Feeling Down: Looking After My Mental Health

An easy read guide for people with learning disabilities

foundation for people with learning disabilities

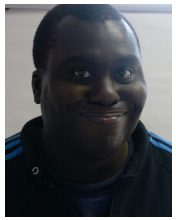
Thank You

We would like to say thank you to all the people who helped make this guide:

The Project Reference Group

Liam Peyton

Peter Cronin



Richard Lawrence

Richard West

Christine Burke

Jill Davies

Kate Ball

Ned Parkinson

Eddie Chaplin from the Estia Centre

estia centre

Christine Burke who wrote this guide and the report

Important words

GP
We use the word GP in the report. General Practitioner (GP) is another word for family doctor or local doctor.

Psychologist
Psychologists can help us to think about what we do and suggest ways to change things that are making us unhappy. Some psychologists do research, others work with people in groups or by themselves to talk about what is upsetting them. This can be called talking therapy. Psychologists are not trained as doctors like psychiatrists are, they cannot give out medicines.

Counsellor
A counsellor talks to you about what is wrong and tries to help you think about how you can feel better.

Psychiatrist
Psychiatrists are trained as doctors and then do more training to be psychiatrists. They deal with more serious mental health problems and are allowed to give out medicines to help people feel better.

Diagnosis
Diagnosis is when a GP tells you what is wrong with you. They use the information you give them about how you are feeling (your symptoms) to think about what is making you feel that way and how to make it better.

Why is it important to look after my mental health?

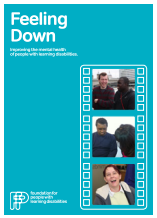
This guide has been made because of what people with learning disabilities said that they want.

They want more support and control over their own mental health.

We wanted to write some information to help people with learning disabilities when they visit their GP and understand how to look after their own mental health.

Members of the reference group talked about how they got support with their mental health.

They said that a diary and information to explain what was happening to them would make it easier to talk to staff and tell the GP how they were feeling.



We have written a report about this work called **Feeling Down – Looking After My Mental Health**. This is important for people with learning disabilities, their families, friends, and professionals.
You can find the report and the easy read summary on our website **www.fpld.org.uk/mentalhealth.**

‘I sometimes need space to get rid of the cloud that is over my head.’

‘My counsellor lets me cry when I want to and talk when I want to. She listens and helps me to think things through.’

‘The psychologist was great. He helped with developing ground rules of how to support our son. People needed to follow these to make sure of his wellbeing.’

‘I can manage my anxiety by controlling my breathing; I don’t have to get angry.’

How to use the guide

Feeling Down – Looking After My Mental Health is an easy read guide for people with learning disabilities. It can be used with or without support.

In this guide there is advice and information about how to look after yourself and get the best out of life. This guide is in 5 parts.

Part 1:
What is mental health?

Part 4:
Planning a visit to your GP

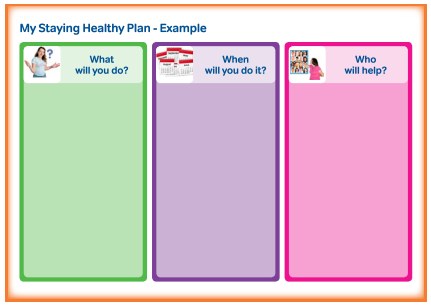
Part 2:
How to keep yourself feeling well

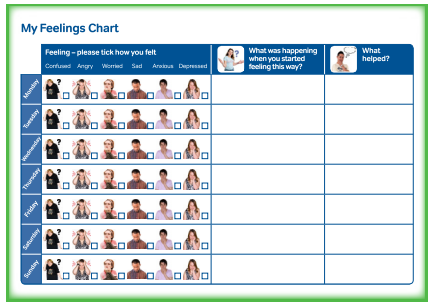
Part 5:
GP Information Pack

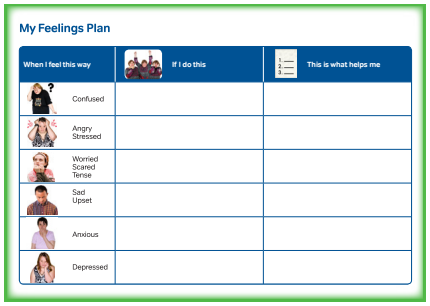
Part 3:
What to do when you are worried about your mental health

We have made some 'forms' (**My Staying Healthy Plan, My Feelings Chart and Plan**) to write about how you are feeling and help you think about how you can keep yourself feeling good.

