Mental Health & Money Advice

Mental Health & Money Toolkit

for Northern Ireland

Free help guide to improve your mental health and money situation



www.mhma.org.uk



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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is a resource to help you understand, manage and improve your mental and financial health.

You can use it to help guide conversations with your relevant healthcare worker about your mental health and money. You can also take it with you to any money or debt advice appointments you might attend.

This toolkit is split into different sections, allowing you to choose which ones are relevant to you. We recommend everyone completes Section 1 first. You don't have to go through the toolkit in one go; you can come back to it at any time.

Mental Health & Money Advice is part of the charity Mental Health UK. This resource was co-produced with:

- People with lived experience of mental health and money difficulties.
- Healthcare professionals who support people to manage their mental health and money.

Mental Health UK would like to thank all of the people who kindly contributed to the creation of this resource. We are also grateful for the support of the National Academy for Social Prescribing and the MoneyHelper.

My situation

Once filled in, this can act as your mental health and money passport to help you communicate between services at any future mental health or money related appointments.

Name:

Address:

GP name and address:

Name of other relevant key workers:

What aspects of your mental health do you find difficult?

What aspects of your financial wellbeing do you find challenging?



Section 1

Mental health & money: where to start

Where to start 8

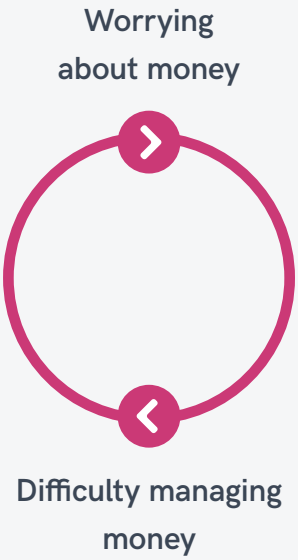
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Where to start

Worrying about money can be extremely stressful. You may feel like it is the only thing that you can think about and that your mind is not able to focus on anything else.

This can feel very debilitating and create the feeling of being stuck in a 'vicious cycle' because it doesn't feel like you can change the situation. It can start to impact on your wellbeing by affecting your thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Whether you are navigating employment, unemployment or getting back to work after a period of ill health or redundancy, it can be a time of uncertainty, stress and anxiety. This can create a 'vicious cycle' where worrying about money leads to difficulty managing money and vice versa.





It can be common to have lots of thoughts about the 'worst-case scenario' or continually thinking about how things could have been different.

You may notice yourself starting to feel very low, and experience feelings such as **shame, embarrassment,** or **guilt**. You could find yourself beginning to withdraw from your usual activities and not wanting to spend time with people as much as you usually would.

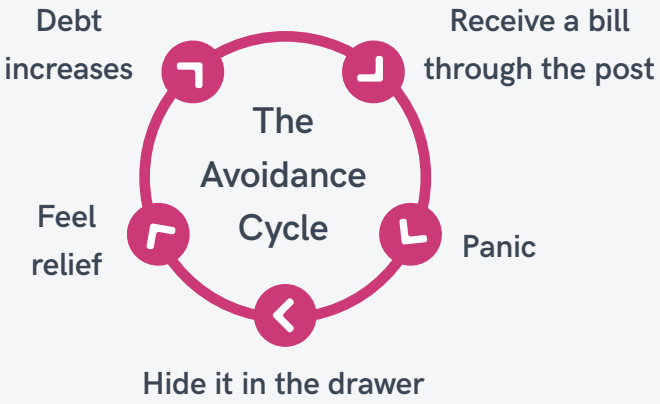
For more information about different thinking styles and how to re-balance thoughts, please visit Mental Health and Money Advice at **www.mhma.org.uk/toolkit**

Role of avoidance

If you are experiencing money worries, you may find yourself avoiding certain places, people or activities.

Avoidance is easy to do if you are feeling down or stressed because it will often make you feel relieved in the short-term. You just want to feel better as quickly as possible, so it makes sense that your brain automatically jumps to this option – even if it is a temporary fix.

