

# THE LITTLE BOOK OF MINDING YOUR HEAD



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# FOREWORD FROM THE FARM SAFETY FOUNDATION

## LIVING WELL IS THE KEY TO FARMING WELL

**Whilst UK farmers are renowned for the attention they give to their livestock, crops and machinery, it appears they do not have such a good track record when it comes to taking care of themselves and their own wellbeing.**

There are a number of mental health risk factors associated with agriculture. Farmers work long hours, often in isolation. They can be under significant financial pressure, often required to take on significant debt to purchase the land and equipment required to operate. And in most cases, a farmer's place of business is also his or her home, meaning there is no easy way to get away from the workload. In addition, farmers are constantly vulnerable to unusual events and circumstances that can impact their bottom line — from weather and natural disasters to international trade disputes.

Our research revealed that four out of five young farmers (under 40) believe that mental health is the biggest hidden problem facing farmers today.

In 2018 we launched a new campaign – Mind Your Head – to raise awareness of this growing issue in the industry.



As an industry, we have a collective responsibility to do something about the issue of poor mental health and the risk of suicide and every one of us has a role to play. Increased understanding, and discussions around mental health will, in time, reduce the discrimination experienced by those who have mental health issues.

This booklet offers a pocket guide to understanding mental health and stress management in agriculture and special thanks must be given to Dr Amy Irwin and the team from the University of Aberdeen, NTSAg, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England and, of course, our funder NFU Mutual for their support in compiling the contents.

From outlining what mental health actually means, to the ways you can support others through challenging times, this pocket sized publication offers practical content for those working in agriculture and allied industries. If you find the information useful, please share it with friends, family, colleagues, and anyone you know who works or lives in the rural community so we are all better equipped to support farmers' mental health in this ever changing world.

# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MENTAL HEALTH?

**Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health issues are a normal part of life. In any one year approximately one in four people experience at least one mental health issue. Being in good mental health is therefore important to everyone and each one of us has a role to play by adopting approaches that help keep us in good health and build resilience for the pressures of life in agriculture.**

Mental health, like physical health, can vary from day to day. Issues can appear as a result of experiences in both our personal and working lives – or they can just happen.

Stigma and discrimination are the two biggest obstacles to people talking about mental health in all walks of life. It takes great courage to talk about an intimate experience. There is always the risk of oversharing or making others feel uncomfortable. This is especially true when talking about mental health. You might feel very happy to tell your workmates about a physical injury you've had, but when it comes to changes in your mental health, people can keep this to themselves through fear of being treated differently or judged.

This long-standing stigma means that many people have a limited understanding of mental health. People still think that it's shameful if they have mental ill health. They think it shows personal weakness, that they have failed. This self-inflicted stigma can make it difficult for people to speak about even their own mental health problems.

If there is one thing we have learned over the past few years of delivering Mind Your Head that it is; mental health issues do not discriminate; they can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, geography, income, social status, sexual orientation or other aspect of cultural identity.

It is important to create a culture in farming that promotes positive mental health, prevents people from experiencing mental ill health and helps them better manage mental health problems.

One of the key ways to do this is to ensure everyone can talk about mental health but it is also essential to know how to provide support. This might include knowing how to spot the warning signs and being confident to signpost colleagues to the support available.

# WHAT IS MENTAL ILL HEALTH?

**One of the biggest challenges we face is the need to make conversations about mental health more common. A good starting point for this is to learn more about mental ill health.**

There are different types of mental illnesses, some of which are common, such as depression and anxiety disorders, and some that are not so common such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Mental illness, as with any health difficulty, causes disability, which can be severe. This is not always well understood, especially by people who have never experienced a mental illness.

A mental health issue is a broader term including both mental illnesses and symptoms of mental illness. However, it may not be so severe to warrant the diagnosis of 'mental illness' or mental health crisis, such as suicidal thoughts which require emergency and immediate treatment.

According to [time-to-change.org.uk](http://time-to-change.org.uk), there are a number of different types of mental health problems, and they each have a different impact on those who experience them, as well as their friends and families. Learning a few things about mental health problems might help you to feel more confident about talking and listening.

**Anxiety & panic attacks** - Anxiety is a normal emotion that we all experience but becomes a mental health problem when someone finds they are feeling this way all, or most of the time. Panic attacks happen when your body experiences a rush of intense psychological (mental) and physical symptoms. You may feel an overwhelming sense of fear, apprehension, and anxiety. You may also have physical symptoms such as: nausea, sweating, trembling and a sensation that your heart is beating irregularly (palpitations).

