
A CLL EMPOWERMENT GUIDE

Coping with challenging emotions





Having a CLL diagnosis, being in treatment, or having a relapse can become extremely stressful and overwhelming for some people. At times, you may also feel sad or discouraged. Struggling with challenging emotions can at times seem like too much to bear. During times when you are overwhelmed by negative emotions, it is helpful to not forget that emotions and thoughts come and go, just like water that flows in a river.

Below are a few things that might help when you are feeling anxious or depressed.

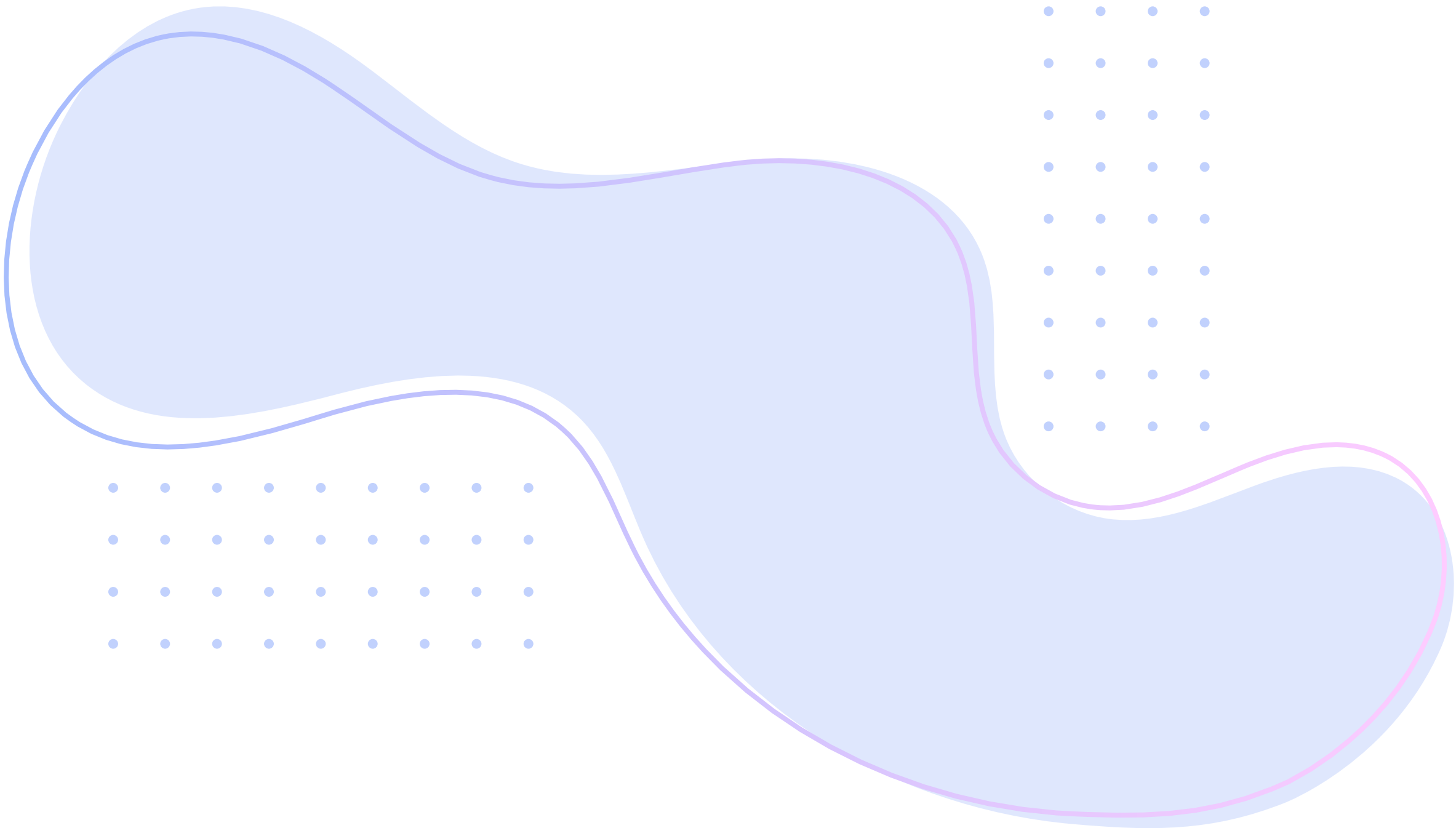
*Emotions and thoughts come and go,
just like water that flows in a river.*



EMBRACE YOUR FEELINGS

Simple as it may seem, it is not always easy to be aware of what you are feeling deep inside. Sometimes we may hide our most painful emotions from ourselves and others, in order to stay protected from them.

Unfortunately, negative emotions don't always go away if we try to put a lid on them. **Just like keeping the lid on a boiling pot, almost never venting our emotions can, over time, build up psychological tension.** Bottled up emotions can then overflow and make you feel sad, worried, and anxious most of the time.



EXPRESS HOW YOU FEEL

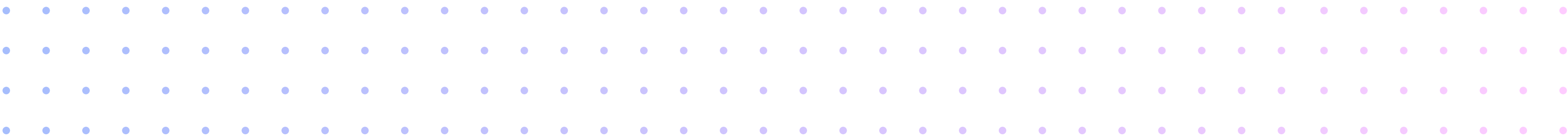
Talking about some of your challenging emotions with someone who can really listen and understand you, can be very helpful. They can be a family member, a friend, a spiritual leader/guide, or a healthcare professional, including your physician.

