



Accessing Mental Health Services as an Autistic Adult - Self Advocacy

WEBINAR - DISCUSSION - Q&A

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**The
Advonet
Group**

Providing Independent Advocacy



**Leeds
Autism
AIM**



**Bradford
and Craven
Autism AIM**

Before we begin ¹



QR Codes

Example



- A **QR code** (Quick Response code) is a barcode you scan using your smartphone to access information, usually a website
- We will be using them throughout the session, so you can scan them on your phone if you are watching on another device
- Some smartphone cameras automatically detect QR codes, sometimes you will need to download an app
- You do not need to use the QR codes, we will post the website addresses too and link to them in the chat

Questions

- There will be time to ask questions at the end of the webinar. You can ask questions **verbally** or in the **chat**.
- Please feel free to ask questions **in the chat** during the webinar, though we may not be able to answer them **until the end**.

Before we begin 2



Registering with a GP in your area



- You will need to be **registered with a GP** in your area to access the support we discuss here – even if you self-refer
- This will usually be a GP surgery **close to your home**, but sometimes it may be different – for example if you are studying away from your usual town/city. This might not matter if you want to access online support – if you need face-to-face support you will need to be registered with a GP in the local area
- **More info about finding a GP surgery and registering:** <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/> or use the QR code

Consider other possible avenues of support available

- NHS waiting lists can be long. Some people may be able to access free therapy or counselling more quickly through **work or university**, or even their **church**.
- Some private or employee **health plans** (i.e. Westfield or Simply Health) may be able to provide short term therapy as part of the benefit package.

What we will discuss



What mental health support is available in Leeds, Bradford and Craven and how to access it

Your rights when accessing mental health services as an autistic adult

How to self-advocate, including:

- **Preparing for mental health appointments**
- **What to do when you are denied appropriate support, or ‘fobbed off’ by health professionals**

Self-advocacy resources available and how to use them

Accessing crisis support

Time for questions and discussion at the end

Mental Health Access Project Team



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**Peer Development Worker &
Mental Health Access
Facilitator**

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**Mental Health Access Project
Deputy Manager**



Lawrence Cwerner

**Mental Health
Access Facilitator**



What is the Mental Health Access Project?

MHAP is a free service available to autistic adults across Leeds who are trying to access appropriate Mental Health Services

MHAP aims to support and empower autistic individuals in identifying any barriers that may prevent access to the mental health and other services.

By working 1-2-1 with autistic adults to identify barriers, MHAP aims to put solutions in place which enable autistic adults to improve their chances of gaining equitable access to the support they need

We work with the Mental Health Equity Project to support Leeds Autism AIM's long-term goal of highlighting inequalities autistic adults face when trying to access mental health support

The MHAP team are delivering training to mental health providers in order to try and challenge these inequalities, as well as providing audits of mental health settings

What can the MHAP appointments do?

Help to navigate the mental health system in Leeds and understand the pathways to referring for support.

Support to prepare for helpful conversation meetings or similar assessments which take place with mental health professionals.

Help to identify any barriers that may be preventing you from gaining access to appropriate mental health support, and strategies to address these barriers e.g., support to complete self-advocacy resources like the Mental Health Profile.

If mental health services offer therapy or treatment, we will offer a follow-up meeting to address any new or ongoing access issues e.g., making sure self-advocacy resources are being utilised by professionals and reasonable adjustments are given.

Who is MHAP for?

MHAP is available to help and support autistic adults from the Leeds area who are having difficulty accessing mental health services. There are 3 different criteria (you only need to meet one of them)

1) You have previously struggled to access the Community Mental Health Team – e.g., you felt your needs were misunderstood/ miscommunicated, due to professionals not understanding your autism

2) You are currently on the waiting list for a helpful conversation/ assessment with Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service (LMWS)

3) You feel you need mental health support but have been unable/ struggled to get a referral via your GP

Your Rights As An Autistic Adult



The Autism Act 2009 – places a duty on NHS England to provide relevant services for autistic adults, or arrange for them to be provided by a third party.



**It's important to understand the basics about your rights as an autistic adult, so you can advocate for yourself in different settings
E.g. healthcare settings.**



Equalities Act 2010 – Autism (under disability) is a protected characteristic under the Act, which gives certain protections related to employment, such as provisions for autistic employees or the right to not be discriminated against, directly or indirectly.

