



### **Mental health crisis support via text**

A new text service has been launched across Kent and Medway for people of all ages needing mental health support.

As part of the Release the Pressure campaign, the texts are free on all major mobile networks and the service is provided by SHOUT and the Crisis Text Line.

By texting the word “Kent” or “Medway” to 85258, you will start a conversation with one of the many trained and experienced volunteers who can give support at any time, wherever you are. It’s a place to go if you’re struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

The service will run in addition to the current 24/7 freephone helpline and is funded by the Kent and Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) which is a collaboration between Kent County Council, Medway Council, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust and all the NHS organisations across Kent and Medway.

Lauretta Kavanagh, Mental Health Programme Director for the NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group said: “Anxiety is a natural reaction to COVID19. We’ve had our everyday lives transformed overnight and are unsure of what might come. All-present news about the pandemic can be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of restlessness or unreality. However when this pandemic has passed, just like previous ones, we will respond with the same sense of relief, a revived appreciation of one another, for the outdoors and life’s other simple pleasures. These will be just some of the benefits. In the interim time, it’s right to be gentle with ourselves and open up about what’s happening to us. As far as you can, reach out to others, including texting Kent to 85258 at any time of the day or night.

SHOUT CEO, Victoria Hornby said: “We are delighted to partner with the STP to provide a crisis text service to people in need of mental health support across Kent and Medway. Over the last few weeks we have seen increasing numbers of conversations (around 30%) mentioning Coronavirus and we know things are difficult for people right now. For anyone who is feeling anxious, lonely, stressed, afraid or worried, our Crisis Volunteers are there 24/7.”

Kent’s Director of Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark said “During this time of social distancing and asking people to stay at home, we know that many people will be feeling anxious, concerned and isolated. You may be worried about loved ones or the impact that this will have on your relationship, your job or your financial situation.

Therefore it’s important to know that you can reach out for support any time day or night. Don’t bottle it up, text Kent to 85258 for support.”

James Williams, Director of Public Health at Medway Council, said: “Everyone is having to adapt to new ways of communicating and interacting with family, friends and the wider community. During these uncertain times we need to think more about the impact these changes are having on our mental health. It is incredibly important for residents to know that help and support is available. The new Release the Pressure text service will help people access help whenever they may need it. I would encourage anyone who needs support to text Medway to 85258.”

You can find out more about the Release the Pressure helpline, the new text service and other community mental health support services by visiting [www.releasethepressure.uk](http://www.releasethepressure.uk)

For more information about how to look after your mental health during the coronavirus pandemic visit <https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/coronavirus/looking-after-your-mental-health>