The problem is, the thing that you are avoiding doesn't go away, and the more you avoid it, the more anxiety-provoking it can feel. Tackling what we are avoiding head-on is the only way to deal with it – even if it feels scary and you don't know where to start.



The following section tells you how to take action to break the avoidance cycle.

Section 2

Getting ready to take action

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Remember: You are not alone

We know that sometimes, having mental health and money difficulties can create feelings of guilt, shame and failure.

It is important to remember that **you are not alone** and that many people have been in a similar situation to yourself.

Carl's Story

Last year, I was made redundant from work and was left struggling to pay my bills. I didn't make a claim for benefits because I found the process confusing and mentally tiring. I am a single parent to my six-year-old son, and I really felt I had failed him.

Christmas soon came around, and I knew I needed to get financial support, as it was seriously affecting my mental health.

I realised I could apply for Universal Credit in my local area but because I have agoraphobia signing on in person was too daunting. In the end, I felt it was easier to ignore the situation, which just made my anxiety and depression worse.

That's when I was referred to and got help from the Mental Health and Money Advice service. I spoke to an adviser who listened to me and helped me make a claim for Universal Credit.

Throughout the process, the adviser gave me practical advice on how to navigate the benefits system, and got the DFC to come and assess me at home.

The adviser also booked me an appointment with the doctor on my behalf; they came out and gave me a doctor's note, and a referral to see a psychological wellbeing practitioner.



The journey has been long, but I am now receiving Universal Credit and in a much better financial position. This has relieved my stress and allowed me to improve my mental health dramatically.

- Carl

Building your confidence

We know that mental health and money worries can often knock your confidence and self-esteem. To help manage this, it's a good idea to recognise your unique qualities. This will remind you that your money problems are only one part of your identity.

Nobody is perfect, but we all have traits we can see as positive. Keep this in mind – as not everyone will have this strength. It can be empowering to write this down and keep it with you. You could keep it in your wallet or on your phone as a note and use it when you need a reminder of your ability.



Activity

Use the space below to write down the things you are good at or that you like about yourself. If you struggle with this, consider the strengths that other people notice in you, or an achievement that made you proud.

I am...

I can...

I am good at...

Other people think that I am...

My achievements are...

Self-care

Think about your current activity levels: Have these changed since experiencing financial difficulties? For good mental health, we need to be regularly taking part in routine, necessary, and enjoyable activities.

When we are under a lot of stress, we can often find that our activity levels decrease – particularly those activities which we used to find enjoyable. It is a catch-22 situation as you are unlikely to feel better in yourself if you don't have any opportunities to enjoy. Still, you are also unlikely to try activities if you don't feel like doing them.

It is important to try and regain a balance to these three activities; the routine, necessary and enjoyable ones. By doing this, it is likely to help your mood and wellbeing, putting you in a much better mindset to tackle some of the difficulties you are currently facing.



Activity

First of all, list the activities you currently do, used to do, or would like to do in each category.

Secondly, identify the order of difficulty of these activities - you may want to break activities down into more manageable steps. For example, 'read one chapter of my book' instead of 'read a book'.

Thirdly, schedule in some of these plans, ensuring you have a balance of the three different types of activity in your week.

Week 1

Routine	Necessary	Enjoyable
Examples: Laundry	Taking the children to school	Read a book
Water the plants	Change the energy supplier	Go for a walk
Do a food shop	Pay a bill	Meet with a friend

It is important to note that you may not be able to do some of the activities that you used to do, or what you like to do, because of the costs attached. Try to consider what it was about the activity that you enjoyed and consider other cheaper (or free) activities which would provide the same value.

Problem-solving

The next sections of this toolkit may seem overwhelming. So first it is essential to identify where you might need some support.