**Bipolar disorder** - Bipolar disorder (or manic depression as it used to be called) is a particular type of depression where the person has extreme mood swings, experiencing extreme periods of low (depressed) and high (manic) moods. Correct diagnosis of Bipolar disorder can take a long time because the person will need to have episodes of both depression and mania. Bipolar disorder is less common than ordinary depression and requires medical treatment

**Depression** - Depression is a diagnosis given to someone who is experiencing a low mood and finds it hard or impossible to have fun or enjoy their lives. This is explored in more detail in section 8.

**Eating disorders** - An eating disorder is a diagnosis given to someone who has unhealthy thoughts, feelings and behaviour about food and their body shape. The term covers a wide range of problems with food including starving (anorexia), bingeing and purging (bulimia) and binge eating. The reasons and causes behind eating disorders are varied and complex and medical help should always be sought.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder** - Obsessive-compulsive disorder OCD is a mental health diagnosis given to someone who experiences obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.

**Personality disorders** - If someone has a personality disorder, some aspects of their personality might affect them in a way which makes it very difficult to cope with day to day life, especially when it comes to relationships. For example, they might be more or less sensitive, impulsive, prone to anger, or obsessive than others. Diagnosis of a personality disorder must be left to a psychiatrist.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** - PTSD is a diagnosis given to people who develop a certain set of symptoms following a traumatic event.

Symptoms include:

- Reliving traumatic event through flashbacks, intrusive thoughts or nightmares.
- Constantly feeling on edge and alert, experiencing high anxiety or panic attacks.
- Avoiding feelings or memories of the event through keeping busy or avoiding talking about the event.
- Not being able to remember the event, through dissociation or feeling physically or emotionally numb.

PTSD can begin immediately after the traumatic event has happened, or it might begin weeks, months or years later.



**Psychosis** - A person experiencing psychosis perceives the world in a different way to those around them, including hallucinations, delusions or both. By definition, psychosis involves the person losing touch with commonly accepted reality, though the extent of this may vary.

**Schizophrenia** - Contrary to popular belief, schizophrenia has nothing to do with 'split personality'. It is a diagnosis given to people who experience symptoms of psychosis, alongside what are called 'negative symptoms'.

**Self-harm** - Self-harm is when someone purposely hurts themselves, usually in order to cope with intense emotional distress.



**Suicidal feelings** - Suicide - when someone intentionally takes their own life - is a very complex issue and should always be treated as an emergency situation.

In 2017 there were 5,821 suicides registered in the UK and males accounted for three-quarters of these, which has roughly been the case since the mid-1990s.

So what are the warning signs that someone is having suicidal thoughts?

According to [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org), warning signs can include:

- becoming anxious, irritable or confrontational.
- having mood swings.
- acting recklessly.
- sleeping too much or too little.
- preferring not to be around other people.
- having more problems with work or studies.
- saying negative things about themselves.

However some signs that an attempted suicide is likely or imminent include:

- threatening to hurt or kill themselves.
- talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, or
- actively looking for ways to end their life, such as stockpiling medication.

At this point, according to MHFA England, there are certain steps that you should take to support the person who feels suicidal...

1. Ensure your own personal safety
2. Ensure the person is not left alone if the risk is high
3. Seek immediate help: Emergency GP, Call 999/112 or take to A&E
4. Discourage acute drug/alcohol use
5. Try to limit access to any means to take life
6. Encourage the person to talk – try the Samaritans on 116 123
7. Consider helping create a support plan
8. REMEMBER – confidentiality does not apply when someone is at risk of suicide.



# TRIGGERS AND SIGNS OF MENTAL ILL HEALTH

**In an industry with the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK, stress is often a key factor in many of the accidents, injuries and illnesses taking place on farms. Stress is something that many farmers face at some point and is an important contributor to mental ill health. It can come from many sources such as financial pressure, livestock disease, poor harvests, market conditions, policies, administration and legislation.**

We all have mental health just as we have physical health, but it can seem more difficult to spot the signs of mental ill health. MHFA England have outlined some of the common triggers which might impact on someone's mental health and the signs that suggest they may need support.

## Triggers

People often undergo significant life changes without developing a mental health issue. But for some people changes in their work or personal life, including happy events, can prove stressful and may trigger mental ill health.

