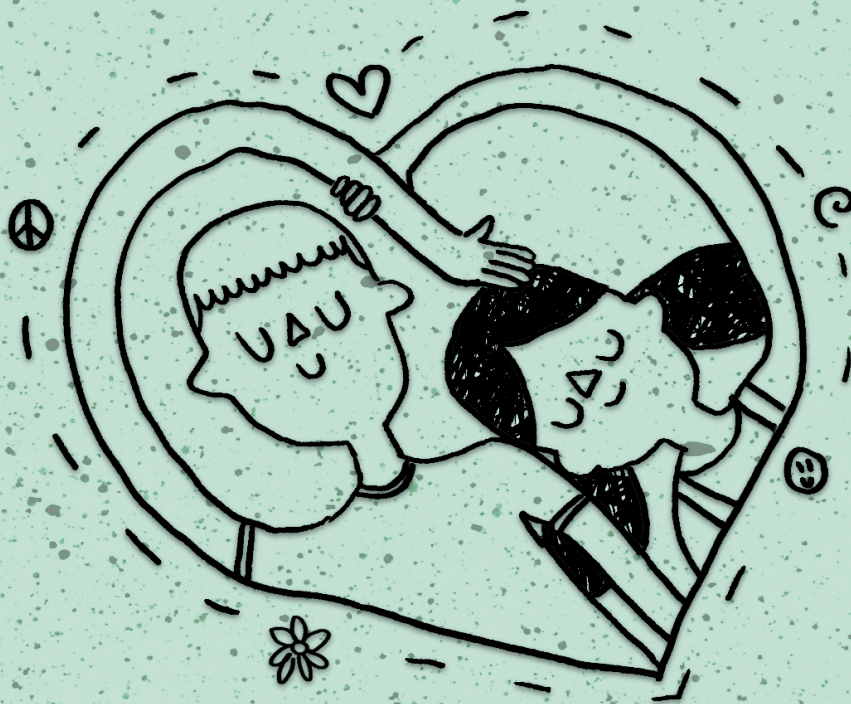


YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME



A Guide To Supporting Yourself & Your Friends

This guide has been created as part of the Rethink Mental Illness Step Up Universities project, which is funded by the City Bridge Trust. The scheme uses students' real-life experiences to try and foster a positive mental health community and help other students with their mental health. This guide has been created by Ciara, Ken, Pamela and Rebecca, with illustrations from Dylan Wilson.

We would also like to say thanks to UCL, Students' Union UCL, UWL, UWL Students' Union, The University of Middlesex, MDX Students' Union, University Arts London Students' Union, SOAS University, SOAS Students' Union and London Metropolitan University. Additionally, we would like to thank all of our student mentors for their input into the creation of this guide.

May Gabriel, Project Manager Step Up Universities
Rianna Fleming, Project Officer Step Up Universities

Creators



Usually, I spend Monday-Friday at my art studio at Central Saint Martins. The studio I'm in fosters collaborative relationships and there's pretty much always someone there to tell you whether your work is good or not. We're a close-knit group, so being without them is a tough. In the making of this zine, we spoke a lot about looking out for friends whilst looking out for yourself. I've shared a few things we got up to regarding this. I hope it helps. The mental health of myself and others is my no.1 priority right now! - Ciara.



Hey guys! My name is Pamela and I am a 4th year BA student at SOAS. I've always liked sticking to a routine but because of this global pandemic, I can't help but feel annoyed and frustrated about my sleep schedule being messed up, the gym having to close down and my final year of uni coming to an abrupt end. Ever since Covid-19 struck, it felt like bad things just kept happening and it affected me negatively that I felt like I was back to square 1 in terms of my mental health. Although now, after a few weeks into lockdown, I am starting to find my new normal and can actually do things I've been meaning to (like restarting The Witcher 3 on my PlayStation after watching the series on Netflix). I enjoyed working on this zine and hopefully the content we have created can help you and comfort you in some way. Stay home and stay safe everyone!



Hi everyone! My name is Ken and I am a Masters student at the Institute of Education, UCL. During the four years that I've been in higher education, I definitely feel that the importance of mental health has gained much presence in universities across the UK. We now see the word 'mental health' everywhere in the university: it's on flyers, posters, events, websites, seminars, etc. etc.... The institution I went to as an undergraduate even renovated a room in the library into a nap room to tackle students' stress and mental health! Thanks to that, I believe many students are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of looking after their own mental health. However, experiencing mental health problems yourself or finding out that people close to you are experiencing such problems are a lot different from awareness or knowledge. For whatever reason you're reading this, I hope the contents will assist you through your journey with your experience associated with mental health.



Hello, my name is Rebecca and I am a part-time Postgraduate Fine Art student. I have always struggled with mental health and neurological differences and I am in the midst of trying to get a diagnosis. Like everyone, my life has suddenly dramatically changed. I hope that the skills and understanding I have learned through my personal struggles come across in my article and is of help to someone in this increasingly stressful and uncertain time.

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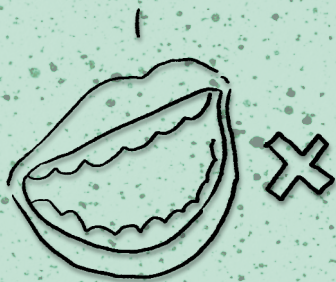
Introduction

Talking about mental health can be extremely difficult, there's a lot of stigma surrounding mental health issues wherever we look – in the media, in our families, maybe in our friendship groups, and within ourselves too. But, just because it's difficult, it doesn't mean that it isn't important – being open and honest about mental health is vital to keeping us all mentally healthy. In this Zine, we explore how to reach out to friends about your own mental health and their mental health, as well as tips you can teach them to help support them. It's important that we're there for our friends, but it's also very important that we look after ourselves too – hopefully this zine can help you find the tools and balance!

Sharing mental health issues with friends; why boundaries are important

Firstly, what are boundaries?