What mental health support is available



EXAMPLE

Accessing Adult Mental Health Services in Leeds - A Quick Reference Guide for GPs Wellbeing Service

PRESENTING SYMPTOMS	Low Level Emotional or Social Support needs (isolation, housing, financial issues, employment problems)	Mild/Moderate symptoms of anxiety or depression panic disorder, OCD Able to self-refer for therapies &/or online resources	Moderate, severe anxiety & depression emotional turmoil grief, stress	Moderate-Severe depression, multiple traumas, deteriorating SMI, poor engagement with services (i.e., the 'revolving door' patient)	Severe cognitive, & emotional problems relating to a mental health diagnosis warranting psychiatric assessment or deterioration of a known severe mental health illness	Acute mental health problems with immediate risk to self or others
WHO CAN HELP	Social Prescribers e.g. Patient Ambassadors, Linking Leeds* <i>Remote appts or Self Ref or PCN Hubs</i>	Mindwell MindWell (mindwell-leeds.org.uk) or direct to LMWS https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/leeds-mental-wellbeing-service/home/ <i>If unable to self refer, consider Healthy Minds or seek guidance from PCMH</i>	Healthy Minds <i>Book through remote appts or on Extended Access Platform</i>	Primary Care Mental Health Teams (PCMH) <i>Task/Refer inside Clinical Systems</i>	Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) <i>Referral Form in Clinical systems to SPA</i>	CRISIS LYPFT SPA <i>0800 1831485- speak to clinician or call police if risk imminent</i>
WHAT TO EXPECT	Assessment Signposting Goal setting Coaching Liaising with GP/other services	Self Help Resources Useful Courses Self-Referral Pathways into Therapies, Groups etc Peer Support etc	One contact but can be more if needed Helpful conversations Triage into PCMH or talking therapies	Assessment Decision support to professionals Short term interventions Safety planning	Psychiatric Assessment Prescribing Longer term interventions Care coordination	Assessment within 72hrs (can be same day if emergency assessment appropriate)

Support you can self-refer to - Leeds



Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service – Talking Therapies Free service for people 17 or over registered with a GP in Leeds



- Offer up to 12-20 weekly sessions – either **one to one or group therapy**. These include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) and Counselling for Depression.
- **Self-refer here:** <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/leeds-mental-wellbeing-service/refer-yourself> or QR use code
- You will be asked a series of questions about the issues you are struggling with. You may then be offered a course of therapy (including group therapy) or other treatment/support. **There is often a waiting list.**
- Once you have completed a course of therapy via LMWS, you will need to **wait 12 months** before you can be referred again. You can access the **Primary Care** part of LMWS during this time if needed

The **Mindwell** website is a searchable directory of mental health and wellbeing support available in Leeds:

<https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk>

Support you can self-refer to - Bradford



Bradford District and Craven Talking Therapies

Free service for people 16 or over registered with a GP in the Bradford, Airedale, Wharfedale or Craven area



- Provides access to short term psychological therapies for **mild-moderate** depression and anxiety disorders
 - Promotes **online courses and remote therapy** – face-to-face appointments may be possible when needed
 - **Refer yourself here:** <https://www.bdctalkingtherapies.nhs.uk> or use QR code
 - Online referral is via an AI chatbot, there is an option on the screen to use a standard online form. You can also phone them.
- You will then be contacted for **an assessment** – these are usually over the telephone unless you need face-to-face or other appointment formats
 - Sometimes while waiting you may be contacted by **Xyla Digital Therapies** and offered the same treatment.
 - Once you have completed a course of therapy, it is suggested you **wait 3-6 months** before you are referred again.

The **Healthy Minds** website is a searchable directory of mental health and wellbeing support available in Bradford and Craven: <https://www.healthyminds.services/>

Approaching your GP for support ¹



Support available via your GP or other appropriate health professional (not usually self-referral)

Primary Care providers - This is the entry level of care for the NHS.

Primary Care Mental Health Service (Leeds) - This is offered by **Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service**, separate to their Talking Therapies offering. For adults with **moderate-severe** mental health issues.

- They may offer short term support to help you understand and manage your needs, improve your wellbeing and help you to access other services. Support is offered through Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioners, usually based at GP surgeries.
- Some bookable sessions are available at Leeds Autism AIM's Lovell Park hub once a month. Initial assessment chat is called a 'Helpful Conversation'

Primary Care Wellbeing Service (Bradford)

This service is available to people with complex health (including mental health) problems that significantly impact on mobility, mood and every-day living.

- Flexible in their approach. May see you at home, at the GP surgery, at a health centre or remotely.
- Talk to your GP or lead health professional to be referred

Approaching your GP for support ²



Support available via your GP or other appropriate health professional (not usually self-referral)

Secondary Mental Health Support/More Specialised Care

Community Mental Health Team (Leeds and Bradford) For adults with **substantial and complex** mental health needs which cannot be met by other services. In **Leeds** they are based in Middleton, Potternewton and Armley. You need to ask your GP to be referred to this service if they feel it is appropriate.

