



**Let's Talk Getting Trauma and PTSD:
A Self Help Guide**

Written by James Thomas

Let's Talk Getting Trauma and PTSD – A Self Help Guide

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Let's Talk is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) Service.

Let's Talk is a free service from the NHS.

We offer short-term talking therapies to people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Our Self Help guides provide an introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy at Step 1 of our programme of support.

The authors have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information in this workbook. However, it is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. Evidence suggests that a self-help material is most effective when you are supported by an appropriately qualified clinician. We strongly advise that when using this workbook you stay in touch with your named clinician. If for any reason you are unable to reach them and you are feeling concerned about your mental health we recommend you go to see your doctor. Other agencies that can help you are listed in the back of this workbook.

For further information please contact:

Let's Talk

2gether NHS Foundation Trust

Rikenel, Montpellier, Gloucester, GL1 1LY

Website: www.talk2gether.nhs.uk

Let's Talk PTSD

**Managing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) using
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy**

Introduction

The aim of this self-help guide is to tell you a little about trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and to help you identify whether you may be experiencing symptoms of trauma. It also includes a number of helpful steps you may wish to take to manage your symptoms and improve your wellbeing using cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

Anybody can experience trauma and levels of severity can vary considerably. You may find that after completing this self-help guide, you wish to develop further strategies for improvement and increase your understanding. To do this you can contact Let's Talk, Gloucestershire's Free NHS IAPT Service. We tell you more about this at the end of the leaflet.

If you feel in need of immediate support please contact your GP.

What is trauma?

You may suffer from trauma after experiencing an out of the ordinary or extremely distressing event, such as an accident, being attacked or a natural disaster. You may have thought you or others could have died or been seriously injured and felt powerless to prevent what happened.

Because traumatic events are so unexpected and distressing, it is normal to have a strong emotional reaction. These reactions may cause you to experience: unpleasant thoughts or images, feelings, and bodily sensations. If you continue to have symptoms for more than one month, you may be experiencing PTSD.

Do I have PTSD?

Your reactions to trauma are unique, but there is a range of symptoms that people might experience:

Flashbacks, feeling like it is happening again or 're-living' the experience, having vivid memories of the event, you cannot stop thinking about it, e.g. 'I thought I was going to die', 'I didn't think I was going to make it', 'I should have done something about it/to stop it', 'it was my fault'.

It is normal to experience unpleasant physical sensations, which interfere with daily life, including feeling hot, breathless, and shaky and feeling keyed-up, causing hypervigilance (looking for danger), being easily startled and feeling panicky. When not experiencing these physical sensations you may feel, tired, flat and have difficulty concentrating or motivating yourself and feel shame, guilt or helplessness. You may have trouble falling or staying asleep, suffer upsetting dreams or nightmares and wake up sweating or panicking. All of this may lead you to try and block any reminders of the event and withdraw from others.

What causes PTSD to develop?

You may be confused and struggle to make sense of what happened to you or what you saw. Unfortunately, for some people small reminders or triggers (a sound, sight, smell, a certain word or phrase or a news event) may lead to a flashback or re-experiencing of parts of the event. This re-experiencing or reliving can cause distress, putting severe strain on you and those around you.

