



**Berkshire Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Understanding complex PTSD and our treatment pathways**

A close-up photograph of several light blue flowers with green leaves, set against a blurred background of more flowers. The flowers are in the lower half of the page, partially overlapping the text.

Produced by the  
Berkshire Traumatic  
Stress Service

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This booklet has been created by staff at the Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service.

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# Introduction

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## Thank you for coming to meet us at the Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service.

This booklet is designed to help you to understand more about **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** and **Complex PTSD**, give some suggestions for strategies to help manage some of your symptoms, and explain the next steps in your treatment.

We are a team of therapists who specialise in working with people who have been affected by trauma. We have expertise which is co-created by our own training and learning from our clients' experiences.

We value the opportunity to learn from our clients' recovery journeys as this helps us shape the service we offer. We want you to know that we will do our best to make you feel heard, seen, and supported through your treatment journey with us and we will do everything we can to offer you the most helpful treatment to support your recovery.



# About our service

**Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service is a specialist NHS out-patient service.** We provide specialist assessment and psychological treatment for people who are experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex PTSD following exposure to traumatic events.

Our service is led by a **Consultant Clinical Psychologist** and consists of a team of experienced clinicians who have expertise in working with people who have experienced trauma and in psychological treatments for PTSD, Complex PTSD and other trauma-related difficulties.

## Our team includes:

- Clinical Psychologists
- Counselling Psychologists
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapists
- Trainee Clinical and Counselling Psychologists
- Assistant Psychologists
- Managers
- Administrators



We offer a range of treatments for PTSD and Complex PTSD, including both group and individual therapy. We aim to help people reduce their distress, process and understand their experiences, and live a life they choose.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like more information about the service, please contact us and we would be happy to discuss this with you.

Call: **0118 904 7111**

Email: **BTSS@berkshire.nhs.uk**

## Chapter 1

# Understanding PTSD and Complex PTSD

**PTSD is a normal and understandable response to devastating and overwhelming experiences.**

Our brain and body responds in a different way to traumatic events than to non-traumatic events. Because of this, PTSD symptoms can develop after trauma.

Often, people experience a range of emotional responses after trauma, for example shame, guilt, rage and anxiety. It's also common to have feelings of numbness, emptiness and disconnection. These are all normal and understandable responses to trauma.

The way our brain and body responds to traumatic events is automatic.

**It's not your fault you've responded in this way.**

**It's important to remember...** that not everybody reacts in the same way, and there is no right or wrong way to respond.

## PTSD

**Post:**

**Traumatic:**

**Stress:**

**Disorder:**

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

After a traumatic event or events.

Traumatic events are devastating and overwhelming experiences that can happen at any age. Sometimes traumatic events happen to people directly and sometimes people can be traumatised by watching or hearing about bad things happening to others. Traumatic events might be one-off or repeated, unexpected or anticipated.

Having nightmares, flashbacks, and/or continuing to feel frightened, anxious or distressed.

It's a difficult that is causing distress and impacting day-to-day life.

## About PTSD

**Often people think that PTSD develops only in people who have been in the military, however PTSD is an understandable reaction to several different types of traumatic experience.**

In the Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service we work with people who have been exposed to a range of different experiences, **including people who:**

- Have experienced repeated or prolonged trauma, such as physical and sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, trafficking, torture and detention
- Have experienced childhood abuse
- Are a refugee or asylum-seeker
- Have experienced war and conflict
- Have experienced a traumatic birth
- Have experienced a traumatic bereavement
- Are struggling to come to terms with strong feelings of shame and self-criticism

Traumatic experiences can have a real impact on physical and mental health, even years after the actual incidents.

PTSD and Complex PTSD can affect many areas of day-to-day life, such as work and social life as well as personal relationships. Changes in mood, including feeling depressed, guilty, ashamed, or angry are very common. Sometimes people cope using alcohol or drugs, or by harming themselves, which are understandable and common ways of coping, but can cause additional and unintended difficulties.

**Symptoms of PTSD and Complex PTSD are explained on the next two pages.**

# What are the symptoms of PTSD?

## Re-experiencing

- Having dreams or nightmares related to the traumatic events
- Experiencing flashbacks where it feels as though the trauma is happening again in the here-and-now
- Having upsetting intrusive memories (memories that suddenly come into your mind when you don't want them to)
- Feeling physically and emotionally distressed when reminded of the traumatic events
- Having strong physical symptoms when reminded of the traumatic events, such as heart racing, difficulty breathing, sweating, shaking, feeling sick, pain



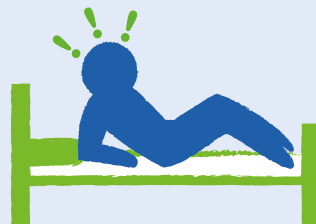
## Avoidance

- Trying not to think about the trauma
- Trying to push away feelings associated with the trauma
- Staying away from reminders of the traumatic events, such as people, places and conversation topics
- Keeping very busy and distracted



## Hyperarousal

- Feeling very alert, jumpy or 'on edge'
- Feeling angry or irritable
- Difficulties sleeping
- Difficulties concentrating
- Taking risks or doing things that might cause harm



