—including about these thoughts. List at least three in your safety plan, such as friends or family, a support worker, a helpline, or online forums. And at least one you can access at night.



Get helpline numbers like Shout and Samaritans in your mobile.

My professional support

Are you connected to mental health services or a care coordinator, and do you know how to contact them in a crisis? Do you have a supportive GP? Keep all their contact numbers in your safety plan and on your phone.

In a crisis, you can also call NHS 111, option 2, to be connected with local mental health services.

My reasons for living

My informal support



Every Life Matters
support directory

Samaritans

24 hour | 365 days a year
Call 116 123

Shout

24 hour Crisis Text Service
Text "SHOUT" to 85258

Papyrus HOPELINE

Young people's 24/7 Helpline
Call 0800 58 58 58

Making my situation safer

My warning signs

My distractions

Lifting my mood

Who will I share my safety plan with?

My professional support

In an emergency

CALL 999 now if you've made a suicide attempt. Explain what is happening. You can stay on the phone until the ambulance arrives.

If you are struggling to stay safe, or your thoughts of suicide are becoming too overwhelming

CALL NHS 111, OPTION 2.

Every life matters



www.every-life-matters.org.uk

Suicide Safer Communities, Training and
Suicide Bereavement Support in Cumbria
Charity No. 1180815

Supported by:



the
Roselands
trust