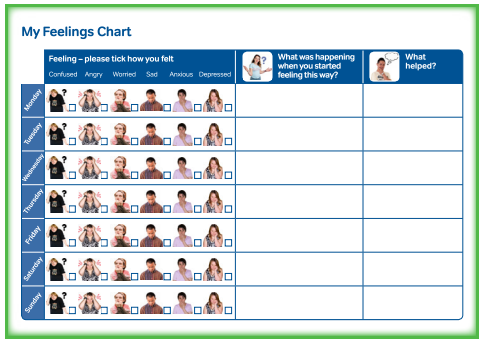
You may want to make photocopies of these forms before you fill them in so you can use them again. There are PDFs on our website to download if you run out of these forms. **www.fpld.org.uk/mentalhealth.**

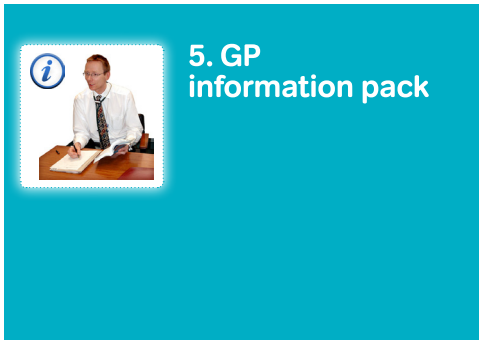






This folder is for you to keep any information which helps you keep well, e.g. **My Feelings Chart.** When you visit your GP take out the GP Information Pack (**Part 5**) and take it with you to help tell the GP how you are feeling.





1. What is mental health?

Mental health affects how you feel and think about life.

Feeling good in your mind is as important as feeling good in your body.

If you feel good in your mind you will feel happy, and good about yourself and friendly towards other people. It will help you enjoy life.

Sometimes we don't feel well, we feel sad or worried:

'I am upset because staff say forget it when I tell them I am sad.'

'I hear voices.'

'Sometimes I feel anxious and get angry. I don't know what to do.'

What does it feel like to be down, worried or depressed?

We are all different – everyone feels down in different ways.

You might feel very quiet and just want to be on your own. You might cry a lot, or you might want to shout or scream.

People talk about feeling down in different ways too.
Here are some words that people use to say how they feel:

Sad
Upset
Depressed

Worried
Scared
Tense

Angry
Confused
Stressed

Why we might feel down, worried or depressed

Lots of things can make us feel down, worried or depressed. For example:

Being in pain

Splitting up with someone we love or arguing with a friend

Money worries

Having health problems

When someone we love dies

Being bullied or hurt

Sometimes we feel down for no reason at all.

How you feel when you are down, worried or depressed

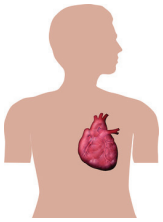
Each person is different. Some people say they feel physically unwell.
Feelings (symptoms) they describe are:

Dizziness

Sweaty hands

Feeling tense

Not sleeping
Being more tired than usual,
so it's hard to get up in the morning



Heart beating fast

Mouth ulcers

Wanting to bite your fingernails

Feeling sick
Butterflies in the stomach
Diarrhoea or stomach pains

Sleep is important

Lack of sleep or being in pain can cause a lot of problems including:

Not able to concentrate
Feeling down

Losing your temper easily

Dizziness
Feeling ill more often

Too tired to wake
up or go out

Feeling withdrawn and
wanting to be alone

Some people find it hard to control their feelings

When we feel unhappy or down it can change what we to do.
Everyone acts differently when they feel down.
We might:

Cry a lot and feel sad

Shout or feel like shouting at people

Feel like hurting ourselves

Not want to talk to anyone

Sometimes these feelings go away but sometimes they get really bad.
If this happens to you, ask for help. There are lots of things you can do to make yourself feel better.

See **Part 2** for ways to stay feeling well.

See **Part 3** for what to do if you are worried about your mental health.

2. How to keep yourself feeling well

a) Keep in touch with family and friends

Family and friends can help you with problems and stresses in your life.
They may be able to offer help and a listening ear.

To keep in touch you can use:

Phone

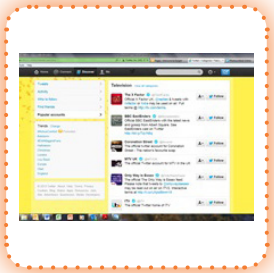
Email

Letter

Skype

Text

Facebook



Twitter

Mobile phone

If you are not sure about these ideas ask someone to support you so you can try them out.