## What are the symptoms of Complex PTSD

Complex PTSD includes the three PTSD symptom groups (re-experiencing, avoidance & hyperarousal), as well as some additional difficulties:

### Difficulties managing emotions

- Emotions may feel uncontrollable, intense, and overwhelming
- Feeling numb, 'zoned out', frozen, empty or disconnected
- Difficulties experiencing feelings such as pleasure and happiness
- Difficulties with anger or angry outbursts



### Negative view or sense of self

- Feeling defeated and worthless
- Feelings of shame, despair and guilt
- Self-loathing and a critical 'inner voice'



### Difficulties in relationships

- Feeling cut off or distant from others
- Feeling isolated from other people and alone, even when around others
- Problems trusting others and feeling safe in relationships
- Avoiding relationships



Complex PTSD often develops after experiencing multiple and repeated traumatic events and being harmed by other people. It's understandable to develop these difficulties. They are natural responses to being hurt and harmed by others that were developed to keep you safe, but may now be causing some additional difficulties and having an impact on your life.

# Experiences of Complex PTSD

I live with it constantly every day when I open my eyes. I can't go out if I don't know people; I can't go anywhere I don't know. If I've got an appointment then to go to that place is terrifying... If you look at me you'd think "what are you on about" - I'm a big guy... but for me that paralysing fear is just too much.

With having my trust abused so many times over the years it's really affected how close I can get to other people. It's made me really cautious with heavy defences. It's hard to bring the walls down and actually trust people... Yeah it's led to a lot of loneliness and isolation.

Terrifying, lonely, scared most of the time... It feels like a washing machine and you put every emotion you've got in there and then switch it on to spin.

I felt like my emotions were a tangled mess of highly charged electrical wires, all twisted and knotted into one big mess. Any stressor, major or minor was a catalyst for a massive explosion.

PTSD is quite lonely. You get quite isolated because you think you're alone and nobody else understands.

I generally have nightmares, waking up, screaming, full sweat.

It's like someone else is driving your life and you're the hostage. You're not in control, helpless to go wherever the driver takes you in your life. He drives you to the painful places. I felt out of control forced to feel and relive. A hostage in my life.

My inner critic was always having a field day - I was ripping into myself on a daily basis, super self-critical and not even constructive... It was kind of hard to see the way out of the fog of absolute depression and self-hate really. Even though there's always been the part of me that is always fighting and carrying on and trying to do little things here and there, I'm always still stuck in the depths of it and really not liking myself.

Mine dissolved all trust in people and I find it really hard to trust people... I generally just like to push people away... because I've been hurt by the people who are meant to be loving me and caring for me most.

You don't think you're enough - you try to be strong and do better for yourself but it doesn't feel like it's ever enough. And then there's the flashbacks and stuff too, and having really freaky nightmares... I think the brain can be quite extreme in some of the imagery it throws at you at night.

It's like hitting a big white cloudy fog in my brain.

When I wake up I do my surveillance... There's me, safe in my house, and the outside is the enemy.

It feels like you're being whacked with polaroids all the time... It makes you feel like you're going mad ... But now I know that I wasn't going mad, my instincts were trying to keep me alive so that I could have a life one day.

# Coping with PTSD and Complex PTSD

## Techniques to help you cope with PTSD

This section outlines some techniques that are designed to help with some of the troubling symptoms of PTSD and Complex PTSD.

We don't expect that all of these techniques will be helpful for everyone and would expect some to suit you more than others.

Try them out and see which ones help you the most.

### Tips for practising these techniques

**Don't overload yourself** - Pick one technique at a time and try this out for two or three days.

**Write down the techniques that work for you on a small card to carry** - It can sometimes be hard to remember the different techniques, particularly when you're feeling anxious or distressed, so try keeping a reminder with you at all times.

**Start by practising in a place you feel safe** - Don't worry if it doesn't help right away; it can take time to get used to using new techniques.

**Involve family or friends** - If you feel comfortable doing so, ask people you trust for help putting some of these ideas into practice.

**Be gentle with yourself** - These techniques are designed to help manage some of the difficulties you are experiencing, but don't worry if you find one doesn't seem to be working for you. Try it a few times then try to practise a different one.

**Be kind to yourself** - remember you're doing the best you can.

# Technique 1

## Grounding

**In PTSD, our mind often takes us back to the past through intrusive memories, flashbacks or nightmares.**

It can feel as though the events are happening again now, in the present moment. Because of this, it can be helpful to find strategies that bring you back to (or ground you in) the present moment.

These strategies are called **grounding techniques**.

This involves using the **five senses and movement**.



This video explains what grounding techniques are and why it can be helpful to use them:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeO5fqHdU08](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeO5fqHdU08)

It's important to make sure you have your grounding objects or reminders with you even when you go out so you can use them when you need them.

You may find that particular smells, sounds, sights, and feelings can be triggering and remind you of the traumatic experiences. Make sure to use grounding sounds, smells and objects that are different to the trauma and don't remind you of what happened.