Here are some examples of circumstances which might trigger mental ill health:

### Personal life changes

- Life changing injury
- Health scares or physical illness
- Bereavement
- Breakdown of a relationship
- Having children

### Changes at work

- Starting a new job
- Coping with an increased workload
- Poor relationships with workmates or supervisor
- Redundancy, or fear of redundancy
- Uncertainty with weather or market conditions

Add to this the stresses faced by everyone in daily life such as:

### **Physical Stress**

Late nights, binge drinking, drug misuse, poor diet, lack of exercise and illness.

### **Emotional Stress**

Relationship problems, peer pressure, leaving home, high expressed emotion within the family home.

### **Environmental Stress**

Poor housing, unemployment, new environments to adjust to such as moving house or holidays.

## **Signs**

Many people believe that poor mental health is rare and “happens to someone else.” It isn’t and it doesn’t.

Although everyone’s signs are individual to them, it is good to be aware of subtle or significant physical, behavioural or personality changes in those you work and live with, so you can remain alert to someone who may need your help...

Recognising a mental health issue is the first step in getting the support needed to recover. One of the first signs of mental ill health may be changes in the person’s behaviour.

Some of the signs to look out for include:

### **Physical**

- Frequent headaches or stomach upsets
- Suffering from frequent minor illnesses
- Difficulty sleeping or constant tiredness
- Being run down
- Lack of care over appearance
- Sudden weight loss or gain.



### **Emotional and behavioural**

- Irritability, aggression or tearfulness
- Being withdrawn, not participating in conversations or social activities
- Increased arguments or conflict with others
- Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes or sedatives
- Indecision, inability to concentrate
- Erratic or socially unacceptable behaviour
- Being louder or more exuberant than usual
- Loss of confidence
- Difficulty remembering things
- Loss of humour.

### **At work**

The signs that someone you work with, or for, may need more support include:

- Increased mistakes, missing deadlines or forgetting tasks
- Taking on too much work and volunteering for every new job
- Someone who is normally on time arriving late
- Working too many hours: first in, last out
- Increased sickness absence
- Negative changes to working socialising with colleagues.

Noticing one, or more, of these behaviours does not mean you should make assumptions about the person or what mental health concerns they may have but they can be used as a way of noticing when to check in and start a conversation about how they might be coping right now...

The earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have. If you, or someone you work with, has concerns, encourage them to talk to someone - the farm manager, their friends, family, vet, NFU Mutual agent or the local GP.

- Look out for the signs and symptoms of stress in yourself
- Learn to spot changes in others (health, personality, behaviour).

Taking time to talk to others can help develop a support network that can benefit everyone.

# WHAT IS STRESS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.’**

There is a clear difference between pressure, which can create a ‘buzz’ and be motivating, and stress, which occurs when this pressure becomes excessive.

Work-related stress is a major cause of occupational ill health in farming and it can cause severe physical and psychological conditions for farm workers. It can also lead to poor productivity, high staff turnover and increases in accidents in an industry with the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK.

HSE statistics show that work-related stress is a significant issue, not just in farming, with more than 11.5 million working days lost as a result of stress, anxiety or depression at an estimated cost of £5.2 billion to industry, individuals and the government.

Health and safety legislation requires you to assess the level of risk from hazards in the workplace and take all reasonably practicable measures to prevent or sufficiently reduce that risk. This includes the risk of stress to your workers.

# TIPS FOR COPING WITH STRESS

## TALK ABOUT IT

Talk to friends, family and workmates about the source of what is causing you stress. You can also join farming forums and Facebook groups to chat to other farmers. They may have useful advice, and be able to provide support.

## TAKE A BREAK

It’s difficult to relax while on a farm as there is always plenty to do. Try to schedule regular breaks where you actually leave the farm for a period of time (anything from a few hours to a weekend away). A short time away can help you come back with a fresh perspective.

## LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Stress can take a physical toll, it’s important that you eat a healthy diet, take part in physical exercise and ensure you have sufficient time to sleep. Making time to take care of yourself will help you stay strong in the face of stress.

## RELAXATION

There are a variety of ways in which you can relax – you might like to read a book, go for a walk or watch your favourite TV show. Try to find time to relax each day, even if it’s just for 15 minutes.

