

# Information for families and carers

## Navigating the Journey

Psychological Support Guide for Relatives of  
Patients in the Major Trauma Service



# Introduction

Welcome to this leaflet, a resource prepared by the Clinical Health Psychology Service at Royal Preston Hospital. We have created this guide for those supporting loved ones in our Major Trauma Service.

This leaflet is broken down into several chapters:

1. **Understanding Major Trauma:** We explore the emotional journey relatives typically go through, including common reactions and how to manage them.
2. **Navigating the Healthcare System:** Here, we help you understand the NHS system and provide tips on advocating for your loved one effectively.
3. **Supporting Your Loved One:** We provide guidance on how to offer emotional support to your loved one, keeping them engaged, and having difficult conversations.
4. **Support for Young Family Members:** We help you address children's needs, explaining how to discuss these situations with them and resources to support them.
5. **Self-care Techniques:** We signpost to resources and exercises to support you to take care of your mental wellbeing during this challenging time.
6. **Further Support and Resources:** We signpost other support services, including Talking Therapies, Headway, After Trauma, and more.

Remember, it is natural to experience a range of emotions, and it is okay to seek help. Please use this leaflet as a guide to help you through your journey and share it with others who might find it beneficial.

## 1. Understanding Major Trauma

Navigating the journey when a loved one is admitted to the Major Trauma Service can feel daunting. This unfamiliar terrain, with its own language and practices, can understandably be a source of stress. This chapter is designed to demystify these environments, giving you a clearer understanding of what they entail, and ultimately, providing some reassurance during this challenging time.

## Major Trauma Service

The term 'major trauma' refers to significant injuries that can occur from various incidents such as road traffic accidents, falls, or serious assaults. If your loved one is being cared for in the Major Trauma Service, it means that they have experienced serious injuries that require specialist treatment and monitoring. Your loved one may be 'stepped down' from the major trauma ward to another ward in the hospital, or they may have been nursed on a different ward since their admission. However, they may still be on a major trauma pathway if they are being nursed elsewhere in the hospital and will have a similar multidisciplinary team supporting them.

A multidisciplinary team consisting of:

- Trauma surgeons
- Anaesthetics
- Additional Medical Staff
- Major Trauma Clinical Practitioners
- Nurses
- Health Care Assistants (HCA)
- Physiotherapists (PT)
- Occupational Therapists (OT)
- Speech and Language Therapists (SALT)
- Dietitians
- Clinical Psychologists (CP)
- Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners (PWP)

This team works together to provide immediate and ongoing care for the patient, with the goal of stabilising their condition, managing discomfort, and initiating the process of recovery and rehabilitation as necessary.

## 2. Navigating the healthcare system

Navigating the NHS during a stressful time can seem overwhelming, especially when a loved one is in the Major Trauma Service. This chapter offers guidance on understanding the healthcare system and tips on how to advocate effectively for your loved one.

### Understanding the healthcare system

The NHS provides comprehensive health care services, ranging from in-patient care to specialist services. Here are a few key components to understand when your loved one is receiving care:

- **Major Trauma Service:** The Major Trauma Service specialises in treating severe and often multiple injuries.
- **Healthcare Professionals:** A multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, therapists, and pharmacists, will be involved in the care of your loved one. Each professional plays a different role in ensuring the best care for the patient.
- **Care Pathways:** Care pathways are standard ways of treating particular illnesses or conditions within the NHS. They ensure consistency and efficiency in patient care.

### Advocating for your loved one

Acting as an advocate for your loved one can feel daunting, but it is a crucial part of ensuring they receive the best care. Here are some tips:

- **Stay Informed:** Make sure to understand your loved one's condition and treatment plan. Do not hesitate to ask questions or seek clarifications from the healthcare team.
- **Communicate Effectively:** Clear communication with the healthcare team is essential. Share important information about

your loved one, such as allergies, previous medical history, or even their likes and dislikes.

- **Be Involved:** Where possible, participate in decision-making processes related to your loved one's care.

Navigating the healthcare system effectively requires patience, clear communication, and a willingness to ask questions. Remember, the healthcare team is there to support both your loved one and you.

### 3. Supporting your loved one

When someone you care about is in the Major Trauma Service, it is natural to want to do everything you can to help. This chapter offers gentle guidance on how to give emotional support during their stay on these wards.

#### Providing emotional support

This can involve listening to their fears and concerns, reassuring them about your presence and the support they have, or simply being by their side when they need it.