Spend time with friends and family and ask them for support if you need it.

b) Have a break

Doing different things away from your home is good for your mental health. You could go:

Away for a few days

For a walk to the park

For a coffee on your own or with a friend

Shopping

For a ride on transport e,g. a bus ride

These things can help you relax and sort out your thoughts.

c) Find time to relax

Relaxing can help you when:

- you feel under pressure
- thoughts keep going round and round in your head
- you are tense

Try doing some relaxing things.

Listen to music

Take a nap

Do some breathing exercises

Read a book

Watch a film

Do some yoga

If you find it hard, ask your GP to let you know where you can get help to learn to relax.

d) Do things you enjoy

Doing things that you enjoy makes you feel good about yourself.
Make sure you don't have too much time with nothing to do.
This can make you feel low.

Keep your mind and body busy. This will help you feel well.
Ask your family, friends or support worker for help to find things to do.

Here are some things you can do to feel better about yourself

e) Eat well and drink sensibly

What we eat effects how we feel. For example, caffeine and sugar can make us feel unwell. Our brains need a good balance of different foods to keep healthy. A diet which is good for your physical health, your body, is also good for your mental wellbeing. A healthy balanced diet includes:

You can find out more about healthy eating from the following websites:
The Balanced Diet Plate is at **http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Documents/Eatwellplate.pdf**

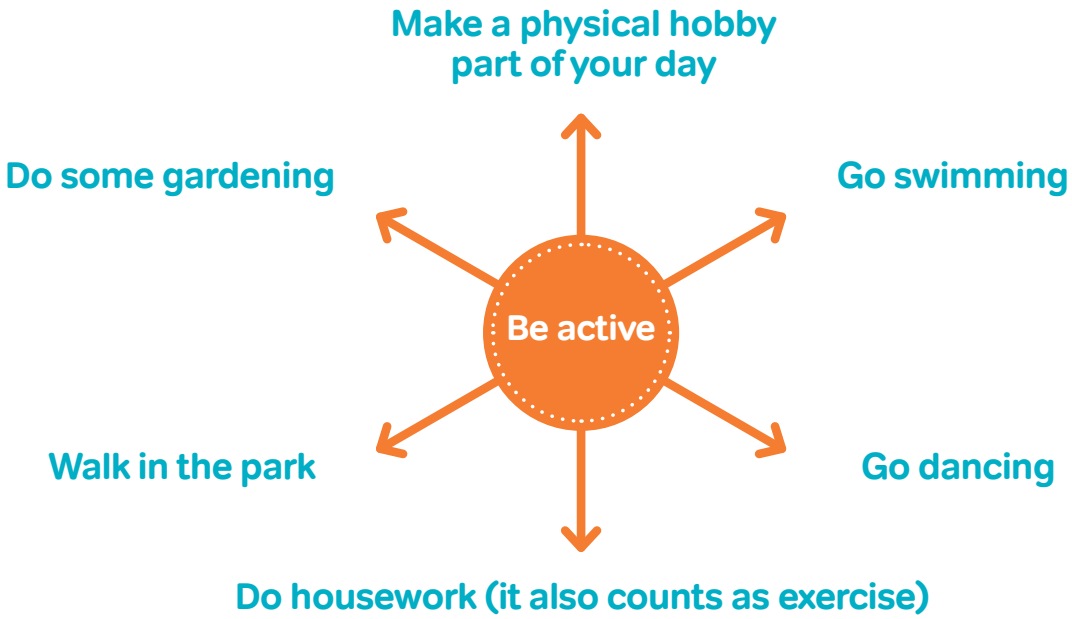
The British Nutrition Foundation's website is at **www.nutrition.org.uk** and on **www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/5ADAY.**

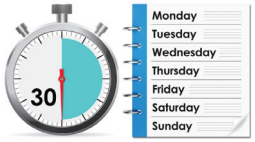
Books Beyond Words have a book about healthy eating, 'Food...Fun, Healthy and Safe'. **www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk.**

Or look at the British Heart Foundation Easy Read Document with CD.
http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1000844

f) Be active

Exercise can help you feel fitter and lose weight. Regular exercise can help you concentrate, sleep and feel better. Being active doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym.
Some things you can do to keep active are:





Experts say most people should do about 30 minutes' exercise at least 5 days a week.
Exercise can help us feel better when we are feeling down. You can have exercise therapy to help you.