When you feel stuck and overwhelmed, it can often feel impossible to think about solutions to a situation. When stressed, the rational part of our brain starts to shut down (to focus on fighting or escaping the threat). Even if you would usually be able to solve problems quickly, you can begin to struggle – this is due to the emotional part of the brain taking over.

The process below can help to retake control of our rational brain and enable us to think about a difficult situation in a structured and logical way. You might want to work through this section with your healthcare worker.



1. Identify the problem

Identify the problem. It needs to be something that has happened, or you have evidence for - not just something that *might* occur. Try and be very specific about this - you might even need to break it down into several problems and use this technique for each one separately.

My current problem is:

2. Note down potential solutions

Identify all possible solutions or responses to this problem and write them down. It's easier said than done - but a good tip is to try not to think too far ahead at this stage - just think of as many possible actions as you can. It can help to think about what you would advise a friend to do in the same situation.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

3. Pros and cons

The next step is to think of the pros and cons of each of your identified solutions. This kick-starts the rational part of your brain, and you can begin to consider which solution is the most reasonable.

	Pros	Cons
Solution 1		
Solution 2		
Solution 3		
Solution 4		
Solution 5		

4. Choose your solution

Choose which option to take forward based on your evaluation. This doesn't need to be the 'perfect' solution – but selecting an option after weighing up the evidence you have is still making progress.

5. Plan out your next steps and take action

Now that you have identified your solutions use the template below to determine your mental health and money management goals.

Short term goals	How can you achieve these goals?	When would you like to achieve this?
1.		
2.		
3.		



Long term goals	How can you achieve these goals?	When would you like to achieve this?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Use the schedule below, or an app on your phone, to plan these activities over the week.

Make it as easy as possible for yourself and break down steps into tiny chunks - it's much easier to succeed when your goals are manageable and realistic. E.g. rather than 'change energy supplier', try breaking it down into small steps like the example below:

Day	Action
Monday	Find out how much I am currently paying
Tuesday	Research alternative energy suppliers
Wednesday	Contact the potential new supplier and confirm details
Thursday	Cancel current supplier and switch over
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

Day	Action
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

6. Review

Continuously review how things have gone. It may be that things didn't quite work out as expected or you've had to change your plan and start something again at Step 4. But that's ok; you're further along than you were, and you've taken a proactive step in dealing with the situation.

Section 3

Understanding your finances

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When it comes to money, often the sooner you begin to tackle the problem, the easier it will be to take control. That said, for some people, during certain times, finding the strength to deal with financial issues feels impossible.

If you're struggling with money, you can talk to someone today, online, by phone or face-to-face. There are specially trained advisers who can help you manage your financial problems.

Go to Section 6 on page 48 to find out how to contact free debt advice organisations. See "taking control of your debt" on page 35 for how to prepare for a debt advice appointment.

Prioritisation

Low mood, anxiety, impulsivity and mania can all be aspects of our mental health which affect the way we spend and manage money. Prioritising the things that we need, such as weekly food and money for bills, can fall by the wayside, especially if we don't have much money.

If you have missed a bill payment, you should seek help from a free debt advice organisation. Your healthcare worker will be able to support you in finding a suitable one.

Priority bills

A priority bill means you would lose something if you did not pay it. Because you might lose something, they are more important than other bills. A non-priority payment is one where if you don't pay it, you won't lose anything important. Sometimes the worst that can happen is that your credit rating might be affected. Priority bills include:

Priority Bills	Potential consequences of not paying
Mortgage repayments and loans secured on your home	Repossession of your property
Rent arrears	Eviction from the property
Rates payment	Court action, deduction from earnings/benefits
Gas/electricity	Disconnection
Magistrate court fines	Deduction from wages or benefits, imprisonment
Child maintenance	Deduction from wages, imprisonment
Hire purchase agreements, if what you're buying with them is essential	Repossession of hired goods
TV Licence	Magistrates Court Fine
Income Tax, National Insurance and VAT	Deduction from bank account, use of bailiffs
Missed payments owed to DFC (Department for Communities) or HMRC (HM Revenue and Customs)	Deductions from benefits

