

# A Guide to Being There: The MHFAider's Handbook



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# The Role of a Mental Health First Aider

As a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA), you'll strive to achieve our vision of improving the mental health of our team and help to create a culture where everyone's mental health matters.

Becoming a MHFA will give you the skills and knowledge to be able to proactively approach people who you are concerned about and know how to best provide initial support. You'll also learn how to support someone who approaches you or is in crisis. It is not about learning to be a counsellor, therapist or how to give advice to colleagues.

**After attending the accredited Mental Health First Aid England training delivered by Stress Matters, you'll be able to:**

- ▶ Understand the important factors affecting mental ill health.
- ▶ Identify the signs and symptoms for a range of mental health conditions.
- ▶ 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.

This role best suits individuals who have an interest in wellbeing and mental health, although no previous experience is necessary. To become an effective MHFA, you'll need to be approachable, empathetic, a good listener and be great at communicating with a wide variety of people. You'll need to feel confident about being a mental health champion in the workplace and working with your fellow MHFAs on a regular basis to raise awareness of the topic and what support is available to colleagues.



## How to loop the line manager into a conversation

As a MHFAider, you may well find yourself in a situation where you are supporting a co-worker who has yet to share how they're feeling with their line manager. There can be many reasons for this but in some situations, it is of benefit to the individual for the line manager to be aware so they can offer greater support.

### Key Phrases to Use:

- "How can I support you in communicating this?"
- "What do you need your manager to understand?"
- "Would it be helpful to practice what you want to say?"
- "Let's focus on what you need right now."
- "You don't have to go through this alone."
- "Your well being is important."

## Approach 1: Low-Level Problem (e.g. increased stress, mild anxiety, feeling overwhelmed)

### Assist in framing the conversation:

"We can work together to create a brief, clear way to explain how you're feeling and what you need. For example, 'I've been experiencing increased stress lately, and I'd like to discuss some adjustments to my workload to help me manage.'"

### Help them clarify their needs:

"What specific support do you think would be most helpful from your manager right now? Do you need adjustments to your workload, time off, or just a listening ear?"

### Suggest focusing on solutions, not just problems:

"Let's think about some practical steps you can suggest to your manager. For instance, 'Could we prioritise tasks or adjust deadlines?'"

### Encourage proactive communication:

"It's often helpful to address these issues early on. Would you like to schedule a brief meeting with your manager to talk about this?"

### Suggest focusing on work impacts:

"It can be useful to explain how the stress is impacting your work, for example, 'I am finding it hard to concentrate on complex tasks at the moment'."



## Approach 2: Crisis Level (e.g. severe anxiety, panic attacks, thoughts of self-harm, significant emotional distress)



### Urgent support:

If you have concerns about immediate safety, help them contact emergency services or a crisis hotline.



### Focus on getting them to a safe space:

"After you have spoken to your manager, let's get you to a safe and calm place, so you can begin to recover, and get the correct support."

### Suggest a brief, direct message:

"We can draft a short, clear message like, 'I'm experiencing a mental health crisis and need immediate time off. I'll need to discuss this further with HR or occupational health.'"

### Advocate for their needs:

"It's important that your manager understands the seriousness of the situation. We can help you communicate that you need immediate time off and access to professional help."

### Encourage them to disclose only what they feel comfortable with:

"You don't have to share every detail with your manager right now. Let's focus on communicating that you need urgent support."

### Offer to accompany them (if they wish):

"Would you like me to come with you when you speak to your manager, or would you prefer I communicate on your behalf with your permission?"



### Ensure they have access to crisis resources:

Remember the E of ALGEE, Encouraging appropriate professional support. "Do you have the contact information for a crisis or occupational health are involved in the process, as they are trained to deal with these situations."

**Remember, your role as a MHFAider is to support and guide, not to take over.**

# Supporting others through grief

As a Mental Health First Aider, we know that you will want to support your colleagues and community when they are experiencing a mix of emotions.

Remember your ALGEE skills and hopefully the below information will help. If you would like any further assistance or guidance, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

## How to help when others are grieving

### Be present.

Nothing beats simply just being there and making that person aware that you are there.

### Offer support & encouragement. Ask:

“Tell me how you are feeling?” or “What do you need from me in this moment?” are the best way to navigate the best way to support someone.

The support you give someone can vary. Sometimes they just want someone who will listen, other times they may need to laugh or even a distraction.

Grief is subjective and everyone experiences it differently.

## Grief strategies

### Give yourself permission to grieve.

The journey is not linear—there will be lots of ups and downs. Some days might involve tears, others may feel numb.

### Be proactive during the grieving process.

Encourage them to reach out to you and to other support systems. Lean on others. Talk openly with people they trust.

### Make a plan.

Mourning takes time. It often involves detaching emotionally from what was lost to make space for something new. Goal setting and planning are key.

## 6 Stages of Grief

### Denial



### Anger



### Depression



### Bargaining



### Acceptance



# I'm an MHFAider, what are my boundaries?

As a Mental Health First Aider, we are looking to you to offer those in your community support but by far, your most important role is to look after yourself. Developing boundaries and protecting your own mental health need to always be at the forefront of your mind.

We aren't able to tell you what your boundaries are, they are your boundaries and therefore it is for you to decide what you are comfortable with. Sometimes this can be a bit of a trial and error and might be something you can't determine until you are in a conversation that you hadn't expected. Refer back to your Window on the World activity from your training and this may give you an indication as to where your boundaries might be.

However one boundary that we do ask you all to maintain is that of not venturing into providing medical diagnosis or medical advice. Your role as an MHFAider involves listening non-judgementally and sign-posting, not undertaking the role of a medical professional that you are not trained for.

If in your capacity as an MHFAider, you are feeling uncomfortable and that it is impacting your own mental health in a negative way, then please review the situation you find yourself in and protect your mental health.

**Remember that whatever scenario you find yourself in, if you need to set your boundaries, there are four steps you can follow:**

- Thank the individual for coming to you
- Communicate the boundary you need to put in place
- Explore other options with the individual so they get the support they need
- Consider what you need to support your well-being - reach out to the Stress Matters team, a fellow MHFAider or prioritise some self-care time.



**If it is a temporary situation and you would be comfortable to continue the conversation but just not now:**

It is fine to share that with the individual and ask to re-arrange for a time and location that would be more appropriate.

**You are struggling to refrain from judging the individual and it is impacting your ability to listen fully:**

If possible, share with the individual that there is another MHFAider that would be able to support them more effectively and ask if they would mind speaking to them instead.

**The individual is relying heavily on your support:**

It's great when you build a connection with someone and they trust you but it's important to maintain boundaries to ensure that the individual can seek out the professional support and support from a wider network of people so the responsibility does not fall on only your shoulders.

# I'm an MHFAider, who do I talk to for support?

As an MHFAider, it's natural to feel fatigued or even emotionally affected after a support session. Providing mental health first aid requires setting aside personal beliefs and biases, which can sometimes be challenging. Remember, your well-being needs to be your top priority. Take care of yourself and understand your limits. Whilst many individuals might come to you for support, you also have a network you can reach out to for support too.



The MHFAider Support App also provides access to Shout's mental health text support so if you are concerned for your own mental health, you are encouraged to take advantage of this service. The 24/7 service offers advice and reassurance on mental health conversations and support for their own well-being.



The MHFAider Support App provides a space for reflective notes. You have access to this app as part of your training qualification so we encourage you to use it and familiarise yourself with using this after every MHFAider conversation as we will ask you to share the data confidentially as part of your MHFA Support Programme.



You are also able to reach out to the Stress Matters team for support. The whole team are MHFA trained and are happy to clarify any elements of the training or signposting options if needed. This can be done in the MHFA Quarterly meetings or through your dedicated Stress Matters team email address.



Your fellow MHFAiders are all trained to support, exactly like you and they are likely to have high empathy for the dual role you are in. We would encourage MHFAiders to communicate with other MHFAiders, whether that's on an informal basis or through the quarterly meetings held as part of your MHFA Support Programme.



## Always prioritise your mental health.

You can't pour from an empty cup—when you take care of yourself, you're better equipped to support others.