Autism Specific Counselling You can apply for funding for this via your GP. The request needs to go to an **Individual Funding Request** panel for approval, and there needs to be an exceptional need. Usually, this pathway isn't considered until patients have tried the usual therapies available and these have been unsuccessful. More info about how to apply in our guide linked below.



More information about specialised mental health services in Leeds

See our **Mental Health Guide** for more information about local services offered

<https://leedsautismaim.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2023/12/Leeds-Autism-AIM-Mental-Health-Guide-v7-December-2023.pdf> or use QR code

Approaching your GP for support ³



Prepare for your GP appointment

Reasonable adjustments – As an autistic person you are entitled to ‘reasonable adjustments’ to make services more accessible to you. If possible, try to agree these with your GP practice in advance, examples include:

- Asking for a **double appointment** for more time to process and express your needs during the appointment.
- Requesting **written summaries** of appointments afterwards
- Appointments during **quieter times**, and/or a **quiet area** to wait in away from the main waiting room

Write down what you want to say at the appointment, in advance – it is easy to be distracted during the appointment or for the GP to lead the conversation. Think about what the issues are:

- Your **mood** recently, including any intrusive thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- Difficulties carrying out your **usual activities and self-care**, such as eating, sleeping and hygiene
- Energy levels and any difficulties concentrating, or losing interest in things you would normally enjoy
- Think about how your **current symptoms differ to how you usually are**, or when you feel you are in a better place mentally.

See our GP appointment planner for more guidance (link at the end of the webinar)

Common problems & possible solutions 1



Sometimes, GPs and other health professionals do not have a good understanding of autism and what support is appropriate, or they may be overwhelmed and attempt to gatekeep services. Some issues that sometimes arise, and suggestions about how you could respond:

- **Referring to Leeds Autism AIM for mental health support** – Sometimes GPs will refer to us when formal mental health support is needed. Autism isn't a mental health condition (though these often co-occur) and while AIM does offer mental health peer support groups, we are not a mental health service, and we cannot offer one-to-one mental health support. Autistic adults also often struggle with groups and require one-to-one support.
- **Not able to refer due to autism/too complex** – it's important that services know about your autism and take this into account during your treatment, including making reasonable adjustments and adapting your treatment where appropriate. You should not be refused treatment because you are autistic.

In 2015, the Department of Health and Social Care published the latest binding Autism Act statutory guidance, which states that autistic people should have support adapted to their needs if they have a mental health difficulty.

See our [Guide to Accessing Mental Health Services](#) for more info (link at the end of the webinar)

Common problems & possible solutions 2



- **Won't make adjustments for you**, reluctant to give 'special treatment' – Reasonable Adjustments are a legal requirement under the *Equality Act 2010* to make sure health services are accessible to all disabled people, this includes autistic people.
- **Waiting lists are too long/the service is overwhelmed** – You have the right to use NHS services. The services cannot refuse to help you without a good reason.

Some NHS commissioned services have maximum waiting times. You have right to be seen within those waiting times. If you are not, the NHS must take reasonable steps to offer you different options to meet your needs.

- **Unable to submit Individual Funding Requests for mental health issues** – if there is a substantial need for treatment, funding requests can be submitted for mental health treatment in the same way as physical issues.

More advanced information

Meeting the needs of autistic adults in mental health services - Guidance for integrated care boards, health organisations and wider system partners:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/meeting-the-needs-of-autistic-adults-in-mental-health-services/>

Self-advocacy resources

The AIM website has many self-advocacy resources available, for lots of different areas of life. Most of our mental health resources can be found here: (we will discuss a few of these in the next few slides)

<https://leedsautismaim.org.uk/our-services/mental-health-equity-project/autism-and-mental-health-resources/>



The screenshot shows the top portion of the Leeds Autism AIM website. At the top right is the logo, which consists of a purple speech bubble containing a white infinity symbol, followed by the text "Leeds Autism AIM" in red and black. Below the logo is a horizontal navigation menu with the following items: "About", "Information", "Services", "Resources" (highlighted in purple), "Get involved", "Referral", "Contact", and a search icon. The main content area has a purple background with the title "Autism and Mental Health Resources" in white. Below the title is a breadcrumb trail: "Home » Our services » Mental Health Equity Project » Autism and Mental Health Resources". The text below the screenshot reads: "For the Mental Health Peer Support Groups, the [Mental Health Equity Project](#) and [Leeds Mind](#) have created a range of autism and mental health resources. They cover many different topics relating to autistic people and their mental health and have been created by and for autistic adults. Please click on the buttons below to download PDF copies of our resources. More resources will be added over the coming weeks and months to this page."