Non-priority bills

Failing to pay non-priority bills usually has fewer consequences than not paying a priority bill. However, your creditors (the people that you owe money to) may take you to court to recover any money that you owe them. It is not a criminal court; non-payment of a non-priority bill is not a crime. Non-priority debts can include:

- Credit card debts
- Store cards and catalogue debts
- Unsecured bank and payday loans (loans that are not secured against your property)
- Loans from friends and family
- Overdrafts

❗ Although water and sewerage are non-priority bills, you should aim to pay these; otherwise, the bill will continue to increase.

You should treat all non-priority creditors fairly - meaning you shouldn't make full payments to one by reducing payments to another.

Suppose you can't afford your non-priority debts minimum payment. In that case, you should make reduced payments to all of them. A debt adviser can help you with this. Go to page 48 for information on how to contact a debt adviser, or ask your healthcare professional to help you find one.

However, everyone's circumstances are different, and you will have other priorities according to your own needs.

Activity

Use the table to list your bills/outgoings and select those which are a priority.

Bills and outgoings	Is a priority
E.g. rates	Yes
E.g. food shopping	Yes
E.g. credit card	No

Financial services and utility companies are actively trying to improve how they identify and provide support for their customers' differing needs. If you feel up to it, you can contact your service provider to let them know you need more support. Ask if they have a specialist team or what they can do to help customers who are experiencing problems with their mental health.

Understand your income and plan your outgoings

Making a list of your income and outgoings is the first step in taking control of your finances. It is a way for you to calculate how much money you have coming in compared to how much you have going out.

If you are in debt or struggling to pay any of your bills you should seek free debt advice, even if you haven't had a chance to make a list of your income and outgoings yet. Go to page 48 for information on how to contact a debt adviser, or ask your healthcare professional to help you find one.

Understanding your income and outgoings is helpful, especially if you have little income or if your difficulties with mental health mean that you struggle with prioritisation. It's also beneficial for you to work out an affordable repayment plan if you are currently in problem debt.

Listing your income and outgoings

You can work out your monthly income and outgoings by using the form on the next page. This will allow you to create your budget and keep your finances on track.

Activity

1. The first step is to list your income which may include any wages, benefits, child maintenance payments or a range of other sources. You can also complete this online budget planner: **www.mhma.org.uk/tools/budget-planner**

If you receive your income with different time-scales, you need to sort them into one frequency such as weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Use the following formula to help you with conversions:

Weekly to monthly payments: Weekly sum x 52 weeks ÷ 12 months

Four weekly to monthly payments:
4 weekly sum x 13 periods ÷ 12 months

Quarterly to monthly payments:
Quarterly sum x 4 quarters ÷ 12 months

Income item	Amount (£)
Wages	
Partner's wages	
Benefits	
Other	
Other	
Total	

2. The next step is to add in your outgoings which includes housing costs, food and hobbies such as a gym membership.

As shown in the priorities section above, some outgoings are considered essential and should be prioritised when working out what should be paid first. After paying this out, whatever is left over is your disposable income which you can put towards paying non-priority debts, savings or treats.