It's important to understand how much you should give and take from friends and family. Time, energy, advice, love, etc. etc. It's hard to know what the right amount is, because, there is no real answer. I think that I'm actually a bit of a leech. I just admire receiving love from friends. Although, I also love my own time and independence and being able to enjoy certain activities alone, which I think naturally brings a bit of a balance. I'm going to think about this from two perspectives, being the listener and being the one seeking help and comfort from friends or family.



1. Being the listener

We've got to be aware of our own capacity and time. We're not all trained therapists. Though it may or may not feel 100% natural to give time and effort to your friends and family, knowing where to stop is very important, for both parties. I had a situation a few years ago when an immediate family member had broken up with their other half. I spent so much time trying to help repair them to the point where I was also feeling mentally drained. At this point, I realised that they had to take more action to want to repair themselves. This was frustrating. I loved this person and wished that I could fix them, but it had to be an independent move on their behalf. Thankfully, they took my advice and got a therapist. But for me, being honest and suggesting this, and withdrawing myself from the situation was definitely not easy. It took another family member's inputting for me to realise that this was even a thing.

Sometimes it's more beneficial for the both of you, if you do not get involved with the mental illnesses and complications of others. I, for sure, do not feel capable of giving credible advice. Knowing where to signpost and researching the internet for credible help sources is an important tool. There are some references on the back page of this Zine if you feel you need to pass them onto someone. Remember that looking after your own wellbeing is the number 1 priority.

...But how do you tell someone close to you that you're not able to help them?

It's difficult. How can I phrase this without sounding like a bad friend? The answer is an honest explanation.

"I don't think that I can identify with what you're going through. I know I've done some research and know who it would be good for you to talk too..."

"I can understand. I'm trying to deal with my own mental health issues currently. I've discovered a great resource/website/technique. You should have a look..."

"Please keep checking in with me, I'm really concerned about you... But I do not feel equipped to solve your mental health issues. I think that you need professional help."

How to set boundaries:

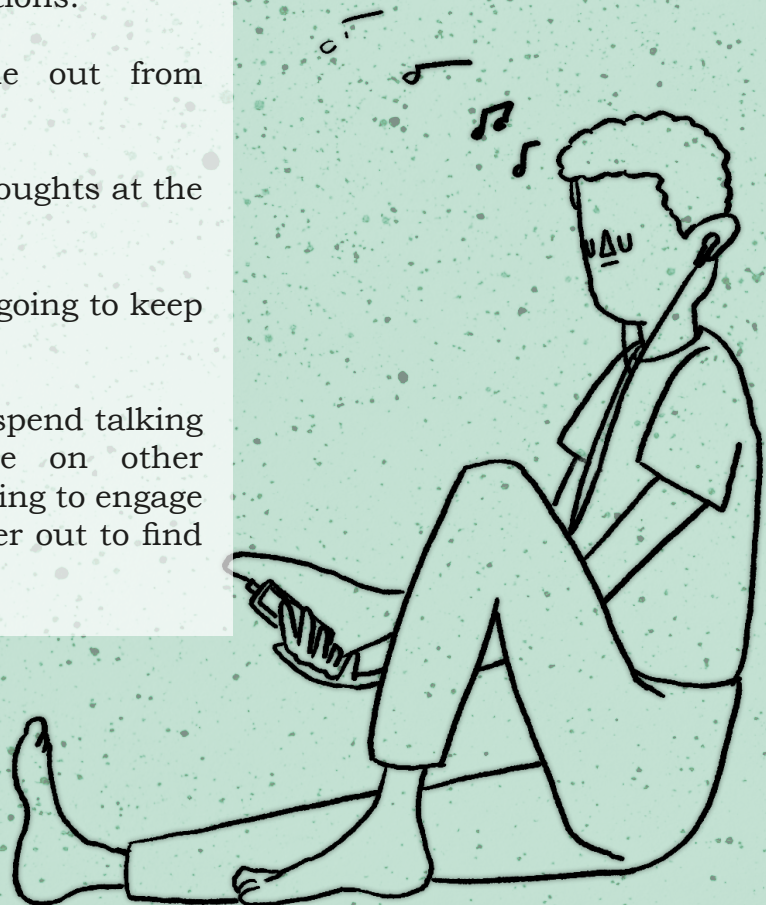
Again, it's difficult. You want your friends to feel like you are always there for them. But if it is consuming too much time, maybe you can suggest some negotiations.

"I need to take some time out from socialising."

"I need to focus on my own thoughts at the minute."

"Can we agree on how we are going to keep our relationship healthy." ...

Agree on time you're going to spend talking about mental health. Agree on other activities/topics that you're going to engage in. Agree on helping each other out to find the right resources.





2. Being the one seeking help and comfort from friends or family.

We can agree that talking to people is important. Sometimes it can be daunting but the right thing to do. As a semi-extrovert, I find it surprisingly difficult to open up to people sometimes about my emotions and mental wellbeing. More recently, I have become more familiar and comfortable with it, and speaking to other people about feelings has definitely helped me understand these emotions more, most of the time, and the normality of these emotions. But I often worry about exerting too much onto someone and it in turn damaging them. It's important to open up to people you trust. I think. But if you know that they're already in a mentally unstable place, maybe it's not the right time or person.

