

Safeguarding Adults and Children with Mental Health Concerns

Timely and effective responses to adults and children with mental health concerns can improve wellbeing and reduce risks of many forms of harm. This briefing is aimed at all professionals who encounters adults and/or children with mental health concerns through their work, whether it be housing, policing, healthcare, social care, support work, probation, education, welfare rights, advocacy, or advice services. This briefing also marks Mental Health Awareness Week 2025.

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Safeguarding Adults With Mental Health Needs

In 2013 research undertaken by Victim Support, Mind, the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, Kingston University and St George's, University of London, in collaboration with University College London found that people with severe mental illness were at significantly higher risk of being victimised than the general population:

- People with severe mental illness were 3 times more likely to be a victim of any crime than those without mental illness.
- People with severe mental illness were 5 times more likely to be assaulted than those without
- Women with severe mental illness were 10 times more likely to be assaulted than those without
- Nearly 45% of people with severe mental illness reported being victims of crime in the last year
- 62% of women with severe mental illness reported being victims of sexual violence as adults
- People with severe mental illness were 7 times more likely to be victims of three or more different types of crime in a year than the general population
- People with severe mental illness were significantly more likely to report the police had been unfair or disrespectful compared to the general population.



Responding to Mental Health Concerns and Suicidal Feelings for Children and Adults

Prompt professional responses to mental health concerns are important to promote wellbeing and, sometimes, to prevent harm to children and adults. Practitioners across the local network need to know how to access specialist mental health services.

Things which indicate a child or adult needs an urgent mental health assessment:

- Expressing suicidal thoughts and feelings
- Worries about self harm
- New or increased symptoms such as hearing voices and/or believing things which are not real
- Expressing paranoid beliefs
- Talking in a very confused way, which is unusual for the person
- A marked change in behaviour including, but not limited to, social withdrawal, aggression, irritability or onset of self-neglect.

These things can indicate serious mental health concerns for adults, children and older adults. Anyone can experience a mental health crisis and people need timely interventions from clinical services.

Getting help before crisis point

Either speak to the person's GP or, if they are already actively involved with secondary mental health services (CAMHS or CMHH), call the relevant team if you know their number. GPs do non-urgent assessments of someone's mental health and can start treatment. Some GP practices have mental health practitioners based in their surgery too. There are community mental health teams for children, adults and older adults. They are all run by CNWL.



CNWL
Talking Therapies



People over 18 can also self refer to CNWL Talking Therapies, psychoeducational programmes and group therapy options. This service is suitable when the person is not in crisis.

CNWL also run Mental Health Support Teams in Schools, providing an early intervention service in partnership with local primary and secondary schools and colleges, in Hillingdon, delivering evidence-based interventions to support young people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties.



Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust



Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

For urgent matters there is 24/7 mental health crisis support for children and adults



0800 023 4650

CNWL's Single Point of Access (SPA) is a 24 hour telephone service which offers support, advice and signposting for children, young people, adults and older adults who may be experiencing a mental health crisis. Individuals, family, carers and professionals can contact SPA for urgent mental health advice. SPA clinicians can support with risk assessments, referring to secondary services, referring an adult or a child for urgent intensive community support or can explore whether hospital admission might be needed.

NB. If someone already has a mental health clinician in place try to speak to them first if possible.

TIP: If you believe that a child or adult needs to be in hospital for mental health care because the risks are very high, they may require an assessment under the Mental Health Act. Go to [page 3](#) for more information.

Mental Health Assessment vs Mental Health Act Assessment

Know the Difference

When responding to mental health concerns, for adults and children, particularly where there is a perceived crisis or high risk, it is helpful when practitioners have clarity about how to access the right kind of help at the right time. There is sometimes confusion about what type of assessment is needed and how to mobilise the right service. Sometimes lack of clarity about mental health assessments and mental health act assessments can delay access to urgently needed help.

Mental Health Assessment

What is it for?

To assess symptoms and severity of mental disorder and make decisions about treatment. Children and adults can be subject to mental health assessments.

Who does it?

Healthcare professionals do mental health assessments. It could be a GP, a psychiatric nurse, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or an occupational therapist with specialist experience.

When is it needed?

When there are concerns that a person's mental health is deteriorating or changing and they may need additional support. This may include a review of medication, or assessment of risks associated with their mental health such as suicidality, self harm, aggression, or self neglect. Consideration should be given to issues around mental capacity if someone is refusing an assessment or support. Efforts should be made to assertively engage them. However, people with mental capacity to decide do have a right to refuse a mental health assessment.

What are the possible outcomes?

A change, or increase/decrease in treatment for a mental health condition. A referral to a more specialist service either in hospital or in the community. Urgent care and treatment by a health service in the community. A referral for a Mental Health Act assessment may follow.

