

## **STEPS - Emotional Support Service**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **What is STEPS?**

STEPS (Stroke Tailored Emotional and Psychological Support) is designed to empower those affected by stroke, who live in Northern Ireland, to:

- Develop emotional resilience
- Readjust to life after stroke, and
- Reintegrate into community life

Three years funding has been provided from The National Lottery Community Fund, made possible, thanks to National Lottery players.

#### **The STEPS project will offer:**

- A stroke specific, emotional support, counselling service for stroke survivors, carers and relatives who live in Northern Ireland.
- A series of self-management workshops in partnership with Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke (NICHHS).

#### **Who is this service for?**

If you live in Northern Ireland and you have had a stroke (including TIA/mini-stroke) or care for someone who has, STEPS provides a safe, confidential place for you to talk to an experienced professional about your feelings and concerns.

#### **This service offers:**

- Free, one-to-one counselling, in person, online or by telephone to stroke survivors, carers and relatives throughout Northern Ireland.
- Up to six counselling sessions, each lasting 50 minutes, and usually taking place weekly.
- Professional support from qualified counsellors who are trained in recognising, understanding and working with the emotional effects of stroke.
- An opportunity to talk about what's affecting you, such as anxiety, fears, worries, grief, relationships, or thoughts and behaviours you want to change.

### **STEPS counselling is:**

- A safe, confidential place where you will be listened to without judgement.
- Designed to help you to develop emotional resilience, readjust to life after stroke and prepare to reintegrate into the community
- A non-directive, person centred, approach that will support you to talk through problems and come to your own conclusions on how best to deal with them.
- Voluntary, clients are free to engage in or end counselling at any point.

**Counselling isn't** befriending, giving advice, solving client's problems for them or telling clients what they should do.

### **How can I get support?**

Details of how to get support for yourself or for someone else (third party referral) is available on the [STEPS webpage](#)

- To get support for yourself you should fill out our [STEPS self-referral form](#).
- To get support for someone else you should fill out our [STEPS third party referral form](#).

### **Getting support for someone else - third party referrals**

Third party referrals from statutory or third sector organisations are especially welcome for this service. Things to consider before making a referral:

- Sometimes, immediately after a stroke isn't the best time for clients to engage in counselling as it can already be a very challenging time and there can be lots of other professionals involved at that point.
- If clients are already involved with clinical psychology it would be up to the Clinical Psychologist to decide if a referral to STEPS is appropriate.
- STEPS does not automatically accept all referrals received and reserves the right for appropriate decision making with respect to the criteria detailed (below) as to what is/is not considered to be an appropriate referral for the service.
- Please ensure you have received consent from the individual/client prior to making a referral to the service (see our on-line third party referral form for details).

### **What is an appropriate referral to STEPS?**

Our person centred sessions can support clients who present with mild to moderate depression as well as exploring issues such as:

- Anxiety
- Fears and Worries
- Anger
- Grief and Loss
- Relationships
- Self Esteem

Types of referrals that are likely to be appropriate for the STEPS service include stroke survivors, carers or their relatives who are:

- Willing and able to work on coping strategies and resilience building.
- Able to engage in counselling by telephone or on-line.

### **What is not an appropriate referral to STEPS?**

Types of referrals which would not be appropriate for STEPS include stroke survivors, carers and relatives who:

- Require a home visit.
- Are receiving support from mental health services (consideration may be given to clients who have agreement from the practitioner supporting them).
- Presenting with risk including self-harm and suicidal intention.
- Are under 18 years old.

STEPS is not a crisis service. If someone is at risk or in crisis contact should be made directly with their GP (or out of hours GP service) or mental health professional, if relevant. If appropriate they can also be provided with numbers for Lifeline 0808 808 8000 (available 24/7) or Samaritans free phone 116 123 (UK and Ireland) or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **What happens when a third party referral is received?**

When a referral is received from a third party, either statutory or third sector organisation, a confirmation email will automatically be sent to the referrer.

If the referral is appropriate for STEPS the client will be contacted and offered an initial appointment with a counsellor to see if counselling is the right service for the client at this time.

If ongoing counselling support is agreed the client will then be offered an additional five sessions.

An email will be sent to the referrer to advise:

- If counselling has been declined.
- If we have been unable to make contact with the client.
- When counselling sessions have ended.

### **Is counselling confidential?**

Counselling is confidential, but there are legal limits to confidentiality. Confidentiality may be broken if:

- A serious criminal offence has been or will be committed.
- We are instructed by a court to disclose information.
- Child abuse is reported or suspected.
- A client shares that they are at risk of:
  - Harming themselves (e.g., suicide plan).
  - Harming someone else.
  - Being harmed by someone else (e.g., domestic abuse).

To maintain the standards of their professional body counsellors discuss their work regularly in clinical supervision but no personal, identifiable information is shared. In line with good clinical governance counsellors attend regular external clinical supervision for at least 1.5 hours each month.

### **Are counsellors qualified?**

STEPS is staffed by qualified counsellors who are trained in recognising, understanding and working with the emotional effects of stroke. The counselling team are accredited or working towards accreditation with their professional body, usually, BACP or equivalent.

Counsellors are required to adhere to the ethical framework of their professional body (e.g. BACP) and are accountable to their clients, the Stroke Association and their professional body for the work they do.

### **How will client information be stored/used?**

In line with good counselling practice brief notes will be recorded after each counselling session. For more details on how we use and look after personal information, read our privacy policy at [stroke.org.uk/privacy](https://stroke.org.uk/privacy)