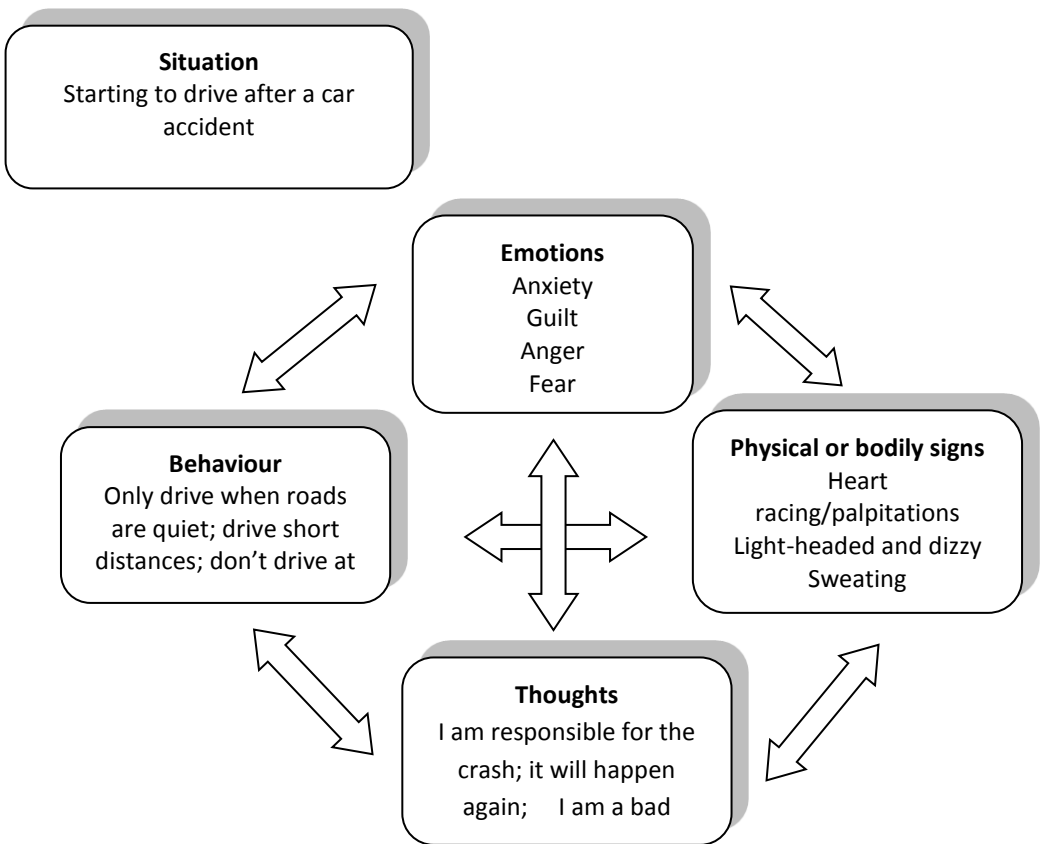
What maintains my PTSD?

A traumatic event can make us doubt our beliefs about the world, others and ourselves. Our sense of the world as a safe place can be severely changed; we may think we are weak and cannot cope in the world; and that there is no hope or point to the future.

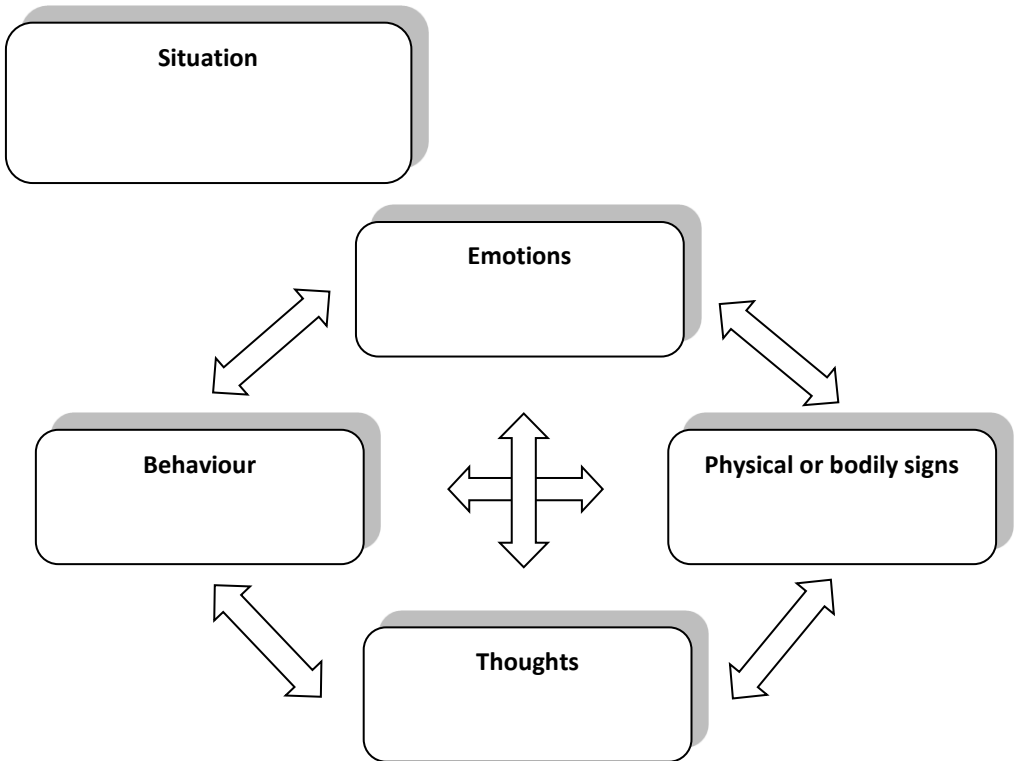
Our behaviours may also change. We may increasingly avoid places, people, activities or even memories and images of the