Ask your GP about it or look at **www.nhs.uk.**
Or the British Heart Foundation Easy Read Document with CD.
http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1000844

Books Beyond Words have a book on exercise - Enjoying Exercise and Sport.
www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk.

g) Sleep well

Having a good night's sleep allows your body and mind to rest, and it can make you feel better and have more energy.

- Make sure your room is clean, dusted and open the window to let air in.

- Have a relaxing bath.

- Put a nice air freshener in the room with your favourite smell (not too strong).

- Eat regularly.
  Try not to eat after 7pm.

- Don't drink alcohol or drinks with caffeine in them in the evenings. If you want a hot drink, drink decaf or herbal tea.

- Don't exercise just before you go to bed.

To find out more about it go to **www.sleeping.org.uk**.

Also the Mental Health Foundation has a good book 'The impact of sleep on our mental health'. You can find it on: **http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/sleep-report/**

h) Make a plan

My Staying Healthy Plan can help you to think about how to look after your mental health.

In it you can write down all the things that make you feel good and happy.

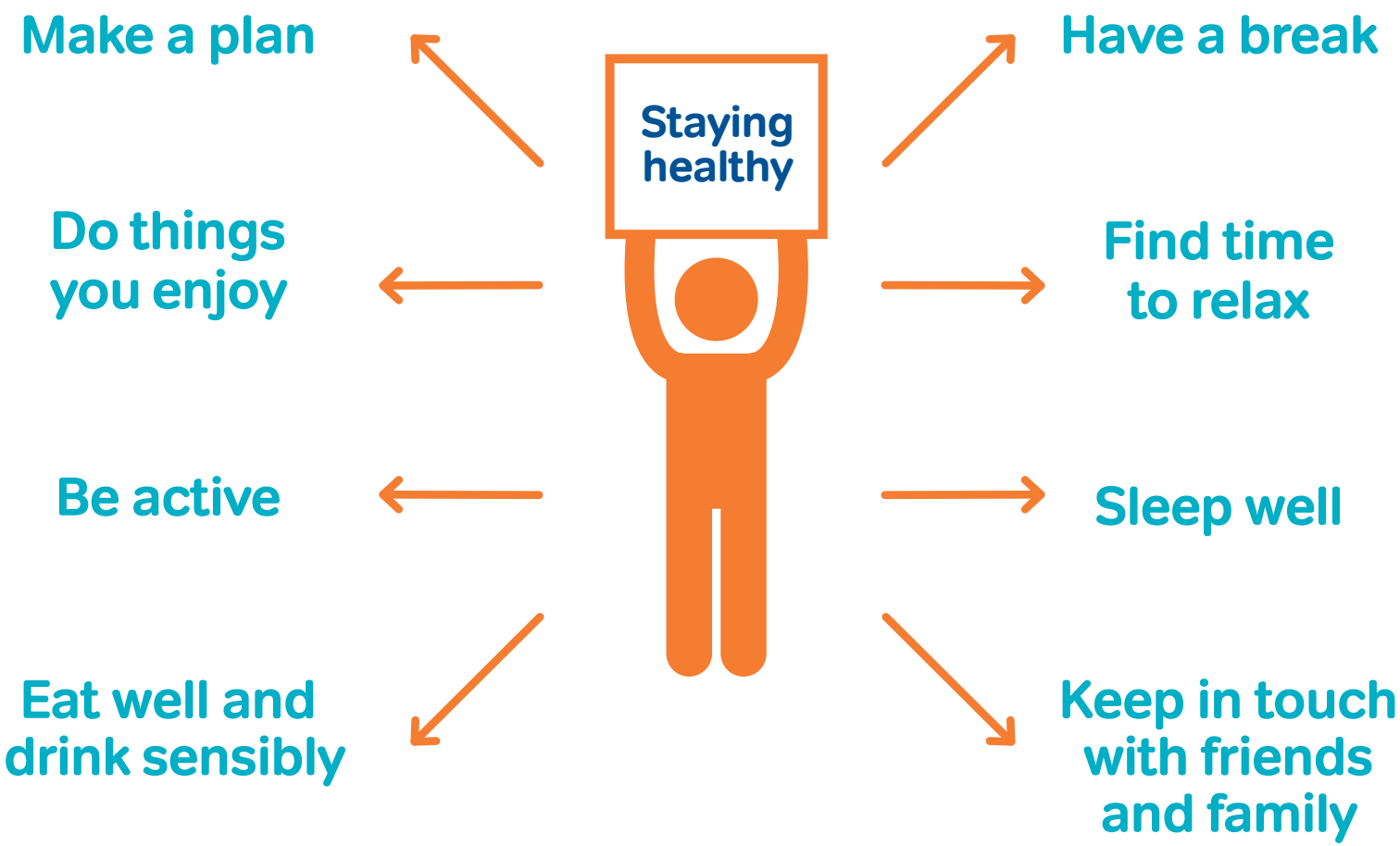
The plan can remind you to keep doing these things and help to stop you from feeling low or down in the future.