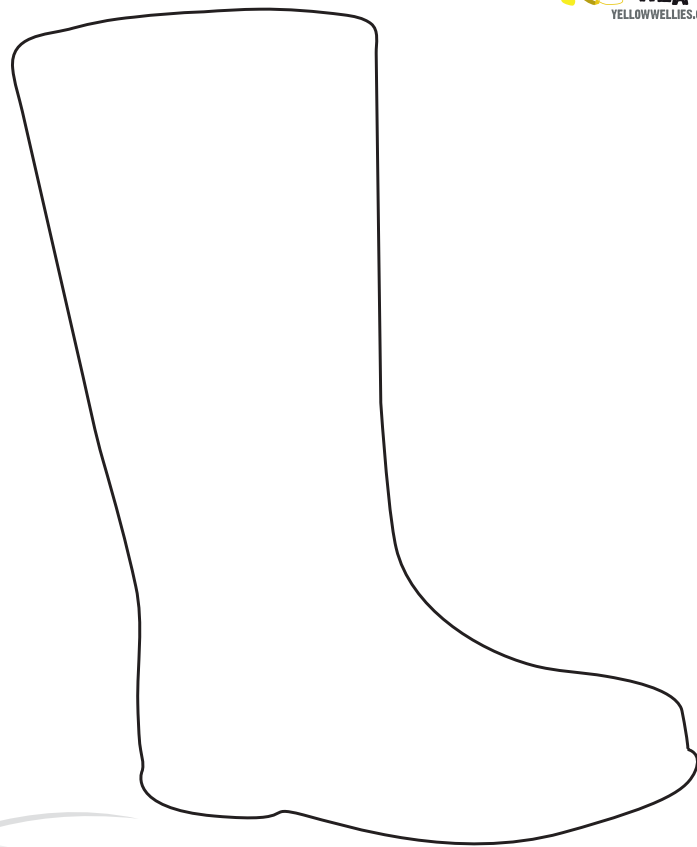
## FILL YOUR BOOT...

**If you, or someone you work or live with, is feeling overwhelmed by the stresses of everyday life, try using this tool to identify the things that are concerning, worrying or causing you to feel down or apprehensive.**

Using the space inside, literally fill the boot with all the worrying thoughts you have inside your head. No matter how big or small, try to include everything from your work, home life and the world at large that is causing you stress right now.

Once you feel that you've included everything, leave it and take a break.

After a short time, come back, take a look at the list and start to separate what you've written into things you can personally control and things that you have no control or influence over...



## **NOW ASK YOURSELF...**

**1. What can I control?**

**2. What is out of my control so I need to accept?**

**3. What needs my attention right now?**

**4. Who can help me? Who can I talk to?**

**5. How do I deal with things in a negative way?**  
(keeping it to myself, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol, not getting enough sleep)

**6. How do I deal with things in a positive way?**  
(asking for help, making time for positive experiences, getting enough rest)

# WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

**The word depression is used in many different ways. Everyone can feel sad or down when bad things happen however sadness is not the same as depression.**

People who are feeling a little ‘down’ may have a short term depressed mood but they can manage to cope and soon recover without needing treatment. The type of depression that does require treatment and that there is no quick fix for is ‘clinical depression’.

Clinical depression accounts for 26% of all mental health issues and is a condition that lasts for at least two weeks and affects the individual’s behaviour. It will interfere with the person’s ability to work and have satisfying personal relationships.

## What does this look like?

Someone who is ‘clinically depressed’ will experience at least two of these three symptoms most of the day, every day for more than 2 weeks:

- Continuous low mood or sadness that does not go away
- Not getting any enjoyment out of life
- Lack of energy and prolonged tiredness

Other symptoms include:

- Loss of confidence/low self esteem
- Feeling guilt-ridden
- Suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- Difficulty in concentrating and making decisions
- Moving or speaking more slowly than usual and unable to settle
- Having difficulty sleeping/sleeping too much
- Loss of appetite / overeating leading to weight loss/gain.

Not everyone who experiences depression has all these symptoms so the following is a good guide to severity of depression...

**Mild Depression** - 4 of the 10 symptoms experienced over the past two weeks and has some impact on your daily life.

**Moderate Depression** - 6 of the 10 symptoms experienced over the past two weeks and has significant impact on your daily life.

**Severe Depression** - 8 of the 10 symptoms experienced over the past two weeks and make it almost impossible to get through daily life.