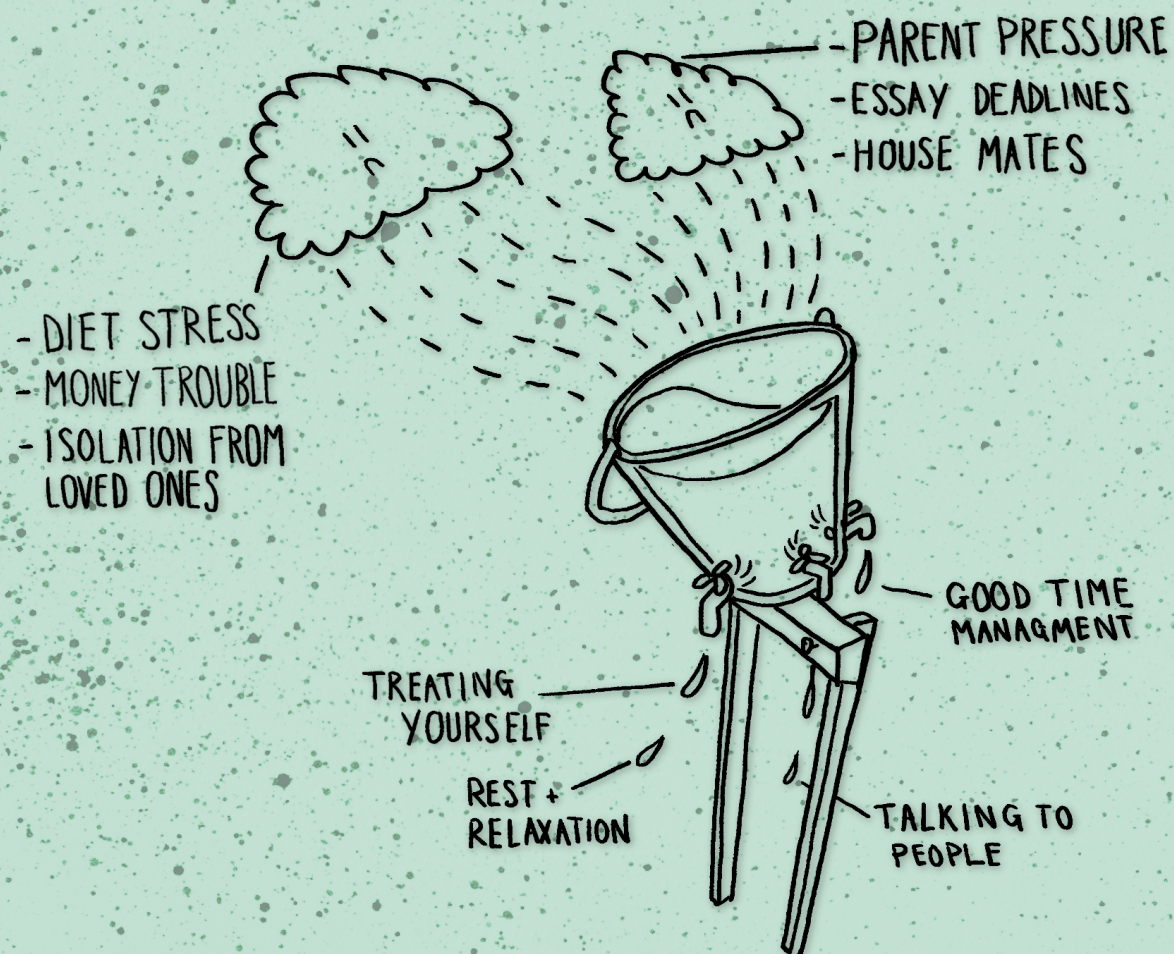
Boundaries are different in every relationship and every situation. But if you are starting to feel strains, if your family or friends are relying too much on your energy, remember that you need that energy too.

Remember you are not a mental health professional. You do not have all of the right answers or techniques for your friends and family. Acknowledging this is beneficial, for both of you. (Even if you are a trained professional, you might not have all of the answers or be in the right frame of mind to take everything on and that is okay too!)

Balancing your Stress Bucket

One way to think about your own mental wellbeing, is viewing it as a bucket. Lots of different stressors in our lives contribute to our buckets filling up e.g. university work, relationships, etc. It is important to ensure that your bucket doesn't overflow as this can be detrimental to your wellbeing. So, we need to make sure we have different types of de-stressors that we can call upon to create more of a balance in our lives. This could be spending some time alone to recharge or meeting up with your friends for coffee - everyone is different.

Sometimes, supporting friends can be an added stressor to your own life and can become quite draining. It is important to keep this in mind as you support others, that you are taking the time to do things that you know will also keep your stressors balanced. Check out the stress bucket below and give it a go, yourself!





Reaching out to others with mental health issues: My experience

I have a memory of a member of my family saying that mental illness is just a 'cry for attention' and that I should do my best to not fall mentally ill. Of course, that stuck with me and because of that, I felt like reaching out to any member of my family would be the wrong move, leaving me feeling completely lost in terms of who to turn to. Coming from an Asian family, mental health was not something openly discussed or even considered, thus I did not have the confidence to talk about my mental health with my parents because I was under the impression that they just would not understand.

I decided to reach out and talk to my closest friend about the way I was feeling. I knew she had dealt with anxiety and I thought she would have a better understanding of what I was going through. It felt good to talk to someone who was really able to relate to how I was feeling, confirming that I was not alone but also validating my feelings. I knew she was only my friend and not a therapist though, and that eventually I would have to seek the help of a professional which is what I did. After a few visits to my GP, I opted to receive treatment through an online CBT program with a mental health worker checking in on my progress every week.

I made sure to fill my friend in on how I felt throughout this online programme; she checked in on me and I also checked in on her. We started talking more openly about our mental health and it honestly felt freeing and, as cliché as it sounds, like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. In our 10 years of friendship, I felt like we became closer than ever.

Reflecting back on all of this now, I knew that my friend was struggling with anxiety way before I had an understanding of what mental health was, before it became a mainstream topic and I regret never doing my research. This is because after the experience I had, I would not wish that on anyone, and I felt bad for not being there for her years ago when she needed someone the most. I wish I didn't leave it so late to reach out to my friend.

I'm so grateful that we both attend the same university because it helped that I was able to physically see and talk to her. We made an effort to meet up every week to do something fun or just chill at a cafe and not think about anything university related. I am glad that our mental health is something we can comfortably talk about now and that we can be there for each other, especially throughout this global pandemic.

It can be difficult to navigate through the world of mental illness and even harder when you try to do it alone. Please remember that there are many people who are ready and willing to help you and that you deserve to be happy!



Tips on reaching out to friends and starting difficult conversations

Sometimes you may be concerned about a friend's mental wellbeing and want to check in with them but feel out of your depth and unsure of how to start the conversation. As a society, we don't talk openly about our mental health enough, so it's very normal to feel this way! We have listed some tips that will help you to create a safe space with your friends and aid you in starting those tricky conversations.