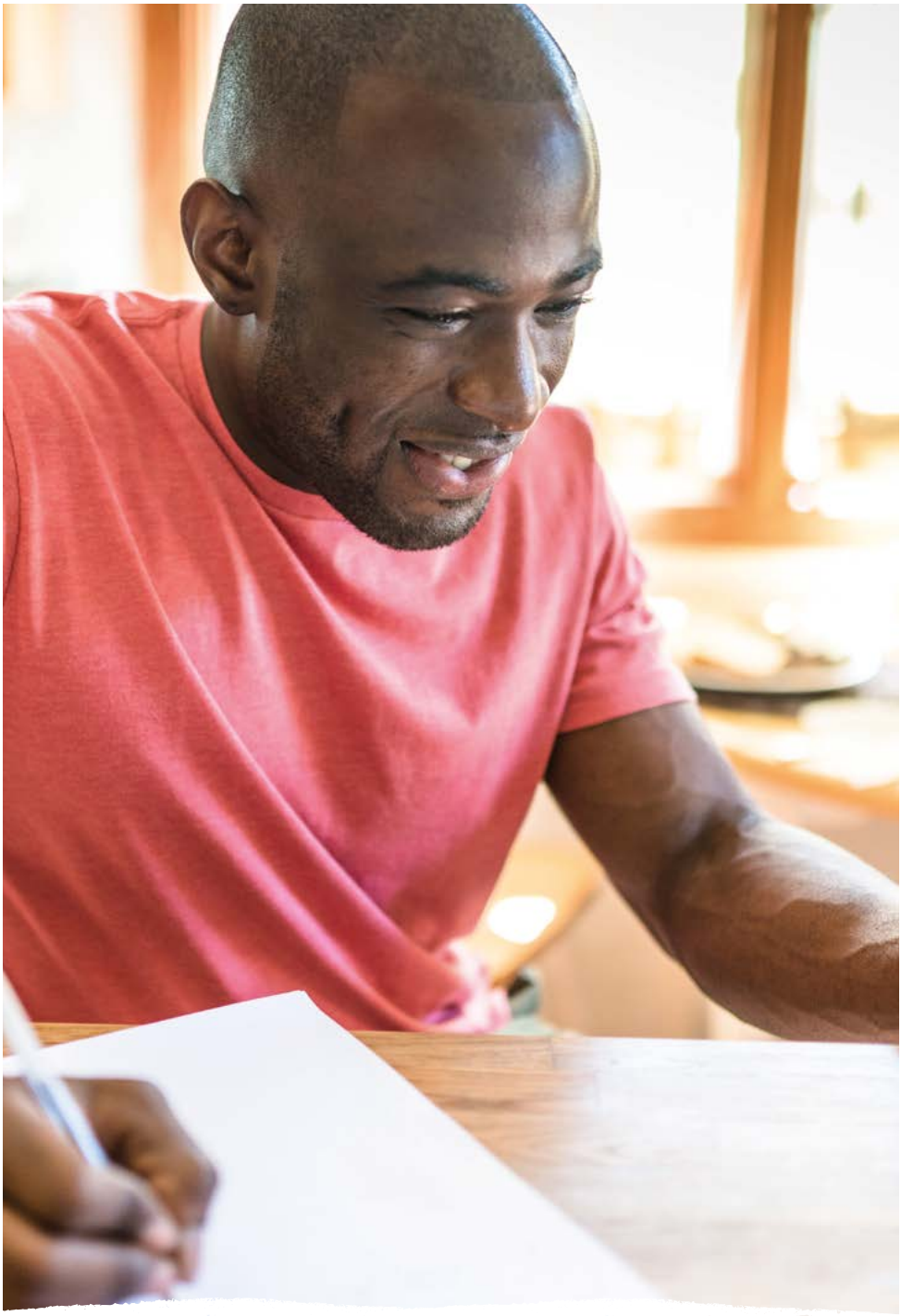
! Everyone's priorities are different, but this logo shows what a priority for most people is.

Outgoings	Amount (£)
! Rent/Mortgage	
Home insurance (e.g. buildings and/or contents)	
Life insurance	
! Rates	
! Gas	
! Electricity	
Other utilities (coal/oil/Calor gas)	
! TV Licence	
! Childcare/Child Maintenance	
Car payments	
Road Tax	

Fuel	
Other travel costs (public/taxi)	
! Food	
Clothing	
! Telephone (mobile/home/other)	
Cable/satellite/internet	
Pets (food/vet/insurance)	
Leisure/hobbies	
Gifts (Christmas/Birthdays)	
Other	
Other	
Other	
Total	

3. Once you have calculated your income and outgoings, use the box below to work out how much you have left over: Total income – total outgoings = money left over.