Look at our example of **My Staying Healthy Plan** on the next page to see how you can make your own plan.

We have a blank template which you can fill in with the things that make you feel well and happy on the following pages.

My Staying Healthy Plan

Use the ideas in this part to think about how you can stay healthy.



My Staying Healthy Plan - Example

What will you do?

1. Relax by going to a relaxation class
2. Go out with friends for coffee
3. Talk to my sister as it makes me feel less anxious when I talk to her
4. Tidy my room. Open the window in the morning to let some fresh air in. Put an air freshener in the room. This will help me sleep better
5. Go to the GP this week to talk about how I am feeling and about not sleeping.

When will you do it?

1. Once a week
2. Once a week
3. Every evening
4. Once a week
5. This week

Who will help?

1. Jane will help me
2. My friends
3. My sister
4. My support worker
5. My sister

My Staying Healthy Plan

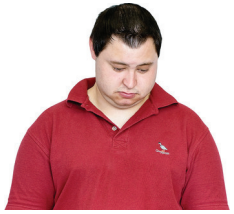
What will you do?

When will you do it?

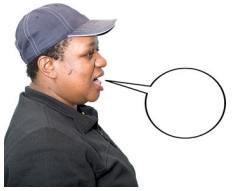
Who will help?

3. What to do when you are worried about your mental health

We all have times when we feel down.
You may feel stressed, frightened, worried or angry.
This can happen to all of us, not just you.
It does not mean that you are not a good person.



Most of the time bad feelings go away.
But sometimes these feelings grow and become a more serious problem.
If your mood does not change you may need help.



a) Talk to someone

Talk to someone you trust. This will help you to:

Feel better

Sort out things that are bothering you

Think about ways to solve problems you may have

Feel supported and less alone

Learn from how others deal with their feelings

Say what you feel. Everyone communicates differently.
Use words, images, pictures - whatever helps you.

Who can you talk to?

Some people that could help are:

Family

Friends

Support worker

Volunteer

Some people have a circle of support. A circle of support is a group of people who come together to:

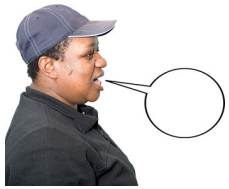
Help you plan

Make things happen

Be there as friends

They are people who love or like you or maybe just know who you are.

Ask someone to help you to invite people to join your circle.
The circle can help you to solve problems or just have fun.
The more people in your life who know you well, the safer you will feel.



This is what some people have said about their circles:

'We arrange to go to the club together.'

'My circle of friends listen to me and I feel they understand me.'

'I can call one of my circle of friends and they will travel with me if I am worried about going somewhere.'

'Meeting with my circle is good. But knowing that I can pick up the phone to talk to one of them helps me to sort out my feelings, not to be alone.'

Some people belong to a Book Club in their local library.
A book club is a group of people who come together to read Books Beyond Words picture books about things that can affect our mental health.

Talking about the stories in these books can help you to share your own experiences and make you feel better.
Ask your library to start a book club. Invite your friends to join.

Talk to your GP

If you think it will help, ask a friend or a family member to come with you.
Tell your GP how you are feeling.

Look at **Part 4**, 'Planning a visit to your GP'. It will help you to prepare for your meeting with your GP.

Also see my **GP Information Pack** at the back of this guide.
This pack tells your GP about mental health and has information about you to show your GP.
It helps you tell your GP how you are feeling.

The GP will listen and may:

Help you work things out or give you an information prescription for a book about mental health

Give you some medication to help you feel better

Tell you to take time off and relax

Refer you (send you) to someone to help you to learn how to relax

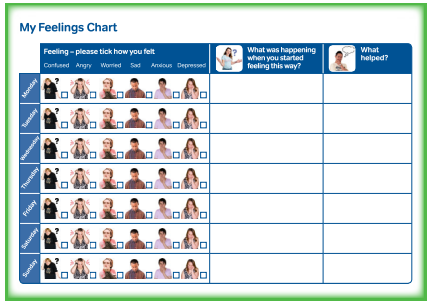
Refer you (send you) to someone else who can help like a psychologist, nurse, psychiatrist or counsellor

Talk to your support worker

Tell your support worker how you are feeling and say you want to see your GP.