Active Listening:

Try to be an active listener. This means maintaining open body language and eye contact (if that is comfortable for them), making encouraging noises as they speak, asking effective questions, and reflecting on what they have said, rather than creating assumptions. This will show you are open to hearing what they have to say and are engaged in the conversation.

The power of asking 'how are you feeling?'

Often people want to talk about how they're feeling but wait until someone asks how they are. Try asking open questions – this lets the person control the conversation and they are likely to share more with you. 'How are you getting on?', 'How are you feeling?' Revealing your innermost emotions - anger, sadness, fear, hope, jealousy, despair and so on – can be a huge relief.

Don't try to solve their problems:

If someone tells you they are feeling miserable or down, don't try to solve their problem or give them advice. Focus on how they feel as this is more helpful and shows you care. 'That must be very hard for you, I'm sorry to hear that', 'That must be tough'.

What? How? Where? But not Why?

What? How? Where? Questions are great, but be careful with Why? As this can make people feel defensive. Instead, you can rephrase with 'how so?' or 'In what ways?'

How to reach out to someone about seeking professional support:

If someone has been feeling low for some time it is probably a good idea that they get some support, whether it is through talking to someone like a counsellor or getting some practical help. It's best for them to make their own decisions, don't push them into it. Useful questions you might ask them include:

- o 'Have you talked to anyone else about this?'
- o 'Would you like to get some help?'
- o 'Would you like me to come with you?'

How to reach out to someone who is reluctant to seek help:

If someone you think is struggling but is reluctant to get help, try asking them;

- o 'Do you have someone you trust you can go to?'
- o 'Do you know about the different types of support available?'

And finally...

If you say the wrong thing DON'T PANIC!

What are red flags?

When talking about mental health, red flags are the common changes that we begin to recognise in ourselves and others when our mental health is in a decline. You may be becoming increasingly anxious, low in mood or heading towards a general burn out.

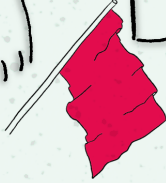
A large part of looking after your wellbeing is recognising when you are struggling. This can be particularly difficult to identify when you are in the eye of the storm. Think about what the indicators are that you see when you might be struggling. We call these red flags.

As a friend, red flags can be a useful tool to use to help you understand when a friend is going through a tough time. Sometimes things do get overwhelming and we don't cope very well – that's totally OK. What you can do to mitigate this, is to identify your own red flags and share them with those around you. We (the content creators), thought about what our red flags are. Maybe it's a good idea to have a think about what your own are. Learn to recognise them. Talk to your friends about them and think of ways in which you can combat these actions, before things get worse and you end up in the eye of the storm.

Ciara's Red Flags

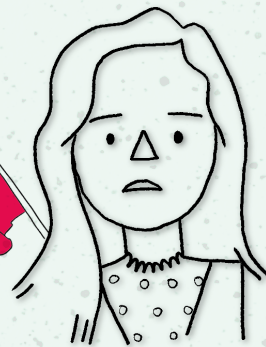
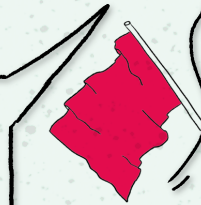


- Generally moodier, easily distracted in conversation
- Binge eating Junk foods
- Not answering phone calls



Pamela's Red Flags

- Trouble sleeping
- Ignoring Emails/Messages
- Easily irritated



Rebecca's Red Flags

- Going to sleep/getting up late
- Binging on unhealthy foods
- Having delusional thoughts about others



Ken's Red Flags

- Difficulty getting up in the morning
- Procrastinating with new 'hobbies'
- Staying on smartphone all day



5 Wholesome Acts within the friendship group that made me feel warm and gave me a bitta joy during lockdown so far

1. Vlogged stuff

It became a thing for us to be sending each other VLOGs, often featuring us doing very normal things. Cooking, cleaning, visiting the supermarket. The kind of things that once upon a time would have received the reply, “no one cares what you’re having for tea” or whatever. But now, I proper care. Some days I’ll just be sat there staring into distant space and bypassing all tasks that I coulda shoulda woulda usually been filling up my day with. Slobbing, lounging about, wondering what are my friends doing right this moment, so to receive videos of them making bread or pesto or just walking around a supermarket and narrating the things that they wouldn’t usually give themselves time to acknowledge gives me a bitta joy.

2. Sending and receiving actual, physical post

The internet feels cluttered sometimes, and it’s where I live most of my daily life right now. To step out of it for a moment and engage in some (legally & morally abiding, yet physical) social interaction gave me a bitta joy. Physical in the sense that I am sending a physical object via the actual physical post. It feels like a romantically outdated act. We now have a communal sketchbook circulating. Also, I was clearing out some of my treasured junk and spotted a couple of things that I thought a couple of my friends might appreciate (materials, fabrics, art student-y things that no longer fit my colour palette) and posted it to them.

3. Virtual parties

Even as a semi-extrovert person, I found the thought of this quite daunting. Group video calls can feel clunky and awkward. But I was pleasantly surprised when we had our first gathering in the Houseparty app. Seeing many of my classmates, live, on the screen together, yet in their natural habitat, was fun. At times I’ve just sat back silent and found a bitta joy in watching them bounce off one another, like the good old days. We organised a get together, and I got that overwhelming wave of excitement that you get when you fancy a bev. So, a bev (or 4) was had. Got a bit tipsy and spent most of the night furiously shouting at a virtual game we played. I understand that drinking isn’t for everyone, and it definitely shouldn’t be encouraged if your mental health isn’t tip top right now. But that was a right laugh, and something that I wouldn’t have imagined myself doing in a billion years (pre-corona times). Oh, and a pub quiz on Zoom, that was splendid. And is pretty easy to set up, if you fancy yourself as a quiz master (and doesn’t need to involve a drink!)