Total income (£)	
Total outgoings (£)	
Money left over (£)	



Taking control of your debt

If you find that you have more money going out than coming in, it is important not to panic or ignore the situation. We would advise you to seek free debt advice.

You can have advice from a debt advisor either:

- Face-to-face at a local debt advice agency
- Over the phone with a local or national organisation.

Some debt advisers will offer **self-help advice**. This means they will explain the different options to you, and you will take actions for yourself to solve your debt problems.

Other advisers will offer **casework**, where they take some actions on your behalf. You should think about the different ways you can access debt advice and also whether you would prefer self-help advice or casework when deciding which debt adviser to contact. You might want to talk through the options with your healthcare professional.

It can be hard to seek help for money problems because you may feel guilty or ashamed. But debt advisers are used to helping people from all walks of life with money problems, and they will not judge you. If you are finding it hard to take that first step, re-visit the confidence-building exercise on page 15.

When you are ready to seek advice, it can be a great help to be well-prepared. Your debt adviser will ask you about:

- Your income
- Your outgoings
- Money that you owe
- Any assets or savings that you have.

! Assets are things that you have that are worth a lot of money, such as a house or car.

This is so they can get a full picture of your situation and give you advice that is tailored to your needs. For example, the options they offer you might be based on what your budget is. Or they may have to rule out some options if you own an asset worth a lot of money. If you have completed a budget sheet, have this handy at the debt advice appointment, along with details of any organisations you owe money to and the amounts.

You might find that the debt adviser gives you a few different options for sorting out your money worries. This might feel overwhelming but remember that you don't have to make a decision straight away.

Ask the debt adviser to give you a few brief action points to take away after your first appointment and ask that you speak to them at a later date when you have had a chance to think things over. You can use the action points in 'plan out your next steps and take action' on page 50 to record any actions the debt adviser gives you.

Section 4

Navigating the benefit system

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Tips when applying for benefits 39

Managing anxiety when applying for benefits 40

Like many people with mental health and money difficulties, you may have to navigate the welfare system to claim benefits such as:

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Universal Credit
- Employment and Support Allowance.

Note: The Mental Health and Money Advice service has guides on each of the above, which you can find on our website: **www.mhma.org.uk/welfare-benefits**

Information you need when applying for benefits

Whether you apply for benefits over the phone, online or in-person to the Department for Communities (DFC) you will need the following information:

- Your National Insurance number
- Details of your mortgage or rent
- Personal identification details, e.g. passport, driving licence, proof of address.
- Details of any income you receive
- Information on any mental/physical illnesses you have
- Information on savings you have
- Your primary health care professional's contact details
- Your bank details

Tips when applying for benefits

1. Some staff within the DFC have a background in mental health, but not all do. You should be open and honest about any health condition you have and how it impacts on your life.
2. Suppose you are thinking about switching from one benefit to another. In that case, you should seek advice from a benefits adviser because you could end up being worse off financially. Go to page 48 for information about finding a benefits adviser, or ask your healthcare professional to help you.
3. Visit the Mental Health & Money Advice service website and read the guides on applying for benefits with a mental health condition: **www.mhma.org.uk/welfare-benefits**
4. Before applying for benefits, or dealing with a benefits concern, make sure you go back to the first section and re-read the confidence-building techniques.
5. If the thought of applying for benefits makes you anxious, follow the activity below, which can help you manage your feelings.

Managing anxiety when applying for benefits

Sometimes, when applying for benefits, people can find the process very overwhelming and anxiety-inducing. To reduce these feelings, try the following breathing exercise:

Activity

When we enter a dangerous situation, our 'fight or flight' response is triggered. It's a natural response and allowed our prehistoric ancestors to fight or escape a dangerous situation, such as being attacked by a wild animal.

However, in modern-day life, our bodies can respond to a 'perceived threat' or 'psychological threat' in much the same way. Although psychological threats will look different for everyone, they could include situations such as a loss of income or increased debt.