## What does this sound like?

Someone experiencing depression will tend to have a negative view of themselves, the world and the future.

Things you may hear them say:

- *I'm useless*
- *It's all my fault*
- *I'm worthless*
- *No-one loves me*
- *Things are never going to get any better*
- *I've let everyone down*
- *Life sucks*

Being aware of what to look and listen out for can allow you to address the issue at an early stage and guide yourself or the person you are concerned about, towards appropriate support.





## START A CONVERSATION...

### You've seen the warning signs... what happens now?

How do you start a meaningful conversation with a friend, a family member or colleague about their mental health and effectively guide them towards the right support?

Having an informal chat and asking 'are you okay?' can be the first step on that journey.

We don't often talk about our mental health so it might seem a little daunting to start a conversation about it but it's important to remember you don't have to be an expert. MHFA England has put together some ideas for how you can start the conversation.

### Choose a setting

- Make a hot drink or grab a glass of water. It's a great way to ask someone a quick 'how are you?' and start a conversation.
- Meeting away from the workplace in a neutral space such as a café or pub might feel less intimidating.

- Give yourself plenty of time so it doesn't look like you're in a hurry – 10 minutes may be enough but, if you need longer, then go ahead.
- Give them your full attention so switch your phone off or onto silent.

### Talking tips

- Keep the conversation positive and supportive, exploring the issues and how you may be able to help.
- Keep your body language open and non-confrontational.
- Be empathetic and take them seriously, this is a serious issue so do not offer glib advice such as "pull yourself together" or "cheer up".

Useful questions to ask – Open questions invite the person to share more so they can't answer with a 'yes' or 'no'

- *"How are you feeling at the moment?"*
- *"How long have you felt like this?"*
- *"Tell me how work is adding to this?"*
- *"What can we do to help?"*

## How to listen

- Don't wade in with your thoughts and opinions. Just let them talk and LISTEN
- Focus on their words, tone of voice and body language – all will give you a clue as to how they are really feeling.
- Don't judge. Respect the person's feelings, experiences and values although they may be different from yours.
- See it from their side. Try and put yourself in the other person's shoes and show them that you hear and understand what they are saying and feeling.
- Be genuine – show that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do.

## What happens next?

- Keep the conversation going – follow up and ask them how they are doing. Reassure them that your door is always open, and mean it. It's particularly important to stay in touch with any workers who are off sick.
- Reassure them that help is available so no matter how they want that support – face-to-face, by phone or online – there are specialist organisations throughout the UK working to offer that support.
- Remember, you are not an expert and may have limited knowledge so sometimes it is appropriate to encourage the person to visit their GP or seek expert help.



## SOURCES OF HELP

**Farming Help (farminghelp.org.uk) is the Farming Charities' Umbrella Organisation and comprises:**

### **FCN (The Farming Community Network)**

Practical Support

03000 111 999 (7am-11pm daily) | [www.fcn.org.uk](http://www.fcn.org.uk)

### **R.A.B.I. (The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution)**

Welfare and Financial Help

01865 724931 (weekdays 9am-5pm) Helpline: 0808 281 9490  
[www.rabi.org.uk](http://www.rabi.org.uk)

### **The Addington Fund**

Housing Support

01926 620135 | [www.addingtonfund.org.uk](http://www.addingtonfund.org.uk)

### **Other Sources Include:**

#### **NHS**

Medical advice 111

Suicide risk or any other life threatening emergency dial 999  
[nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services](https://nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services)

#### **Mind**

Advice and Support

0300 123 3393 (weekdays 9am – 6pm) | [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

#### **RSABI (The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution)**

Support in Scotland

0300 111 4166 (7am-11pm daily) | [www.rsabi.org.uk](http://www.rsabi.org.uk)

#### **Rural Support Northern Ireland**

Practical Support

0845 6067607 (weekdays 9am-9pm) | [www.ruralsupport.org.uk](http://www.ruralsupport.org.uk)

#### **Samaritans**

116 123 (24/7) | [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

#### **Scottish Association of Mental Health**

0141 530 1000 (weekdays 9am-9pm) | [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

For more guidance around how to support and respond to someone experiencing a mental health issue visit [www.mhfaengland.org](http://www.mhfaengland.org)

A full list of rural support groups can be found in the National Rural Support Groups directory available from The YANA Project or by download from [www.yellowwellies.org](http://www.yellowwellies.org)





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