Give him/her the **GP Information Pack** at the back of this guide.
This will explain what mental health is and what he/she needs to do if someone says they feel down.

Ask your support worker to help you to complete the **My Staying Healthy Plan (Part 2)**, **Feelings Chart and Plan (Part 3)**, and **GP Information Pack (Part 5)**.



If they don't help you, ask a family member or a friend.

If you are alone, contact one of the groups listed on the next page and ask them to help you.

Talk to an advocate or self-advocacy group

Self-advocacy groups help people with learning disabilities get better at speaking up for themselves.

They organise meetings where you can learn new skills and meet new people.

Self-advocacy groups will also speak up for you if you want them to.

They are on your side.

There are self-advocacy groups all over the county.

Ask your GP, social worker or nurse to help you find one near you or telephone your local council.

These are some places that might be able to help:

- **Citizens Advice Bureau:** they give free advice on the law (legal advice), on benefits and on money, for example if you are in debt and need advice on budgeting. They are independent and confidential.

- **Mencap** has a helpline telephone: 0808 808 1111; email:help@mencap.org.uk. Mencap Direct telephone line is open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. They can also help you find your local Mencap group which may offer support and advice.

- **Community duty social worker.** If you need to talk to a social worker call the council and ask for the telephone number for the duty social worker.

- **Samaritans:** this is a 24-hour telephone support service. You call them and they listen to you in confidence.

- **Your doctor** will be able to give you information on psychological services available, such as counselling: this offers you time to talk to someone in confidence.

- **IAPT** is a psychological therapy service and you can ask your doctor or local council to give you the number. They will be able to help you with therapy.

b) Join a support group

There are many people who feel like you do. It can be helpful to meet them and talk about what you are going through. There are organisations that bring people together to do this.

Your GP can help you to find one in your area.

c) Avoid people who are not good for your wellbeing

If being around someone is making you feel bad it may be best to stop seeing them. Only talk to people you trust and like.

Some people may be trying to be nice but you want them to stop telling you what to do.

You can tell them you want to do things on your own for a while.

You might like someone but not want to talk to them sometimes.

That is OK!

Just tell them that you are busy and ask them to come back later.

d) Write down how you feel

If your feelings have changed and you have started to feel sad or down, it can be good to write this down.

We have a **Feelings Chart and Plan** on the next pages where you can write about how you are feeling.

Having a record of what you are feeling and when can help you recognise any changes in how you feel.

It is also a good way to help you tell other people like support staff, family members or your GP about how you have been feeling so you don't have to remember it all by yourself.

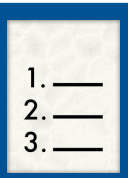
Sometimes when we feel sad or down for a while it can help us to go to our GP and see if he/she can help us to feel better.

By writing down your moods and pain daily, you will have information to help your GP decide what treatment is best for you.

My Feelings Chart

	Feeling – please tick how you felt Confused	Angry	Worried	Sad	Anxious	Depressed	What was happening when you started feeling this way?	What helped?
Monday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Tuesday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Wednesday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Thursday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Friday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Saturday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		
Sunday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		

My Feelings Plan

When I feel this way	This is what I do	 This is what helps me
Confused		
Angry Stressed		
Worried Scared Tense		
Sad Upset		
Anxious		
Depressed		

Things I Feel In My Body

If you have felt these things, put a tick in the box

Pain in my tummy

☐

My breathing was difficult

☐

Pain in my head

☐

I was sick

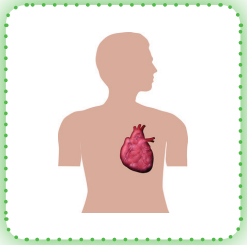
☐

Voices in my head

☐

Not sleeping

☐



My heart beating faster

☐

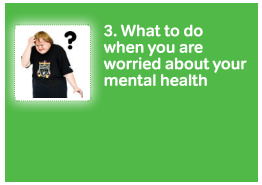
My hands were sweaty

☐

4. Planning a visit to your GP

It is important to talk to your GP about everything that is happening, including anything else that you are feeling in your body (your symptoms).

It's a good idea to write things down. In **Part 2** and **Part 3** of this guide there are forms for you to fill in. These are for you to write down ways you can keep well and how you are feeling.



It is best to be prepared before your visit to your GP.
This will help your GP to understand how you are feeling and what help you need.