Sharing how you feel with others can be valuable, since:

- Through discussion you are able to reflect on what is really troubling you and vent it out.
- The reactions of a compassionate listener are likely to soothe you. You may feel cared for and experience genuine interest from them.
- Sharing some of your deeper thoughts and emotions, can make you feel closer to others and let others come closer to you. This could help you realize you are not alone in what you are going through, and alleviate feelings of loneliness.
- Expressing what is in your mind, you may often find that it becomes less threatening.

At the most difficult times, maintaining frequent contact with people you feel connected to can really become a shelter against isolation and overwhelm. **However, opening up to others can be difficult.**

Remember to follow your feelings and remain gentle to yourself, without forcing anything.



*Sometimes, time is all you need
to make a step ahead.*





PARTICIPATE IN SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups or Peer Groups consist of people who share similar experiences (e.g., CLL diagnosis) and meet regularly to discuss. Such meetings can become a safe place where you can express yourself, feel understood and connected with others. Listening to other patients' stories can also be a source of hope and inspiration (see leaflet "Peer support groups").

CONSIDER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Along the CLL journey, it is normal to sometimes have feelings of stress and anxiety. However, if you experience these most of the time, if they really disturb you or if keep you from getting on with your life, you may want to think about getting support to deal with them. One of the most effective ways to manage intense and ongoing feelings of anxiety and depression is to talk to a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychotherapist.

A mental health professional will have the expertise and experience needed to help you with intense feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

People with cancer who received support from mental help professionals have shared with researchers what they have found particularly useful:

Having a space to **talk freely** about their problems, in an emotionally safe space. Very often they would not talk to family members or friends for fear of upsetting or worrying them.

Talking to someone who was not afraid to hear what they said, but rather was able to **stay present** and collaborate with them in handling their difficulties.

Receiving warmth, empathy and **genuine care** from their mental health professional. This made them feel seen and heard, as well as experience safety and comfort.

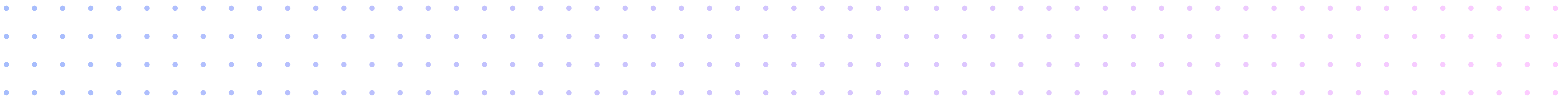
Expressing and **exploring vulnerable feelings** that they would have held back if they were not in therapy. This made them feel relieved and "lifted a burden off their shoulders".

Gaining a **different perspective** on their issues and seeing their problems in a new, more hopeful light.

Questioning, with the help of the mental health professional, **unhelpful thoughts** and behaviors.

Receiving support to **engage** in helpful behaviors in their everyday life (e.g., starting a new hobby).

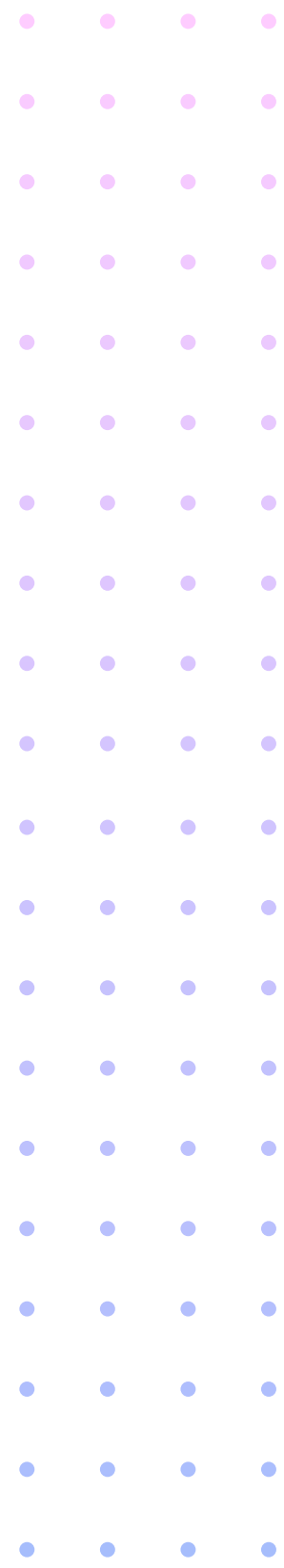




Depending on where you live, different options for mental health services may exist. For instance, **mental health services may be offered by a local hospital or a mental health center.** Another option would be to look for a therapist working in private practice in your area. You could get more information on available services in your region or hospital by asking your physician or by contacting a local patient organization.

MOVING FORWARD

Trying to overcome the emotional challenges of living with CLL might "open a door" for growth for you. CLL might give you the chance to revisit what really matters to you and what you value the most. Little by little, you may find yourself finding balance by focusing on what gives you pleasure and meaning in the present, instead of ruminating about the future. As time goes by, you may start changing your priorities and spend your time based on what you actually desire.



*This can give you a new and
deep sense of purpose and meaning*

This leaflet was created within the context of the "Patient Empowerment" Program, which is designed and implemented by the Institute of Applied Biosciences at the Center for Research and Technology Hellas (INAB|CERTH) and approved by the Hellenic Society of Haematology (HSH) and the European Research Initiative on CLL (ERIC)