event. This is because they are either directly related to the incident or remind us of it. We may then withdraw into ourselves, isolate ourselves from others and find ways of coping which can become problems: using too much medication, drinking too much alcohol or using street drugs, etc.

You may find yourself caught in a vicious cycle of unhelpful thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical sensations that lead to PTSD and keep it going.



Has a similar cycle happened to you? Try and fill out yours below.



What steps can I take to overcome PTSD?

You can begin by identifying and then challenging unhelpful thoughts. Our thoughts affect our emotions and make us believe we have no control over them. However, unhelpful thoughts are simply thoughts and you can stop them from making you feel helpless, unable to cope or that the world is a dangerous place. Unhelpful thinking can follow certain patterns: catastrophising, jumping to conclusions, mind reading, and all or nothing thinking.

We can begin to work with unhelpful thoughts by recognising them in certain situations and challenging them by developing balanced alternatives by asking ourselves a series of questions

Situation	Feelings	Unhelpful thoughts	Balanced thought
Driving a car after an accident.	Fear Anger Guilt anxiety	I was responsible for the crash. It will happen again. I am a bad person.	I can't predict the future. I have driven a car many times before the accident. I have more control than I think. It is the anxiety and unhelpful thoughts that are making me afraid.
What happened? Where? When? Who with? How?	What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it?	What went through my mind? What did those thoughts, images, memories mean to me, or say about me or the situation?	<i>What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture? What advice would I give someone else? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?</i>

Your examples:

Situation	Feelings	Unhelpful thoughts	Balanced thought

Trying to make sense of what happened can help you by improving your understanding of what you experienced. You can do this by speaking to others who were there, so that you can build as complete a picture as possible about what happened. The emergency services would be a good starting point. It can help by talking to someone or even writing things down:

Write out your understanding of what happened.
Make a list of people you could talk to.

Managing Flashbacks and Nightmares.

Trying to distract or stop yourself from thinking about the event does not help long-term. Unwanted images or flashbacks, memories or thoughts will come back into your mind, often as bad dreams.

You can begin to work with these flashbacks or nightmares by going over them on a regular basis. Put aside time each day to talk or write out things about the trauma. Spending 10 – 20 minutes each day doing this exercise helps make the flashbacks and nightmares weaken and happen less and less. It is not a good idea to do this exercise just before you go to bed.

Key steps:

1. Write down what you can remember of the flashback or nightmare.
2. Find a time, each day when you can spend 10 -20 minutes thinking, talking, or writing out what happened.
3. Try to write down positive, helpful things, e.g. I have friends and family who have supported me; I am recovering physically from the accident

Reducing tension to help manage difficult emotions

Tension and irritability often occur following trauma. Physical sensations caused by anxiety (over-breathing, feeling hot, heart racing or pounding, headache, dizziness) are also common. There are various ways to reduce these symptoms. First, by noticing the signs of tension, then using various relaxation techniques, e.g. daily techniques, such as reading, exercising, doing something with friends, listening to music or relaxation

CDs. Relaxation needs to be learned and practised, there are several relaxation techniques that can help reduce anxiety and tension.

Controlled breathing

When you become anxious you breathe too much or over-breathe. This can lead to feeling: dizzy, light-headed and fearing that you may pass out; your breathing has become faster and shallower. Practising a controlled breathing exercise can help you overcome these feelings, helping your body and mind to relax.

You can practise the following exercise anytime and anywhere:

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, begin to notice your breathing, try and breathe through your nose 'from' your belly-button, feel your stomach move in and out, rather than your chest or shoulders. Breathe in for 3 seconds (counting 1-2-3), hold for 2 seconds (counting 1-2), then breathe out through your mouth for 3 seconds (counting 1-2-3).