How to refer for a mental health assessment?

This depends on whether the assessment is urgent, the level of complexity, and what professionals are already involved. Look at the options on the previous page about how to get help for someone if you are concerned about their mental health.

Mental Health Act Assessment

What is it for?

To decide whether the legal criteria for compulsory detention and treatment for mental disorder are met. Children and adults can be subject to Mental Health Act assessments.

Who does it?

Only an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), along with two doctors with special training, can do a Mental Health Act Assessment. AMHPs are employed by the Local Authority. They are usually social workers with special training.

When is it needed?

If it appears to an AMHP that a person may need to be held in hospital against their will because their mental illness poses a risk to their health or safety, or poses a risk to other people, and there is no way to manage the risks without compulsory detention/treatment. People do NOT have a right to refuse a Mental Health Act assessment.

What are the possible outcomes?

The person could be detained in hospital, also known as 'sectioned', under the Mental Health Act. If the person is not detained in hospital, the AMHP may then take steps to arrange support with local health and social care services.

How to refer for a Mental Health Act assessment?

Anyone can refer by telephoning the AMHP Service on 01895 485 181 9-5pm Monday-Friday, or 01895 250 111 out of hours. Usually, a health or social care professional, police officer or family member will identify that a person may need to be in hospital and they then refer for an assessment.

Partnership Working Between Social Care and Clinical Services

To improve outcomes for children and adults with mental health needs, it helps for social care practitioners and mental health clinicians to work together. Effective interventions and management of risk involve:

- joint risk assessments and formulations
- sharing knowledge and expertise with other disciplines
- assessments including input from both social care and clinical services
- planning care and support together

Make sure you know how to contact teams and professionals in other organisations and be curious about how other services operate, including their thresholds and expertise. Build relationships across services and make use of joint forums for discussing individual children, adults and families.

Resolving Professional Differences: Our partnership Escalation Policy provides a framework for addressing and resolving circumstances where there are differences of opinion about safeguarding practice



Identifying and responding to needs

Adults

If you think an adult with mental health concerns needs social care support you should seek help through Adult Social Care: 01895 556633 or socialcaredirect@hillingsdon.gov.uk

Social care support includes things like:

- help with personal care, including washing and dressing and using the toilet
- support to go out in the community to access resources including education, social activities, work
- help to shop for and prepare food
- managing social relationships
- maintaining and safe and habitable home.
- If people need residential care or supported accommodation this is also usually a social care need.

Eligibility for social care support is determined by a [Care Act 2014 assessment](#).

Children

If you think a child has a disability arising from a mental illness they may be a child in need.

In discussions with the family, consider completing a Stronger Families assessment using the [Stronger Families Hub](#) to identify the child and family's needs for support.

Eligibility for statutory social care support is determined by a child and family assessment.

If you have a safeguarding concern about a child with a disability contact the Stronger Families Hub 01895 556006.

Think Family When Supporting a Parent with Mental Health Needs

"Published case reviews tell us that professionals sometimes lack awareness of the extent a mental health problem may impact on parenting capacity. This may result in a failure to identify potential safeguarding issues. The learning from these reviews highlights that professionals must recognise the relationship between adult mental health and child protection."



When supporting a parent with mental health problems it is important to 'Think Family'

- explicitly consider the potential impact on the children and on parenting capacity.
- Take responsibility for making child safeguarding referrals - follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures.
- referrals to children's social care which indicate parental mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation, ought to be recognised as a child safeguarding concern
- adult mental health clinicians and child safeguarding practitioners should proactively and promptly communicate directly to develop a shared understanding of a family's situation

Assessing parental mental health or child wellbeing in isolation from other professionals working with a family will result in less effective interventions.

Protecting the Mental Health of Professionals

Working in helping professions or emergency services can place a strain on your emotional wellbeing. You may have to hear or respond to people who are in distressing situations, or reply to emails that make you feel shock, anger, sympathy, disbelief or sadness. You may be experiencing an increase in workload.

If you're struggling, you are not alone. Your mental health matters, and you deserve support.



If you are a Hillingdon based CNWL or NHS Staff member, or work in the care sector you can self-refer to CNWLs Hillingdon Talking Therapies Service. Indicate clearly that you are CNWL staff, NHS staff or work in the Care sector, in the referral.

Access to Work, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, is here for you if you are struggling at work. Their support is easy to access and there's no cost.



Having a mentally healthy workforce can bring so many benefits to your organisation. Mind produces extensive resources for staff, managers, and organisations on how to take care of staff and look after their mental health at work.



This guide is for managers of staff who have mental health problems.