## Examples of Sensory Grounding



### Sight

- Notices stating your location and todays date
- Night lights
- Pictures to orientate you to your current location
- Grounding statements



### Sound

- Music
- Sounds that distinguish between now and the trauma
- State sights out loud



### Smell

- Smelling salts
- Essential oils
- Air fresheners
- Citrus fruits
- Olbas oil
- Peppermint
- Fresh ginger
- Vaporub





## Taste

- Strong mints
- Chilli gum
- Cough sweets
- Wasabi peas



## Touch

- Stress balls
- Marbles
- Velvet
- Feathers
- Hot / cold compress
- Fidget spinners
- Textured objects
- Soft blanket



## Movement

- Being in postures or moving in ways that were not possible during the trauma



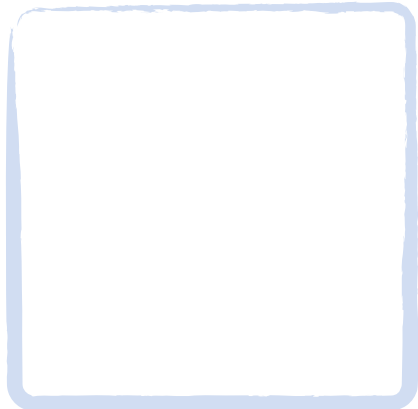
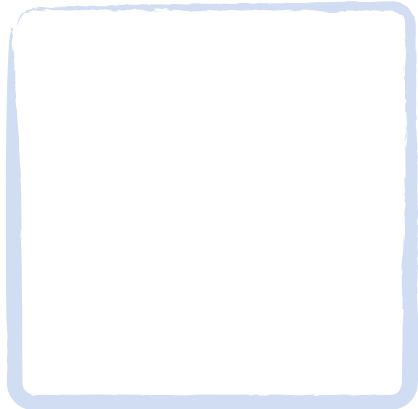
## Grounding statements

**During intrusive memories and flashbacks it can be difficult to remember that you are safe in the present.**

Writing grounding statements can be helpful for this. These should remind you that you are safe, what the year is and what the differences are between now and the traumatic experience.

**If you would like to, you can use the spaces below to write your own grounding statements**

E.g. It is a different year and I am safe now. My trauma happened in the past and I am having a memory of it now.



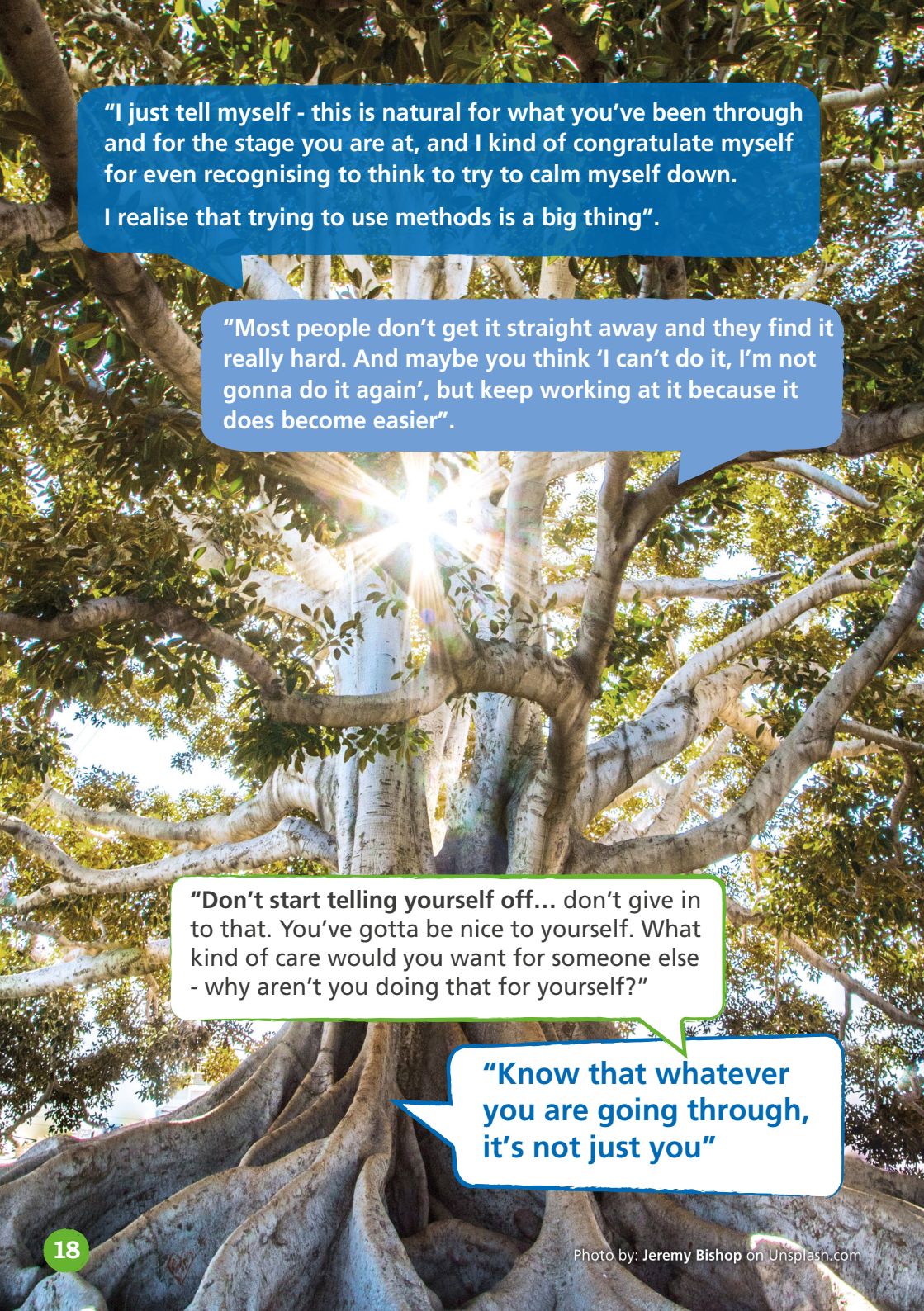
## 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