4. (Inter)Netflix ‘n’ Chill

You’re probably already aware that Netflix allows you to get together with other Netflixers and have a virtual movie night. How real does it feel?! Love that.

5. Online peer review/objective directed meeting talking about things other than COVID-19

Probably, like most university students right now, I have been very demotivated when it comes to making work. And (so I’ve been told) that’s fine, it is a global crisis after all. We hear idealised stories of people who turn crises into productivity, and amazing things happen.

‘He who can turn negative situations into something positive, has learned the law of transformation, his mind empowers life.’

Yano, these quotes are flying about everywhere. That’s great. I’m happy for anyone and everyone who has reacted in this kind of way. For the people who haven’t, hearing these quotes and stories can be crippling just as much as they are inspiring.

A couple of my friends have set up a peer review on Zoom. They suggest that we can bring a piece of writing which we’ve created to the table, and that the group will chat about it. Casual stuff, no expectations. I think that this is a really good way of creating some kind of gentle work to share with others, and chat to your peers about thoughts you’ve been having. This feels especially important to us, as we’re used to working in a shared studio. The bulk of daily life is to just share ideas with each other and see what one another thinks. Also, I’m hoping that it’ll be a steppingstone to feeling a bit calmer about my first one-to-one Zoom tutor meeting.

What I learnt while supporting my partner with depression

1. Getting a diagnosis is not always the solution

When you find out that your romantic partner has been experiencing mental health problems, what's the best course of action that can be taken? There is no right answer but creating a safe space for your partner to open up about their feelings is one of the easiest and most important things you can do. In many cases, that would have a significantly positive impact on their conditions. For a more serious case, however, you would have to consider seeking professional help, in addition to being a listening ear.

So, what would you expect to get from accessing psychological services? For me, it was getting a diagnosis for my partner, so we could understand exactly what was happening to them and what we should do to relieve their symptoms. It's something you would normally do when you catch the flu or other physical conditions - you consult your GP, you'll come back with a clear diagnosis, and you'll eventually get better as long as you follow your GP's instructions. I thought that getting a diagnosis would show us a clear path to recovery.



It wasn't that simple. Yes, we did find out that my partner has been suffering from mild to moderate depression. This has helped them realise that what they were going through was not their fault, or something that can be easily remedied. It has also helped them apply for extenuating circumstances, which has significantly reduced their stress levels. However, coming from an Asian background where the stigma of depression is more apparent, the relationship between my partner and their family has become strained after telling them about their condition. In addition, they started to look up things related to depression on the internet, which led to them catastrophising the condition (for more information on catastrophizing and other cognitive distortions, please turn to page 20).

I would definitely agree that visiting psychological services is an important step to recovery. However, in our case, it probably would have helped to have communicated more prior to the appointment, about how to proceed afterwards.

2. Overstepping boundaries

Sharing a life with someone with mental health problems can be an overwhelming experience, especially as you are likely to become your partner's pillar of support. In my case, I tried to do things that were beyond my capabilities in order to provide support, to the point that it was affecting my mental health as well.

Suffering from depression, my partner's social life was almost non-existent, and there was limited support from their family, as they were an international student. I felt a sense of responsibility, as the loved one, to do everything I can do to help, but on many occasions, the time periods that they would become stressed would be the same as my own, both being university students (exam periods, new academic year, applying for internships/jobs, etc.). In addition, my lack of expertise as a 'therapist' only added to the struggle, causing me to question whether I was doing the right thing for them. I found that open communication was really important, and in a relationship one person's mental health isn't more important than the other person's. Sometimes it's important to just be there for one another, and not try to fix the situation.

3. Not having enough empathy towards my partner and his/her experience

What would you do if your partner is rejecting therapy? This was the question that made me commit the biggest mistake: being frustrated rather than being empathetic. I thought that doing something was definitely better than doing nothing at all, and thus I had tried to impose that on my partner, instead of communicating a lot more with my partner to find out how the condition has manifested in their life, and why they are reluctant to receive therapy. It's really easy to impose your idea and thoughts to your partner 'for their own good', even though in reality that could have the opposite, or even adverse effects on them. This made me realise that you have to be very patient and understanding when facing mental health problems.

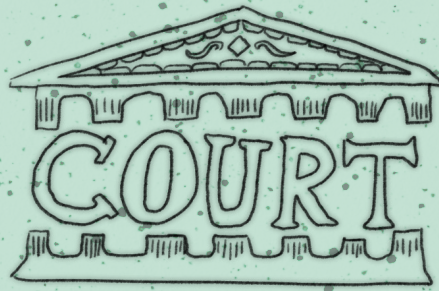
In conclusion, it can be upsetting and difficult to find out the 'right thing' to do to support your significant other. I've certainly felt on many occasions that I've made 'mistakes' along the way. However, she often told me that she was glad to have me close by in this fight, and in retrospect, that's probably what matters the most.

Cognitive Distortions

Our thoughts can be very powerful, impacting how we feel physically and emotionally. Cognitive distortions are thoughts that cause individuals to perceive reality inaccurately, and we've outlined a few below. By identifying cognitive distortions in your thinking patterns, you are more able to challenge them, asking yourself whether they are based on fact or fiction.

Cognitive Distortion	Explanation	Example
Black or White thinking	Seeing a situation and/or yourself in extreme polarities – there is no grey area or middle ground.	I didn't make it to my first class today, so there is no point in going in at all.
Fortune Telling	When an individual makes unreasonable predictions about the future.	I know that if I open up to my friends about how I'm feeling, they won't get it and I'll look stupid.
Catastrophising	Imagining and believing the worst possible thing will happen	If I don't get a good grade in this module, I will fail my degree and I won't be able to get a job.
Making Demands	When you set high expectations for yourself which are inflexible, rigid and unattainable.	By the end of the day, I should have completed a whole section of my dissertation.
Critical Words	Using critical words such as 'should', 'must' and 'ought' can make us feel guilty or like we have already failed.	I must go for a run every day.

