

Being a Mental Health First Aider

Your guide to the role

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MHFA England

Welcome

Congratulations on becoming a Mental Health First Aider.

You are now part of a community of hundreds of thousands of people in England and 4 million people worldwide trained to support themselves and each other.

Together, we strive to achieve our vision of improving the mental health of the nation, and create a society where everyone's mental health matters.

This document is for Mental Health First Aiders and outlines what to expect from this role, what support you will need from your employer if you are a Mental Health First Aider for your workplace, and how MHFA England can support you.

Thank you for becoming part of our community.



Simon Blake OBE
Chief Executive
MHFA England

Using the five-step MHFA action plan, you now have the skills to:



Approach the person, assess and assist with any crisis

Listen and communicate non-judgementally

Give support and information

Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help

Encourage other supports

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Mental Health First Aiders

Now that you are a **Mental Health First Aider**, you can:

- Understand the important factors affecting mental ill health
- Identify the signs and symptoms for a range of mental health conditions
- Use ALGEE to provide Mental Health First Aid to someone experiencing a mental health issue or crisis
- Listen non-judgementally and hold supportive conversations using the Mental Health First Aid action plan
- Signpost people to professional help, recognising that your role as a Mental Health First Aider does not replace the need for ongoing support

Being a Mental Health First Aider is a voluntary role. If you feel at any time it is affecting your own wellbeing, or you are not in the right place to support others, please consider stepping down from the role. Your own mental health is always the priority.

MHFA England courses do not teach people to be therapists or counsellors and do not teach people how to diagnose mental health conditions or provide ongoing support. Instead, your role is to act as a point of contact and reassurance for a person who may be experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. Maintaining appropriate boundaries is a key part of successfully providing Mental Health First Aid and keeping yourself safe and well.

“Sarah, one of our Mental Health First Aiders, noticed I wasn’t how I usually was. I was really struggling and I didn’t know who else to go to. To sit there and let me speak about how I feel and what’s happened, it made me feel reassured that I wasn’t just an employee, but she took my personal and mental health into consideration.

Together we discussed the next best steps to take: we phoned the GP together and Sarah personally took me to my appointment that very same day. She came in with me so they could discuss what would be the best thing for me at work, as well as what steps my doctor wanted to take.

I ended up taking three weeks off work and then began a phased return with the help of Sarah. I also had private counselling through the company’s employee benefits scheme, and cognitive behavioural therapy through my GP.”

Rachael, Dermalogica

Your responsibilities

Mental Health First Aiders can have a profound and positive impact on their communities. Carrying out your role responsibly involves the following:

- ✓ Keeping yourself safe and well, and only performing the role at times that are appropriate for your own wellbeing. For more information refer to your MHFA England course manual
- ✓ Communicating any concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of anyone in your workplace, for example to an appropriate manager
- ✓ Following your workplace's policies and procedures on how MHFA is implemented in the workplace
- ✓ Upholding your role as a Mental Health First Aider alongside your other responsibilities
- ✓ Establishing appropriate boundaries between yourself and colleagues you may be supporting
- ✓ Refreshing your skills every three years on an MHFA Refresher course

“The MHFA training also made me realise that I need to look after my own mental health more and keep an eye on how I’m feeling, as well as supporting others.”

**Mick, Mental Health First Aider,
Royal Mail**

Supporting people remotely

As more organisations move to remote working, human connection has never been more important. Remote working can increase feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are risk factors for mental ill health. Fortunately, the principles of Mental Health First Aid are the same whether you are supporting someone face to face or from a distance. However, the way you apply these principles might be different.

A Getting to know remote workers when they are well makes you more able to spot when they are struggling. Consider how online workers approach you. Are you easy to get in touch with digitally? Think about how your colleagues know who their Mental Health First Aider is. Lanyards or posters work well in person but won't tell remote workers who they can go to for support.

L When listening to an online worker, much of their non-verbal communication – facial expressions, posture, body language – can be lost. Using video calling is best wherever possible.

G Giving support in a face-to-face setting might mean speaking to a person's line manager with them or supporting them to contact their EAP. Where possible, it is important to offer remote workers the same support you would give any other colleague.

E When encouraging professional help, make sure you work with the person to discover what professional support might be available to them locally. The support available to an online worker might differ as their place of work is different.

E Talk to the remote worker to find out what other supports are available to them. Think about sharing **some guidance about how to support their mental health when working from home.**

Engaging with your employer

Being a Mental Health First Aider makes you an important part of an organisation's health and wellbeing strategy. But promoting positive mental health is not just down to you. To perform your role effectively and safely at work, MHFA England training should be one part of a whole organisation approach. You need the full support of your employer, which should include an effective strategy, policies and procedures, and clear communication of your role and how you will be supported.

✔ Discuss policies

Discuss with your employer what organisational policies and procedures you should follow and refer to in your role as a Mental Health First Aider. Ask your employer what the process will be if you need to step down from the role for any reason.

If you are advising a manager, or if you're a manager yourself, consult the [Line Managers' Resource](#) for external guidance on dealing with mental health in the workplace.