It can be helpful to use 5-4-3-2-1 grounding to remember the different objects.

Try to think of five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.

If you would like to, you can use the spaces below to write down grounding strategies you find helpful'.





**"I just tell myself - this is natural for what you've been through and for the stage you are at, and I kind of congratulate myself for even recognising to think to try to calm myself down. I realise that trying to use methods is a big thing".**

**"Most people don't get it straight away and they find it really hard. And maybe you think 'I can't do it, I'm not gonna do it again', but keep working at it because it does become easier".**

**"Don't start telling yourself off... don't give in to that. You've gotta be nice to yourself. What kind of care would you want for someone else - why aren't you doing that for yourself?"**

**"Know that whatever you are going through, it's not just you"**

## Technique 2

### Breathing and relaxation exercises

#### Feeling a sense of current threat can keep PTSD going.

On the following pages are some breathing and relaxation exercises for you to try. These exercises are designed to help manage and reduce this feeling of threat.

When we are anxious or feel threatened our breathing speeds up. Settling our breathing sends a signal to our body that we are safe now and helps to change how we feel in our body.

Some people who have been exposed to traumatic events can find breathing exercises threatening or uncomfortable.

We will help you with this in your treatment, so don't worry if you find this hard. But, we have included some exercises here that some people find helpful.



This video talks about the importance of breathing exercises, explains the science behind why they can be helpful, and gives a demonstration of how to practice this (from minute 8:00):

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_ffattg8N0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_ffattg8N0)

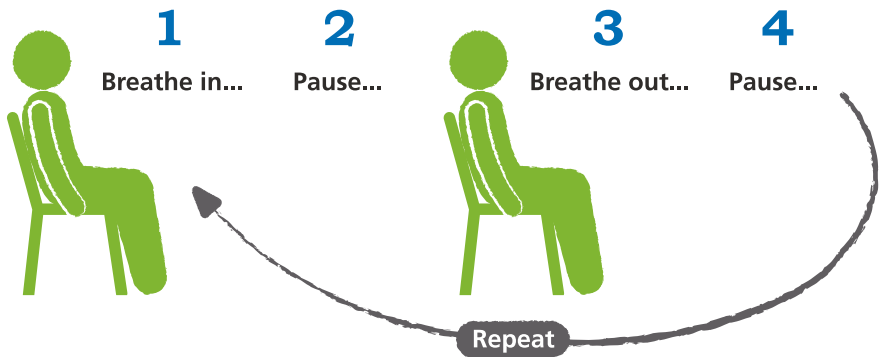
**Aim to try each exercise for 5-10 minutes at a time, if you are able to, as it might take a few minutes to notice an effect.**

Try to practise each one a few times so that you can work out which ones you prefer and are most helpful for you.

## Relaxed breathing

**Calm breathing is slow, relaxed, and from the diaphragm ('belly breathing'),** whereas anxious breathing is quick, tense, and high up in the chest.

1. Begin by sitting somewhere comfortable but supported
2. If you feel comfortable to, close your eyes
3. Breathe in slowly and steadily - try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth
4. Pause for a moment, then breathe out slowly and steadily. Make sure your breaths are smooth, steady and continuous
5. Repeat for a few minutes. It's normal for your mind to wander. If it does, gently bring it back to focus on your breathing



There are some audio recordings of breathing exercises on page 29, if you would find it helpful to have someone talking you through this exercise.

Don't worry about the exact timing of your breaths, just try to make sure your breaths are in a smooth, continuous and consistent rhythm

## Coloured breathing

**Another technique for slowing your breathing and settling your mind is to use imagery while you breathe.**

Some people find it helpful to imagine breathing coloured air. You could memorise these instructions, ask someone to read them slowly for you, or record yourself speaking them then listen to the recording.

1. Imagine a colour representing tension, or tense feelings
2. As you breathe, calmly and steadily, imagine breathing out air tinged with that tense colour
3. Try to imagine the coloured air, and watch as you breathe it out and it floats away
4. Allow the tense coloured air to become paler and paler, as you breathe out all of the tension
5. Now bring to mind a colour representing calming, soothing feelings
6. Imagine breathing in this relaxed coloured air
7. Notice what happens to your body as you imagine breathing in the relaxed air
8. Continue breathing this way for a few minutes



## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

**When we feel under threat our muscles tense up.** One way of letting your body know that you are safe is to deliberately relax all of your muscles.