TAKE
YOUR
THOUGHT 



When experiencing negative thinking, it can be helpful to consider your thinking habits and challenge whether your thoughts are emotional or rational. The process of ‘taking your thought to court’ is relatively simple and can be done by writing it out or just in your head – and can be very good in combating the cognitive distortions and mind tricks your brain can play on you. Here is an example of take your thought to court in use:

My Thought: The person I like ignored me on purpose because I am unpopular and nobody likes me.

Evidence it's a fact:

Evidence it's an opinion: Based on my emotions. I'm not feeling very confident

Based on the evidence, is it fact or fiction? Fiction

Revised rational thought: They probably didn't see me as they were looking at the floor.

Male mental health

Speaking as a man, vulnerability can be hard to show others, let alone recognise it yourself - I find it often easier to get on with things rather than have an immediate emotional response and I've come to realise this is NOT the way to do things. Internalising emotions, I've found, is a defense mechanism I've learned over the years and it can be a useful way of defending myself (saving face) but can and has led to emotional outbursts, low moods and low self-esteem. One thing that helped me was to not see negative emotions as a negative thing, but simply to accept them as a Yin Yang situation - you cannot have good without bad, as you cannot be happy without having some sad times in your life (as the legendary Bob Ross teaches us). Even just knowing that, for me, was such a blessing and allowed me to at least accept these emotions and from there work on the cause of the issue.

I'm aware it's a cliché, but as a man, through peer pressure or role model complications, I find I'm nowhere near as in touch with my emotions as my female friends. A statistic (I think from WikiHow) has stuck in my head which is that the average woman will cry 37 times a year, for the average man it's 7. My message to fellow males in this whole thing would be that crying is important, as is embracing negative emotions. It's more important now than ever to be connecting with your friends, listening (really listening!) to them and hopefully they listen to you. It's good to talk about what we're all going through right now to better understand what is happening and how we can grow from it.

How to support friends from afar and in person



Some of us are lucky to live close or even next to our friends. Being able to do things together can help us and our friends clear our minds, even for a little while, and I find that it does help when I do this. Talking about mental health and focusing a lot on your feelings and thoughts can also take its toll. Support doesn't have to be constantly checking in with your friends and asking if they're okay, support can also mean going out, having fun and creating memories, so here's a suggestion of things you can do with your friends now or once we're all allowed back outside!

In person:

- Check out a new cafe/restaurant or just walk around an area of your city or local area.



- Living in a highly populated area can sometimes seem suffocating and overwhelming, so why not suggest a day out to the countryside?

- Be a tourist in your own city! I know I always go out to central London, but I have never been to the Tower of London or been inside Buckingham Palace.

- Gather your friends and have a picnic in the park or have a potluck to show off your newly acquired cooking skills.

- When you spot a friend's red flag, you can spend time doing each other's hobbies.

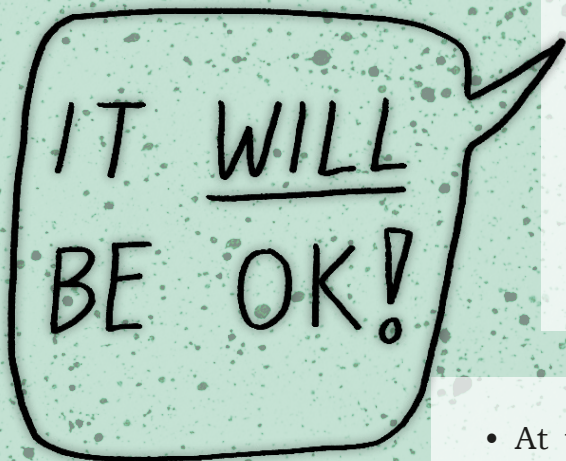
- Downloading an app like Sweatcoin can motivate you to walk and go out more. It simply converts your steps into Sweatcoins which you can exchange for products or donate towards charities. You can also follow each other!

- Summer is just around the corner and that means outdoor cinemas will also start popping up.



- Making something from scratch can be a meaningful experience - I went to a tray making workshop with my friend and we both loved it! Check out @ktgillies_surfacedesign on Instagram and look out for her online workshops.

- Be mindful of what you are saying and how it can come across. Perhaps instead of saying “calm down”, “there’s no need to be so anxious”, try “I know you’re scared, but I’m with you”, “thank you for trusting me and telling me how you feel” or “it’s okay to feel like this and these are feelings that you will figure out”. Avoid phrases that dismiss a person’s feelings and makes them feel bad.



- You can both write letters to your future self! Futureme.org lets you write letters so that you can receive them in a year or 10 years. It can be a way to let all out all your feelings, without having to show anyone and surprise your future self.

- At the end of the day it is a friendship which binds you guys together. There will be a time where it might feel like every conversation will about their feelings. You are allowed to make a situation about you too.

From afar:

You're stuck at home, with the exception of exercising near your home and shopping for essential items. Here are some ways you can socialise with people even if you can't see them. When this pandemic is over, the examples may remain as some ways to socialise with people who are ill or can't leave home for other reasons. Whilst we are in this weird, scary situation it's time to think in a creative, compassionate way and stay in touch with those you love.

- There are so many apps out there that allow you to video chat and hang out with lots of people that you can't see in person.

- Watch a movie together via a watch-party programme such as Netflix watch party.

- Hold a live video performance of your musical talents, or better yet, hold a virtual musical performance with your friends.

- Hold a class, teaching your friends some of your skills or knowledge such as baking or drawing.

- If you like to party, there are apps such as House Party and other video conferencing apps where you can party with people even if you aren't in the same place.

- Share seeds and plant cuttings. We can't buy plants right now so share what you have.

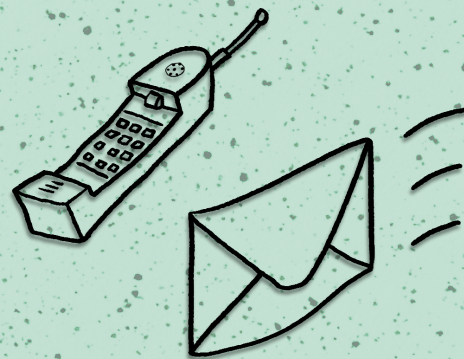
- Make things for your friends' things that come from the heart – this can mean more than just buying someone something.