Try to practise for about 10 minutes each time. The more you practise the better you become with this technique. Tension, stress, and physical symptoms usually reduce after a few minutes.

Progressive or deep muscle relaxation

When anxious or stressed we often hold tension in our muscles. Think about where in your body you might be holding this tension, it is often our neck and shoulders. This muscle relaxation exercise can help to reduce physical tension and help you feel calmer. You can work through the muscles in your body, you do not have to relax 'every' muscle, but try to repeat the exercise for the same muscles each time. You will need to practise this exercise every day.

Find a quiet, comfortable place. Sit or lie down and begin by noticing your breathing, let it become slow and comfortable (see the controlled breathing technique to help with this). Try the breathing exercise for a few minutes.

When you are breathing evenly and slowly, tense and hold each muscle group (see below) for a count of five, do not tense it too tightly. Relax those muscles for a count of five, then tense and hold again for five, and then relax again for five. Notice the feeling each time the muscles relax. Then move on to the next muscle group. Make sure you breathe evenly, do not hold your breath when you tense your muscles. Start with:

Toes and feet – squeeze your feet and toes.

Calf muscles – on both legs squeeze your calf muscles

Squeeze or tense your thighs

Tense your bottom

Tense your stomach muscles

Make fists and squeeze your arms at the same time

Shrug or lift your shoulders, lift them towards your ears

Make a frowning expression with your face

Reducing avoidance

The more you avoid things the more you may find it difficult to cope, as certain situations will become more frightening if you keep avoiding them. In fact, we forget what we can cope with. Anxiety will continue to get worse and you may begin to avoid more and more situations, people, and places. This could lead to you developing low mood or depression.

By starting to face situations you find difficult, your confidence will increase. It is very common to experience physical symptoms of anxiety. The fight or flight response, is an inbuilt response to help

you react to danger, e.g. if a car is driving too fast towards you, you run out of the way. Evolution has developed this process over time to help you to react quickly to danger. Unfortunately after a traumatic event this response becomes over sensitive and acts like a false alarm. Using the above techniques you can learn to relax and switch the 'alarm' system off.

The more you can do to 'expose' yourself in a gradual way to anxiety causing situations, the more you learn to stay with the physical symptoms of anxiety, rather than avoid or escape them. This helps you to learn that not all situations are threatening. You can work through real or imagined situations, e.g. in nightmares, by thinking them through.

First, make a list of the things you avoid. Give them a number from 0 – 100 (0 = no anxiety, 100 = the highest amount of anxiety). Then re-arrange the list in order of difficulty. Start with the lowest numbered item on your list, the one with the least anxiety and do it repeatedly until your anxiety comes down. Anxiety may go up at first but it will reduce the longer you stay in the situation. The more times you repeat the activity the more your anxiety will come down; when you are comfortable with an item move on to the next one. Put your list in the table below:

Hierarchy of items	Anxiety rating (0 – 100)

How might PTSD affect my life?

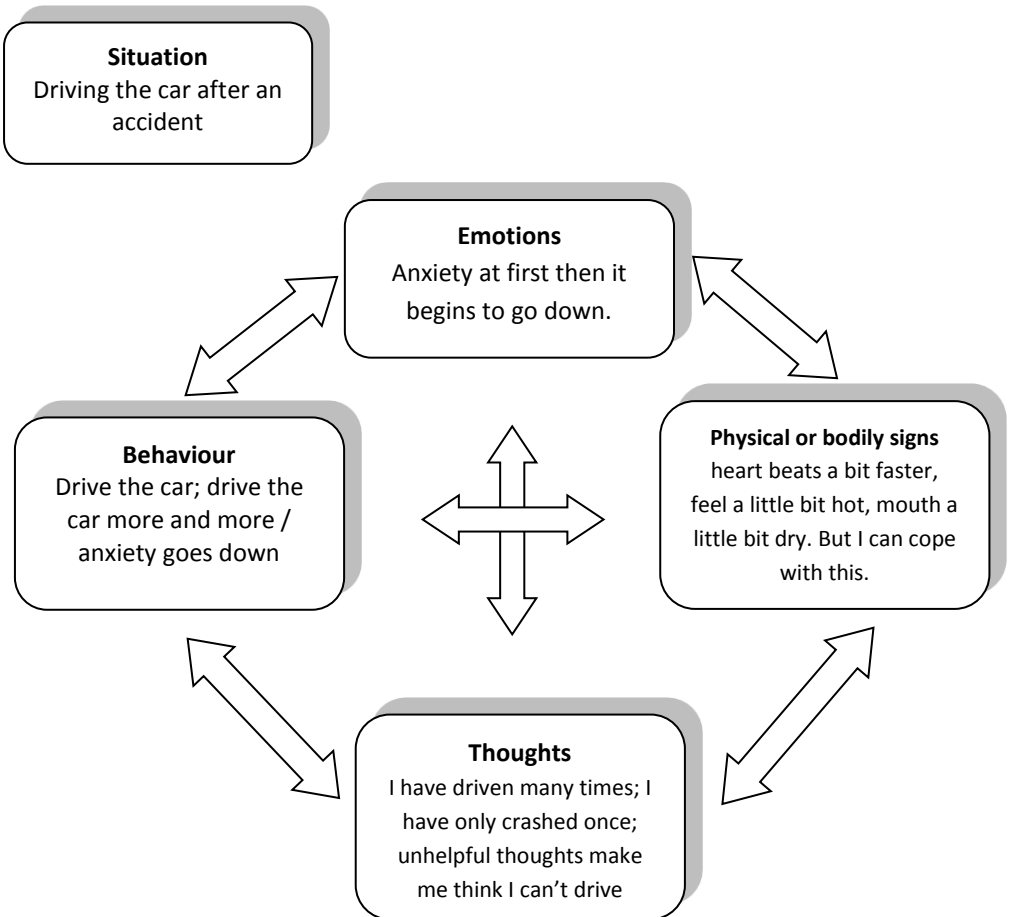
You may need to practise the self- help exercises in this guide for a while before you feel any benefit. If you still find you are suffering from flashbacks, nightmares and avoiding any reminders of the traumatic experience, causing you difficulties in daily life, at work or with relationships, then you may like to access further help from Let's Talk.

Can PTSD be treated?

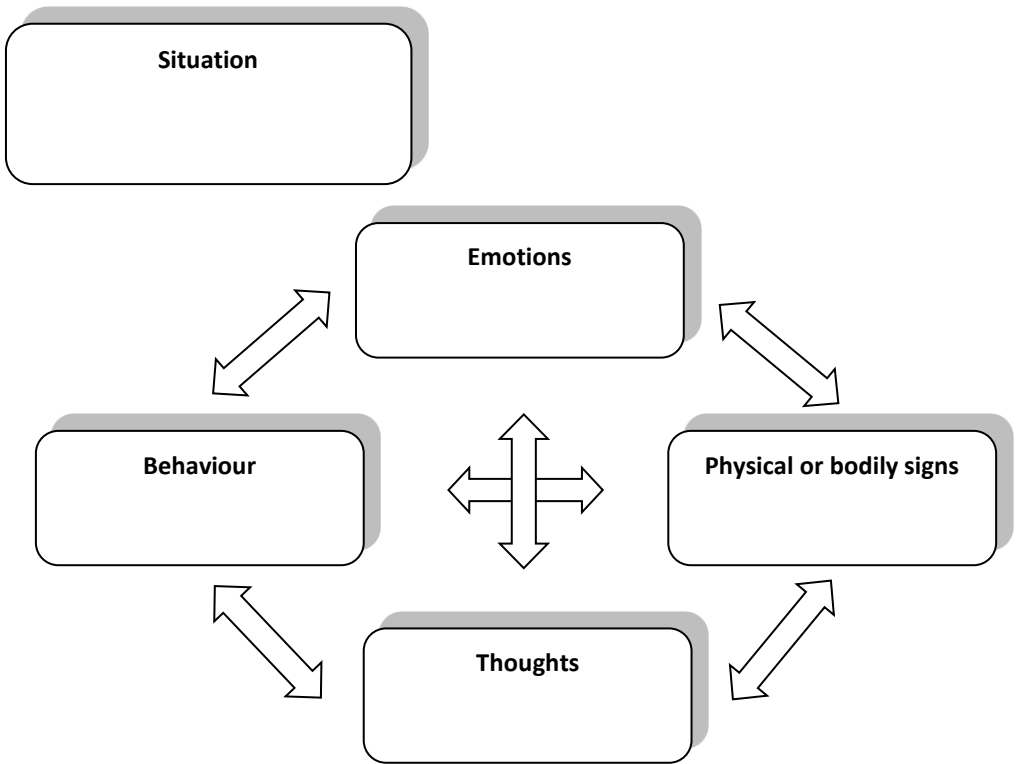
Yes. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) who publish guidelines for treatments in the NHS recommend CBT and Eye Movement Desensitising and Reprocessing (EMDR) for the treatment of PTSD. CBT can help you understand and manage the relationship between avoidant behaviours, flashback, negative images, and thoughts, feelings of guilt and physical sensations. Importantly, 'reliving' parts of the event, often using a CD recording of your memory of the event, in a managed, therapeutic way can actually help you to make sense of difficult thoughts and beliefs, emotions and physical sensations that have become stronger due to the PTSD.

