



# Being an MHFAider

## Your guide to the role



MHFA England

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# Welcome

Congratulations on completing your Mental Health First Aid course and achieving your certification as an MHFAider®.

Having taken the course, you are becoming part of a community of half a million people in England and four million people worldwide who are trained to recognise poor mental health and help people find the support they need. It is this community which will achieve our vision to improve the mental health of the nation. Through our mission to train one in ten adults in mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills, we want to create a society where mental health can be spoken about freely and everyone has the skills to look after their own and other people's wellbeing.

This document is for MHFAiders and outlines what to expect from the role, what support you will need from your employer if you are an MHFAider for your workplace, and how MHFA England® can support you.

Thank you for becoming part of our community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Blake".

**Simon Blake**  
Chief Executive

# Your responsibilities

MHFAiders can have a profound and positive impact in their communities. Carrying out your role responsibly involves the following:



## **Upholding the values and qualities of the role**

Approachable, impartial, non-judgemental, confidential, empathic, trustworthy, patient and a skilled listener.



## **Contributing to reducing stigma and promoting positive mental health**

Use active listening skills throughout your support, taking into consideration your own Frame of Reference and the language you are using around mental health.



## **Using the MHFA action plan**

Use the MHFA action plan to guide your support and use good judgement about the order and the relevance of these actions, being flexible and responsive. The MHFA action plan is in accordance with international MHFA Guidelines, which have been developed by researchers in Australia since 2005. These guidelines were developed using the consensus of expert panels with lived experience, carers, and professionals from several English-speaking countries.



## **Using the MHFAider Support App**

Use the MHFAider Support App<sup>®</sup> to access the online national database of mental health services, [Hub of Hope](#), to record your reflections after an MHFA conversation using the conversations feature and to access resources to support you in your role, with 24/7 support included.



## **Practising self-care**

Understand the importance of self-care and practise wellbeing regularly to manage the stress in your Stress Container.



## **Maintaining boundaries in the MHFAider role**

It's important to remember that MHFA England courses do not teach people to be therapists or counsellors, how to diagnose mental health conditions, nor encourage MHFAiders to provide ongoing support. Understanding and maintaining appropriate boundaries is a key part of successfully providing MHFA.



## **Refreshing your skills every three years with an MHFA Refresher course**

Just like refreshing your physical first aid skills, we recommend that MHFAiders attend a Refresher course every three years. Completing a Refresher course will help you to feel confident in your role and to hold MHFA conversations safely.

## Your responsibilities cont.

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*Sarah, one of our Mental Health First Aiders, noticed I wasn't how I usually was. I was really struggling, and I didn't know who else to go to. To sit there and let me speak about how I feel and what's happened, it made me feel reassured that I wasn't just an employee, but she took my personal and mental health into consideration.*

*Together we discussed the next best steps to take -we phoned the GP together and Sarah personally took me to my appointment that very same day. She came in with me so they could discuss what would be the best thing for me at work, as well as what steps my doctor wanted to take.*

*I ended up taking three weeks off work and then began a phased return with the help of Sarah. I also had private counselling through the company's employee benefits scheme, and cognitive behavioural therapy through my GP.”*

**Rachael,**  
Dermalogica

Do you need to refresh your mental health skills and update your knowledge? [Get in touch to book your Refresher course today!](#)



## Boundaries in the role

Understanding and maintaining appropriate boundaries is a key part of successfully providing MHFA and keeping yourself safe and well. If boundaries are not maintained, there is a risk of significant impact on the wellbeing of both the MHFAider and the person being supported.



### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is key to the role of the MHFAider. When discussing MHFA conversations with other people (such as other MHFAiders or HR representatives), it is vital to respect the person's right to privacy. Identifying someone risks stigma and unfair treatment in the workplace or community.

**Confidentiality always applies unless you are concerned that the person is at risk of harming themselves or others.**



### **Your wellbeing**

Consider and communicate your availability and time commitments to the role, in relation to other work or community responsibilities, and your own wellbeing. Recognising when you are struggling is key. When you are experiencing poor mental health yourself, or are having a tough day, you will bring these emotions to the role and will find it harder to be empathic, which puts the person being supported at risk. You also put your own wellbeing at risk by adding to your Stress Container. If you can't support someone, signpost them to another MHFAider or provide the details of a mental health helpline.



### **Inappropriate relationships**

You may use natural empathy and listening skills when looking out for someone close to you; however, sometimes it is important to consider if you are the right person to support them in this role at that time.

Pursuing a personal relationship between the MHFAider and the person being supported, where there is no existing personal relationship, is outside of the role's boundaries. It isn't possible to see a situation objectively and you risk being judgemental. A person seeking support may be vulnerable, which could compromise their mental health. In instances where the person being supported shows signs of being dependent on your support, communicate the boundaries of the role clearly.

## Self-care

After providing MHFA to a person who is in distress, you may feel worn out, frustrated, or even angry. You may also need to deal with the feelings and reactions you set aside during the conversation.