- Call that person you have been meaning to talk to but didn't have the time to.

- Call your relatives, friends and family - catch ups can be really valuable.

- Share playlists of music.

- If all else fails, there is also the good old-fashioned letter.



Something so simple and forgotten during this age of technology is so valuable when you can't see each other. I have moved back to my parents. I am 23 it's hard as at times I feel like I have lost my independence in some ways and gained it in others. There is a lack of space, and an inability to travel anywhere else except within the village I live in. We are all stressed with the uncertainty of this time and living in a more confined space than we are used to. We just have to be patient with each other and allow each other to have space where we can. It's just about rethinking what we would usually do and adapting our daily activities to the current situation.

Should I make Banana Bread?



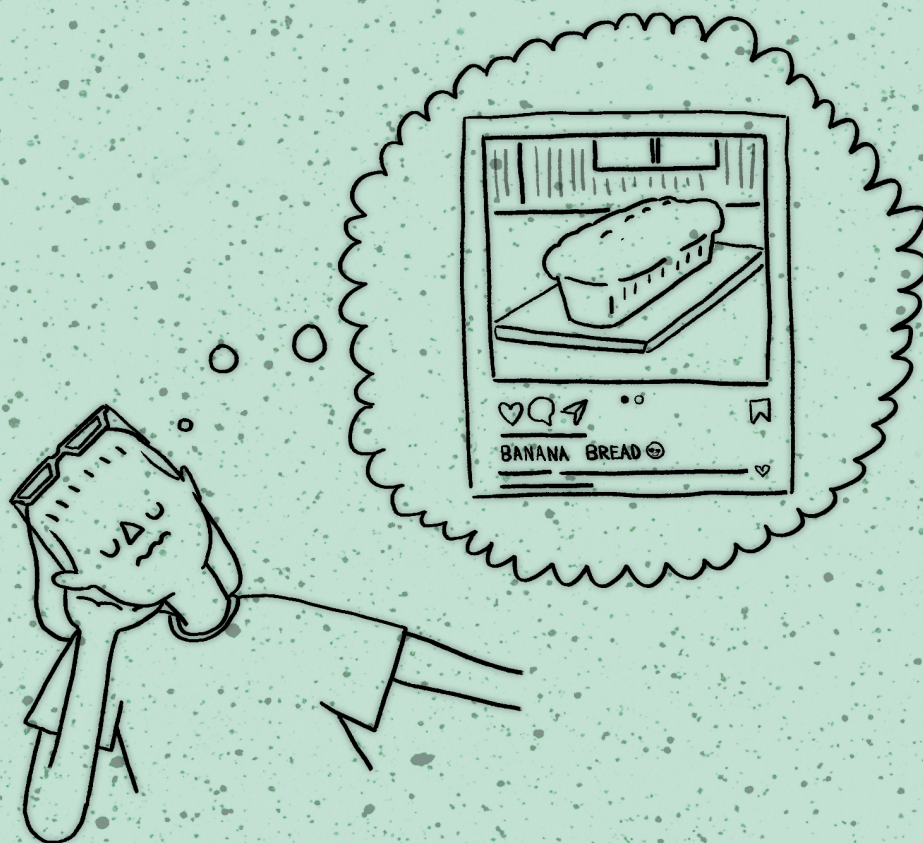
I'm sure I'm not alone when I say I do not bake. However, all of a sudden, I feel pressured to bake banana bread every time I see it pop up somewhere on social media. I love baked goods and I love taking aesthetic pictures of them before I eat, but I never felt the need to bake anything until now.

People around me have described this time as a "wellness retreat" or "time to do things you always wanted to do but never got to". At first, I was lost because I suddenly had all this time and I honestly didn't know how to act! Eventually, it became a time to do nothing and to chill from the stress of final year at university and the back-to-back deadlines at the beginning of the second term, yet I felt like I couldn't chill since I was taunted by all the pictures of banana bread. I admit - I have already fallen prey to the Dalgona Coffee trend and you know what's funny? I don't even drink or like coffee. I made it, took my aesthetic photos to post on Instagram and watched the likes rack up, feeling smug that I was one of the first to try it.

I was never one to be obsessed with trends, and the fact that I made a viral coffee drink and how I felt peer pressured by bread told me that something was off. I knew it was unusual for me to suddenly want to do these things and I thought that maybe, I might have just discovered another red flag of mine. It's classic FOMO (fear of missing out) or the need to do things that 'cool' people are doing online so that I can feel relevant and 'in' and actually say "I did that too!"

The thing is, there is only so much we can do as we #stayhome and I am using my phone more than ever before in order to help curb my boredom, but at the expense of my mental wellbeing. Not only was it banana bread bothering me, but also people showing their 'Quarantine OOTD' made me question if I should dress better and wear something other than the various sweatpants and jumpers I've been wearing for the past few weeks. Not to be dramatic but I took the FOMO feeling as a hit to my self-confidence, which was slowly improving, so I was not happy about feeling that way. But with all the time in my hands and not much to do, I couldn't help but dwell on the thought that I can do more cool stuff and do better with my time. The way I saw it, social media seemed to have turned into a place where people were showing how amazing their quarantine was going compared to yours and how fun they were making their time at home.





In the end, I made a vow to limit my time on social media and on my phone and instead actually do things to improve my mental and physical health. I made this easier for me by not being in the same room as my phone or placing it out of reach. Now, when I'm scrolling through social media, I don't spend a long time going through my feed or stories and instead look at the accounts which actually help me. A few people I check daily are Dr Hazel Wallace (@thefoodmedic) and Alice Liveing (@aliceliveing). Dr Hazel posts daily updates about Covid-19, and I find it a great alternative for those who become too anxious and overwhelmed when reading articles or watching the news. Dr Hazel even posts recipe ideas that are NOT banana bread. Alice Liveing goes live on Instagram every morning to do a workout, and even posts home workouts regularly which I love taking bits from to create my own routine to follow.

