

Often the best thing to do for someone who is suffering from a mental health crisis is to talk with them. That is why we've trained more than 600 local council staff in Mental Health First Aid and the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#). Here are some stories of how this training has been used to help people who are in a difficult situation.



Mental health: training staff to have good conversations to help people in crisis

The special educational needs officer: 'I now have the confidence to make a difference'

Having had personal experience of mental health difficulties and also in my family, I was really interested to attend this course. I wasn't sure what I would learn. The most powerful thing about the course for me was the discussion around

suicide. I felt a real reluctance to mention or discuss suicide as I feared it could put the idea into someone's mind. After attending, I had the confidence to speak up to someone who was at a really low ebb. I don't know if their threat was a genuine attempt or a cry for help. Because of the course, I knew that I couldn't make things any worse by asking a simple question. It gave me the confidence to make a difference.

Everyone needs to know that if they encounter someone who may be thinking of taking their own life, they cannot make it worse by asking that simple question. Even if the answer turns out to be a categorical no.

The children's social care worker: 'We were able to meet the baby's needs calmly together'

A resounding fact for me was that people with mental health problems were more likely to hurt themselves or be victims of crime than hurt others.

This was particularly useful. At the time I was working with a parent struggling to cope with a new born baby. This was alongside his own precarious mental health and a lifelong struggle with a learning disability.

It was clear on arriving at the home, that dad having had a long and wakeful night with an unsettled baby was extremely exhausted and emotionally unwell. I was able to have direct and open approach, to identify with him his heightened state of anxiety, and to quickly explore with him what needed to happen next.

This action plan was to put away the sharp knives that he was feeling 'drawn too'. To meet the baby's immediate care needs calmly together. And to wait for additional support to arrive. He calmed in response to my taking control of the situation and was anxious to receive medical support.

It is my view that the Mental Health First Aid Training enabled me to approach the situation calmly and professionally. The insight into mental illness in its various forms, removing some of the fear and mystery, allowed me to manage the sufferer with confidence and a better understanding.

The housing officer: ‘I am able to switch off when I get home, even though work can be draining’

The nature of my job means I deal with issues around domestic violence and our most vulnerable tenants. Many of these have mental health issues and chaotic lifestyles. Because of the training, I am deal with the work better by having more of an understanding of what mental health means. I find I am able to switch off when I get home, even though the work can be mentally draining.

The Facebook message: ‘She admitted that she had pills in the house and was ready to do it’

I noticed a comment on Facebook that seemed completely ‘out of sorts’ for the person who posted it. The comment was very new so I sent her a private message and asked if she was ok. She replied that she was feeling very low.

We exchanged messages where I expressed my own experience (with no detail). I said that even after counselling I ‘could see the black holes coming but had no idea how to avoid falling into them. Each time I fell in it seemed harder to get out’.

She admitted that was what she was experiencing. I then told her about cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which now allows me to avoid the holes. I asked her directly if she was considering harming herself. She admitted that she had pills in the house and was ready to do it, even though her husband was in the house at the time. She also said she had contemplated it in the car earlier in the day. I gave her links to NHS information online to look at about CBT.

I asked her to speak to her husband. I reminded her of the people who love her dearly and would be sad if she wasn’t around. She has been unwell with concerns around her heart and was due to see her GP the following day. I suggested she talk to the GP about the impact her illness is having on her mood and also to discuss the possibility of accessing CBT. I told her I was glad she was around.

I saw the lady two days later with her husband. I said I hoped I hadn’t been too outspoken and they both thanked me for the time and information I had given. It had helped her come out of the mood far enough to see a way forward.

The worker suffering from anxiety and depression: 'It's incredibly difficult to explain why I can't complete a task'

I recently had a meeting with human resources as I had been away from work with depression. I also have dyspraxia, dyslexia, and dyscalculia, which I have struggled with for years. They have all been major contributors to my depression. It is difficult to explain to people who haven't got these conditions why my self-confidence is so low.

All the conditions are invisible in that they don't manifest themselves as a broken leg would. Often because the conditions are invisible or abstract, it's incredibly difficult to explain why I can't complete a task without feeling inadequate and stupid.

So there is the old familiar, the negative paragraph! At the time of writing, I feel quite positive! I don't feel the need as much to fight my ground when explaining why I find something difficult to do. I was fortunate enough to have the backing of the local council's occupational health doctor who has explained to my managers where I have need assistance.

The Mental Health First Aid also helped with coping strategies and the feeling that I'm not alone. Rather than struggling with a task, I ask for help. Someone who can complete the task does it for me. I carry on with the work I can do well, no anxiety for me and I remain well enough to carry on with my job. This means as my anxiety levels have been cut I don't get as tired. And I now have more time awake rather than sleeping. This means I can walk the dogs or go out with my husband more often than I have done for a long, long time!