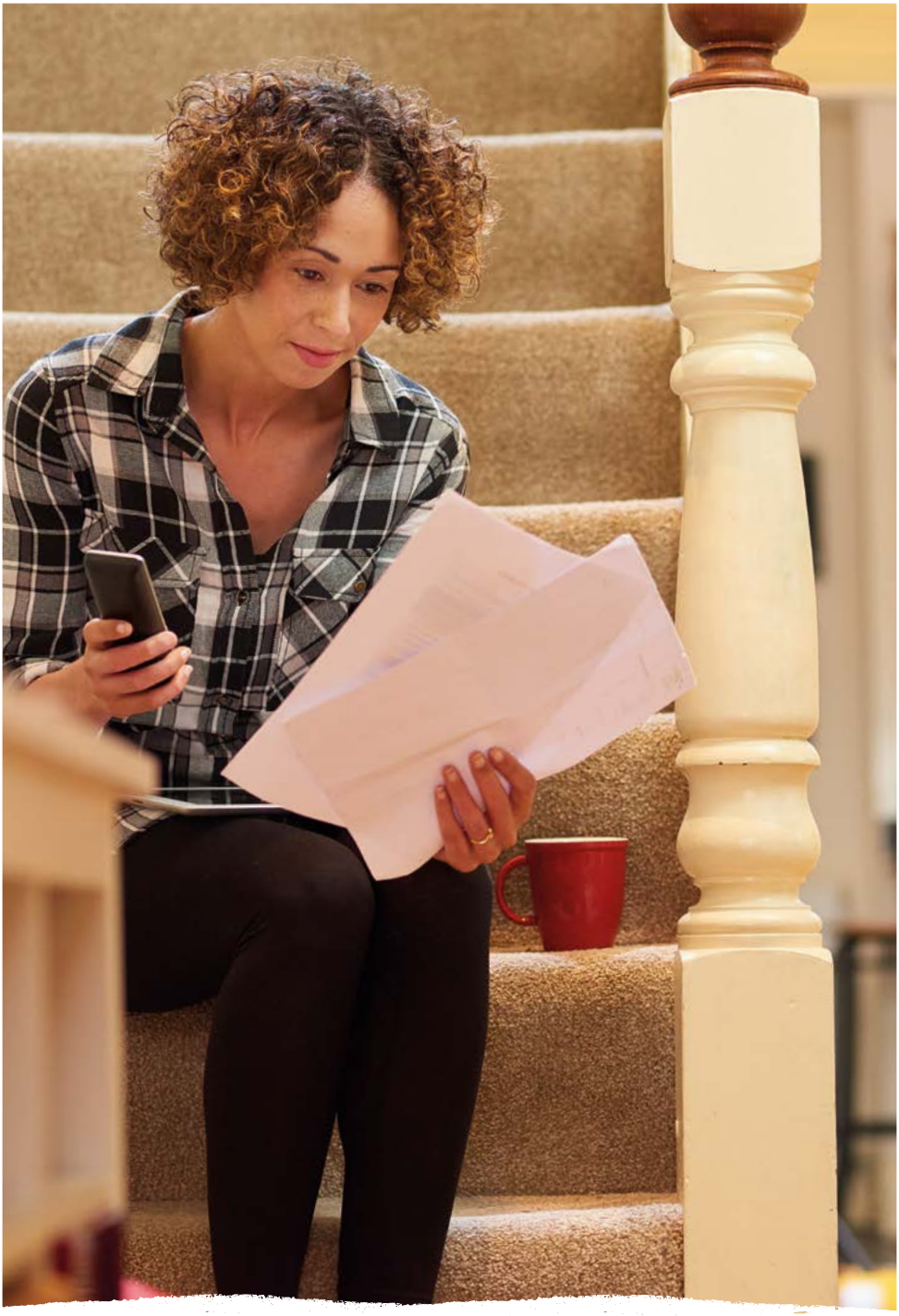
If you are experiencing money worries, your brain could interpret this as a psychological threat, and the 'fight or flight' response may be triggered. Some of the symptoms in your body that you may notice are:

- Increased heart rate
- Tightening of the chest
- Feeling unable to breathe
- Headaches
- Tension (particularly in your neck or shoulders)
- Dizziness
- Restlessness
- Feeling sick
- Loss of appetite.

