



# MHM Meet-Up Starter Pack

Thanks for showing interest in running a Mental Health Mates (MHM) meet-up!

Bryony Gordon established MHM as a safe space for you to walk and talk about mental health problems **without fear of judgement**.

We're thrilled you'd like to bring MHM to your area; together we can **break the stigma** and support each other.

## *What happens at a meet-up?*

We base our meet-ups around a walk, with a cup of tea at the start or end of the event (or maybe both!). This is because walking and talking helps us relax, but we know exercise is also great for mental health.

People are welcome to run or jog if they want - we've even had marathon runners join in - but most of us just enjoy walking along and chatting in small groups. The walk route should always be gentle: think trainers or possibly wellies, not walking boots and hiking poles!

Anyone who attends is welcome to bring family, friends or even their dog for support. However, most people come alone, so it's important to make everyone feel included. Some will be in a 'good place' with their mental health and others may be struggling, but **the group is open to everyone affected by a mental health condition** – their own, or that of someone close to them.



## Planning

### *Where should I hold my meet-up?*

Decide on a location that's easy to get to (with good public transport links and possibly signposts), which has a **central meeting point, like a cafe**. Then everyone can get refreshments before and after, and it's easier to find you.

### *How do I plan a route?*

A circular route works best, as anyone who loses sight of the group for any reason can find us again. Start and end at your landmark or cafe. Our walks tend to be about a mile - for example, we walk around the Serpentine in Hyde Park. You don't need a complicated or long route, as the aim is to be **accessible for all levels of fitness**.



# "Being part of Mental Health Mates has made a big difference and everyone I have met through it has been great."

## What happens now I've planned my walk?

- Tell us which **location, date and time** you've picked (we normally do Sunday mornings or a Tuesday evening) by sending an email to [hello@mentalhealthmates.co.uk](mailto:hello@mentalhealthmates.co.uk). We'll publicise it on the Mental Health Mates website and on social media, and list you (by first name only) as the walk leader. See an example on the right:
- **Create a poster** to promote your walk, and email us your design before you distribute it. We like to use a free app called [Canva](#), which is easy to use and has poster templates, but alternatives include Microsoft Paint and Microsoft Word. Give us a shout if you can't get to grips with the design bit, and we can help.
- Your poster should include the Mental Health Mates website ([mentalhealthmates.co.uk](http://mentalhealthmates.co.uk)), and maybe social channels if there's enough space, so that people can find out what the meet-up involves. We like to mention that it's a peer support group, or we describe it as '**a place to walk and talk without fear of judgement**'. Please try to avoid using words like 'therapeutic' or 'mindful', which can sound misleading because MHM is not a therapy service.
- Think about printing your poster and handing copies out to local places, such as town halls, libraries, hairdressers, doctors' surgeries, or the cafe where you plan to meet.

• **Worcester, February 19th** on 19th Feb 2017 11:00:am  
Meeting at Worcester Woods Country Park at 11am. Walk leader: Peter



- As a walk leader, you'll be made an admin on our [Facebook page](#) (provided you have a Facebook account – we wouldn't force you to join!). This means you can post about the walk and also respond to people's questions.
- Walk leaders also become part of an organisers' email group, so Bryony and the main admin team can contact every leader at once, should we need to share any updates with you.
- Remember to take it easy; what you are doing is an amazing thing, but don't push yourself. If it feels overwhelming or you feel unable to do the walk, that's totally ok - just let us know ASAP. Most importantly, **do ask for help if you're struggling**: we understand!
- Don't forget to charge your phone before the meet-up, so you can check social media and emails to know of any last-minute messages (e.g. someone telling you they're running late but still want to join in). Keep an eye on the hashtag **#mentalhealthmates**.



## Anything else I should know?

- We've trialled using [Eventbrite](#) to get people to register for the walk – it's a free service that means we can keep in contact with those who have RSVP'd, and can email them directly. You don't have to add your event on Eventbrite, but let us know if you'd like to do so.
- Possibly ask for a discretionary contribution of £1, if it helps, to cover the cost of the printing and balloons. Do this in advance so people know to expect it, and be clear that it's optional – **walks should always be free to attend, and non-commercial.**
- Consider buying a few balloons to take to the walk - we use blue star-shaped ones, but any will do. If possible, write 'Mental Health Mates' on the balloons with a permanent marker.
- Bring sticky labels and a marker pen if you want people to use name labels.
- You don't have to pass on your email address or phone number to attendees (just listing [mentalhealthmates.co.uk](http://mentalhealthmates.co.uk) is fine as a point of contact), but some of our regular walk leaders have set up separate email addresses so people can get in touch. For example, our Newcastle walk leader, Nat, uses [mentalhealthmatesnewcastle@gmail.com](mailto:mentalhealthmatesnewcastle@gmail.com).
- You could print out our list of [useful numbers and helplines](#) and let people know you have them so they can seek advice from professional organisations. If you don't own a printer, use one in your local library.



