



A SMALL BOOK ON
MENTAL HEALTH

Or how I stopped worrying and
learned to love the Fringe.

Produced by Objectively Funny

Hello Fringe performer, participant, person!

Welcome to a guide on how to help your brain be its happiest and healthiest during the Edinburgh Fringe.

Everyone who has ever taken a show to or worked at the Fringe before knows the pressure it can put on your mental health, physical health and pocket. However, suffering under this pressure should not be an inevitability, an expected and accepted part of the Fringe. We want performers and staff to have an enjoyable, supportive and creatively-productive time.

This handbook pulls together guidance from mental health practitioners and charities such as Breathing Space and Crew, as well as advice from comedians and Fringe stalwarts, and information on services around Edinburgh.

There is a lot of support out there and so many people who understand how you feel - we hope this guide is helpful and points you in the direction of a happy and productive Fringe.

Have a great Fringe!

**Ellie
Objectively Funny**

Objectively Funny are partnering with brilliant mental health charity the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) throughout the Fringe, with support from the good eggs and funny folk at Dave TV.

Primarily we will be running training sessions in mental health peer support, with the hope that anyone bringing their time and energies to work at the fringe will be better able to look out for their colleagues, and feel better in themselves.

Anyone working at the Fringe is likely giving up their financial security, support networks and routine to help make art, something that is full of stressors, relies on considerable vulnerability and doesn't always go to plan.

The chances of experiencing poor mental health in this environment are high, no matter if they are performers, producers, venue staff, flyerers or any of the umpteen other roles that make this incredible festival possible.

So we want to help equip the comedy industry to support itself a bit better. I myself have written mental health policy for a charity in the past, and we have developed these training sessions with a professional therapist with 10 years in the NHS, who also happens to be a comedian.

If you want to help us, email support@objectivelyfunny.com or drop by the Forest Café. Alternatively, you can hand this booklet to someone who it could help, or buy a ticket or two to An Objectively Funny Night.

We will also be working with professional trainers to run sessions at the Forest Café in yoga, meditation and other valuable skills to improve mental wellbeing. Follow [@objectivelyfunny](https://twitter.com/objectivelyfunny) on Twitter to keep informed of upcoming training sessions. Otherwise, pop into the Forest Café at 10am-12pm on Mondays, 4-6pm on Wednesdays and 2-4pm on Fridays to join a workshop.

**Martin
Founder, Objectively Funny**

SELF-HELP TECHNIQUES ON THE GO

A guide for performers experiencing stress or anxiety.
Brought to you by Breathing Space, Scotland's mental
health phone line.



 0800 83 85 87

www.breathingspace.scot

Too stressed to impress?

Stress causes physical changes in the body designed to help us take on threats or difficulties. Changes such as our breathing quickening, heart racing, muscles tensing and increased sweating. This is sometimes known as the flight or fight response. This response is helpful when we face immediate danger, but debilitating emotionally, physically and mentally if we feel constantly stressed.

In the creative industries, anxiety and high levels of stress can be triggered by factors which include working hours, pressure to meet high standards, irregular work, meeting new people, financial pressures, travelling around, and balancing work and family life.

We can always do more for our mental health. Here are some simple techniques for helping to manage stress and anxiety which can easily be practiced during this busy month.

Calming breathing technique

This technique for stress, anxiety and panic attacks takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere. Performing this exercise regularly, as part of a daily routine, will achieve the most benefit.

- Make yourself as comfortable as possible**
- If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground and hip-width apart**
- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it**
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth**
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from one to five. You may not be able to reach five at first**
- Without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from one to five again, if you find this helpful**
- Keep doing this for three to five minutes**

Being more mindful

Mindfulness is a simple form of meditation which involves maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings and surrounding environment. Being fully present in the moment can help to decrease stress, and increase levels of focus and happiness. There are several free mindfulness apps that can be downloaded but here are a few tips to get started.

Take notice – avoid going through life on ‘auto-pilot’. Becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings and body sensations can help us to enjoy the world around us

Keep it regular – pick a regular time to practise mindfulness, whether that’s in the morning or on a lunchtime walk

Try something new – trying new things, which can be as simple as choosing somewhere different for lunch, can help us notice the world in a different way

Watch your thoughts – becoming more aware of thoughts and feelings can help us see thoughts as ‘mental events’ which have no control over us

Name feelings – sometimes silently naming thoughts and feelings e.g. ‘This is anxiety’, can help us to develop more of an awareness of them

Free yourself – take a mindful approach if you realise that for several minutes you have become ‘trapped’ into reliving past problems or ‘pre-living’ future worries

It's good to talk

Sharing our problems with family or friends can help. Talking to someone might sound like a simplistic solution but it really is one of the best possible things we can do.

