

Volunteers and Mental Health

It is really important that volunteers are supported to stay healthy and manage their mental health, as well as being able to access additional support if they need it, especially in the context of Coronavirus.

Volunteer Co-ordinators

Manage contact with the volunteers you are supporting

- Be reliable and consistent in communicating with your volunteers.
- Make sure you are able to be contacted by your volunteers and that the conversations include not just practical and logistical issues but also include their mental and physical health.

Respect people's needs

- Don't assume someone wants or needs your help: ask first.
- Then listen carefully: don't jump to give advice or sympathise. Feelings of stress can be complex. Someone may take time to explain their feelings fully.
- Don't underestimate the impact of their role on your volunteer's mental health.
- If a volunteer seeks support:
 - Check you understand both the feelings and their impact of them on the volunteer. Don't make assumptions.
 - Ask sensitively if the volunteer has experienced these feelings before and if they are able to access support in regard to this (for example, they may have access to talking therapy or prescribed medication).
 - Ask if the volunteer has any friends or family they can talk to about this and if so encourage them to do so.
 - Support the volunteer to use appropriate support (see below).
 - Keep volunteers informed about other support options that may be available so that they can choose the best service for them and don't feel they can only come to you.

Manage boundaries and expectations

- Don't offer advice on things such as benefits or legal matters, even if you have experience with the relevant issue: support the person to contact a local Advice Centre or the Citizens Advice (see contact details below).
- Don't attempt to offer in-depth emotional support. To do this properly you need training. Refer to a helpline (see contact details below).

If you are worried that someone you are helping is in danger or is experiencing any form of abuse you must report it. If you have a key contact at your group or organisation tell them as soon as possible. If necessary contact the police. Call 999 in an emergency, or if the person is not in immediate danger call 101.

Useful expert contacts – support for mental health and practicalities

Emotional support	The Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/ 116 123 (free call)
	The Silverline (for older people) https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/ 0800 470 80 90
	Childline (for young people) https://www.childline.org.uk/ 0800 1111
Legal advice (for example employment, discrimination, EU Settled Status)	Bristol Law Centre https://www.bristollawcentre.org.uk/get-help/ 0117 924 8662
Benefits, debt and housing advice	Bristol CAB https://www.bristolcab.org.uk/get-advice/ 03444 111444
	North Bristol Advice http://www.northbristoladvice.org.uk/ 0117 951 5751
	St Paul's Advice Centre https://www.stpaulsAdvice.org.uk/ 0117 9552981
	South Bristol Advice Services https://www.southbristoladvice.org.uk/ 0117 985 1122