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing, then relaxing, all of the muscle groups in turn.

Find a comfortable spot, sitting or lying down. Then, using the **steps** below, tense each of the **muscle groups numbered 1 to 10** in order:

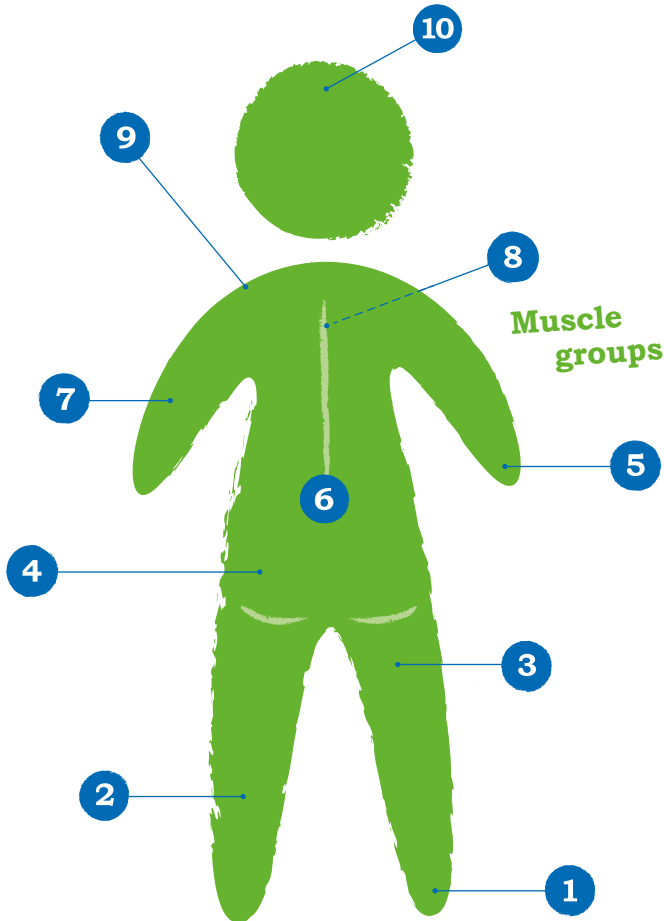
### Steps

1. Tense the muscles
2. Notice the tension for a few moments
3. Release
4. Notice the sensation of relaxation

### Muscle groups 1 to 10

- 1 **Feet** - Tense your feet by scrunching your toes, as though you are making a fist with your foot.
- 2 **Lower legs** - Tense your legs by pointing your toes to the ceiling.
- 3 **Thighs** - To tense your thighs, try squeezing your knees tightly together, as though you're trying to hold a coin between them.
- 4 **Buttocks** - Tense your buttocks.
- 5 **Hands** - Tense your hands by making fists and squeezing them as tightly as you can.
- 6 **Stomach** - Tense your stomach/abdominal muscles by sucking your stomach in.
- 7 **Arms** - Tense your arms by bringing your forearm up towards your shoulder and 'make a muscle' while clenching your fists.

- 8 Back -** You can tense your back by trying to touch your elbows together behind your back.
- 9 Shoulders -** Tense your neck and shoulders by raising your shoulders up as though you are trying to touch your ears.
- 10 Face -** Finally, tense your face by squeezing your eyes tightly shut, clenching your jaw, pursing your lips and wrinkling your nose. Try to 'scrunch' your whole face.



If you have any injuries or experience any pain you may wish to leave out that part of the body during this exercise.

## Sleeping better: sleep tips

**PTSD often affects our ability to sleep due to thoughts and worries, nightmares, fear of sleeping or feeling unsafe.**

We have included some tips and ideas below that may help your sleeping difficulties.

### 1. Bed is for sleeping and sleeping happens at night-time

- Try and keep your bedroom and bed for sleeping only
- Avoid sleeping in the day
- Develop a routine before bed time. This might include:
  - having a relaxing bath
  - listening to some relaxing music
  - going to bed at around the same time each night
- Try and get up around the same time each morning
- Make your bedroom a nice place to sleep - try using different smells, a soft blanket, or keeping soothing or grounding objects near to your bed
- If you can't sleep after 30 minutes, get up and sit somewhere quietly. Try a quiet activity such as listening to music or reading. Try this for about 15 minutes then return to bed when you feel sleepy



This helpful film explains sleep difficulties in PTSD and some ways to manage these difficulties:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_1LPNZ5848](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_1LPNZ5848)

## 2. Be kind to your body

- Try not to go to bed hungry
- Avoid caffeine after 4pm - caffeine is found in tea (including green tea), coffee, fizzy drinks (such as coke and energy drinks), and some chocolate. You can buy de-caffeinated versions of these drinks, if needed
- Try to avoid looking at screens (smartphones, tablets, laptops, the TV) 30 minutes before bedtime — the blue light can keep us awake
- Although alcohol can initially make us feel sleepy, it stops us from experiencing restful sleep. It can also make it harder to fall asleep again, if you wake up in the middle of the night.