Speaking to a GP or calling a helpline such as Breathing Space can also help.

Breathing Space is a free and confidential phone service for anyone in Scotland feeling low, stressed or anxious. Advisors are available on **0800 83 85 87** in the evenings (6pm-2am) and 24 hours at the weekend (6pm Fri- 6am Mon) to offer listening, advice and compassion.

Other activities to consider

Make time for interests and hobbies - you are allowed to enjoy yourself! Exercise and regular, nutritious meals - walk into town, remember your packed lunch. Make sure you are getting enough sleep and tell FOMO to shove it.

Further advice on managing stress and anxiety can be found under 'Mental Wellbeing' on www.nhsinform.scot.



'THE ART FORM'S
CUTTING EDGE'

GUARDIAN

AN
Objectively
**Funny
NIGHT**

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JOZ NORRIS on The Fringe

I'm going to share something I learned about the Fringe last year, and it took my nearly losing my best friend to learn it. Last year a lot of bad things happened to me and I was struggling with my mental health and I jeopardised a lot of friendships by not being able to cope in a sensible way. I'd decided not to make a new show as a result, and was at the Fringe just acting in a friend's play and my top priority was to look after myself – I was going to go swimming, and not look at the review websites and not engage with the more careerist, anxiety-inducing aspects of the Fringe. All I needed to do was look after myself and do whatever self-care things I needed to make sure I didn't spiral. I decided I wasn't going to do anything I didn't want to do.

In the middle of that, my best friend came to visit and I did my best to host her, but I got things wrong. I was so fixated on looking after myself and only doing the things I wanted to do that I wasn't very open to the things she wanted to do with her visit. I dragged her along to the shows I wanted to see, but I didn't listen when she suggested other things we could try out. I got tetchy and defensive when she didn't enjoy shows I liked, and I got tetchy and defensive again when she pointed out I hadn't prepared any bedding or anything for her. "Hey," I thought, "it's the Fringe, we all put up with these rubbish little student flats with hard mattresses and paper-thin pillows, how am I supposed to lay on decent bedding for a guest?" I was selfish, basically, and I got things wrong. I'd convinced myself that because the Fringe was stressful, and anxiety-inducing, and exhausting, it was up to me to look after myself and it was up to everybody else to look after themselves, and there was nothing else I could do about it. We've been best friends for over a decade, and we came very close to agreeing to never speak again after that. I was very much confronted with the impact of my behaviour.

It doesn't matter.

None of it matters, none of the ego, none of the vanity, none of the stress, none of the exhaustion, none of it. You know what does matter? Your actual life. Your real life, the thing you write about when you're making your shows. The people you care about and the places you go to and the things you do. None of the Fringe counts for anything if you end up hurting people you love. I'm not speaking out against self-care, absolutely not – the Fringe is tough, and tiring, and hard on the brain and the old self-esteem, so you need to take the measures that will help you to look after yourself, absolutely, but those are all well-reported, much-talked-about things that we all know about. What we must remember is that we mustn't use the fact that the Fringe is difficult as an excuse to treat other people badly. It's just a month of our lives, like any other.

So relax, and take it easy, and be good to yourself, and be good to the people around you. Treat that month with the same levels of respect and kindness and normality as you would any other month of your life, because that's all it is. This Fringe, I'm leaving Edinburgh for a couple of days to go and be a bridesman at my best friend's wedding now we've patched things up. I think it'll be my favourite two days of the whole thing.

Joz has a show called "Joz Norris is Dead. Long Live Mr Fruit Salad." every day (apart from 10 - 11 Aug) at Heroes @ The Hive, 16:40.

SIÂN DOCKSEY HAS FOUR THINGS TO TELL US

1 Food containers are your friends. If you have a free hour and can access a kitchen, make a big pot of pasta with kidney beans and loads of vegetables. Keep it in the fridge and eat it whenever you're low on energy or general will to live.

2 Call a friend. Schedule in a call/FaceTime/Skype with a pal who is in no way connected to the festival, and when you are chatting, **DO NOT JUST WAIT UNTIL THEY HAVE STOPPED SPEAKING TO BEGIN YOUR ANXIOUS MONOLOGUE ABOUT THE FRINGE** - actually listen, laugh stuff off, appreciate what's going on in their life and remember that there is a world outside Edinburgh.

3

Managing your energy budget will help you manage your financial budget. You need to rest, eat, and have fun. Schedule in time when you can do chilled things for cheap or free e.g. go down to Leith and stare at the water or get a cup of tea with a pal. Being WISE about what your needs are will help you avoid binge-spending if/when you feel miserable.

4

Most important: DEATH IS COMING.
ENJOY YOURSELF. You are at a festival, not a yoga meditation retreat - have fun, let loose, and enjoy the breathable oxygen before we've fully melted Greenland and the poisoned tides swallow us all.