It is difficult to stop this response - however slowing your breathing down can help to counteract the 'fight or flight' response, and help us feel less anxious. **Try practising this simple technique:**

- Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Exhale through your mouth for 6 seconds
- Hold for 2 seconds
- Repeat 5-10 times.

By regulating your breathing, you should now feel calmer and more prepared to take the practical steps to apply for welfare benefits.



Section 5

Support

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Sharing the load

Many people with mental health and money difficulties find it helps to involve their family members, partners or carers in conversations about their financial problems. Complete the section below with a person you trust, so that they know how best to help you if things get difficult.

Name of trusted person:

Do you consent to your healthcare/support worker or money adviser contacting this person: **Yes / No**

If yes, what are their contact details:

When you are having mental health or money difficulties, how can your trusted person help you?

What things are unhelpful when you are having mental health or money difficulties?

Crisis plan

When our mental health declines, or when we are in financial difficulty, we may experience feelings of hopelessness, or that there is no way out of our situation, which can cause great distress.

For some people, these feelings could become overwhelming and lead to a mental health crisis. This can mean different things for different people; for example, it might mean experiencing mania, psychosis or suicidal thoughts. If you think you are at risk of going into a crisis, it's critical to think ahead and share your crisis plan with those close to you. The crisis plan below can be a helpful and pre-emptive tool to be completed before things deteriorate.

A mental health crisis for me looks like:

When I have experienced a mental health crisis before, the following things have helped me:

The first person I will contact if I experience feelings of a mental health crisis is:

Their contact number is:

If they are unavailable, I will contact:

Their contact number is:

Remember if you experience feelings of suicide or self-harm, you can phone 999 in an emergency, as well as attend your local A&E.

My nearest A&E is:

Other emergency resources:

- Call Samaritans on 116 123 (UK-wide)
- Text SHOUT to 85258 (UK-wide)
- Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000 to speak to a trained counsellor in Northern Ireland

Section 6

Signposting & appointment planner

Several organisations can support you with your money worries:

Mental Health & Money Advice

Mental Health and Money Advice is a UK-wide service that provides information, advice and casework to people who have mental health and money issues.

For more information on money and mental health visit our website: **www.mhma.org.uk/toolkit**

StepChange Debt Charity

StepChange Debt Charity provides free debt advice and a wide range of debt solutions.

Website: **www.stepchange.org** or call **0800 138 1111**.

AdviceNI

AdviceNI is is charity that offers advice on debt and benefits to anyone in Northern Ireland.

Website: **www.adviceni.net** or call 0800 915 4604.

MoneyHelper

MoneyHelper is here to make your money and pension choices clearer. Here to put you in control with impartial help that's on your side, backed by government and free to use.

Website: **moneyhelper.org.uk** or call **0800 011 3797**

You can use the Debt Advice Locator tool where you can find national and local organisations that provide free debt advice:

www.moneyhelper.org.uk/debt

Turn2Us

Turn2Us is a national charity that provides practical support when people are struggling financially. They have a useful benefits calculator on their website, and you can also search for charities who may be able to provide you with grants to buy essential items.

Website: **www.turn2us.org.uk**

Local support

There may also be organisations and services in your local area. The Turn2Us advice finder will help you find an organisation in your area that can give you advice on debt and benefits:

Website: **www.advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk**

Use this page with your healthcare provider to identify relevant people in your community who can support you:

Follow-up appointment	Actions from appointment	Date of appointment	What support can they offer me?	Name of organisation

Notes

www.mhma.org.uk

Registered charity number: 1170815

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