Before an aeroplane takes off, flight attendants will talk flight passengers through the oxygen mask procedure. The procedure instructs passengers on a flight to ensure that they put on their own mask first before helping others, because we can't assist others if we lose consciousness. The same principle applies to the MHFAider role. If we aren't well, we're not able to safely offer support to others. To remain well we can practice self-care.

Self-care is the practice of engaging in activities that take care of your health and actively manage poor mental health when it occurs. Self-care differs from person to person and can change over time. Some things we might do daily, and some might be once a year.

### Examples of self-care

- Engaging in creativity or DIY
- Unplugging from technology
- Meditating or practising spirituality
- Learning something new or a new skill
- Doing exercise
- Dancing and singing
- Cooking and eating food that makes you feel good
- Sleeping well
- Spending time in nature
- Setting boundaries and spending time alone

- Connecting with others
- Laughing
- Watching a film or TV show
- Taking a bath or enjoying a beauty treatment
- Doing kind acts

Following an MHFA conversation, MHFAiders are also encouraged to access Shout's mental health text support service via the MHFAider Support App, make reflective notes in the app, or find another MHFAider to talk to about your experience, remembering to leave out identifying details. This is not the same as a crisis when you will need to reveal their identity.

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*“The MHFA training also made me realise that I need to look after my own mental health more and keep an eye on how I'm feeling, as well as supporting others.”*

**Mick,**  
MHFAider, Royal Mail

Check out our free [self-care resources](#) for useful tools and self-care activities.

# Being an MHFAider in the workplace

Being an MHFAider makes you an important part of an organisation's health and wellbeing strategy. But to perform your role effectively and safely at work, MHFA England training should be one part of a whole organisation approach. You need the full support of your employer, which should include an effective strategy, policies and procedures, and clear communication of your role and how you will be supported.

## **Policies**

Discuss with your employer what organisational policies and procedures you should follow and refer to as an MHFAider, including who to communicate concerns of a mental health crisis with. Ask your employer what steps they are taking to adopt a whole organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.

## **Referral pathways**

Your workplace may have its own support available for employees, such as an Occupational Health or an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Find out from your employer what the referral pathways are for mental health support and how best to signpost a colleague, either internally or externally. If in doubt on where to signpost, use the MHFAider Support App to access the [Hub of Hope](#).

## **Communication**

Ask your employer how they will let colleagues know you are an MHFAider and how to contact you. Some examples include putting up posters around the workplace, putting a list on an intranet hub, or giving out MHFAider lanyards or badges. MHFAider posters are available to download from the MHFAider Support App.

## **Working together**

You may be working with colleagues who have completed another MHFA England course such as MHFA Champion, Mental

Health Aware or Mental Health Skills for Managers course. Find out how you might work together as a team. Each role is different but plays a part in supporting a mentally healthy organisation.

## **Support for you**

In the workplace, you should be able to uphold your role as an MHFAider alongside your other responsibilities. It's a rewarding role, but it can also be a challenging one. It's important that you find out what support is available to you. It would be useful for you to know:

- who you should contact if you need support or are concerned about any aspect of your role
- whether there is a peer support system such as an MHFAider network where you can meet regularly with others to discuss your role and share ideas
- whether you will have the opportunity to renew your skills on an MHFA Refresher course after three years



*"It's as though the safe space created during the MHFA training has come back with us into the office. We now feel able to be more open with each other about our mental health and to support each other when we are stressed."*

**Pamela,**  
MHFAider

# Providing Mental Health First Aid remotely

As more organisations implement hybrid or fully remote working, connection is becoming more important. Remote working can increase feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are risk factors for poor mental health. Fortunately, the principles of MHFA are the same whether you are supporting someone face to face or from a distance. However, the way you apply these principles might be different.

## **Employee connections**

Getting to know remote workers well is important as it is harder to spot signs of poor mental health remotely or in an online environment.

## **Promoting your MHFAider role**

Consider how remote employees can approach you. Lanyards or physical posters work well in person, but a digital version will be essential for colleagues working from home. Make your role known clearly by:

- Including your digital MHFAider badge in your email signature, with agreed copy on how to contact you or find out more
- Partaking in virtual MHFAider network launch events, awareness campaigns or drop-in sessions

## **Listening non-judgementally in a virtual environment**

When listening to a remote employee much of their non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, posture and body language can be lost. Using video conferencing software is recommended wherever possible. Set aside time, minimise distractions, and give the person your full focus.

## **Consistency**

Giving support in a face-to-face setting might mean speaking to a person's line manager with them about their work pressures or supporting them to contact their EAP. Where possible, it is important to offer remote employees the same support you would give a colleague face to face.

## **Location-specific support**

When encouraging professional help, make sure you work with the person to discover what professional support might be available to them in their local area. The support available to a remote employee might differ as their place of work is different. They should be made aware of how to contact HR, their line manager, or their EAP remotely.



*"If you think a remote worker may be struggling, act sooner rather than later. The isolation that accompanies lone working can aggravate a period of low mood or stress that might be easily sorted out if dealt with promptly."*

**Jane Cattermole,**  
The Mainly Mental Health  
Company Limited

## MHFAider support and benefits

As an MHFAider you have three-year access to a range of support and benefits across the Online Learning Hub and the MHFAider Support App, including functions to support you in your role, a programme of online events, and supporting resources.