Siân isn't at the Fringe this year, but you can follow her on Twitter: [@siandocksey](https://twitter.com/siandocksey) or go to her website www.siandocksey.com.

August is an exciting and hectic month for performers heading to the Scottish Capital to take part in the infamous Edinburgh arts festivals.

Each summer many creatives visit our central Crew Drop-in on Cockburn Street, looking for resources, information and support on drugs, drinking and sexual health.

We specialise in harm reduction, so we thought we'd share a quick essential guide to looking after yourself this festival time.



Tips for a safer festival

All drug use has risks, and the best way to avoid them is to not take drugs. If you choose to drink alcohol or take drugs, the following info can help to reduce harm:

Be prepared

- Eat well to maintain energy and line your stomach. Supplements like magnesium, and vitamins C, D and B12 can also be helpful when combined with a good diet
- Think about any other health conditions and medication you may be taking – including antidepressants. If you're diabetic, make sure your body has what it needs to avoid hypo- or hyperglycaemia and pack snacks. Our “Drugs and Diabetes Guide” has some great tips on how to look after yourself
- Sleep! A “play hard now/sleep in September” approach is tempting, but as many seasoned performers will tell you, factoring in good sleep, including naps, will improve your experience. Sleep may help you avoid feeling strung out or making unwise decisions and generally putting on a less-than-good performance!
- Plan how you are getting home before you start your night and make a note of where you are staying. Never drink/drug drive - the drink drive limit in Scotland is low (22 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath) meaning even 1 drink can put you over the limit!
- Spend a few hours researching any drug you plan to take
- Try not to accept/buy drugs from people you don't know
- Carry safe sex materials and think about consent - Crew has free condoms and lube!
- Home drug testing kits are available online. They give a basic understanding of what the drugs contain but may not identify mixtures, newer drugs or adulterants, and can't tell you about purity or strength

Taking drugs

- Avoid mixing with alcohol and other drugs (including medicines)
- Avoid taking drugs alone and try to have a 'straight/sober' friend around
- If taking for the first time or taking a new batch/packet take a small test dose first - this might be a tiny dab of powder or scrapings of a pill
- The purity of some drugs in Scotland is at an all-time high. Start low, go slow - take small amounts – this might be quarter of a pill, one small line, a few puffs of a joint or vape
- Pace yourself and wait 2 hours before taking any more
- Drug paraphernalia isn't for sharing. Keep all injecting equipment, pipes and tooters/snorters to yourself
- Stay hydrated, drink small sips of water or isotonic drink (about half a pint or 240 millilitres per hour) and never leave drinks unattended
- If experiencing issues with jaw clenching, chew gum or soft sweets
- Take regular breaks when dancing

Need help?

- If you feel unwell, tell someone and be honest about what's been taken, how much and when
- If the effects are stronger than expected, stay relaxed and take small sips of flat sugary juice
- Negative feelings will pass, changing the environment and letting someone know how you are feeling can help
- If the person taking drugs is sleeping or unconscious place them in the recovery position (on their side) and check them frequently
- In an emergency – get help. Call 999 and ask for an ambulance. Be honest about what has been taken. Stay with the person and reassure them
- Have at least a few drink/drug free days a week to allow your body to recover
- If you need support, our Drop-in is open Monday-Saturday 1-5pm and Thursday 3-9pm, during the Fringe. We offer free pregnancy testing, blood borne virus testing (including rapid HIV testing on the 3rd Thursday of August 5-9pm), confidential chat and signposting to services

For information about specific drugs please check out www.crew.scot. For a confidential chat with one of our trained staff or volunteers, visit the Drop-in at 32-32a Cockburn St, Edinburgh, EH1 1PB (just behind Waverley Station) or call (+44) 0131 220 3404.

How to Survive as a Flyerer

by **Christian Brighty** Former street team manager, Heroes

Personally, I hate that the Edinburgh Annual Festival of Flyering is hijacked by artists demanding we publicise actual, real shows. Our egos don't require paying crowds or reviews. However, our integrity comes at a cost. Constantly putting yourself in the firing line, dealing with rejection – all for someone else's career – is exhausting and terrifying. But, if you follow the below, it can also be the best way of experiencing Edinburgh.

Survival Get the physical basics sorted. Have somewhere to permanently stay. Eat a big breakfast. Wear trainers or good boots. Waterproof coat. Backpack. Water bottle. Portable phone battery. Vegetables. Drink less. Sleep more. Honey & lemon & ginger. Make friends (it's easy here). Get cuddles. As many cuddles as you can find.

Quit You don't need to work for a dick. It's very easy to find flyering work during the fringe, through the Flyerer Network facebook group or by asking to work for an act you loved. If someone is abusive or exploitative in any way, such as paying you less than £10 p/h, don't work for them.