Here are some useful sleep tips websites:



## Soothing mantras

**These are some phrases that can help to soothe and reduce a sense of threat.**

Try to practice saying these to yourself and notice how it makes you feel. Notice your tone of voice and try to change this to a calming tone. It can be helpful to try to say these alongside breathing exercises:

When you're having a panic attack say **"this will pass, I am feeling anxious at the moment, but this feeling will pass"**

**Try speaking to yourself with a gentle tone**

If your mind is jumping all over the place and you can't control it, remind yourself **this is what our minds naturally do**

When you are feeling pain in your body and the natural response is to feel tense and beat yourself up, say to yourself, **"your body doesn't mean to hurt like this, it doesn't know what to do"**

When you are thinking about what you have been through and think you're the only one who is going through this, think to yourself, **"you're not alone in this"**

When you feel distressed, notice what it feels like to say to yourself "your mind is traumatised and this is what traumatised minds do"

When you're worried about coming to treatment, notice what it is like to say to yourself **"you're being very courageous, you're doing the right thing"**

When you notice you are being harsh on yourself, notice what it feels like to ask yourself **"what could you do to be helpful and not harmful in this moment"**

**Treat your pain kindly**

**"It's alright to feel like this, it's understandable"**

# Accessing support and additional resources

## Support

### NHS services

- Your **GP**
- **NHS non-emergency line: 111**  
NHS 111 is available 24/7 and can be contacted for urgent and non-urgent mental and physical health support
- Your local **Accident & Emergency** department at the hospital
- **Emergency services: 999** (If you think there is a significant and immediate risk of harm to you or someone else)

If you are under the care of a **Community Mental Health Team** (CMHT) and your mood deteriorates, you can contact your care coordinator during working hours (9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday)

### Charities and other services

**Samaritans** - 24 hour support over the phone for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair

Call: **116 123**

Visit: [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

**Mind** - Support over the phone from 9am - 6pm, Mon to Fri, for people needing help with mental health problems, medication and advocacy

Call: **0300 303 5999**

Visit: [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)

**PTSD UK** - Information and support for anyone experiencing PTSD

Visit: [ptsduk.org](http://ptsduk.org)



## Charities and other services continued...

**Citizens Advice Bureau** - Advice about benefits, work, finances, housing, law and courts, immigration and health

Call: **03444 111 444** Visit: **[citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk)**

**HAVOCA** - Help for Adult Victims Of Child Abuse, HAVOCA is run by survivors for adult survivors of child abuse. They provide support, friendship and advice for any adult whose life has been affected by childhood abuse. They offer support groups and online resources. The closest support group (to Berkshire) is in Basingstoke.

Visit: **[havoca.org](http://havoca.org)**

**Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA)** - BWA provide Outreach and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) support for people experiencing domestic abuse across Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell local authority areas.

Call: **0118 950 4003** Visit: **[berkshirewomensaid.org.uk](http://berkshirewomensaid.org.uk)**

**ManKind** - Offers support and advice for men who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Call: **01823 334 244** Visit: **[mankind.org.uk](http://mankind.org.uk)**

**Cruse Bereavement Care** - Offers support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies.

Call: **0808 808 1677** Visit: **[cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)**

**Reading Refugee Support** - Support for refugees and asylum seekers rebuilding their lives in Berkshire.

Call: **0118 950 5356** Visit: **[rrsg.org.uk](http://rrsg.org.uk)**

**British Red Cross Refugee Support** - Offers help with the urgent needs of refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants.

Call: **0300 333 5393** Visit: **[redcross.org.uk](http://redcross.org.uk)**

## Websites

It can be helpful to listen to a recording of breathing or relaxation exercises while you're practicing them. The links below contain some different exercises you could try.



## Breathing and relaxation exercises

- **Recite Relaxation techniques** - [cntw.nhs.uk/resource-library/relaxation-techniques](https://www.cntw.nhs.uk/resource-library/relaxation-techniques)
- **Soothing Rhythm Breathing on YouTube:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2\\_CeW6iRGLI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_CeW6iRGLI)
- Anti-stress maximum relaxation breathing pacer: [grc.com/breathe](https://www.grc.com/breathe)
- **Balanced Minds:** [balancedminds.com/audio/](https://www.balancedminds.com/audio/)
- **Relaxation exercises:** please see the 'resources' section of this webpage, where there are exercises in English, Arabic and Farsi. <https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/services/mental-health-services/adult-and-older-adult/woodfield-trauma-service>
- **Exercises in multiple languages:** [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUemDobtdPA7ME8I\\_\\_aec5Aplaylists?view=50&sort=dd&shelf\\_id=5](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUemDobtdPA7ME8I__aec5Aplaylists?view=50&sort=dd&shelf_id=5)
- **Camden and Islington Traumatic Stress Service exercises:** [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfYudhcAq9HCtcg2X1kXZb2jFZQm9L\\_u7](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfYudhcAq9HCtcg2X1kXZb2jFZQm9L_u7)

