

Mind your mental health this winter



The festive season can be a joyous time for many. But for others, the long winter months, and the burden of money worries after over-spending at Christmas or loneliness at New Year can be too much to bear. Not to mention the added stress that COVID is contributing this year.

'Winter blues' can have a considerable impact on employee wellbeing and mental health. There are increased reports of depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse during winter months and sadly more suicide cases.

Here we look at how to spot the signs of suicidal tendencies and how to get help.



Suicide alert



KEY FACT: According to the Samaritans, over 1 in 10 people reported experiencing suicidal thoughts or thoughts of hurting themselves during the first week of lockdown

COVID-19 is having a detrimental effect on the economy and in times of recession, suicide rates inevitably rise. This is further exacerbated by the isolation which may be forced upon many over Christmas and the winter months either due to illness or lockdown restrictions.

Recognising suicidal behaviour

Suicidal feelings can affect anyone, of any age, gender or background, at any time.

Although it can be the consequence of treatable mental disorders, it can also follow a life-changing event such as bereavement, bullying, money worries, divorce or retirement and even a reaction to anti-depressants. Nobody is immune from suicidal thoughts - that's why it is so important to spot the warning signs in others or yourself:

- Excessive sadness, mood swings, and unexpected rage
- Feeling a deep sense of hopelessness about the future
- Sleep problems
- Suddenly becoming calm after a period of depression can be a sign that the person has made a decision to end their life
- Choosing to be alone and avoiding friends or social activities
- A change in behaviour, such as speaking or moving with unusual speed or slowness and becoming less concerned about personal appearance
- Potentially dangerous behaviour, such as reckless driving, increased use of drugs or alcohol might indicate that the person no longer values his or her life

- Many people considering suicide will give someone a subtle warning sign
- Putting personal business in order such as unprompted visits to friends and family, giving away possessions, sorting finances, making a will and cleaning their home
- Previous suicide attempts



Whatever you're going through, there's help 24/7

- A GP can refer you for talking therapies with a counsellor or a psychotherapist, prescribe medication such as antipsychotics and mood stabilisers or refer you to specialist services, such as a community mental health team (CMHT)
- Helplines and listening services such as the Samaritans offer confidential support night and day, 365 days a year. Call **116 123**
- Online peer support, including:
 - **Togetherall** - offers support from trained professionals as well as peer support from other people experiencing mental health problems
 - **Side by Side** - Mind's supportive online community
- Crisis resolution and home treatment (CRHT) teams can support you if you have a mental health crisis outside of hospital
- Crisis houses offer intensive, short-term support to help you manage a mental health crisis in a residential setting
- Local support services offer day services, drop-in sessions or counselling or issue-specific support



Useful resources:

- <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/>
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community/
- www.samaritans.org/



Brighter days ahead

Here are some practical tips and general advice to help ward off the winter blues:

GET SOME EXERCISE: Even a brisk 10-minute walk can have a positive effect on mood. Physical activity plays a vital role in treating depression and anxiety.

EAT WELL: Improving your diet may give you more energy, clarity and positivity.

SLEEP TIME: Switch off electronic devices an hour before bedtime and aim for 8 hours sleep a night.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: Reap the free rewards of fresh air and nature - walk the dog, do gardening, go for a jog or stroll during your lunch hour, ditch the car and take a bike instead... all great ways of fighting off the mood-dampening dark mornings and evenings.

AVOID EXCESSIVE DRINKING: It may seem like a quick fix but the answer is never at the bottom of the bottle and a hangover will make things seem worse.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS: Combat loneliness by joining an online evening class as a way of widening your social circle.

BE KIND: A brilliant mood enhancer for you and the recipient, whether it's baking a cake for an elderly neighbour or making that long overdue phone call. Everyone wins with kindness.

BE MINDFUL: Try yoga or meditation or even just living in the moment can help lift spirits and pause the stresses of a busy life.



The final word of support

Whether you or someone you know is suffering from anxiety or loneliness, SAD or suicidal thoughts, remember there is always someone who can help. Always.

If life ever feels overwhelming, never suffer in silence. Speak to your GP or friends and family. They, and you, will always be glad you did.

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