Remember: there is no right way to spend this time at home. Let's not forget that at multiple points in our lives we wished we had time to sleep-in or time to cook ourselves proper meals, so don't feel pressured into making it THE most productive time of your life and don't compare your quarantine activities with anyone else.

Banana bread isn't even all that. Brownies though...

How I cope with lockdown as a limited social butterfly

I am someone who doesn't need to be regularly socialising with other people and I often find it exhausting to be around others for extended periods of time. I'm not a recluse that hates people entirely - I am just not someone who needs to talk to people every single day of the week. As someone who has had a positive screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder and is waiting to be fully tested (very likely on the spectrum), I find socialising stressful. I do like to socialise with people but it's hard work to fully understand what's happening and not get annoyed by things most people can ignore. So sometimes, I just need a break and most of the time I would rather be by myself. When I do attend social gatherings and meet friends, I enjoy it, but I am not a constant social butterfly. I need time to myself to relax. Not everyone needs to socialise all the time and it's okay to take a break and have some time to yourself to; reflect or just switch off from thinking for a while.

So, the current situation is completely unexpected and so extreme I could have only ever imagined it in a film. I made the decision whilst my London university was moving to online teaching to move back to my parent's home. I have been back for a few weeks now and the adjustment period has been hard. It's been a large adjustment to my way of living. Especially not being able to leave the small village where I live. There is comfort in the isolation as I am able to take a lot more time to myself to reflect where I was unable to before. The quiet is something I really appreciate. It allows me to think clearly and have deep uninterrupted sleep. I also have access to a garden and a room with a desk. It has really made me appreciate the things I have as I haven't had access to this for nearly a year.



Socialising with friends is difficult at the moment with increases in group chat activity and not much thought about effectively communicating. Group chats are great for limited communications but only if mixed with vocal or face to face (at the moment digitally) communications. So much is lost through messages; body language, tone of voice, social nuances are increasingly hard to understand when you are missing information. It can be difficult and exhausting too, continuously having small talk with many people every day. My advice to others who are perhaps on the introverted end of the spectrum is to take things easy. Maybe try and plan some phone calls with friends, but don't plan for too many. We see people on social media having 5 group chats a day – if you're having none, it doesn't mean you're 'doing lockdown wrong', you're just doing lockdown in the way that's best for you. If you reach out to a friend and they seem distant or miss your call, try again – communication and openness is really key in times like this. In this time, we should communicate in safe means that work for everyone and are mindful of people's needs and boundaries.



Getting Help

In the first instance, we would recommend seeking help through your university's welfare services, as often this is the quickest way to receive psychological help and advice as a student.

Crisis Care

If you or someone you know is experiencing a wellbeing crisis and/or wants to end their life, please contact emergency services (999) or your GP as soon as possible. If you or the person feels they cannot keep themselves safe, stay with someone until help arrives. Please know that there is no right or wrong way to talk about suicidal feelings. The most important thing is to seek support so that you or the person you are concerned about do not have to struggle with those feelings alone. If suicidal feelings become intense or develop into urges and/or plans please seek emergency support as soon as possible.

Talking Therapies

Therapy for common disorders such as depression and anxiety are now widely available across England thanks to the Improving Access to Therapies (IAPT) services. Each borough or locality has its own therapy service which can vary in size, waiting times, and therapeutic options available. The most commonly available therapy is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Most services have a local website where you can look up how to get access to their service. Some require referrals via a GP, whilst others accept self-referrals. *

Mental Health Referrals

Adults aged 18 and over need to access Adult Mental Health Services. Both Adults and CAMHS services provide support for depression, problems with food, self-harm, abuse, violence or anger, bipolar, schizophrenia and anxiety, and more. There are local NHS services around the UK, with teams made up of nurses, therapists, psychologists, support workers and social workers, as well as other professionals. You can refer yourself for an assessment with either service to see what help you could get. We would suggest initially visiting your local GP to see what help can be offered to you there. To find therapies in your local area, please go to <http://bit.do/findtherapynhs> *

*due to the ongoing situation with Covid-19 referrals may be slower than usual.

There is also a lot of help and support that you can get online:

www.rethink.org

Rethink Mental Illness helps millions of people affected by mental illness by challenging attitudes, changing lives. Website contains A-Z factsheets on conditions, treatments, living with mental illness also information for carers.

Advice line 0300 5000 927 Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm

www.thecalmzone.net

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) is a health promotion charity with the aim of reducing male suicide in the UK. Website contains helpful information and ways to get involved. Helpline 0800 58 58 58 5pm to midnight, 7 days

www.papyrus-uk.org

Site focused on preventing young suicide with dedicated sections on resources for young people and their friends.

Hopeline UK 0800 0684141 Monday to Friday, 10am to 10pm

www.talktofrank.com

Web-based information as well as an email service and helpline. Website contains A-Z of drugs and advice on what to do if you are worried about a friend.

Helpline 0300 123 6600, 2pm to 6pm

www.lifesigns.org.uk

Site that gives guidance and support around self-harming.

www.nightline.ac.uk/want-to-talk

A confidential listening, support and practical information service for University students. You can talk to them about anything – big or small – in complete confidence without judgement.

Call (+44)207 631 0101 6pm to 8am BST every night of term

www.nopanic.org.uk

No Panic helps people who experience Panic Attacks, Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders and other related anxiety disorders including those people who are trying to give up Tranquillizers.

Helpline 0844 967 4848, 7 days 10am to 10pm

www.mind.org.uk

Mind is a mental health charity offering both frontline services and online information. A-Z information about mental health and information and support can be found on their website.

Info line 0300 123 3393

Legal Advice line 0300 466 6463

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans provide a helpline for people wanting assistance to talk about issues related to their wellbeing or any other problem troubling them.

Helpline 08457 909090, 24hrs, 7 days a week

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>

The student minds website has a wealth of information and resources about being a student and managing your mental health as well as information if you are concerned about a friend.