## Other resources:

- **Mind**, the mental health charity ([mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)): [bit.ly/Mind\\_PTSD](https://bit.ly/Mind_PTSD) Information about PTSD and Complex PTSD, alongside helpful contacts and support organisations.
- **No Panic**, call this number to reach a message that plays a recording of a breathing technique: **01952 680835**

## Books

- **The courage to be me** - [Nina Burrowes](#)  
The courage to be me is freely accessible on the author's website: <https://ninaburrowes.com/books/the-courage-to-be-me/preface/>
- **The Compassionate Mind Approach to Recovering from Trauma** - [Deborah Lee and Sophie James](#)
- **8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery: Take-charge strategies to Empower Your Healing** - [Babette Rothschild](#)
- **Overcoming Childhood Trauma**  
[Helen Kennerley](#)
- **The PTSD Workbook** - [Mary Beth Williams and Soili Poijula](#)
- **Trauma and Recovery**  
[Judith Herman](#)



## Apps



**PTSD Coach** – Get help to learn about and cope with symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder

[ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach\\_app.asp](https://ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach_app.asp)

Here is a video that explains how to use this app:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnpVp3xupg>



**PTSD Family Coach** – Support for family members of those living with PTSD

[ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/familycoach\\_app.asp](https://ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/familycoach_app.asp)



**Breath Ball** – Four easy breathing exercises

[breathball.com](https://breathball.com)



**CBT-i Coach** – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia  
[ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/cbticoach\\_app\\_public.asp](https://ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/cbticoach_app_public.asp)



**Calm** – App for sleep and meditation with relaxing nature scenes [calm.com](https://calm.com)



**Insight timer** – Guided meditation practice, music and ambient sounds  
[insighttimer.com](https://insighttimer.com)



**Breathing Zone** – Guided breathing with ambient sounds and visual imagery [breathing.zone](https://breathing.zone)



**Breathe+ Simple Breath Trainer** – Helps you visualise your breathing with daily relaxation, meditation or breath training (Only available on the Apple App Store for iPhone or iPad)  
[apps.apple.com/us/app/breathe-simple-breath-trainer/id1106998959](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/breathe-simple-breath-trainer/id1106998959)



**Bright Sky** – For safety, this app initially appears as a weather, calendar, or game app, but on holding the weather, date, or game score it provides information and support for people affected by domestic abuse.



**Mood Meter** – helps to identify emotions and provides support when you'd like to try to feel differently.



**Please note:** Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust ("Berkshire Healthcare") is not the creator, owner, editor, manager or providers for any of these apps (or any information and content contained therein). The app developers are solely responsible for the compliance and fitness for purpose of their apps and content. Users must exercise their own skill and judgement when using the apps and digital tools. Users acknowledge that Berkshire Healthcare has no liability for any damage or loss howsoever caused (including damage and loss caused by (but not limited to) any errors, loss of data, inaccuracies or omissions in any information, advice, instructions, content or scripts provided by the named supplier to users independently of the apps and digital tools or contained within the apps and digital tools themselves) by a user's use of or reliance on them. Berkshire Healthcare is not responsible or liable for any advice, services or products that you obtain through the use of the apps and digital tools listed.

## Chapter 4

# About treatment

**We provide evidence-based psychological treatments for PTSD and Complex PTSD. These treatments aim and have been shown to reduce distress and symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks and intrusive memories.**

Treatment at Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service typically follows a phased approach, which is outlined on the next page. Each phase may not be appropriate for everyone so treatment is tailored to each individual, following an assessment with us, and is agreed between the person and their clinician.

We offer both **group** and **individual** therapy. We will talk about the different options with you and decide together the most appropriate treatment pathway for you.

Therapy appointments are typically **face-to-face** in our clinics in Reading or Slough, however we can also discuss other options, such as remote appointments. All therapy rooms are fully wheelchair accessible.

We have also created a short video that explains the different types of therapy offered at BTSS, which you may find helpful to watch. You can access this video using the **link** or by **scanning the QR code**:



[l.lead.me/BTSS-Therapy](https://www.lead.me/BTSS-Therapy)

## Three phased approach

### Phase 1

#### Developing Compassionate Resilience

This phase explores our capacity to be self-compassionate. Self-compassion is a much needed skill to help us manage strong emotions and a tendency to blame ourselves for things that have happened in our lives.

### Phase 2

#### Working on trauma memories

This phase helps you to make sense of your trauma experiences and, where necessary, work more directly with flashbacks and difficult memories. **This will be one-to-one with a therapist.**

### Phase 3

#### Living life after trauma therapy

This phase helps you to discover how you would like to live in line with your values and self-compassion.



# Experiences of treatment

It did take a while for me to connect with my critic and get hold of it and put it in its place... I found that quite tricky... But I can do that now and now I know what that is - it's my critic and everyone's got one.

**You think that you've changed when you have PTSD,** you think that they have changed you and you have gone wrong and you're not you any more... but you don't change, you haven't been changed, you're yourself but you're just ill... What I've learnt is that when you get better you don't have to be somebody else... I understand that it's scary. You think you're never going to be you again, but you've not not been you, and that's the greatest thing when you realise that.

