

MENTAL WELLBEING, KEEPING THE RUGBY COMMUNITY HEALTHY

ENGAGE

WITH MENTAL WELLBEING

ENCOURAGE

A KIND CULTURE

AND EQUIP

EACH OTHER TO SUPPORT



Simplyhealth

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RUGBY SAFE

PARTNERSHIP & PROJECT AIMS

RugbySafe, supported by Simplyhealth, is England Rugby's overarching player safety and wellbeing programme, putting player welfare at the heart of the game and covering how the game should be played and managed in a safe and enjoyable way.

We know that prevention is better than cure. England Rugby provides guidance and resources for clubs and other rugby activity organisers on what can be in place to create a fun and safe playing environment. Together with Simplyhealth, we recognise that mental and physical wellbeing go hand in hand to keeping the community healthy.

This resource has been created to support the rugby community because we know that clubs are often places that people join to feel welcomed, engaged, safe and supported. Rugby clubs are a place people feel they belong and can enjoy the links between good physical and mental health. The purpose of this document is to support and feed into the amazing local initiatives which are vital to the game we love.

From our survey 80% of rugby club members agree that having a resource that provides information and signposting for emotional health and wellbeing in a rugby club is a helpful way to support club members' mental health within rugby clubs.¹

This resource has been researched and prepared by the Mental Health Foundation, with input from the rugby community, including through a survey of over 160 rugby club members, a focus group with RugbySafe leads and a literature review of relevant publications. This has provided us with valuable information and feedback which you will see throughout the booklet.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of this resource.

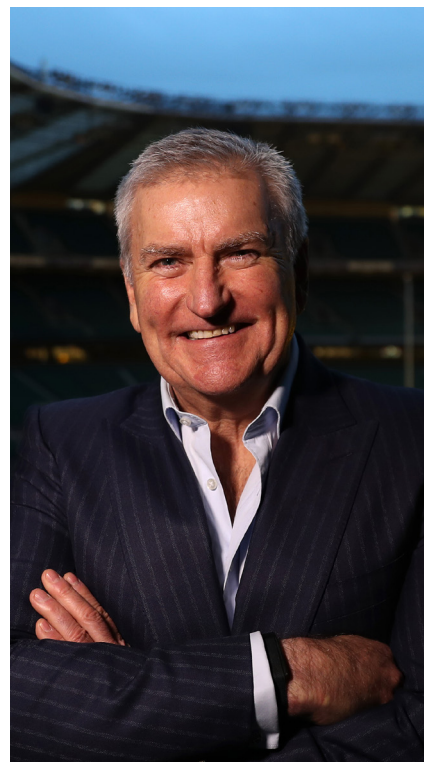
ENGLAND RUGBY

"I am impressed by the progress that we as a sport and a society have made in removing the stigma around talking about mental health. We have still got a long way to go but so many of our clubs have embraced mental health awareness and support that I am optimistic about the future.

We often talk of the rugby family and the best families are always willing to listen and to help in challenging times. Many of us have been touched by tragedies which might have been avoided had we known and understood more – that knowledge and understanding is something that our sport is well placed to provide.

We are a team sport and a sporting community and I am most grateful to all of our clubs and CBs who are working to improve the mental wellbeing of their players and members and keep those in the rugby family safe."

**BILL SWEENEY,
RFU CEO**



"The last year has been a difficult time for everybody and it's more important than ever to pay attention to mental health.

Part of the ethos of rugby is to look out for each other. Whether you're a coach, player or supporter it's important to keep an eye on those around you and if you see someone struggling, don't be afraid to say something and offer support.

For those finding it tough themselves, try to acknowledge it and reach out to those around you for support. Rugby, whether at grassroots or elite level, is all about team spirit and working together and supporting each other through hard times can make a real difference."

**EDDIE JONES,
ENGLAND MEN,
HEAD COACH**





A MESSAGE FROM



AT SIMPLYHEALTH, WE BELIEVE THAT GOOD HEALTH IS THE FOUNDATION FOR A GOOD LIFE.

TOGETHER WITH OUR PARTNER, ENGLAND RUGBY, WE UNDERSTAND THE BENEFIT OF EXERCISE ON MENTAL WELLBEING.

At Simplyhealth, we want to help people stay healthy, now and in the long-term. We believe in being proactive when it comes to our health, to prevent problems coming up in future. But we're in the midst of a mental health crisis, amplified by the pandemic, that means attaining and maintaining health isn't always easy.

Rugby clubs are the heart of many communities, often playing a vital role in keeping people happy and healthy. In fact, it's an important reason why many people are involved in the game we love.