If your employer has any questions about their legal responsibilities around Mental Health First Aid, we have a [legal FAQ](#) which you can share with them.

✔ Find out about referral pathways

Find out from your employer what the referral pathways are for mental health support and how best to signpost a colleague, either internally or externally. Your workplace may have its own support available for employees, such as an Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Programme.

Your MHFA England course manual also contains details of reputable national charities and services that can be approached for support. If in doubt on where to signpost someone or how to deal with a crisis, refer to the guidance in your manual.

✔ Ask how your role will be communicated

Ask your employer how they will let colleagues know you are a Mental Health First Aider and how to contact you. Organisations use a variety of

ways to let staff know how they can talk to a Mental Health First Aider, and what kinds of thing a Mental Health First Aider can support them with. Some examples include putting up posters around the workplace, putting a list on an intranet hub, or giving out first aider lanyards or badges.

✔ Your role within the whole organisation

Training up Mental Health First Aiders is only one part of an effective approach to fostering a mentally healthy organisation, so it's a good idea to find out how your role fits in. Ask your employer what steps they are taking to adopt a whole organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Engaging with your employer

You may be working as part of a team alongside colleagues who have completed other MHFA England courses, to become MHFA Champions or Mental Health Aware. Find out if your organisation has trained staff in these roles and how you might work together as a team.

Each role is different but plays a part in supporting a mentally healthy organisation.



**MHFA
Champions**

MHFA Champions can:

- Understand why mental health is as important as physical health
- Help build a mentally healthy workplace and understand how Mental Health First Aid fits into the workplace
- Recognise the main symptoms of mental health conditions
- Listen non-judgementally
- Use ALGEE to provide Mental Health First Aid for the most common mental health conditions
- Guide a person towards appropriate professional support
- Consider becoming a Mental Health First Aider



**Mental
Health
Aware**

Mental Health Aware can:

- Understand why mental health is as important as physical health
- Support a mentally healthy workplace
- Recognise some signs of mental health distress
- Start a supportive conversation about mental ill health and listen non-judgementally
- Guide a person towards appropriate professional support
- Go on to become an MHFA Champion or Mental Health First Aider

Engaging with your employer



Useful resources

Download our free digital resources for mental health awareness and tips, which can help to create a culture where it's OK to talk about mental health:

My Whole Self toolkit

Address your Stress toolkit

Take 10 Together toolkit

Every Mind Matters

Visit the **Mental Health at Work gateway** for a hub of information and resources for organisations of all sizes



Support for you

Being a Mental Health First Aider is a rewarding role but it can also be a challenging one. It's important that you communicate with your employer to understand what support is available to you. It would be useful for you to find out:

- Who you should contact if you need support or are concerned about any aspect of your role
- Whether there is a peer support system such as a Mental Health First Aider network where you can meet regularly with others to discuss your role and share ideas
- Whether you will have the opportunity to renew your skills on an MHFA Refresher course after three years

"It's as though the safe space created during the MHFA training has come back with us into the office. We now feel able to be more open with each other about our mental health and to support each other when we are stressed."

Pamela, Mental Health First Aider

Providing Mental Health First Aid from a distance

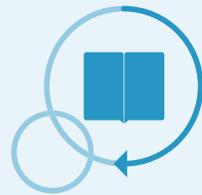
When providing Mental Health First Aid from a distance, the following tips may be useful:

- Get to know remote workers and check in with them regularly
- Show that you are a Mental Health First Aider in your email signature or by sharing a digital poster so remote workers know who you are
- Apply the same principles to video calls as you would to conversations in person – set time aside, minimise distractions, and give the person your full focus
- Make it clear that you are there to support the person remotely in any action they want to take
- Know how the person can contact HR, their line manager, or their EAP remotely
- Offer some self-care tips that they can do from home – going for a walk, meditating, and eating well can be done from almost anywhere

“If you think a remote worker may be struggling, act sooner rather than later. The isolation that accompanies lone working can aggravate a period of low mood or stress that might be easily sorted out if dealt with promptly.”

Jane Cattermole,
The Mainly Mental Health
Company Limited

How MHFA England supports you



MHFA Refresher

Mental Health First Aiders and MHFA Champions are encouraged to take an MHFA Refresher course every three years. Just like physical first aid, regularly updating skills and knowledge empowers people to perform the role confidently and safely.

Speak with your employer about attending an MHFA Refresher course and how regularly they would like you to update your skills.

MHFA Refresher enables you to:

- Keep awareness of mental health supports current
- Update knowledge of mental health and what influences it
- Practice applying the Mental Health First Aid action plan

Keep in touch with MHFA England

You may find it helpful to keep up to date with the latest mental health news and campaigns. Find out how to keep in touch with us below.



Follow us on social media [@MHFAEngland](https://twitter.com/MHFAEngland) for self-care tips and news from the MHFA England community



Sign up to our newsletter for updates on the latest news, events, and resources



Explore our website mhfaengland.org for free **downloadable toolkits** for supporting mental health in your workplace or community



Visit our **community blog** where Mental Health First Aiders across the country share their stories