Don't trust strangers You're being paid to talk to strangers, but some strangers are AWFUL. Be extremely careful flyer-ing after 9pm on Fridays and Saturdays, as that's when the baddies come out. Avoid night time on Cowgate at all costs. Put your physical wellbeing first in all instances, and don't approach groups if you don't feel comfortable.

Play You're being paid to talk to strangers, and most strangers are AWESOME. Flyer-ing is a chance to perform for longer each day than anyone else at the Edinburgh fringe. You get to make strangers laugh, to play and to help support an artist you believe in. If you can find the joy in it, and I promise you it's there, it's the easiest and most fun job in the world. That's why I do it full time, with a lot less success outside August.

Remember why you're here You're probably already following a dream by being up here, but don't trick yourself into thinking that that in itself is enough. You'll be so much happier if you make the effort to see even more shows, meet more people and learn as much as possible about the art you want to make. And crucially, come back next year with a show. There's a home for you here - you just need to find it.

FRINGE CENTRAL EVENTS

Fringe Central is a space exclusively for participants and industry (the Fringe's very own green room!), so you can pop in to escape the crowds and grab a cup of tea or just sit down.

Every year, Fringe Central also puts on a programme of events for participants. The Fringe is an opportunity to connect with others as well as performing and seeing lots of great shows and Fringe Central have programmed tons of events to help you do this, including meet-ups for artists of colour, LGBTQIA+, women, disabled and working class artists.

All of the events are free for participants so you can just turn up and get involved. All events take place at Fringe Central which is located in Appleton Tower on the corner of George Square.

This year, there are lots of events to do with mental health and wellbeing. Below is a selection that may be useful for you but you can find more information on their whole programme at edfringe.com under the Take Part section, or pick up a programme from Fringe Central when you can.



A Mentally Well Fringe 13:00 (2 hrs) Aug 9 & 16

Ran by NHS Lothian. The Fringe can be a stressful and pressured time (as well as an exciting one!), so we will offer Fringe participants the opportunity to sample some experiences commonly used in psychological therapy practice which are known to help mental well-being.

FFS Livestream 10:30 (1 hr)

Every day except Sundays and Mondays.

Supported by the Mental Health Foundation, Fringe Festival Support is a filmed hour of fun chat with very special guests in order to provide practical Festival advice, create a community and encourage positive thoughts to help get you through your Fringe. Come along. Watch. Share. Drink tea. Make friends!

Mental Health First Aid 1-2-1s 11:00 Aug 13-15

(8 hrs - appointment or drop in between 14:00 & 17:00)

An opportunity to talk 1-2-1 about your wellbeing. Sheffield-based Space to Breathe provide a team to talk in an informal, creative and supportive environment. If you are worried about your wellbeing or need some support, just drop in 2-5pm or book a morning/afternoon appointment by emailing fringe@spacetobreathe.eu.

Mindful Mondays 10:00 (1hr) Aug 5, 12 & 19

Start your day in a mindful way. A quiet space for your morning meditation, stretch or reflection. Facilitators announced on the day.

The Sanctuary 11:00 (6 hrs - drop in) Aug 11, 14, 18 & 23

Part of ArtsMinds (Equity, Spotlight, The Stage and BAPAM). Get away from the madding crowd to this calm, silent space where you can just be for a while before getting back out there. Providing peace in a comfortable environment, there'll also be a neck and shoulder massage therapist (free). Just pop in. Massage slots reserved in person on the day (first come first served).

The Voicebox Toolbox: How To Avoid Cracking Your Voice During The Fringe 11:00 (1hr30) Aug 20

Practical advice and exercises, designed specifically for the vocal demands of the Festival Fringe. Topics explored will be; the vocal mechanism, how to protect the voice (both on the Royal Mile and on stage), what to do when things go wrong and effective and efficient vocal warm-ups.

Forest Cafe

Drop-in sessions with Objectively Funny throughout the festival

All through August drop in to Forest Cafe on Lauriston Place for mental health workshops, yoga, meditation or just a nice, calm place for a chat. Keep an eye out on Objectively Funny social media for what's happening each day.

TW: @objectivelyfunny IG: @objectivelyfunny

Mon 10am-12pm Wed 4-6pm Fri 2-4pm

Get involved! If you can offer your time in any way to help us, please get in touch at support@objectivelyfunn.com.

Mental Health Peer Support

A free 90min training workshop developed by Objectively Funny & Rachel O'Connor

Aug 12th 1245

Gilded Balloon Teviot Wee Room

Aug 13th 1330

Gilded Balloon Teviot Balcony



CALM IS THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST LIVING MISERABLY

We are a movement against suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK. Get support and join the campaign at theCALMzone.net

CAMPAIGN
AGAINST
LIVING
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