The Mental Health Profile

- What is the MH Profile?

A form which can summarise your needs and preferences, as well as MH history

- What information does it contain?

Communication preferences, sensory needs, ways to help distress, Mental Health history, etc

- Why should I use the MH Profile?

It can help Mental Health professionals understand your needs and preferences. It can be easier to use this profile in a Mental Health assessment to show things which you may find difficult to explain



The screenshot shows the top portion of a form titled "Mental Health Profile". At the top is a purple horizontal bar. Below it, a rounded rectangle contains three logos: "The Advonet Group" (with a small tagline "Helping Independent Lives"), "Mental Health Access Project", and "Leeds Autism AIM". The title "Mental Health Profile" is centered below these logos. Underneath the title is the "Mental health matters" logo, which includes a brain icon, the text "Mental health matters", and an icon of a person sitting at a desk with thought bubbles. At the bottom of the form, there is a table with two columns: "Your name" and "Lawrence Cwerner".

Your name	Lawrence Cwerner
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How to help me in meltdowns and shutdowns

Please let us know how you would like to be supported during and after you have a meltdown or shutdown.

More information on meltdowns and shutdowns can be found on the **Useful Information** page of this guide.

Autism & Mental Health Resources

- Disclosure & Wellbeing ¹

Choosing when, whether or how to disclose an Autism diagnosis may be a significant decision which can affect your wellbeing.

Employment – autism is a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act, alongside other service provisions outlined in The Autism Act 2009.

Your employer must respect your needs as an autistic employee.

Personal – disclosure to family and friends may also be a cause of anxiety. There is no obligation to disclose immediately, or at all. Your disclosure depends on You.

- How – preparation can help you advocate for yourself, ensuring you/your needs are understood
- When – it's a personal choice, no correct time. You may disclose to some people before others.
- Pre-Emptive Disclosure and Delayed Disclosure – two different approaches. Partial Disclosure.

Autism & Mental Health Resources

- Disclosure & Wellbeing ²

Disclosure and Unmasking – Disclosure may be an important step in unmasking, which can have a positive impact on wellbeing and self-acceptance.

Important not to rush this however, as both masking and non-disclosure are often connected to feelings of being unsafe.

Dealing with Stigma – unfortunately, Autism disclosure can still result in misunderstanding and stigma. In the workplace, this may come in form of discrimination. In our personal life, this could be implicit or explicit judgement.

Self-Care after Disclosure – disclosure can be a relief, but it may also bring stress.

Self-Acceptance is an important part.

Peer support groups can help with mental wellbeing and providing strategies and support for issues you face.

Finally, re-thinking and setting boundaries, eg social boundaries, sensory considerations, managing energy

Autism & Mental Health Resources

- Masking and Mental Health

Masking consists of learned and practiced behaviours to allow you to better fit into neurotypical spaces.

Autistic people mask for a whole variety of reasons. Masking can be a conscious or a subconscious response.

Subconscious masking is often a learned response to avoid stigma and invalidation or discrimination. This can develop from an early age.

Despite the positives of helping autistic people navigate situations, research shows masking often comes at a high cost.

Taking time to unmask when you feel safe to do so can make a major difference to mental wellbeing and avoiding burnout.

“Decide for yourself when and how you want to mask, have the confidence to be your authentic self but also don’t put yourself down for strategically retreating behind the mask occasionally!”

Helen Ellis,
Autism and Masking

Other Autism & Mental Health Resources

**Sleep and
Mental Health**

**Autistic
Burnout**

**Anxiety
Management**

**Management
Of
Conflicting
Needs**

Loss and Grief

**Sensory Needs and
Mental Health**

**Setting and
Maintaining
Boundaries**

New - Mental Health Access Resources

<https://leedsautismaim.org.uk/our-services/mental-health-access-project/mental-health-access-project-resources>



Accessing mental health services via your GP

Home » Resources » Self-Advocacy Tools » Strategies and Resources » Accessing mental health services via your GP

A self-advocacy guide for autistic adults in Leeds

If you are autistic, struggling with your mental health and need to access support, this guide will clarify what support is available in Leeds; how to access it, and what to do if you have any issues getting the help you need. The guide is from our [Mental Health Access Project](#) team.