It's obviously very difficult and it's upsetting, **but I'm alright.** When it's a partnership you want to open up because you know that person is there to help you, and that's massive.

I thought there's no way that just that simple thing that we did would make a difference. But somehow gradually over the weeks you feel the difference. I felt like I was coming down off of my perch and going back into my own body.

I realised that you teach us the tools of how to eventually cure ourselves ... it is happening, but it is slower, it's a slow process. It took a long time for that [the traumatic experiences] to happen for me so it's going to take a while, not as long as the 20 years, but a while to get back to myself.

For me, the difference in me from last year is amazing. I hadn't left my house in four months, and now I'm walking my dog and going to the shops. My daughter was in tears ... because she couldn't believe the difference in me since I've been going to treatment. She said **"he's changed your life"**.

Beforehand I was barely keeping my head above water and now I feel like I'm out of the water; my toes are in and I'm having a bit of a paddle but I've got control.

I think it's good that you're not limited to 6 sessions and then "off you go you're fine" - it's a lot more complex, so that time being taken to go at your own pace and address it is a really big deal.

I just feel like everything's not so whizzy around me, things have slowed down slightly for me, quite a lot actually. I feel like I'm more grounded, more stood on the ground, and not floating around with no control... and I feel calmer. And I'm not scared, I'm not scared.

## Experiences of treatment (continued)

I didn't believe that I could ever find the help that I needed so much. I didn't believe that I could be helped as my religion and cultural differences would be so difficult to explain. However, throughout this journey I have realised that to understand and help me, the human me needed to be understood. Everything else was just extra.

You think you're going to freak out and not be able to cope going through the painful parts but it's, I don't want to make this sound trivial, but it really is gentle... You don't feel like it's working at the time, but **gradually you realise that it is working.**

By practising the techniques and doing the work at home away from the sessions, **I began to feel in control.** I was taking the wheel and when the flashbacks happened I could let them pass by. It has helped me greatly cope with the flashbacks and reliving. When life sends a curve ball I go back to my "tool kit" and use the techniques to get back in control. I'm proud of me, it's a hard journey to travel but I did it and now I have a life I enjoy.

## Experiences of the group

You're gonna get angry, you're gonna get **upset**, you're gonna get **frustrated**, you're gonna **cry**, and you're gonna **laugh** as well. But that's all okay as well. That's completely normal. And you'll find the group will actually feel exactly the same as you will, so **you're not gonna be alone**.

For anyone who's unsure, it's okay to feel nervous and anxious and it's okay to feel anything. If you think that you can't do it, everyone else is feeling that as well, **it's not just you**.

**This whole course is where you're with other people...** who actually know what you're going through and can relate to you in some shape or form... you'll find that you're not alone. These are people that you know you can start to really trust because they actually know what it's like, what you're going through.

When you go through the group you're not going to talk about what actually happened to you.. So, **don't feel scared** that you're going to get pressured into talking about things that you don't want to talk about, because that's not gonna happen.

I know everyone says that you know you're not alone, but, when you start the group you actually start realising that you're not alone, and that other people feel exactly the same emotions that you do even though they've gone through something different. **What you're feeling is completely normal**.

## Words of encouragement

It feels scarier than what it actually is as well, it feels hopeless but it's not hopeless, **there is help for you and just hold on and stick with it.**

I'd never talked about being abused, not being loved, all the shit I've been through, I never spoke about it to anyone, anyone. You know though, just having someone who knows what you're on about, that is a massive massive deal. I just realised the power of expressing it. **Now I can talk about it.**

I've just gotta say from someone who's had PTSD for 20 years, you really try to convince yourself that nothing on earth will ever change the way you feel and you will struggle forever but I just want to say, **please give it a go. Because it really does work and it will change your life.** And that's very surprising coming from me, from the way I felt. I know it's difficult to believe in anything but please just give it a go, because from my experience it's given me my life back, and I can feel it.

**Things can get better...** It's okay to be skeptical, our skepticism has protected us, but there are some techniques that really properly work.

Just take a deep breath and go for it. Don't be scared, just go for it. Have confidence in the people. Being rejected a lot I didn't have confidence in anyone, I've always been rejected, so that was a big barrier. Just going to an appointment for me is a really big deal and I expect it's like that for a lot of people... **To do that first step is immense.**

**YOU CAN DO IT! YOU CAN DO IT!** You do end up at your wits end and you're fighting to keep it together but you get so weighted down by all the trauma and you do wonder just how broken you are, you know, and whether any of it can be fixed. You can definitely pull things together, and there will be scars, but it can truly not hurt as much as it used to do.

You guarantee yourself no amount of help will ever help you. And that's not true. I know that this is not true because **it's helping me.** I didn't think it ever would and it is.

**It's something that somebody else has done to you.** It's not you going wrong and it's not you that's doing something wrong.



**Berkshire Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

## Contact us

### Berkshire Traumatic Stress Service

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If you have any questions, or need more information before coming to the service, please feel free to contact us.



**‘You are not alone’**



**berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk**