



How can we make private mental health and wellbeing support more accessible?

Reframing mental illness and wellbeing in 2022 and beyond

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Executive Summary

The demand for mental health support is higher than the current system is able to keep up with. **Figures released in August 2021** revealed 1.6 million people in England were on waiting lists for mental health care, while an estimated eight million could not get specialist help as they were not considered 'sick enough' to qualify. How can we make private mental health care and wellbeing support more accessible for individuals?

Mental health matters: New figures and findings **What are people seeking help for?**

With a combined 35.3 million users accessing counselling, hypnotherapy, life coaching, holistic therapy, and nutritional support over the past five years, new figures from the Happiful family give a unique insight into how people are accessing private mental health and wellbeing support. Data shows that key areas of concern include relationships and intimacy (therapists from Counselling Directory saw a 1,061% increase in clients seeking advice on whether their relationship could survive without intimacy), and stress (Life Coach Directory saw a 372% rise in new users accessing content on "Could you be stressed without knowing it?" between 2019–20, and 38% between 2020–21).

How are people accessing support?

The ways in which people are accessing help and support appear to have changed. According to data from Counselling Directory, the number of therapists offering telephone and online support has risen significantly from 11,500 in March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, to 17,600 as of February 2022. This suggests an ongoing demand for remote mental health support.

Who is looking for support?

Five of Happiful's six platforms have seen an increase in men seeking information including 7% on Counselling Directory. It's worth noting that NHS talking therapy referrals for men currently sit at 36%, while Counselling Directory saw just 34% of traffic between 2017–21 from male visitors. This could suggest an increased need to encourage more men to seek out mental health information and support.

How can we ensure mental health and wellbeing support is accessible?

Ensure online and in-person support are both available.

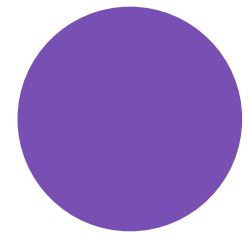
While demand for online support has grown, significant numbers are still searching for support near them.

Continue to raise awareness of common mental health issues.

Despite 79% of us frequently experiencing work-related stress, Life Coach Directory saw a 372% increase in new users accessing content explaining "Could you be stressed without knowing it?" Through helping more people to understand the signs of common mental health concerns, it could help them feel more comfortable seeking support.

Encouraging a 'whole person' approach. Through encouraging individuals to improve their health and wellbeing as a whole, it could help to not only focus on surface issues, but underlying negative behaviours, thought patterns, or past experiences that may be holding them back. By placing a more equal emphasis on the different options available (counselling, coaching, hypnotherapy, holistic, nutritional) it could help individuals to find and connect with a solution that works best for them.

Affordability. Ensuring prices are clear and easy to understand can help overcome one of the barriers holding people back from seeking support. Highlighting price ranges, concessions offered, and block session booking could aid with connecting individuals and professionals more quickly. Making sure other avenues are clearly signposted, such as support groups, helplines, and other free options, could help those who are on waiting lists for NHS support or who cannot afford private treatment.



The state of mental health care in England: How has mental health and wellbeing support changed in recent years?

How we access mental health and wellbeing support has changed drastically over the course of our lifetime. As highlighted by **NHS Digital**, in the space of 70 years, we saw a shift from asylums to care in the community, while the number of people accessing talking therapies has increased dramatically. The latest figures published in *The Psychological Therapies: Annual Report on the use of IAPT services, England 2020-21* revealed a total of 1.46 million referrals for talking therapies were made in 2020–21 in England alone, with 1.02 million of those referred accessing treatment – a decrease of 12.2% compared to the previous year.

While the numbers receiving referrals and treatment may initially sound impressive, when compared to the number of therapy referrals made by the NHS in the five years prior, figures have barely changed. Of the 1.4 million new referrals made as part of NHS England's Increasing Access to Talking Therapies (IAPT) programme, 965,000 **began treatment in 2016–17** – meaning around 435,000 did not enter talking therapy following their initial referral.

The demand for mental health advice, guidance, and services has increased exponentially since the start of

the coronavirus pandemic. According to figures released by **Rethink Mental Illness**, in the 12 months following the announcement of the first national lockdown in 2019, the mental health charity saw a 175% increase in traffic to their site compared to the previous 12 months. During this period, they saw a significant increase in people seeking advice and information about:

- anxiety (703%)
- self-harm (459%)
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 217%)
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD; 199%)

Further **figures released in August 2021** revealed that eight million people have been left without help as they were 'not considered sick enough to qualify', while waitlists are as high as 1.6 million, including 374,000 under 18s.

The latest figures as reported on by the **BBC in March 2022** show an increase from 3.8 million referrals in 2020, to 4.3 million in 2021.

Our knowledge and understanding of mental health problems have increased over recent years, thanks in part to positive changes brought about by campaigns such

as **Time to Change England**, which sought to reduce mental health-related stigma and discrimination through traditional and social media marketing campaigns. Yet, despite 82% of us acknowledging the **benefits of meaningful conversation** on our mental wellbeing, one in five of us who do not live alone spend 10 minutes or less a day having meaningful conversations. In essence, we know the impact that sharing our worries can have, yet many of us continue to remain quiet rather than speaking up and being heard.

With many worrying that the additional strain placed on the NHS since the start of the pandemic is pushing it towards breaking point (with **nine in 10 leaders** within the NHS saying that current work pressures and staff shortages are unsustainable in England), two-fifths of patients already waiting for mental health treatment have been forced to **resort to emergency or crisis services**, according to the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

1 in 5
Forced to seek private healthcare

More than 2 in 5
GPs advised parents to seek private mental health care for their child

1 in 4
saying wait times to access NHS care harmed their MH

Around **one in five Brits** have been forced to seek private healthcare, with 25% saying that waiting times to access NHS care had harmed their mental health. An estimated **43% of GPs** have gone as far as advising parents of children with mental health problems to pay for private care.

Patients are seeking private mental health and wellbeing support for a wide variety of reasons. Long waiting lists for talking therapies, a lack of specialist treatment in their area, a desire for more choice of

treatments and providers, or a need for sustained support over a longer period of time are just a few of the reasons why many in the UK are choosing to explore private mental health and wellbeing options.

1 January 2017 – 31 December 2021	
Happiful family users (total)	35,301,66
Users helped (total enquiries email, telephone, website)	5,518,149

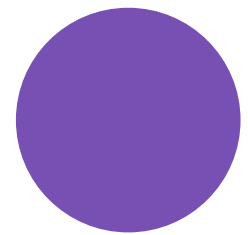
Users by directory	
Counselling Directory	21,752,727
Nutritionist Resource	3,307,028
Happiful.com	3,142,338
Therapy Directory	2,886,615
Hypnotherapy Directory	2,381,454
Life Coach Directory	2,191,502

Table 1: Google Analytics, Happiful, January 2022

Over the past five years, Counselling Directory alone has seen 21.8 million users accessing their information about mental health and wellbeing [Table 1]. Between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021, Happiful’s mental health and wellbeing directories have seen a combined 35.3 million users, with more than 5.5 million people reaching out for help and support.

How we access mental health and wellbeing support has and continues to change. Since the start of the pandemic, Counselling Directory alone has grown from having 11,500 counsellors and therapists offering online and telephone support, to more than 17,600 as of February 2022. With changes to online and phone access initially driven by necessity due to the pandemic, many are choosing to remain remote for numerous areas of their lives from work to mental health care.

As our current system struggles to keep up with the needs of the public, it’s time we asked: How can we make private mental health and wellbeing support more accessible in 2022 and beyond?



Mental health matters: Identifying common mental health, illness, and wellbeing concerns

An estimated **280 million people** are affected by **depression worldwide**. Other prevalent mental health concerns affecting millions across the globe include bipolar disorder (45 million), schizophrenia and other psychoses (20 million), and dementia (50 million). Despite their prevalence, the **World Health Organization estimates** between 76–85% of people with a mental disorder receive no treatment.

Figures in the UK suggest that **one in six adults** has a common mental disorder, and **one in four** will experience mental illness during their lifetime. Nearly 8% of Brits meet the criteria for a mixed anxiety and depression diagnosis, while somewhere between 4–10% of those in England will experience depression at some point. The latest figures from the **House of Commons Library** reveal that in addition to one in six adults experiencing a 'common mental disorder' in the past week, around one in six children aged six to 16 experienced at least one mental health problem in 2021 – an increase from one in nine just three years earlier. Despite our increased



awareness of mental health and its importance, more and more of us are reporting mental health problems.

New figures released by Happiful highlight some of the most commonly searched for mental health and wellbeing related terms. With a combined 35.3 million users [Table 1] over the past five years, the Happiful directories offers unique insight into what type of mental health and wellbeing help people are seeking, what issues they are searching for help with, and how they are accessing that help.

Top areas of concern or interest for users searching for therapy [Table 2] through Counselling Directory have centred around lack of intimacy in relationships (259,951), what is passive-aggressive behaviour (245,008), emptiness and borderline personality (169,417), attachment disorder (97,370) and bereavement (97,004). Specific approaches to access support and seek help [Table 3] have included frequently asked hypnotherapy questions (33,635) and past life regression (15,786).

Counselling Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
Can a relationship survive without intimacy	259,951	304,785
What is passive-aggressive behaviour	245,008	290,405
Why do I feel nothing: emptiness and borderline personality	169,417	199,053
Attachment disorder	97,370	123,047
Bereavement	97,004	122,416

Table 2: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Counselling Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Issues sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Counselling Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Approaches	New users	Sessions
Person-centred therapy	174,288	282,059
What is counselling	165,410	213,144
Counselling	148,607	200,644
EMDR	125,897	175,683

Table 3: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Counselling Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Of new users accessing Life Coach Directory [Table 4], relationships (43,363) were also a key reason for people reaching out for further knowledge or support, with knowing yourself (68,237), motivation (26,722), self-awareness (26,591), and dealing with difficult people (25,307) also featuring. Specific coaching styles [Table 5] proved to be areas of particular interest, as well as connecting with coaching for confidence (50,508), further information on coaching (39,010) and coaching styles (34,669), youth coaching (29,415), and personal development coaching (27,630).

Life Coach Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
Three main reasons why it is helpful to know yourself	68,237	77,045
Confidence	50,508	60,628
7 ways to build strong, positive relationships at work	43,363	48,171
10 questions to ask yourself to increase motivation	26,722	30,084
The benefits of self-awareness in the workplace	26,591	30,885
Dealing with difficult behaviour: Nosy people	25,307	277,668

Table 4: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Life Coach Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Issues sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Life Coach Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Approaches	New users	Sessions
Confidence	50,508	60,628
Coaching FAQs	39,010	49,358
Coaching styles	34,669	41,324
Youth coaching	29,415	35,549
Personal development	27,630	33,416

Table 5: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Life Coach Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Of new users visiting Hypnotherapy Directory, users showed a particular interest in anxiety and addiction-related issues. Top issues [Table 6] users sought out more information about hypnotherapy for included weight loss and gastric band hypnotherapy related searches (72,327), anxiety (27,226), smoking (25,023), male sexual problems (22,051), and alcohol abuse (18,545). Specific hypnotherapy approaches [Table 7] that appeared to be areas of particular interest included past life regression (15,786) and frequently asked hypnotherapy questions (33,635).

Hypnotherapy Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
Is eye colour change with hypnosis a myth	101,352	112,697
Weight loss	36,877	45,322
Gastric band hypnotherapy	35,450	42,830
Anxiety	27,226	34,820
Smoking	25,023	30,610
Male sexual problems	22,051	25,226
Alcohol abuse	18,545	21,880

Table 6: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Hypnotherapy Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Issues sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.



Hypnotherapy Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Approaches	New users	Sessions
Hypnotherapy FAQs	33,635	45,114
Past life regression	15,786	18,966

Table 7: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Hypnotherapy Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.



Of new users visiting Therapy Directory, therapeutic approaches were the primary interest. The highest number of new users [Table 8] were interested specifically in healing crystals for children (67,938). The majority of new users visiting Therapy Directory were interested in information on specific therapeutic approaches [Table 9] such as bowen therapy (45,302), crystal therapy (42,928), reflexology (37,071), massage therapy (29,480), reiki (23,205), ear candling (20,329), kinesiology (18,789), acupuncture (17,601), and EFT (16,514).

Therapy Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
7 healing crystal for children	67,938	84,343

Table 8: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Therapy Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Issues sourced from top-performing issues based on new users.

Therapy Directory: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Approaches	New users	Sessions
Bowen therapy	45,302	54,337
Crystal therapy	42,928	51,017
Reflexology	37,071	42,848
Massage therapy	29,480	35,375
Reiki	23,205	27,599
Ear candling	20,329	23,984
Kinesiology	18,789	22,420
Acupuncture	17,601	21,119
EFT	16,514	19,963

Table 9: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Therapy Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Of new users accessing Nutritionist Resource, nutritional support at different ages and stages of life* [Table 11] was of most interest (175,170). Users were interested in specific approaches [Table 10] around balanced diet (103,868), sports nutrition (92,647), germ vs terrain theory in relation to coronavirus (86,707), and healthy eating approaches for kids (80,324). Physical health issues [Table 11] that particularly interested new users included weight gain (77,239), PCOS (69,170), tiredness (67,513), and endometriosis (58,387).

While no specific mental health or wellbeing related queries were in the top 10 for new users, four were within the top 50. These included confidence (31,361), anorexia nervosa (27,555), nutrition and mental health (17,206), and stress (13,622).

*combination of Adults and elderly adults and Life stages.

Nutritionist Resource: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Approaches	New users	Sessions
Balanced diet	103,868	103,868
Sports nutrition	92,647	92,647
Germ theory vs terrain theory in relation to coronavirus	86,707	86,707
Healthy eating for kids	80,342	80,342

Table 10: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Nutritionist Resource, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Issues sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.



Nutritionist Resource: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
Weight gain	77,239	86,688
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)	69,170	79,545
Tiredness	67,513	77,590
Endometriosis	58,387	73,017
Adults and elderly adults	54,540	63,001
Life stages	40,288	47,537

Table 11: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Counselling Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Of new users visiting Happiful.com, the majority sought out [Table 12] wellbeing advice or tips, and mental health advice or mental health-related entertainment (225,538). Users also sought out physical health recommendations on virtual PE lessons for kids (50,721), as well as further information on the approach spoon theory (26,679).

Happiful.com: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021

Issues	New users	Sessions
20 greatest mental health songs	45,197	50,885
How to talk to a partner with low self-esteem	39,175	43,871
7 ways to help a child who is having a panic attack	38,331	43,257
7 poems that teach us about mental health	29,035	33,600
6 tips to help protect your empath energy	19,929	24,020
Recognise your fight, flight or freeze response	19,373	21,526
Coronavirus ways to help	17,677	21,306
7 habits that will change your life	16,821	19,412

Table 12: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Happiful.com, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021. Approaches sourced from top-performing pages based on new users.

Based on the initial data from Happiful, it would suggest that those searching for help with a specific issue may be more likely to access support through counselling, coaching, or hypnotherapy, as these see the highest number of users looking for more information or support based on a certain issue or condition, rather than an approach or type of therapy.

Common concerns across different methods of seeking support

Are people more likely to seek out specific types of help based on a specific condition or worry, or are they seeking more information about their individual worries before choosing an approach? Through looking at the data from Happiful, it would suggest that it can vary.

For example, two key areas of concern that are seeing visitors approaching multiple different types of support include relationship issues (therapy and coaching), and weight related issues (hypnotherapy and nutrition).

Relationships, intimacy and wellbeing

Research from Counselling Directory and Happiful* reveals that nearly half (44%) of us experienced a lack of sexual intimacy with our partner during the initial months of the pandemic prior to lockdown, while counsellors saw an incredible 1,061% increase year on year in people seeking advice on whether their relationship could survive without intimacy. Furthermore, 63% of therapists reported an increase in client conversations around household relationships, and 70% said there had been an increase in household arguments. Plus, 83% of therapists felt the pandemic had increased tension, strain, or pressure on romantic relationships.

Research revealed, 46% of respondents reported that covid had a severe impact on their mental health due to not seeing friends, 45% experienced feelings of loneliness, while 43% experienced feelings of anxiety around socialising or meeting up with friends again.

Negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing continued to be experienced by individuals as the pandemic progressed. A further survey of Happiful subscribers** showed 85% felt they were severely stressed and their stress levels had notably increased since March 2020. More than half (58%) felt their quality of life had decreased since lockdown began.

*More than 2,000 registered therapists from Counselling Directory responded to a member survey between 12 – 20 March 2021. Over 1,000 Happiful readers were polled about their experiences of relationship and intimacy struggles prior to the first lockdown.

**More than 1,000 Happiful subscribers were surveyed between 19 October and 4 November 2020.

1,061%
increase
year on year

people seeking advice on whether their relationship could survive without intimacy

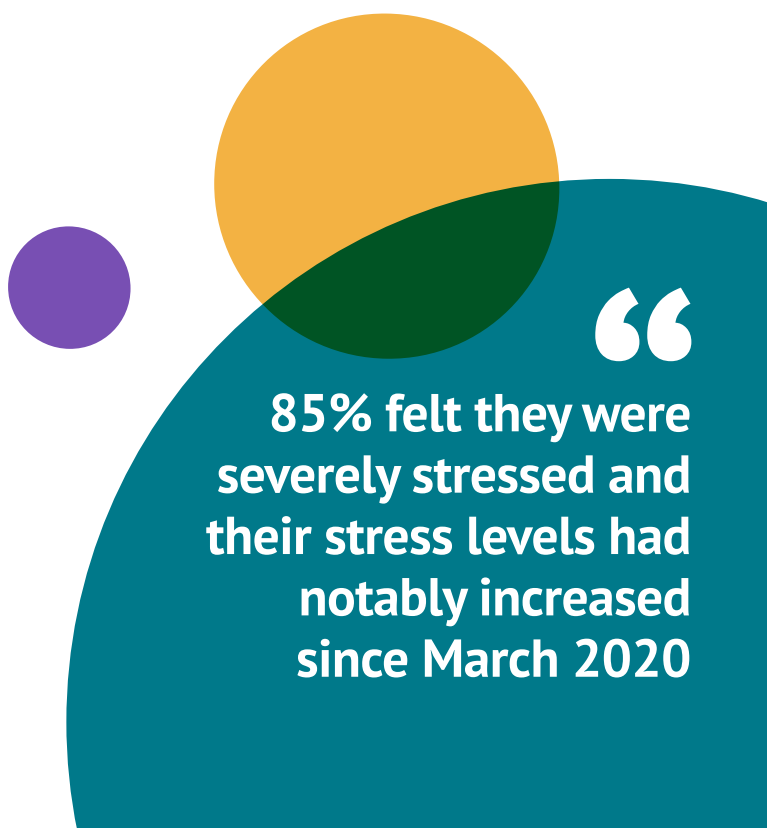


Stress

While Happiful and Counselling Directory's findings seem to be further supported by their 2017–21 data on new users and the content they accessed ('Can a relationship survive without intimacy' being most searched question by users on Counselling Directory during this five year period), the same cannot be said for the topic of stress. Despite individuals reporting an overwhelming increase in feelings of stress during the first year of the pandemic, stress has not been a top-performing search term for the 35.3 million users accessing Happiful's sites over the past five years.

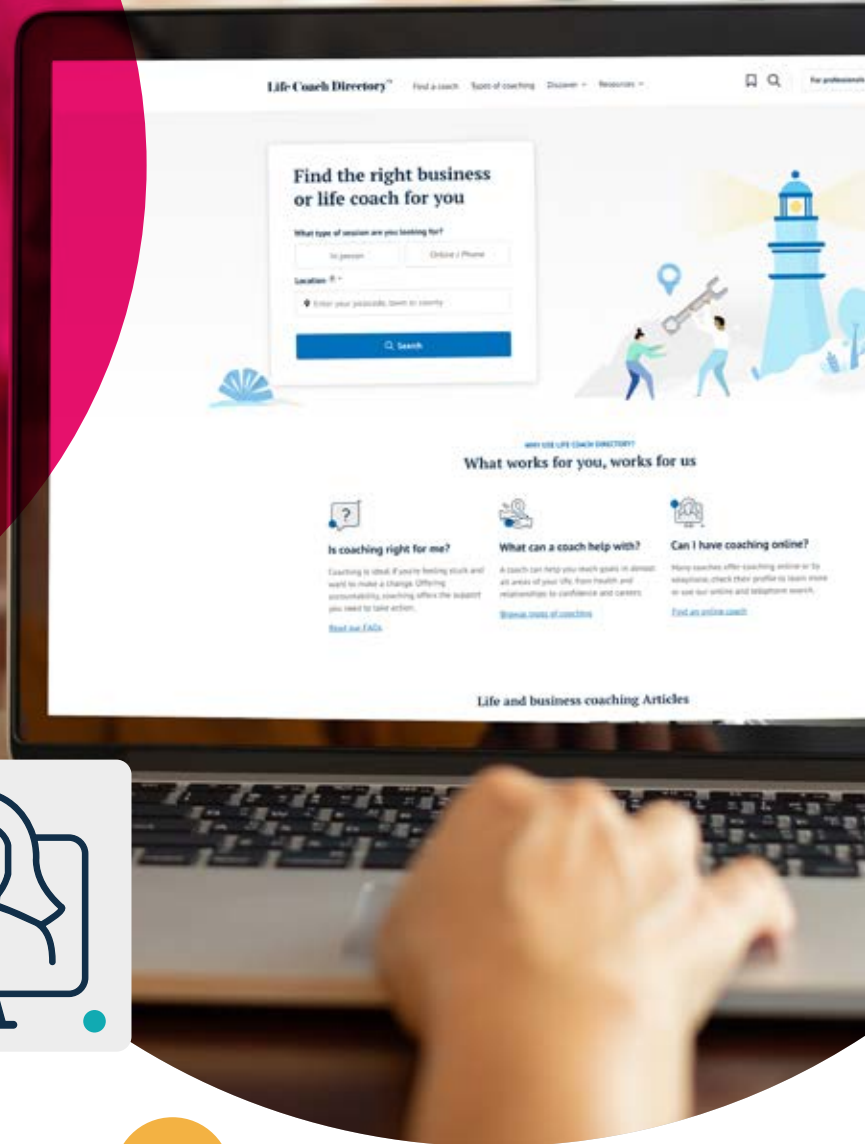
Data published through [Statista in 2021](#), confirmed that 79% of the UK experience work-related stress. A staggering 68.9 million GP appointments were made with GPs due to stress-related illnesses in 2019, with 5.54 million inpatient hospital admissions due to stress-related illnesses during this same period.

Could this mean that stress has become so entrenched in our day-to-day lives that we now struggle to recognise the signs and symptoms? Data from Life Coach Directory suggests that this could be the case.



85% felt they were severely stressed and their stress levels had notably increased since March 2020

Nearly 40,000 people searched for coaching related help with stress



5 out of 6

Happiful sites saw stress-related queries bringing users from Google in 2021



Year on year, Life Coach Directory saw a 372% rise in new users to the article 'Could you be stressed without knowing it?' [Table 13] between 2019–20. This continued to rise by a further 38% in 2020–21. This suggests that there may be an increasing number of people concerned about the symptoms of stress without being certain that what they are feeling is stress or something else.

Life Coach Directory : Behaviour - Landing pages

Could you be stressed without knowing it?	New users	Sessions
Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2017	4,334	4,588
Jan 1 2018 – Dec 31 2018	3,883	4,127
Jan 1 2019 – Dec 31 2019	1,403	1,489
Jan 1 2020 – Dec 31 2020	6,330	6,804
Jan 1 2021 – Dec 31 2021	8,756	9,455
Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021	24,706	26,463

Table 13: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Life Coach Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.

Search result behaviour across Happiful's directories further support the idea that the public's overall knowledge and general understanding of stress may be holding them back from accessing help and support as quickly as they could.

Five out of six Happiful sites saw stress-related queries bringing users from Google in 2021 [Table 14], as 5,769 people searched for stress metaphors, while a further 16,655 wanted to know if they could be stressed without knowing it. People seemed most likely to reach out to find a coach to help them with stress, with a combined 39,442 searching for coach-related stress terms. A further 5,259 sought to find out more about potential links between nutrition and stress.

Surprisingly, of the top 500 search queries, there were no stress-related terms in relation to holistic/alternative therapies (Therapy Directory) or talking therapies (Counselling Directory).

Google Search Console: Search results, 1 Jan 2021 – 31 Dec 2021

Directory	Search query	Impressions
Life Coach Directory	stress coach	17,039
	stress coaching	12,185
	can you be stressed and not know it	8,658
	stress management coach	6,601
	stress management coaching	3,617
	can i be stressed and not know it	2,575
	can you be stressed without knowing it	2,496
	can you be stressed without knowing it	1,583
	can you be stressed without feeling stressed	1,343
Hypnotherapy Directory	hypnosis for stress	7,672
	hypnotherapy for stress	6,476
Nutritionist Resource	nutrition and stress	2,617
	stress and nutrition	2,376
	nutritional guidelines for stress	266
Happiful.com	metaphor for stress	1,699
	metaphors for stress	1,476
Counselling Directory	metaphor for stress	1,372
	metaphors for stress	1,222

Table 14: Google Search Console, 1 Jan 2021 - 31 Dec 2021, top 500 search queries, all directories and happiful.com

Weight-related issues

Weight continues to be a common search topic [Table 15–17], with Happiful sites receiving more than 132,300 new users to weight loss and weight gain content over the past five years. Despite the predominant advice around losing weight focusing on making simple food choice changes and increasing activity levels, Hypnotherapy Directory saw significantly more interest in weight loss during this period (36,877 new users) in comparison to Nutritionist Resource (3,575). In contrast, Nutritionist Resource was the only site attracting sessions around weight gain, with significantly more users seeking information on how to gain weight compared to weight loss.

Weight loss: New users, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021	New users	Sessions
Hypnotherapy Directory	36,877	45,322
Therapy Directory	8,077	9,062
Nutritionist Resource	3,575	4,402
Counselling Directory	1,242	1,463
Happiful.com	1241	1745
Life Coach Directory	479	589

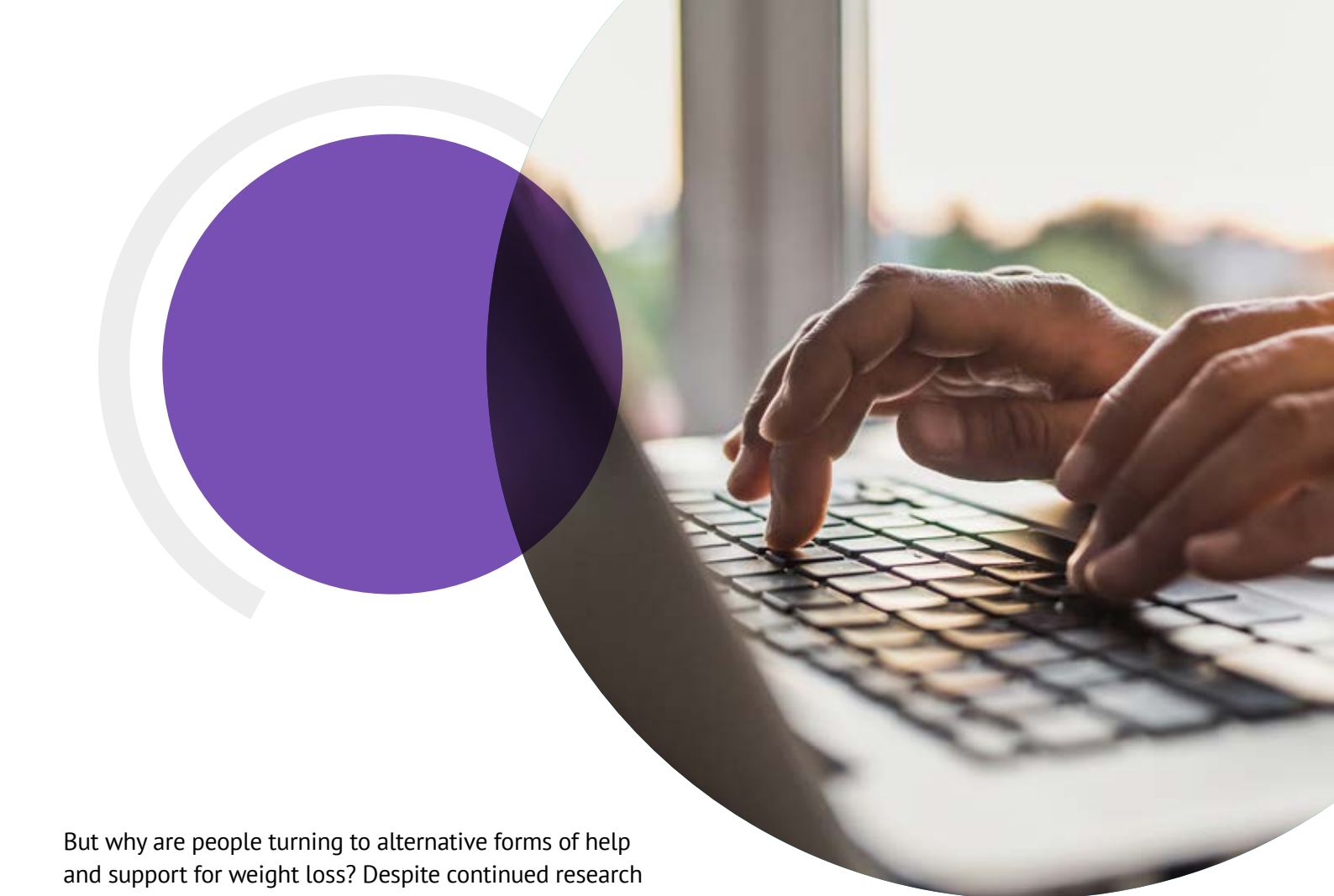
Table 15: Google Search Console, 1 Jan 2021 - 31 Dec 2021, top 500 search queries, all directories and happiful.com

Nutritionist Resource: Landing pages - New users Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021	New users	Sessions
Weight gain	77,239	86,688
Weight management	3,579	4,355
Weight loss	3,575	4,402

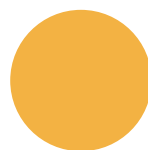
Table 16: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Nutritionist Resource, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.

Weight Loss: Landing pages - New users	New users	Sessions
Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2017		
Hypnotherapy Directory	15,595	18,400
Therapy Directory	4,336	4,833
Nutritionist Resource	-	-
Counselling Directory	-	-
Life Coach Directory	-	-
Jan 1 2018 – Dec 31 2018		
Hypnotherapy Directory	5,922	7,312
Therapy Directory	1,972	2,228
Nutritionist Resource	283	424
Counselling Directory	-	-
Life Coach Directory	-	-
Jan 1 2019 - Dec 31 2019		
Hypnotherapy Directory	3,905	5,001
Therapy Directory	446	543
Nutritionist Resource	398	519
Counselling Directory	-	-
Life Coach Directory	-	-
Jan 1 2020 – Dec 31 2020		
Hypnotherapy Directory	8,820	11,013
Therapy Directory	576	632
Nutritionist Resource	1,860	2,204
Counselling Directory	415	492
Life Coach Directory	138	185
Jan 1 2020 – Dec 31 2020		
Hypnotherapy Directory	2,635	3,596
Therapy Directory	747	826
Nutritionist Resource	1,034	1,255
Counselling Directory	827	971
Life Coach Directory	341	404

Table 17: Data sourced using Google Analytics across all Happiful directories, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.



But why are people turning to alternative forms of help and support for weight loss? Despite continued research from psychologists highlighting the complexity of weight loss and factors that may lead to people being overweight, such as environment, stress and trauma, hypnotherapy-related weight loss searches [Table 18] far outstripped other information and support offered by other wellbeing and mental health practitioners. In addition to seeing nearly 37,000 new users accessing Hypnotherapy Directory’s weight loss information, a further 35,450 new users accessed content about hypnotic gastric bands.



While weight loss and weight gain may specifically have been the higher volume terms in relation to how users are searching for and accessing information, a significant number of people sought help for other food-related issues (in which a change of weight can be a symptom).

These issues included:

- eating phobias
- eating disorders (binge eating, anorexia nervosa, bulimia)
- unhealthy/unhelpful eating habits
- emotional/stress eating
- avoidant/restrictive eating (AFRID)

This would suggest the importance of taking into consideration the language being used by individuals themselves when approaching a broad spectrum of health and wellbeing related issues. How visitors’ search terms are framed, and how the information and potential help or solutions they are accessing are being presented would seem to play important parts.

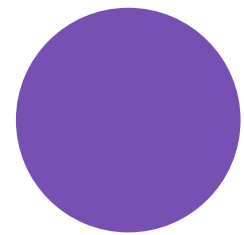
Hypnotherapy Directory: Landing pages - Jan 1 2017 – Dec 21 2021	New users	Sessions
Gastric band	35,450	42,830
The truth about gastric band hypnosis	931	1,114
Do hypnotic gastric bands actually work	402	482
How does the virtual gastric band work	342	388

Table 18: Data sourced using Google Analytics from Hypnotherapy Directory, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.



“

More men are seeking help



Mental health and wellbeing information: What content is resonating with people?

The types of content and how people are accessing them has changed. Over the past five years, all of Happiful's wellbeing and mental health brands have seen an increase in men [Table 19] accessing their content. Most significantly, Nutritionist Resource has seen a 10% increase in male visitors, while Counselling Directory saw a 7% increase. Other sites also saw an increase, including Therapy Directory (6%) Hypnotherapy Directory (5%), and Happiful.com (2%), with Life Coach Directory seeing the smallest increase (1%).

While all Happiful family sites saw a rise in male visitors during the first year of the pandemic (2020), only Happiful.com saw this increase continue through 2021.

This could suggest that many were inspired to focus on their health and wellbeing during the pandemic due to a number of different reasons, including:

- Having more time for wellbeing and/or self-improvement due to furlough.
- Looking for career advice or redundancy information due to a change of circumstances.

- Seeking advice and support due to stress, anxiety, or loneliness (all of which were reported as having increased during the pandemic).

With the Covid-19 pandemic having such a significant impact on who and how people accessed mental health and wellbeing content across the board, it raises the questions: What kind of help are people seeking? What is resonating with readers, and what areas are leading people to make that next step by contacting a professional?

Looking at the behaviour of new users landing on Counselling Directory, there has been a shift towards people accessing articles created by accredited therapists, psychotherapists, and counsellors over the past two years, compared with previous years where the split with factsheets (information about a specific issue or therapy type) was more even*.

*Google Analytics data, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021, new user behaviour - landing pages, top 10 landing pages (excluding members login and home page).

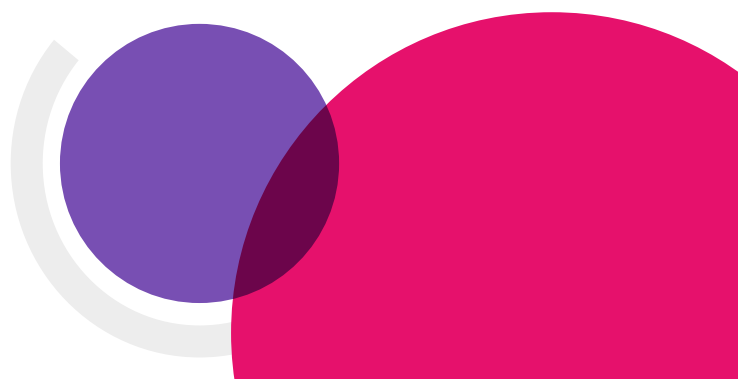
Happiful family: Audience demographic - Gender

Counselling Directory		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	66%	34%
2017	69%	31%
2018	68%	32%
2019	67%	33%
2020	61%	39%
2021	62%	38%
Life Coach Directory		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	64%	36%
2017	65%	35%
2018	65%	35%
2019	64%	36%
2020	62%	38%
2021	64%	36%
Hypnotherapy Directory		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	64%	36%
2017	66%	34%
2018	65%	35%
2019	65%	35%
2020	60%	40%
2021	61%	39%

Therapy Directory		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	64%	36%
2017	66%	34%
2018	66%	34%
2019	65%	35%
2020	58%	42%
2021	60%	40%
Nutritionist Resource		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	69%	31%
2017	73%	27%
2018	71%	29%
2019	69%	31%
2020	62%	38%
2021	63%	37%
Happiful.com		
Year	Female	Male
2017-21	70%	30%
2017	69%	31%
2018	76%	24%
2019	73%	27%
2020	69%	31%
2021	67%	33%

Table 19: Data sourced using Google Analytics across all Happiful family sites, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.

2020 marked the first year that depression appeared in the top 10 most visited pages on Counselling Directory. The data suggests an ongoing desire among visitors to learn more about individual therapy approaches, consistently asking the question 'What is counselling?' each year. Users also continue to search for more information specifically on person-centred therapy.



Questions users have consistently asked include:

- ‘Can a relationship survive without intimacy?’ (2017–21)
- ‘I don’t know who I am anymore’ (2017–18, 2020–21)
- ‘Am I losing my mind?’ (2018–21)

Since the start of the pandemic, ‘7 metaphors to illustrate anxiety’ (2020–21) has continued to appear in the top 10. This may suggest a growing need among people to find new ways to explain and understand how they are struggling or to connect with how they are feeling.

For new users accessing life coaching advice and guidance, Life Coach Directory has seen confidence coaching as well as ‘Signs you are quietly confident’ consistently appearing among the top landing pages. Confidence remained the number one between 2017–19, before dipping to sixth during 2020, then falling off completely in 2021.

Interestingly, 38% of the most landed on content comprised of listicles (short-form articles) by professional coaches and Life Coach Directory writers, suggesting a high demand for easy-to-digest content that offers a quick breakdown of an issue and/or solutions to common problems.

Redundancy saw an increase in traffic, with the article ‘10 steps to coping with redundancy’ appearing third in the top 10 landing pages. This is likely due to many experiencing uncertainty and redundancy during the pandemic. Despite the rise in people looking for jobs as redundancies rose to an all-time high in the UK, there was no resurgence of users returning to the previously popular ‘Top 20 common interview questions’, which had been the second and fifth most popular life coach articles driving traffic in previous years.

2020–21 saw a particular increased interest in the self, with 35% of top landing pages focused on ‘3 main reasons why it is helpful to know yourself’, ‘The benefits of self awareness in the workplace’, ‘10 questions to ask yourself to increase motivation’, and ‘10 ways to start loving yourself the way you deserve to be loved’. In the three year period prior to this, just 6% of articles focused



on these topics, suggesting that the pandemic may have lead many towards focusing more on self-reflection and self-improvement. [Google Trends data](#) supports this idea, as top health and wellness trends for 2021 revealed that worldwide, ‘affirmations’ were searched more times than ever before.

‘7 ways to build strong, positive relationships at work’ was a particularly interesting topic that shot from appearing as ninth (2018) and 10th (2019), up to second in both 2020 and 2021. This could indicate that more people sought to foster positive relationships while working remotely, as they no longer had the benefits of reading social cues and in-person team bonding granted by being in the same physical space. Making a more conscious effort to connect with colleagues since remote working became more of the new normal for many, this could also suggest many are seeking to maintain or foster a positive mindset around workplace wellbeing through finding new ways to improve working relationships.

Other key areas of interest that connected with readers included ‘Could you be stressed without knowing it’, which was among the top 10 for new users on Life Coach Directory throughout 2017–18 and 20–21, suggesting that there may be wider concerns among people that they may be experiencing the negative effects of stress without recognising what signs to look out for.



Of those visiting Hypnotherapy Directory for the first time, an overwhelming 64% were seeking information about hypnotherapy in regards to a specific issue, including:

- addiction
- sexual issues
- weight loss
- anxiety

In 2020–21, Hypnotherapy Directory also saw a rise in visitors to pages exploring the types of hypnotherapy and what approaches are available, specifically, past life regression, Time Line Therapy™, and Ericksonian hypnotherapy.

From looking at the top landing page behaviour over the past five years, it would suggest that the majority of those interacting with hypnotherapy content do so in relation to a specific problem they are experiencing that they believe hypnosis (rather than a specific form of hypnotherapy) may be able to help with.

The behaviour of new users landing on Therapy Directory highlights a potential shift brought about by the pandemic. Since 2020, there has been a real move towards visitors accessing articles created by members (each a practicing, qualified alternative or holistic therapist) over the previously most popular fact-sheets (focusing on a single therapy or approach).

How-to and listicle content have grown in popularity. Between 2017–19, just 6.6% of the top landing pages for new users were articles. Between 2020–21, this rose to 40%. Among the most popular included:

- ‘6 simple things to do after a Reiki treatment’
- ‘The benefits of reflexology for infertility, conception and IVF’
- ‘7 healing crystals for children’
- ‘Ways to raise your vibration’
- ‘How to use crystals for studying’

Many of the articles focus on a specific aspect of a wider therapy type, giving short, easy to understand, actionable advice on that single area.

Those accessing Therapy Directory appeared to consistently search by specific therapy type, rather than by individual issue or concern, suggesting that as with other sites such as Hypnotherapy Directory, they already have a clear idea in mind of what they want to try before they seek out further information.

Crystals and crystal therapy continued to be highly visited landing page and search terms across Therapy Directory over the past five years. Crystal therapy as a therapeutic approach has appeared in the top 10 landing pages consistently year on year, while ‘7 healing crystals for children’ briefly dipped in 2019 before returning into the top 10. Interestingly, 2021 saw the introduction of a further two crystal related pieces in the top 10: ‘How to use crystals for studying’ (created by a crystal therapist), and ‘11 healing crystals to help during your first year at university’ (created by Therapy Directory).

With many of the crystal related articles offering how-to advice that readers could enact by themselves, this would suggest an ongoing interest in alternative or holistic wellbeing options that individuals can practice or complete themselves. This is potentially supported by the continued interest in aromatherapy, as well as an increase in other holistic therapies that can be self-completed, such as the emotional freedom technique (EFT), a form of ‘psychological acupuncture’ which rose into the top 10 between 2019–21, coinciding with a fall in acupuncture, which had previously appeared in the top 10 between 2017–19.

2021 also saw the introduction of ‘What is holistic therapy?’ into the top landing pages for new users for the first time. This could indicate a rising interest in learning more about alternative ways to increase wellbeing, other therapy types and how they can help. This ties in with the overall desire for more knowledge about wellbeing approaches that we have seen consistently across all of Happiful’s sites.



“

More people are beginning to seek out mental health in relation to popular culture

Research released in Sociological Research Online by the **British Sociological Association** suggests there has been a significant rise in Brits who are aware of mindfulness. Using data from an online survey on a sample of 1,013 adults in Britain in November 2018, findings suggested that 15% of adults in Britain had learnt to practise mindfulness – significantly more than 2012 findings which revealed just 2.5% of participants in a similar study in the US had practised mindfulness in their lifetime. Higher levels of engagement beyond awareness being most prevalent among young and middle-aged adults.

For those visiting Nutritionist Resource for the first time, there has been a consistent interest in healthy eating for kids, sports nutrition, and weight gain. 2019 saw a spike in new users accessing content on specific issues including tiredness, confidence, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

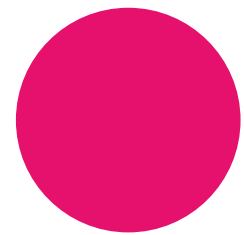
2021 saw a significant increase in users accessing expert-created articles as well as blogs (produced by Nutritionist Resource). This type of content made up 60% of the top landing pages for 2021, compared to just 15% in the previous four years.

2021 also saw 'Nutrition and mental health' entering the top 10 landing pages for new users for the first time. This could suggest that people are looking for alternative ways to support their mental health as a whole through making changes throughout their lives, rather than relying purely on therapeutic means.



For new users accessing Happiful.com, there has been a sustained interest in counselling and therapy-related issues and terms. Since 2018, there has been a specific interest in mental health in relation to entertainment, with 'Great mental health songs' (2018–21) consistently appearing in the top 10, and 'Poems that teach us about mental health' (2021). This could suggest that more people are beginning to seek out mental health support in relation to popular culture, as the stigma around mental health conditions continues to lessen.

Songs and poetry may also be formats that some people find to be more accessible in helping them to better express how they are feeling, and to connect with others who are experiencing similar struggles or issues.



Who is looking for wellbeing and mental health help and support?

Are specific genders or age groups more likely to try and access mental health and wellbeing support? And is the type of support they attempt to access affected by these factors?

According to statistics released by **Mental Health Foundation**, while mental health problems are likely to affect both men and women, figures suggest that they do not do so in equal proportions. For example, 2014 figures in England suggest that while one in six adults experienced common mental health problems, around one in five women were likely to experience these issues compared to one in eight men.

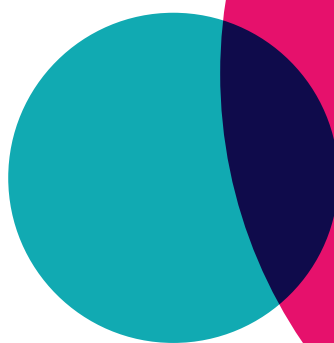
Women aged 16 to 24 are almost three times as likely (26%) to experience common mental health issues as men the same age (9%) according to a 2014 study by **NHS Digital**. Women (25.7%) in this age bracket are also more likely to report having self-harmed at some point in their lives compared to men (9.7%) of the same age. However, it could be argued that the likelihood to report

these issues compared with the likelihood to experience them are not necessarily the same.

Similarly, while women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety as men, as reported in a 2016 **systemic review of reviews** on the prevalence of anxiety disorders in adult populations, this may just mean that men are less likely to seek a diagnosis, or that the symptoms may be attributed to something else.

When it comes to NHS-provided help and support, figures released by **NHS Digital** on Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures in England 2019–2020 revealed that men are less likely to access psychological therapies than women, making up only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies. With as many as one in four people experiencing mental health issues each year according to MHFA England, as many as 75% of those with diagnosable mental illnesses receive no treatment at all. But are these numbers reflected in who accesses private mental health and wellbeing support?

Figures from across the Happiful family of sites [Table 20] show an overwhelming majority of individuals seeking mental health and general wellbeing support and information are female. While 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies comprised of men, that figure was even lower at just 33.65% for Counselling Directory.



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Men account for just 36% of NHS talking therapy referrals, and 34% of patients accessing private therapy

Happiful family: Audience demographic - Gender

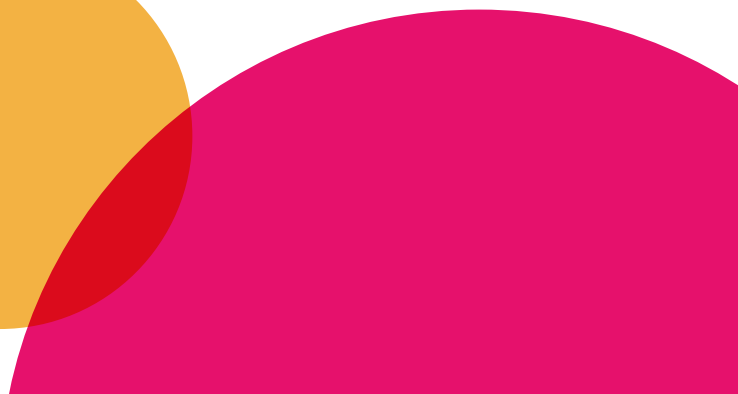
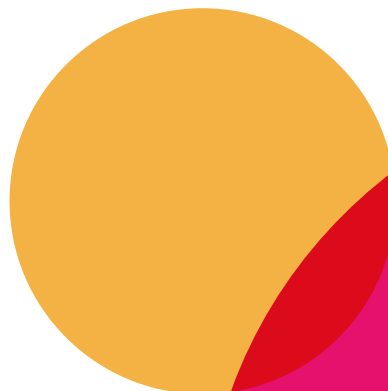
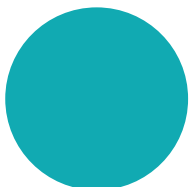
Counselling Directory				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	66.35%	33.65%	-	-
2017	69.43%	30.57%	3.08%	-3.08%
2018	67.68%	32.32%	-1.75%	1.75%
2019	66.88%	33.12%	-0.80%	0.80%
2020	61.29%	38.71%	-5.59%	5.59%
2021	62.27%	37.73%	0.98%	-0.98%
Life Coach Directory				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	64.02%	35.98%	-	-
2017	64.92%	35.08%	0.90%	-0.90%
2018	64.55%	35.45%	-0.37%	0.37%
2019	64.23%	35.77%	-0.32%	0.32%
2020	61.89%	38.11%	-2.34%	2.34%
2021	64.37%	35.63%	2.48%	-2.48%
Hypnotherapy Directory				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	64.23%	35.77%	-	-
2017	66.07%	33.93%	1.84%	-1.84%
2018	64.84%	35.16%	-1.23%	1.23%
2019	65.10%	34.90%	0.26%	-0.26%
2020	59.63%	40.37%	-5.47%	5.47%
2021	60.52%	39.48%	0.89%	-0.89%

Table 20: Data sources from Google Analytics from all Happiful family sites, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.

Happiful family: Audience demographic - Gender

Therapy Directory				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	64.29%	35.71%	-	-
2017	66.27%	33.73%	1.98%	-1.98%
2018	66.30%	33.70%	0.03%	-0.03%
2019	64.80%	35.20%	-1.50%	1.50%
2020	58.12%	41.88%	-6.68%	6.68%
2021	60.12%	39.88%	2.00%	-2.00%
Nutritionist Resource				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	68.88%	31.12%	-	-
2017	72.84%	27.16%	3.96%	-3.96%
2018	70.98%	29.02%	-1.86%	1.86%
2019	69.31%	30.69%	-1.67%	1.67%
2020	62.10%	37.90%	-7.21%	7.21%
2021	62.61%	37.39%	0.51%	-0.51%
Happiful.com				
Year	Female	Male	Change Female	Change Male
2017-21	71.59%	28.41%	-	-
2017	71.62%	28.38%	0.03%	-0.03%
2018	77.74%	22.26%	6.12%	-6.12%
2019	75.36%	24.64%	-2.38%	2.38%
2020	70.90%	29.10%	-4.46%	4.46%
2021	67.87%	32.13%	-3.03%	3.03%

Table 20: Data sources from Google Analytics from all Happiful family sites, Jan 1 2017 - Dec 31 2021.



Looking at the most recent figures from Happiful [Table 21], it would seem that there has been a shift towards more men seeking mental health and wellbeing support. Comparing audience demographics by gender between 2017 and 2021, all six Happiful sites have seen an increase in male users:

- Nutritionist Resource 10.23%
- Counselling Directory 7.16%
- Therapy Directory 6.15%
- Hypnotherapy Directory 5.55%
- Happiful.com 3.75%
- Life Coach Directory 0.55%

Looking at the audience demographic, although figures from the Mental Health Foundation suggest that 75% of mental health problems are established by the age of 24, the age group with the highest number of new users across the board between 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2021 was 25–34.

Audience: Demographic - age	Age	%
Counselling Directory	25–34	29.14%
Life Coach Directory	25–34	30.09%
Hypnotherapy Directory	25–34	23.51%
Therapy Directory	25–34	22.06%
Nutritionist Resource	25–34	30.25%
Happiful.com	25–34	28.48%

Table 21: Data sources from Google Analytics from all Happiful family sites, Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2021.

Despite ranking **fourth out of nine** categories for disposable income in the UK, data would suggest 25–34 year olds are the most likely to seek private mental health help and support.

While mental health didn't join the national curriculum until 2020, public awareness of mental health and a move towards giving voice to people

and their lived mental health experiences has become more prevalent over recent decades. Campaigns such as England's Time to Change between 2008–19 aimed to reduce mental health-related stigma and discrimination amongst those aged 25–45, however findings as to the effectiveness couldn't be definitively attributed to it.

The rise in celebrities willing to speak openly about mental health could also have helped continue to foster a greater sense of openness and willingness to share personal experiences. Many feel that this has helped to normalise mental health issues through creating an international dialogue that can both humanise celebrities, while normalising issues many of us face but may have previously been scared to talk about.

Counselling Directory member **Claire Elmes** shared her thoughts on the impact of high-profile individuals sharing their personal mental health experiences.

“

“Over the past couple of years, there has been an increase in celebrities and high-profile individuals speaking up on mental health and wellbeing issues, which have gathered media attention. When celebrities speak up around mental health struggles, this normalises having these conversations around struggles and treatment options so that more individuals, particularly the target audience for the celebrity, feel able to access the help they need. This, in turn, helps to tackle the unhelpful stigma around mental health that can prevent individuals from seeking help.

“In my view, celebrities speaking out about mental health has helped create further awareness around mental health, struggles and mental illness, and tackles the stigma that many individuals experience daily. This has been shown during media portrayals of mental health such as when soaps show a storyline that involves suicide and speaking out about suicidal thoughts, and has a strong correlation with many hotlines such as Samaritans receiving an increase in calls for help.”



Tipping point: What causes someone to finally reach out to a professional for help?

While it can be tricky to pinpoint the reason why individuals choose to seek professional help, data from Happiful can give us some insight into the areas users are accessing prior to reaching out to mental health or wellbeing professionals.

Users seem interested in the particular method of accessing counselling, as 'Online Counselling' has led to the highest number of users reaching out to a counsellor or therapist over the past five years, a trend which also was prevalent among those seeing nutritionist or dietitian support through Nutritionist Resource.

The rise in those seeking online support could also be attributed to an increased need due to the pandemic, technological advances allowing for smoother online therapy experiences, and even a rise in smartphone usage (46%) since the pandemic. **As of 2021**, 99% of those aged 16 to 34 in the UK own a smartphone, with 60% of all smartphone owners using them to search for health advice, and a further 49% making video or voice calls.

Counselling Directory member, **Shelly Treacher**, provided further insight as to why some clients finally reach out for professional help.

“

Presenting reasons for coming to therapy may include just wanting to talk, desiring strategies, requiring challenge, wishing for accountability, or some may want to be told what to do. But, many feel they don't know what they need, they just hope that someone can help with the stress of their lives.

Frequently, I find that people are prompted to attend because they are experiencing a strain in a primary relationship, which they fear losing. Or they have reached a crisis point that pushes them over the edge of being able to cope alone. Some come in order to stop harmful patterns of behaviour before their children repeat the same processes.

Many want to work out how to be less reactionary; less angry, less sensitive, or less jealous. Some desire something deeper than their previous experience of therapy or relationship. Most people come to therapy to work something through. Some seek to support someone else.

Untold people seek therapy in order to be 'fixed' for being 'faulty'. Feeling bad about themselves is regularly what clients have in common. They end up realising that the thing that needs to change is the prominence of their self-critic. Countless people find out that therapy is about finding your own authority, creating boundaries, and understanding yourself. Rarely do people explicitly come for these reasons, but these end up being the greatest reasons to come, above all.

“

In this time of crisis, counselling could be seen as their only choice, even though, arguably, it should have been the first choice.

Counselling Directory member **Anthony Purnell** provides further insight into what he feels are the two main motivating reasons why people reach out to speak with a professional.

“

“One is pressure from external sources such as family, partners or friends. Family, partners and friends can often see before clients are aware that some sort of intervention may be required; the individual might be reluctant but may feel compelled in order to maintain these relationships. This can mean their motivation is focused on pleasing others rather than working on their own issues, or the client can have a sudden moment of clarity and be grateful for the push towards therapy.

“Secondly, and arguably the most useful, is when the client reaches out because of their own need to solve the presenting issue. In the UK context, we are taught to just get on with things and not make a fuss. In order to live up to this idea people can put off dealing with issues until they reach crisis point; in a sense the individual is being motivated by sheer desperation. In this time of crisis, counselling could be seen as their only choice, even though, arguably, it should have been the first choice.”

For those accessing support through Life Coach Directory, career coaching drove the most users to go on to contact a coach. Those using Hypnotherapy Directory were most likely to contact a hypnotherapist about weight-related issues (weight loss or gastric band), or for addiction-related reasons (gambling, alcohol, smoking, drugs), while Therapy Directory saw the most individuals seeking acupuncture.

Life Coach Directory member, **Laura Caunter**, shared her thoughts on why clients want to speak with a coach.

“

“I find with my clients that they have a watershed moment, when they decide that enough is enough. They need to make a change to create the impact they desire and realise they need someone to support them on that journey. Often, this comes at two points in someone’s life: either when things are going well and they are riding the wave of success, but self-doubt or imposter syndrome creeps in and begins to hold them back; or when they are stuck in a rut and everything feels hard and overwhelming. This can cloud all aspects of their life, having a detrimental effect on personal relationships, as well as impinging on their success trajectory.

“Another motivation might be comparing themselves unfavourably to others. If they see or read about someone who is successful, the desire to emulate such achievement can lead to their seeking out professional help. In my experience, when someone makes a decision to reach out and seek support, it provides a spark and creates momentum, which leads to positive action. Couple this with accountability and dedicated support, the person can really feel the results of coaching quickly.”

Nutritionist Resource member, **Sonal Shah**, shared her thoughts on what motivates people to reach out and work with a nutritionist.

“

“There is a greater awareness on the effect of food on the whole body and mind. Individuals are more conscious than ever before of what they are consuming, and there is still conflicting information out there which increases the demands of nutritionists to guide people back on the path to optimum wellness.”

“With [interest in] mental health on the rise, the need for good food that energises and nourishes is more important than ever before. Staying at home more, people are more likely to cook at home or rely on convenience food, and are more conscious about what they are feeding their body and families. Sales of vitamin C and immune boosting remedies went through the roof between 2019–2020. This shows us that many are taking the natural route, i.e. nature’s pharmacy, to support their immune health and more.”

“From the clients I’ve seen, many have been hitting a brick wall with their symptoms, be it discomfort or pain, for years before seeking expert help from a natural practitioner. So reaching out to a nutritionist is the first step in getting better and healing the body.”

“

Despite significant rises in online support, there is still a need for face-to-face options

32%

of those searching for counselling are ready to speak with a therapist near them.



Using data from Google Search Console, we can see that both Counselling Directory and Nutritionist Resource have had high numbers of users searching for professional support 'near them'.

- 44% of the top search queries used to visit Therapy Directory looked for specific alternative or holistic therapies near them.
- 32% specifically looked for a counsellor or therapist near them*.
- 24% searched for hypnotherapy, hypnosis, or hypnotherapists near them.
- Just 8% specifically sought out a coach, or a nutritionist (4%) near them.

Despite significant rises in the number of professionals offering online support, as well as the number of individuals seeking support online, this would suggest a continuing need for many to access support face-to-face.



How can we ensure mental health and wellbeing support is accessible?

As previously outlined, there are many different factors that may affect how individuals choose or feel able to access mental health and wellbeing support. With 8 million people left without help as they were 'not considered sick enough to qualify', it's no wonder many can be reluctant to seek support for fear of being turned away or deemed not near enough crisis point to warrant help.

Long wait lists, lack of specialist treatment nearby, a need for support over a longer period of time, or a desire for a choice in type of treatment or provider are just some of the motivating factors for people seeking private help and support. But what methods can we use to ensure that mental health and wellbeing support is accessible to everyone?

Moving online while remaining offline

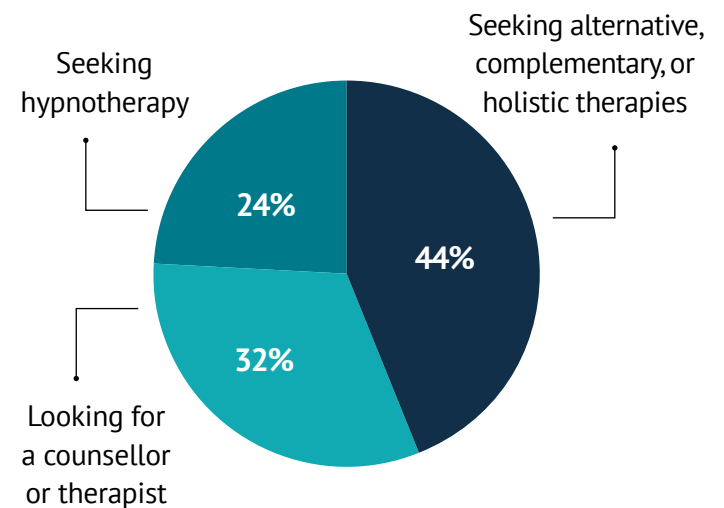
A rise in online support has increased dramatically over recent years. Through Counselling Directory alone, the number of therapists offering online and telephone therapy has increased by 53% between March 2020 and February 2022.

While numbers may have increased initially out of necessity, the continued trend of therapists and counsellors offering their services online suggests many are continuing to access therapy remotely. By professionals offering therapy online, accessibility can be increased through:

- Making it easier to access a wider range of therapists and therapy types despite geographical location.


- Enabling access to professionals by those who may have a disability that impacts travel.
- Reducing the cost for patients, as there is less likely to be need for additional travel expenses or time taken to get to and from appointments. Cost saving may also be experienced and even passed on by providers, who may no longer have a need to rent physical office space.

Although many are seeking out online support, it is important to note that a significant percentage of individuals seeking help continue to specifically search for local providers*. This includes:



While fewer than one in 10 (8%) seek out a coach near them, or a nutritionist (4%).

*Based on Google Search Console data, 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2021, from all Happiful family sites.



In order to offer the best accessibility to the highest number of individuals in need of help, providing a variety of different methods (online, telephone, in-person, group or individual) of receiving support is key.

Defining what is 'normal'

There's no such thing as normal. What's 'normal' can vary so much from person to person, it can be a fairly unhelpful term for the majority of us. Yet our lack of understanding over how we should be feeling when it comes to certain areas, such as stress and anxiety, could be having a negative impact on our overall health and wellbeing.

Using Happiful's data from Google Search Console between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2021, we can see that stress was a topic people were seeking information on. In fact, it was stress-related search queries that brought users to five out of six Happiful websites during this time. Nearly 5,800 of these were people looking for 'stress metaphors', while a worrying 15,000 individuals wanted to know if they could be stressed without realising it. When it came to coaching, nearly 40,000 people searched for coach-related stress terms.

Despite 79% of us frequently experiencing work-related stress in the UK according to research published through [Statista](#), many are still uncertain as to what signs and symptoms they should be looking out for.

Raising awareness around the wide variety of symptoms of stress, and highlighting that sustained levels of stress shouldn't be normal for anyone could be a positive step towards encouraging better access to mental health support for stress, thereby helping decrease the risks of further mental health or medical problems caused by long-term stress.



The language we use when talking about mental health

The language we use can have a huge impact on not only what we are saying and how it is being said, but on how others perceive and react to that information. As acceptance of mental health problems has increased over recent years, so too have we seen a decrease in the number of people who find mental health terms as an insult to be acceptable. Just look at the [backlash](#)

surrounding the 2018 song *Sweet but Psycho*, the withdrawal of [New Look](#)'s poor taste 'depression' T-shirts in 2015, and [Urban Outfitters](#)' many missteps around shampoo for 'suicidal hair', the 'Eat less' T-shirt promoted by a slim model, and pill bottle-shaped shot glasses.

Experts are speaking out when they see problematic depictions of mental health in the media and popular culture, and in some cases, it's leading to content creators taking responsibility for how mental health problems are depicted. International backlash from more than 75 leading mental health organisations following the initial season of *13 Reasons Why* led to a graphic scene of attempted suicide being [removed](#), [trigger warnings](#) being retroactively added, and the creation of a [support toolkit](#) for parents and teens.

As explained by the [Mental Health Foundation](#), "It is perhaps not surprising that an area of health that has been so systematically stigmatised for so many decades has historically settled for a discriminatory lexicon. Generations of people have grown up in societies that found terms like 'psycho', 'schizo', 'loonie', and 'crazy' perfectly acceptable. Many would argue that it is practice and not language that matters. But words are a barrier to help-seeking and a motivator for making discrimination acceptable."



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Words are a barrier to help-seeking and a motivator for making discrimination acceptable

The way in which people are searching for mental health support and the language they are using are important factors to keep in mind when looking to ensure the information they may need is as accessible as possible.

Ongoing education and awareness

As explained by the Mental Health Foundation, raising awareness of any health issue is the crucial first step towards ensuring that people take action to improve their health and reduce the risk of becoming ill.

Mental Health Awareness Week has been taking place in the UK annually for 21 years. While some may argue it's time to 'stop raising awareness and start taking action', it's important to highlight that awareness is a crucial first step for anyone experiencing mental health problems. Without first being more aware of the potential problems that **one in four** of us will experience during our lifetime, we cannot move towards acceptance or seeking help and support.

“The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.” – psychologist Nataniel Branden.

Data from the Happiful family of directories [Table 22] suggests that common questions around the type of mental health and wellbeing support (What is available; How to deal with specific issues; Why we may be feeling certain ways) are all significant motivating questions or reasons for people seeking further information about counselling, hypnotherapy, coaching, nutrition, and holistic therapies.

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The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance

GSC 2021: Top 500 search queries %	What	How	Why	Near
Counselling Directory	3.4	3.6	1.2	13.6
Life Coach Directory	2	2	0	10.2
Hypnotherapy Directory	5.2	12	4.8	2.6
Therapy Directory	5.4	4	2.2	5
Nutritionist Resource	3.2	2	0	14
Happiful.com	5.4	11.6	0.4	0.4

Table 22: Data sourced using Google Search Console across all Happiful family sites, Jan 1 2021 - Dec 31 2021.

Through continuing to promote general awareness and increase understanding of common mental health terms, conditions, and forms of treatment, we can help to connect individuals who may be struggling with the support that is right for them. Knowing what and how to ask can act as significant barriers. By helping provide individuals with a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing, it can enable and encourage them to seek help.

Encouraging a 'whole person' approach to health and wellbeing

Data suggests that many of the top search terms across the wellness and wellbeing sector are relevant to different methods of support. Common issues that people may look for help in, such as phobias, addiction, confidence issues, or weight management, can all be helped with a multitude of different professionals and approaches. By encouraging individuals to look to improve their health and wellbeing as a whole, rather than targeting a single segment, this can help to not only focus on surface issues, but on underlying thoughts, and negative behaviours or connotations that may be holding them back.

Through placing a more equal emphasis on the different options available (counselling, coaching, hypnotherapy, holistic approaches, nutritional support) it can help individuals to connect with a solution that can work for them.

Affordability

Mental illness is a costly issue. According to the **National Mental Health Development Unit**, "The financial cost of the adverse effects of mental illness on people's quality of life are estimated at £41.8 billion per annum in England. Wider costs to the national economy in terms of welfare benefits, lost productivity at work etc. amount to some £77 billion a year."

The personal financial cost of mental health or wellbeing support can be an insurmountable obstacle for many. With the **NHS estimating** private counselling sessions can cost anywhere between £10 and £70 (often for 50 to 60 minutes) depending on location, the price can act as a barrier for some.

It's worth noting that private counsellors may offer a free consultation session. Others may provide discounted rates for students, job seekers, those on income support, or even those who work in emergency services. Ensuring prices are clear and easy to access can help those who are hesitant to get in touch to feel more confident in reaching out if the worry of being unable to afford sessions is removed.

For those who cannot afford to seek private help or who are unable to access free NHS support, a number of charities do also offer free or reduced rate counselling. Typically in a single, specialised area such as relationship counselling, bereavement and grief counselling, or family therapy, these can offer another accessible alternative. Clearly signposting these where possible can highlight all areas of help quickly and easily for those who may be struggling to access support, in order to figure out what kind of help they need.

The next steps

With demand for mental health support leaving many without access to specialist help, ensuring private mental health and wellbeing options are easy to access is critical.

We should make sure that professionals providing a broad spectrum of treatment and support options to help support mental health and wellbeing are continuing to do so both online and in-person where possible, so as to best meet the needs of individuals. Ensuring that pricing is clear and easy to understand, and alternative free options are signposted, could help individuals to feel more confident and comfortable when reaching out for support.



Online directories provide a quick, easy way for individuals to connect with professionals

Continuing to raise awareness of common mental health issues and the variety of different methods of support could help more individuals to feel comfortable in reaching out when experiencing signs of mental ill-health. Focusing on a 'whole person' approach could help individuals to focus on their overall wellbeing.

As many turn online to seek further advice, guidance, and support, creating a strong online presence is key for individual practitioners to connect with potential clients. Online directories such as those provided by the Happiful family provide a quick, easy place for individuals to connect with professionals.

While each site offers factsheets helping people to learn more about different concerns, common symptoms, and mental illnesses, expertly created articles help individuals to connect directly with professionals. Each professional's profile can clearly state their availability, concessions, and fees, helping clients to feel more confident in reaching out to someone with expertise in the right area for them, and within their budget.

With professionals, articles, and more information on individual conditions and worries all combined in one place, the Happiful app helps people to connect with experts across the wellbeing and mental health industry, while also providing contact details for free or low-cost local support groups, charity helplines, as well as signposting crisis support.

For more information on the **Happiful family of directories**, to join, or to access help and support, visit:

Counselling Directory
Hypnotherapy Directory
Life Coach Directory
Therapy Directory
Nutritionist Resource
Happiful.com



The Happiful family of sites includes: Counselling Directory, Life Coach Directory, Hypnotherapy Directory, Therapy Directory, Nutritionist Resource, and Happiful.com. Happiful Magazine and the I Am. I Have. podcast are also part of the Happiful family. Counselling Directory has been helping connect people with the help they need since 2005. Listing more than 28,000 professionals including counsellors, hypnotherapists, coaches, nutritionists, and holistic practitioners nationwide.

Each directory also provides useful information on different types of help and support available, and common mental health concerns, articles from qualified practitioners, as well as public and professional events, to help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to find mental health support.

Happiful Magazine was established in March 2017. It exists to provide a supportive community and continue conversations about mental health and illness – sharing stories from members of the public, people in the public eye, and professionals from therapeutic industries.

happiful.com/5-year-report

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press@happiful.com

Our data

Data sourced using Google Analytics for Counselling Directory, Hypnotherapy Directory, Life Coach Directory, Therapy Directory, Nutritionist Resource and Happiful.com in January 2022, for 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2021. Additional data sourced using Google Search Console in January 2022, for 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021 across all Happiful family sites.

Happiful and Counselling Directory's sexual intimacy and relationships data sourced in October 2020. More than 2,000 registered therapists responded to a member survey by email, calling for professional views. During the same period, more than 1,000 Happiful readers were also polled about their relationship and intimacy struggles as a result of lockdown and the pandemic.

Original quotes provided by:



Counselling Directory member Shelly Treacher, underground confidence to BACP accredited Psychotherapist.



Counselling Directory member Anthony Purnell, BSc (Hons), MBACP (Accredited).



Counselling Directory member Claire Elmes, Emotional Well-Being Consultant, Therapist and Life Coach MBACP, PTUK.



Life Coach Directory member Laura Caunter, ICF PCC Personal Development, Confidence and Business Success.



Nutritionist Resource member Sonal Shah, Nutritional Therapist, BSc (hons) PTLLS Nutrition Tutor.

White paper written by Bonnie Evie Gifford
February 2022. PR by Alice Greedus

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