Your GP may need to check your blood pressure or weigh you, or send you for blood tests.
The GP will use this information along with all the information in your diaries to help you make a plan to keep healthy.

In the **GP Information Pack** (**Part 5**), there is a letter to your GP and room for you to write all the other information you want to give him/her.

GP Information Pack

We have written a pack to help you when you visit the GP in **Part 5**.

Sometimes GP's do not know how to help people with learning disabilities when they are feeling sad or unhappy.

The GP Information Pack can be used with or without support.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for your letter. We are pleased to say that we are happy to do the things you asked us about. We will phone you to talk some more about this.

Best wishes,

D James

The GP Information Pack has a letter to your GP to show them how important mental health is for people with learning disabilities.

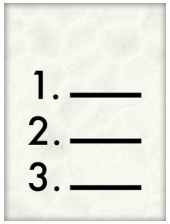
There is also room to write about how you are feeling, what medicines you take and make notes when you visit your GP.

You may want to visit your GP if:

- you have been feeling down or sad or unhappy a lot of the time.

- you are not able to control how you feel.

- you have been having bad feelings in your body or you have not been sleeping.



If these things are happening to you then:

- make an appointment to see your GP.

- fill in your GP Information Pack and take it when you go to see your GP.

Use the 8 tips below to help you to prepare for your visit to your GP.

1. Write down how you are feeling

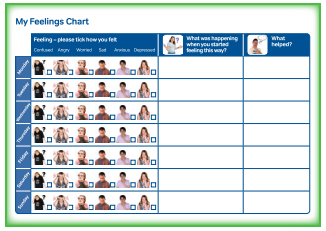
Trying to explain your symptoms (how you are feeling) can be hard.

It is even harder if you are not feeling well.

That is why we suggest you write down how you are feeling in a **Feelings Chart and Plan** (Part 3).

2. Get help to prepare

You can ask a family member, friend or support worker to help you to write down how you are feeling and fill in the **Feelings Chart and Plan** (Part 3), **My Staying Healthy Plan** (Part 2) and **GP Information Pack** (Part 5).



3. Prepare for your visit to the GP

Write down in the **GP Information Pack** any questions you want to ask your doctor.
Here are some examples of questions to ask your GP:

- Do you understand my Feelings Chart?
- What do you think is wrong? (diagnosis)
- What do you think would help?

About my medicine:

- Do you understand my medication record?
- What medicine should I take?
- How often should I take it?
- What is it for?
- Will it have side effects?
- If it makes me feel ill what should I do?
- Will this medicine react with any of the other medicines I am already taking?

Having tests:

- What tests do I need to have and why?
- Why do I need a blood test?
- What will it show?
- When will I get my results?
- Is there something I need to do before the test?

About my appointment:

- Do I need to make another appointment? What date and time?
- Can you give me information about my appointments and health in pictures or easy read so I can understand them?

4. Take someone with you

You could take a family member, a friend or a support worker, if you find it helps.
They can help you understand what the GP is saying.
They can also make sure the GP is listening to you.

5. At the GP's

Introduce yourself to the reception desk when you arrive.

Some GPs' surgeries have a screen with the name of the next person to see the GP on it.

If you find this hard to use, ask the receptionist to call you when it is your turn to see the doctor.

You can also ask your GP or the nurse at the surgery to make a Health Action Plan (HAP) for you.

This is a record of everything that is important for your physical and mental health. The information you have on your mental health will help them complete the Health Action Plan.

Give your GP the **GP Information Pack** at the back of this guide. It will help him/her to understand how you are feeling.

6. Information about your treatment

Ask your GP for information leaflets about your treatment and medication.

7. Write down what the GP has told you

Use the pages at the back of your **GP Information Pack** to write down notes about your visit. Or ask the person supporting you or the GP to write things down for you.

8. Taking medicine

If your GP gives you some medicine, write it down in your **GP Information Pack.**
When you have started taking the medicine, write down how it makes you feel.
That way you can keep a record to see if it helps you.

If you feel worse or if the medicine makes you feel sick or generally unwell, you should tell the GP.
The GP will check if the medicine is working well and decide whether you need to stop taking it or stay on it. Your GP may suggest that you try a different medicine.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists have made some information about different medicines in easy read.
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice

Some last things to think about...

Be yourself

- Remember we are all different.

- With a little help we can do a lot of things: some of us make people laugh, some are good at counting, and some people cook fantastic meals.

- Feel good about yourself and who you are.

