Preparing for a Mental Health Appointment

A practical, compassionate guide to organising your thoughts, communicating your needs and making the most of your appointment.

Space to Breathe Therapy | Support Hub

Why preparing can help

Talking about mental health can feel unfamiliar or overwhelming. You might be uncertain about what to share, worry about forgetting something important, or find that your words become harder to access under pressure. Preparation is not about finding perfect answers. It is about giving yourself another way to communicate what matters.

An appointment may involve a GP, counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, mental health nurse or another professional. The structure will vary, but the following ideas can be adapted to your situation.

1. Start with what matters most

Consider what led you to arrange the appointment. Write down your main concern in one or two sentences, then add examples of how it affects everyday life. This can include sleep, relationships, eating, work, education, emotional wellbeing, concentration or personal care.

- When did you first notice a change? Has it been constant or does it vary?
- What happens on a particularly difficult day?
- What are you hoping will be different with appropriate support?

You do not need to minimise an experience because you happen to feel better on the day of the appointment.

2. Gather useful information

It may help to have a short timeline of important changes, any previous support or assessments, current medication and relevant physical health information. Only share what is relevant or feels appropriate. You can explain when details are uncertain rather than guessing.

3. Consider communication and sensory needs

Some people find it easier to write, type, point, use communication aids or bring someone they trust. You may need extra processing time, clear questions, a quieter room, a break, a remote appointment or written information afterwards. Ask the service in advance about reasonable adjustments where possible.

> *“I have written some notes because speaking about this can be difficult. Could we use them during the appointment?”*

4. Prepare a few questions

- What might be contributing to the difficulties I have described?

- What support, assessment or treatment options could be appropriate?
- What are the possible benefits and disadvantages of each option?
- What happens next, and who should I contact if I need clarification?
- Can I have an accessible written summary of the plan?

5. During the appointment

Begin with the point that matters most, even if it feels uncomfortable. You can tell the professional if a question is hard to answer or ask them to explain a term differently. It is acceptable to pause, look at notes or say that you need more time. If there is a concern about your safety, be as clear as you can about what is happening so the professional can assess and discuss appropriate support.

If there are several concerns, ask which can be addressed today and how the others can be followed up. Before the appointment ends, check your understanding of any agreed actions, referrals, prescriptions or follow-up arrangements.

6. Afterwards: give yourself processing time

Appointments can be tiring, even when they go well. Consider allowing time to rest and, when ready, write down what was discussed. If you later realise that something important was missed, you can contact the service to ask how best to add it or arrange follow-up.

A simple appointment checklist

- I know the date, time, location or joining instructions.
- I have identified the one or two concerns I most want to raise.
- I have notes about symptoms, impact and relevant history.
- I have considered communication adjustments and whether I want support.
- I have written questions and know where to record the next steps.

When a conversation feels difficult

You might say: “I am struggling to explain this aloud”; “Could you give me a little more time?”; “Can I show you what I wrote?”; or “Please can we check that I have understood the next step?” These are reasonable ways to make your needs known. You do not have to perform calmness or confidence to deserve support.

Your notes

My main concern: _____

_____

What I need the professional to understand: _____

_____

My questions or adjustments: _____

_____

Agreed next steps: _____

_____

Further support

The interactive **Preparing for a Mental Health Appointment** workbook in the Space to Breathe Therapy Support Hub provides space to organise concerns, identify accessibility needs, choose questions and download a personal appointment summary.

Visit spacetobreathetherapy.co.uk for support and information.

Important: This guide is educational and does not replace personalised medical or mental health advice. If you are in immediate danger in the UK, call 999. For urgent mental health support in England, contact NHS 111 and select the mental health option. Samaritans provides emotional support on 116 123.