

YOU CAN DO IT!

Support for people experiencing mental health difficulties

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Have you thought about going back to learning?

Participating in a learning course is an enjoyable way to make new friends while learning about something that interests you. It could lead to many possibilities. Taking part in a course can help you to improve your confidence, your health and generally how you feel about yourself. Learning can help to build skills to improve job opportunities or personal benefits.

There is a wide range of subjects from computer courses to singing and from arts to reading and writing. Learning can take place at your own pace and at a suitable time to you. There are short courses, part-time and full-time courses. Learning centres are a good place to meet people, develop interests and to hear about social events. Many colleges offer taster sessions where you can go along and see what courses are available and try them for yourself. Learning can be affordable and you can often start a new subject from scratch. Most colleges have a named person who specialises in offering advice and guidance to learners with mental health difficulties to ensure you find the right course for your interests.

This is what George had to say about his experience at college...

'I thought learning would help me recover from my stroke and to cope with my mental health difficulties. I have been at the college for five years and have completed many different courses in computing, personal development and art. Through the courses, particularly the art courses, I have been able to express myself in new ways, which has been good as I have speech difficulties as a result of my stroke. The support worker in the college is always there to help and the tutors on the courses are friendly and nice which makes a big difference. I started taking small classes with other people with mental health difficulties and have now moved on to larger courses and classes in the art department. Through coming to college I have made friends and regularly go on trips with other students as part of a college wide social group run by students with mental health difficulties or recovering from drug abuse. I have also had some of my artwork exhibited, my speech has improved and I feel more confident about trying new situations.'

Natalie says, 'don't delay it like I did, start now, don't be nervous and scared, just give it a go...'

'My support worker suggested going to college to help me with my depression and isolation. I started a confidence-building course a year ago and have now completed three different courses. I was surprised that the college offered so many courses and I could attend small classes for people like myself not ready for larger classes. It has been challenging combining the courses with being a single mum, although it has been worth it. I would like to go on and do as many courses as possible as I really enjoy the courses. I've had problems in my personal life – if I didn't have the support and experience of the courses I wouldn't have dealt with it in the same [positive] way. I have had contact with the college support worker who helped me a lot at the start. I know the support is there for when I need it, which is a relief. It's important to realise that you are not just going to get thrown into college – support is available specific to your needs and it's always there if you want it. The courses have made a huge difference to my confidence ... in my confidence to talk to people, to just do things.'

Your rights

The Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 (Education) came into force in 2002. As a result of this Act, all education providers have a responsibility to offer support and make changes to meet your needs. If you disclose any mental health difficulties or disabilities, support must be made available to help you with your studies.

Support can include:

- access to a support worker to talk over any difficulties that occur in your learning;
- social support as well as learning support is sometimes available;
- advocacy support to help you get the right support and disclose your needs to other tutors and staff (with your agreement);
- support in the classroom;
- classes set up specifically for people with mental health difficulties;
- funding or access to free classes;
- access to counselling services.



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What can you do now?

- have a think about what you would like to learn about and what kind of support would help you to learn;
- talk about it to a friend or someone who knows you and get their help and encouragement;
- contact your local college or adult education centre and make an appointment to talk to the support worker who can offer specialist advice and help you to access the right learning opportunity.

Useful numbers

Contact details of the support worker at your local college:

For other information please contact:

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The original leaflet can be downloaded from www.niace.org.uk

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