However, now more than ever people and communities will be feeling the strain.

The rugby community is made up of players, coaches, volunteers, referees, club officials, parents/carers and spectators.

By providing a safe, welcoming and supportive environment, community rugby clubs already provide vital support to people's mental health by providing access to exercise, reducing isolation, increasing social skills and, as a result of your work, increasing self-esteem. Many clubs even have dedicated initiatives for mental health.

England Rugby and Simplyhealth recognise the work already being achieved at local level, but no-one can expect coaches and volunteers to be mental health experts.

Our aim is to engage people in conversations around mental health, encourage kind cultures where healthy minds are met with open ones, and equip each other with the skills to support.

Simplyhealth has been working with the Mental Health Foundation, to develop resources, information and signposting to support on the topic of mental health and wellbeing.

This resource is available to anyone within the game to help you spot the signs and support people finding specialist help. We recognise that some days may be harder than others.

Together, we can break down the barriers to our collective mental health and empower everyone to build habits for a healthier mind and a happier life.



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH

In many ways, mental health is just like physical health: everybody has it and we need to take care of it. It is just as important to have good mental health as it is good physical health.

Good mental health means the ability to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions. If you go through a period of poor mental health, you might find the ways you're thinking, feeling or reacting become difficult to cope with.

If you're in good mental health, you can:

- **Make the most of your potential**
- **Cope with life**
- **Play a full part in your family, workplace, community and among friends**
- **Everyone is different. You may bounce back from a setback, while someone else may feel weighed down by it for a long time**

Your mental health doesn't always stay the same. It can change as circumstances change and as you move through different stages of your life.

There is a stigma attached to mental health problems. This means that people feel uncomfortable about them and do not talk about them much. Many people do not even feel comfortable talking about their feelings, but it is healthy to know and say how you're feeling and ask for help if you're unwell.

"I've found that clubs I have been involved with have been very good at highlighting this and many members of the team/coaching staff making it clear that they are always available to talk to. Just discussing the topic of mental health has made me feel more supported."

- Men's Adult Player.



The economic and social costs of mental health problems in England are estimated at around £105 billion each year.⁴



One adult in six has a common mental health problem.⁶



In 2019/20, 55% of all working days lost were due to work-related ill health.³

51%

In 2019/20 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 51% of all work-related ill health cases



THE BENEFITS OF SPORT

FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Physical activity has a huge potential to enhance our wellbeing. Even a short burst of 10 minutes' brisk walking increases our mental alertness, energy and positive mood.⁶

Participation in regular physical activity can reduce stress and anxiety. It also plays a role in preventing the development of mental health problems and in improving the quality of life of people experiencing mental health problems.

Exercise can also increase our self-esteem. Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves and how we perceive our self-worth. It is a key indicator of our mental wellbeing and our ability to cope with life stressors.

Studies show us that rugby specifically has been shown to have a positive influence on mental wellbeing:

Among veteran male players aged 54–83 it was reported that playing gave participants a sense of nostalgia and pride, lifelong friendship and belonging, pure joy and passion and helped them be mentally and physically active.⁷

Making friends was a main motivation for playing rugby union among amateur male players aged over 35.⁷

Female rugby players reported that they played rugby because they enjoy the game, they like the aggressive aspects of the sport, they appreciate the social aspects of the game, and they believe the sport provides them with positive benefits, such as increased fitness, confidence and strength.

“Rugby helps me have freedom from all negative thoughts.”

-Ashleigh Rollins,
South Molton RFC player



THE REALITY

Am I the only one who feels this way?

Mental health problems are a common human experience. It is often upsetting, confusing and frightening at first. If you start to struggle you may feel that it's a sign of weakness, but this is not the case.

Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. They can happen to all types of people from all walks of life. We are all individuals and will all benefit from some of the strategies in this booklet.

“We’ve had players who are open about mental health and it is freeing to know people like me have the same problems. I’m now open about my past because of it. I think we need to make an environment where at least a few players in every club feel comfortable to speak up and others will follow. One player from my club that I look up to spoke up. Realising I wasn’t on my own stopped me killing myself.” - Men’s Adult Player.

WE ARE TACKLING

Managing your stress:

Sometimes when we have a lot of pressure and stress in our lives, we can feel overwhelmed and anxious. A certain level of stress is helpful; it helps us to get out of bed in the morning to go to work or motivates us to revise for an exam. For a rugby player, this adrenaline boost helps increase your alertness on the pitch and enhances your performance, making you ready for action.