## How can I prepare for bad weather?

- We prefer to meet at cafes or bandstands, but if your meeting point is in the open, perhaps arrive with an umbrella or two!
- If the weather's torrential, fewer people might turn up than planned, but there will always be some who attend.
- **Keep to the agreed meeting point** until everyone's arrived, then consider moving indoors to a cafe or pub (if this isn't triggering for anyone attending) should the bad weather continue.

# On the Day

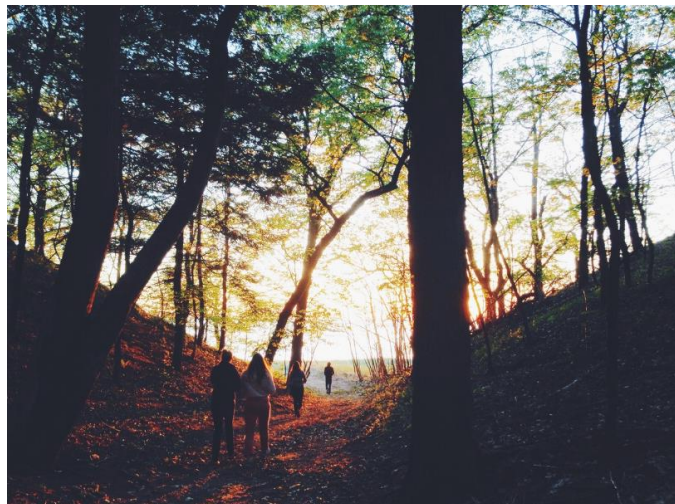
## How will I start the meet-up once everyone's arrived?

- You could make a little speech about why you're all here, but it doesn't need to be elaborate.
- Run through the rules (see below) to reassure everyone.
- Go around the group and ask everyone to **introduce themselves**, saying their name and perhaps a bit of information, such as where they've travelled from, the last program they watched on TV or what they do for a living. If you've brought name labels, now's the time to use them!
- Hang around in the meeting point for 5-10 minutes before you start walking, in case anyone's running late.



## What are the rules of the meet-up?

- MHM must be a **safe space**; what happens at the meet-up stays at the meet-up, and we respect each other's privacy.
- People can choose to talk about their mental health or talk about other things, from what's on TV to current affairs. There is no pressure to discuss your condition, medication or treatment.
- A meet-up is not a therapy session and we are not qualified therapists or medical professionals; we're an **informal peer support group** offering a friendly ear.
- Group leaders or members might like to take a photo of the meet-up, but they can only do this with consent. Anyone who doesn't want to be photographed, or tagged in a photo on social media, must be allowed to opt out.
- People can leave at any time if they feel uncomfortable, as long as they let you know they're leaving.
- The most important thing is that people are up and out. They don't need to share their inner thoughts unless they want to.
- Congratulate everyone on coming to the walk - and give yourself a pat on the back!



## How does a meet-up finish?

At the end of a meet-up, we tend to let go of the balloons (in a light-hearted ceremonious 'letting go of the balloon' way). However, this is optional.

Try and get people's email addresses, to let them know about upcoming walks. Hopefully you will find people who could help organise the walks when you are busy!

We recommend holding a meet-up **once or twice a month**, but see what works for your group.

## What if nobody turns up?

Most meet-ups involve 10-20 people but if only one person turns up, it will be worth it! You can build the group over time. We'll always promote the event on social media and have an early idea of numbers so you know how many to expect on the day.

Because meet-ups only take 1-1.5 hours and are so important for wellbeing, most people do attend once they've agreed to.



## Any tips for keeping conversation flowing?

- People often open up about their interests, like films, TV, books and hobbies.
- Pets, jobs and family members are also good conversation starters.
- **Use open-ended questions** that can't be answered with a 'yes' or 'no', e.g. 'How far away do you live?' rather than 'Are you local?'.
- If you feel comfortable, share a bit of your own story to make people feel at ease.



- Focus on the local area - ask how well everyone knows it, and if they have any favourite places nearby.
- If anyone looks lonely or becomes separated from the group, make an effort to involve them.

### **Help - I don't feel up to running the event today - what do I do?**

Send us an email ASAP (to [bryony@mentalhealthmates.co.uk](mailto:bryony@mentalhealthmates.co.uk)) and a member of the admin team will be in touch. We will then email everyone who had signed up for the walk, and also post on social media, to let them know the event won't go ahead.

Don't take it out on yourself if you are unable to run a planned meet-up; we only ask that you let us know at the earliest opportunity so we can keep everyone informed.

**" If you're in two minds about coming along to a future meet-up, I'd urge you to take a chance and see what it's like."**

**If you have any more questions in the planning stages, please email [bryony@mentalhealthmates.co.uk](mailto:bryony@mentalhealthmates.co.uk).**

**To tell us about your confirmed walk plans, please email the date, time and location of your walk (and, when it's ready, the image file of your poster) to [hello@mentalhealthmates.co.uk](mailto:hello@mentalhealthmates.co.uk).**

**We look forward to helping you run your own MHM meet-up soon!**



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

**#mentalhealthmates**

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/findyourwe> (search @findyourwe)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/918721931544553> (search 'Mental Health Mates')

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthmates> (search @Mentalhealthmates)