- **Listen actively:** Provide them with space to express their feelings without judgement or rushing to provide solutions. Your role here is to listen and validate their emotions.
- **Reassure them:** Remind them that they are not alone in this journey. The simple act of holding their hand, if possible, can provide immense comfort.

#### Keeping them engaged

Stimulation and engagement can be beneficial for your loved one's wellbeing.

- **Engage in familiar activities:** Depending on their condition, engage them in activities they enjoy and are familiar with, such as listening to their favourite music, reading to them, or discussing a beloved book or film.

- **Encourage participation in their care:** Where possible, encourage your loved one to be involved in decisions related to their care. This can empower them and provide a sense of control.

## 4. Support for young family members

When a family member is in the Major Trauma Service, it can be particularly challenging for younger family members to understand and cope with the situation. This chapter provides guidance on how to talk to children about these situations and highlights resources to support them.

### Communicating with children

Children might not fully grasp the gravity of the situation, and their reactions can vary widely depending on their age, development, and relationship with the patient. Here are some tips on how to communicate with them:

- **Honesty is important:** Be honest about the situation but use age-appropriate language. Children are often more perceptive than we give them credit for and hiding the truth may cause more harm than good.
- **Provide reassurance:** Reassure them that it is okay to feel scared, upset, or confused and that there are many people working to help their loved one get better.
- **Encourage questions:** Let them know it is okay to ask questions and express their feelings. Answer their questions as simply and honestly as you can.

### Activities for children

- **Drawing or writing:** Encourage them to draw pictures or write letters to the family member in the hospital, which can help them express their feelings and feel connected.
- **Books and stories:** There are many children's books available that deal with illness and hospitalisation. Reading these together can help children better understand the situation.

## Resources for supporting children

There are many resources available to help children cope during this difficult time:

**Childline:** A counselling service for children and young people up to their 19th birthday in the United Kingdom provided by the NSPCC.

Telephone: 0800 1111

Website: <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

**YoungMinds:** A UK charity committed to improving the mental health of all children, they offer a wealth of resources for young people and their parents

Telephone: 0808 802 5544

Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

**School support:** Reach out to your child's school about the situation. Schools often have counsellors who can provide additional support

Remember, supporting young family members during this time requires patience, love, and reassurance. It is also important to remind them (and yourself) that it is okay to seek professional help when needed.

## 5. Self-care techniques

Facing the reality of a loved one's health condition can be overwhelming. During this time, it is important to have strategies and techniques in place to help you manage your stress and ensure your wellbeing. Scan the QR codes below to signpost you to self-care exercises.

## Mindfulness practices

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment. This can help reduce stress, increase emotional awareness, and create a sense of calm.



## Breathing exercises

Deep breathing exercises can provide immediate relief from feelings of anxiety and stress.



## Relaxation exercise (video)





## **More self-help exercises**



## **7. Further support and resources**

Beyond this guide, there are many local and national resources available to support you and your family during this challenging time. This chapter provides an overview of some key services, including contact details, to help you find additional support if needed.

### **Mental health crisis line**

If you need urgent help as you are in mental health distress you can call the crisis line for Lancashire and South Cumbria, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Telephone: 0800 953 0110

### **NHS Talking Therapies**

Talking Therapies provide access to psychological therapy services for people living in Lancashire. They offer a variety of therapies for individuals facing common mental health problems. The service is free and confidential.

Telephone: 01772 695 300

Website: <https://www.lscft.nhs.uk/services/talking-therapies>

## Headway

Headway is a UK-wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury. They provide support, services, and information to brain injury survivors, their families, and carers.

Helpline: 0808 800 2244

Website: [www.headway.org.uk](http://www.headway.org.uk)

## After Trauma

After Trauma is a community for trauma survivors, including both patients and their families. They offer resources for recovery and a forum for shared experiences and support.

Website: [www.aftertrauma.org](http://www.aftertrauma.org)

## Other mental health charities

There are several other charities that offer support for various mental health challenges:

**Mind:** Mind provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness, and promote understanding.

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**Samaritans:** The Samaritans offer a safe place for anyone struggling to cope, round the clock, every single day of the year.

Telephone: 116 123

Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Remember, you are not alone in this journey. There are numerous resources and services available to support you and your family.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

**Clinical Health Psychology Service: 01772 523252.** If there is no answer then please leave a message with your name, contact details and reason for calling and someone will get back to you. Please note, this telephone number is not an emergency helpline. If you do require this, please use the contact details listed above.

## Sources of further information

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware)

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smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

**Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.**

**This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.**

Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

[patientexperienceandinvolve@LTHTR.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceandinvolve@LTHTR.nhs.uk)

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