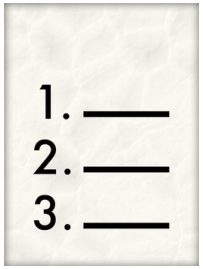
- Be proud of the things you can do – this will help you to feel good and be stronger when life gets difficult.

- Take one step at a time to make things happen. Celebrate each small step.

- Plan fun things to do, things that make you smile.

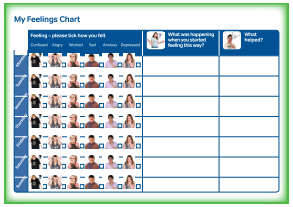
- Make time to think about all the good things in your life and how to make yourself feel better.

5. GP Information Pack



What to take to the GP

Checklist:



1. My Feelings Chart ☐

2. Things I Feel In My Body chart ☐

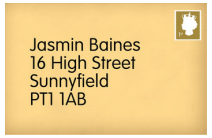
3. GP Information Pack ☐

4. Someone to support me (if I need them) ☐

GP information

My GP's name

_____



My GP's address

_____

_____

_____

_____

My GP's telephone

_____

Dear Doctor,

I want to talk to you about my mental health.

People with learning disabilities, like me, are more likely to have some problems with how they are feeling (their 'mental health') than other people.

For people with learning disabilities it is said that between 20 to 40% will have a mental health problem.

A lot of the time we find it hard to get help when we are having problems with our mental health. This is because:

- People think we are feeling this way because of our learning disability.

- Parents and people who work with us don't know enough about mental health problems or where to get help from.

- We are not being listened to.

- We are moved from service to service, and no one takes charge of making sure we get help.

- It can be difficult for us to say how we are feeling and what is wrong

It is important for me to be heard if I think there is something wrong with my mental health.

I want my Health Action Plan to include my mental health and wellbeing.

I have not been feeling well. I have filled in some information to tell you how I have been feeling. Please look at these and talk to me about what's been going on.

I have some forms I would like you to help me fill in about what will happen next.

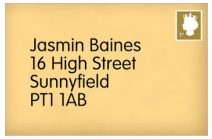
Thank you for reading this and please help me to look after my mental wellbeing.

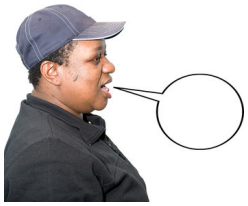
Yours sincerely

P.S. You can find more information about this diary and guidance written by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities from **www.fpld.org.uk/mentalhealth**.

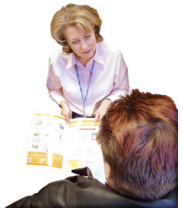
GP Diary

Planning my visit to the GP

Information about me	
Name	
Date of birth	
 Address	
Telephone	
I live with	
My religion is	
My ethnic background is	



How I communicate

	The languages I speak/understand:				
	I understand better if you use pictures	YES ✓		NO ✗	
	I need someone to help me communicate	YES ✓		NO ✗	
BIG words	I understand better if people use easy words and explain slowly	YES ✓		NO ✗	
	I use sign language to help me communicate	YES ✓		NO ✗	

Questions for my GP

See **Part 4** of the Feeling Down guide to give you ideas.

Write any questions you have for your GP in the box below.

Questions

My medicine and tablet list

Medicines or tablets I am already taking	1	2	3
Name of medicine or tablet			
How much do I take?			
How do I take it?			
When do I take it?			
Start date			
End date			
What is this medicine for?			
How does this medicine or tablet make me feel?			

Questions for your GP to answer

Date:

Referrals	
Do I need to see someone else?	
Who am I going to see and why?	
Medicine	
Are you asking me to take medicines or tablets?	
What medicines or tablets?	
What is it for?	
Are there any side effects?	
Will it make me feel unwell or sick?	
If it does make me unwell should I stop taking the medicines or tablets?	
Is it safe to take this medicine or tablet? (see my medication record)	
Is there easy read information about this medicine that I could have?	

GP visit record

Date:

Next appointment	1	2	3
Date			
Time			
Who will I see?			
Supporter's name			
Other comments			

Who did we do this work for

This resource was made using Photosymbols.

Written by Christine Burke from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

Email:
info@fpld.org.uk
Website:
http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/

changing lives

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities is part of the Mental Health Foundation

Colechurch House
1 London Bridge Walk
London SE1 2SX
United Kingdom

Telephone
020 7803 1100

Email
info@mentalhealth.org.uk
Website
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Registered Charity No.
England 801130
Scotland SC039714
Company Registration No. 2350846

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