### Digital manual

Learners on the MHFA course will receive a digital reference manual to support you after you complete your course. The digital manual includes a detailed look at the MHFA action plan and other mental health models, information about common mental health conditions and crises from trusted and up-to-date sources, and best practice for using the MHFA action plan.

### MHFAider Support App

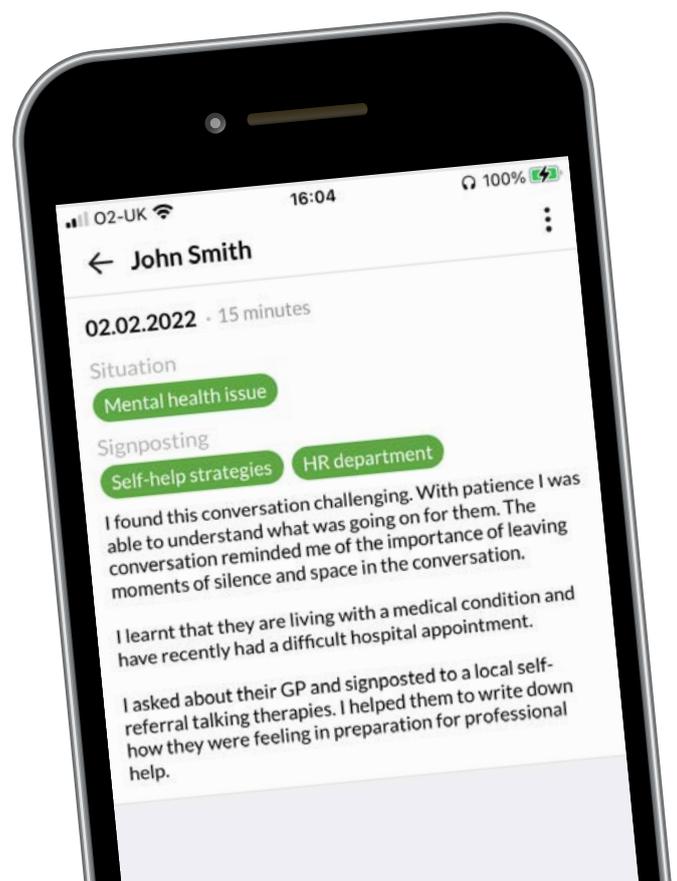
The MHFAider Support App hosts features and resources to support you in your MHFAider role, including:

- **Hub of Hope.** A national mental health database of local and national mental health advice and support services. MHFA England have partnered with Hub of Hope so that you can access the database from within the MHFAider Support App.
- **Reflective note taking.** Record your reflections after an MHFA conversation using the MHFAider Support App conversations feature. Your reflections are not formal notes and should be written to remind you of how you felt, anything that concerned you, and any actions you took. You don't need to ask the person's permission to make notes, but it is good practice to explain

the benefits of your reflective notes. The benefits are: to support you in processing the conversation and reflecting on how you used your skills, to be a helpful note for any future MHFA conversations, and to better understand the impact of your role by seeing how many MHFA conversations you are having and how long you are spending in the role.

- **Shout's text support service.** You may want support after a challenging MHFA conversation.
- **Resources.** You will find documents, films, and toolkits designed to remind you of important course content and help you to promote positive mental health in your setting.

Check out our [FAQs](#) [here](#) for information on data protection.



## MHFAider support and benefits cont.

### Ongoing support and benefits

Our courses are more than simply one-off training - we offer a supportive community as part of the three-year support package. MHFAiders will have access to monthly newsletters and a range of online resources, and role development opportunities, that will aim to increase your confidence and knowledge to have impactful MHFA conversations.

### MHFA Refresher course

MHFAiders are encouraged to take an MHFA Refresher course every three years. Regularly refreshing knowledge and making time to practice skills with others empowers people to perform the role confidently and safely. Taking an MHFA Refresher course also provides a further three years of access to MHFAider benefits. If it has been three years since you completed your Mental Health First Aid training, speak with your employer about attending a refresher course today.

### MHFAider Qualification

MHFAiders who have completed our new MHFA course are eligible to complete our internationally recognised Ofqual MHFAider qualification, in partnership with Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH).

It gives you a chance to demonstrate your commitment to the role and test your knowledge as an MHFAider. For more information and how to register, visit our website, [here](#).

### Resources

Other free digital resources from MHFA England, available on the MHFAider Support App and Online Learning Hub, include mental health awareness, campaigns, self-care and workplace materials and guides.

For more information, [Mental Health at Work](#) host a range of resources on their website for organisations of all sizes.



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## Get in touch with MHFA England

You may find it helpful to keep up to date with the latest mental health news and campaigns. Find out how to keep in touch with us below.

Follow us on social media [@MHFAEngland](#)

Explore our website [mhfaengland.org](https://mhfaengland.org)

Visit our [community blog](#)





**MHFA England**

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