GP Appointment Planner

Where is the appointment	Date and time of appointment
Who is the appointment with	Other people present
What Is The Appointment About? <i>(For example - Asking for support with mental health)</i>	
<i>Usually, your GP will only be able to speak to you about one issue at a time. You may need to make further appointments to discuss other issues</i>	

Accessing crisis services in Leeds



Dial **111** for 24/7 crisis mental health support (NHS 111)

Or **999** in a mental health emergency



Services with this logo are also available in Bradford and/or nationally

MindWell



Place to call

Connect helpline is a survivor-led service offering emotional support to people in Leeds. Open every night 6pm to 2am. Call 0808 800 1212 (free phone).

Connect BSL helpline is available every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday evening from 7pm to 11pm, text or FaceTime: 07984 396 001 email: survivor.led@slsclcs.org.uk



West Yorkshire 24 hour mental health helpline offers support, advice and information for anyone in Leeds. Open 24/7. Call 0800 183 0558 (free phone).

Samaritans is always open to talk about whatever you're going through. Open 24/7. Call 116 123 (free phone).

Night Owls is a confidential support line for children, young people, their parents and carers who live in Bradford, Leeds, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield. Call 0800 148 8244 or text 07984 392 700.

NHS 111 (freephone) is open 24/7. If you are worried about your mental health call NHS 111 and select the mental health option.





Face to face help



GP emergency appointment - ask to talk to the first available GP. GPs see many people every week who are worried about their mental health.

Here For You (formerly Well-Bean Hope in a Crisis Café) offers a safe and confidential space for people (16+) experiencing crisis in Leeds. Open 7 nights a week, 6pm to 12am. Face-to-face support and by phone. Call or text 07760 173 476 before visiting.

Dial House is a place of sanctuary offering emotional and practical support to people (16+) in crisis. Open Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 6pm to 2am. Face-to-face support, phone and video chat. Call 0113 260 9328 or text 07922 249 452.

Dial House@Touchstone offers support to people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (16+). Support by phone. Open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6pm to 12am. Call 0113 249 4675 or text 07763 581 853.

Support by text or online chat



Connect online is a local survivor-led online chat service for people in distress. Open every night 6pm to 2am via website homepage: www.islcs.org.uk

Shout text service struggling to cope? Text SHOUT to 85258 (free) any time 24/7 for support. Messages are anonymous and won't appear on your phone bill.

Email the Samaritans - sometimes writing down your thoughts can help. Email Jo@samaritans.org. Response time is 24 hours.

Signhealth Crisis Text Service for Deaf people Text DEAF to 85258 (free). Messages are anonymous and won't appear on your phone bill.

NHS 111 online get help for your mental health symptoms online if you're not sure what to do: www.111.nhs.uk.



Accessing crisis services in Bradford



If you need urgent mental health support, call First Response:

0800 952 1181

You can now also call 111 and select the mental health option

Call:
0800 952 1181
Or call 111 and select the mental health option.

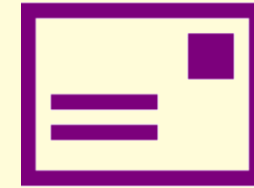
First Response - Crisis Mental Health Support is available **24 hours a day**, 7 days a week.

- This service is for people of all ages living in **Bradford, Airedale, Wharfedale or Craven** experiencing a mental health crisis and needing **urgent** help.
- You do not have to have used any mental health services before.
- Where possible the **person who is experiencing the crisis** should contact but when this is not possible First Response accept contact from a person concerned about someone.

Time for questions and discussion

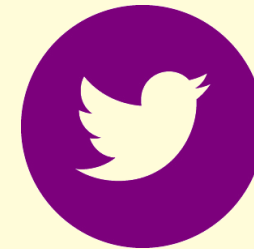


Contact the AIM team



Website: leedsautismaim.org.uk

Email: leedsautismaim@advonet.org.uk



Call the Advonet Group Office on
0113 244 0606

Facebook: [Leeds Autism AIM](https://www.facebook.com/LeedsAutismAIM)
X: [@leedsautismAIM](https://twitter.com/leedsautismAIM)

ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AS AN AUTISTIC ADULT – SELF ADVOCACY

Webinar Delivered by:



**Mental Health
Access Project**



**Leeds
Autism
AIM**

**The
Advonet
Group**

Providing Independent Advocacy

References P10 - <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/leeds-mental-wellbeing-service/about-us1/lmws-referral-guide/>

P25/26 - https://www.leedsandyorkpft.nhs.uk/advice-support/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/08/MW_Finding-support-in-a-mental-health-crisis_foldable-resource_2024.pdf