When someone has experienced a traumatic event, the brain appears to 'freeze', which means it cannot process the trauma-memory of that event in the usual way. If the person remembers even a small part of the event they have a very intense experience linked to what they saw, heard, smelt, tasted or felt. Remembering can lead to very intense and distressing feelings they try to stop, avoid or block any further memories. It seems sometimes that these memories can appear just pop into their mind. EMDR or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy is an approach that helps people to unfreeze these memories using techniques that stimulate the different sides of the brain using eye movements, sounds or tapping to process the frozen information. EMDR is available through the Let's Talk service.

At Let's Talk we aim to help you develop more positive ways of behaving, thinking, feeling etc.



Complete your own cycle after trying the exercises above.



EMDR or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing, is a technique that helps the brain make sense of traumatic memoirs.

EMDR involves techniques that use eye movement, sounds or tapping to stimulate the brain in such a way, that frozen memories become unblocked. These distressing memoirs then become less intense and distressing and seem more like 'ordinary memories'.

What further help is available?

You can contact Let's Talk on 0800 073 2200.

Let's Talk is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service. We offer courses and one to one work where we can guide you in developing strategies like the ones discussed here, and we also offer CBT with a qualified therapist. CBT focuses on the 'here and now' and uses specific techniques to help you manage your symptoms. CBT encourages you to work on tasks between sessions to help you achieve your goals.

You can access our website on www.talk2gether.nhs.uk where you will find more information about your difficulties, and also our leaflets and questionnaires that we would like you to complete before you phone us.

Alternatively you can speak to your GP, who can refer you and also give you a copy of the 'Introducing the Let's Talk Service' leaflet, which has our questionnaires on it.

Useful Books on Prescription

Let's Talk can provide you with a book prescription to take to your local library. You can then choose from a range of self-help books to borrow, which provide helpful information and step by step self-help techniques for managing common conditions, including depression and anxiety. These include:

Overcoming Traumatic Stress: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques. Herbert, C and Wetmore, A (1999).

Other Self-help Guides in the Let's Talk Service

Let's Talk Panic
Let's Talk Low Self Esteem
Let's Talk Health Anxiety
Let's Talk Social Anxiety
Let's Talk OCD
Let's Talk PTSD
Let's Talk Bereavement and Loss
Let's Talk Managing Negative Thinking
Let's Talk Managing Negative Behaviours

Useful websites

Let's Talk website: www.talk2gether.nhs.uk

Moodometer:

<http://www.2getherinclusion.nhs.uk/themoodometer.php>

Living Life to the Full website: www.lltff.com

MoodGym: <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome>

Other helpful contacts:

The Samaritans: www.samaritans.org

Call on 116 123; 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

Info line: 0300 123 3393

Mental Health Helplines Partnership: www.mhhp.org.uk

The Royal College of Psychiatrists: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info

Community Health Trainers, Gloucestershire

(Community Health Trainers offer support, information and guidance to people who want to make changes to their lifestyle whatever their faith or culture)

Email: gloshealth.trainers@independencetrust.co.uk

Website: www.gloshealthtrainers.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0845 863 83 23