However, sometimes there is a need to manage the adrenaline that our body naturally produces. If anxiety is experienced too often, or is constantly under the surface, it can be harmful to your mental health and mood.

This is when the balance tips too far and the amount of stress outweighs the stores of resilience.

Physical exercise can be very effective in relieving stress. Research on employed adults has found that highly active individuals tend to have lower stress rates compared to individuals who are less active.⁶

“Having a stressful job can really weigh on me mentally. Playing rugby, whether it’s training or matches gives me the freedom to let go of that stress and enjoy what’s going on in the moment on that field rather than anything else.”

-Adult Rugby player at Minchinhampton RFC.

CHILDREN

RUGBY IS A GAME FOR ALL. HOWEVER, DIFFERENT GROUPS FACE DIFFERENT ISSUES WHEN IT COMES TO MENTAL HEALTH.

Mental health problems affect about one in eight children and young people.⁸

They include depression and anxiety and are often a direct response to what is happening in their lives.

Most children grow up mentally healthy, but surveys suggest that more children and young people have problems with their mental health today than 30 years ago.⁹

That's probably because of changes in the way we live now and how that affects the experience of growing up.

Dealing with change

Usually things that happen to children don't lead to mental health problems on their own, but traumatic events can trigger problems for children and young people who are already vulnerable.

Changes often act as triggers—moving home or school or the birth of a new brother or sister, for example. Some children who start school feel excited about making new friends and doing new activities, but there may also be some who feel

anxious about entering a new environment.

Teenagers often experience emotional turmoil as their minds and bodies develop.

An important part of growing up is working out and accepting who you are. Some young people find it hard to make this transition to adulthood and may experiment with alcohol, drugs or other substances that can affect mental health.



YOUNG MEN

IN ENGLAND, AROUND ONE IN EIGHT MEN EXPERIENCE A COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM SUCH AS DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, PANIC DISORDER OR OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD).¹⁰

Within the context of a rugby squad of 23 players and coaching staff, those statistics tell us that three of your team mates may have a common mental health problem.

As with many mental health statistics, it's hard to know if the figures really represent what is happening. They can only tell us about mental health problems that have been reported – many cases may go undiagnosed. This may be especially true when it comes to men's mental health.

1

Men are six times as likely to be problem gamblers, with those aged 25-34 being the highest risk.¹⁴

2

Men report lower levels of life satisfaction than women according to the Government's national wellbeing survey.¹²

3

Men are less likely to access psychological therapies than women: only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies are for men.¹³

4

Men are nearly three times as likely as women to become dependent on alcohol, and three times as likely to report frequent drug use.¹¹

5

Three times as many men as women die by suicide.¹¹

6

Two in every five men feel pressure to have the perfect body.¹⁵

7

Nearly half of men have struggled with their mental wellbeing because of how their body looks.¹⁵



WHY DON'T MEN TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

Statistics provided by the Mental Health Foundation...

- Societal expectations and traditional gender roles play a role in why men are less likely to discuss or seek help for their mental health problems.¹⁶
- Although society and expectations are changing men are often expected to be the breadwinners and to be strong, dominant and in control. These can make it harder for men to reach out for help and open up.
- Some research also suggests that men who can't speak openly about their emotions may be less able to recognise symptoms of mental health problems in themselves, and less likely to reach out for support.
- Men may also be more likely to use potentially harmful coping methods such as drugs or alcohol and less likely to open up to family or friends.
- Mental health can present differently in men e.g. anger instead of sadness.

However, the encouraging news is that there is research¹⁶ to suggest that men will access help when they feel it meets their preferences, and is easily accessed, meaningful and engaging, and rugby clubs are a great opportunity for that...

"Personally, my rugby club is my release from everyday worries. The craic, the contact and the deserved beer at the end of a session cannot be overestimated."

- Men's Adult Player



YOUNG WOMEN

The underlying factors for the deterioration of young women's and girls' mental health are complex.¹⁷

Analysts point to the role of:

- domestic violence and abuse, which has risen significantly over recent years.
- online culture and social media as a source of increased pressure.

Large numbers of girls report holding themselves back from doing everyday things they'd like to do for fear of their bodies being criticised.

- **37%** of girls aged 11-21 saying they compared themselves to celebrities 'most of the time' or 'often'.
- **69%** of girls aged 7-21 saying they feel that they are "not good enough."

Unrealistic portrayals of success online and in the media has been cited by girls as the most dominant factor underlying lack of confidence.

- **70%** of young women agreed with the sentiment that online portrayals were unrealistic.
- Nearly a third (**31%**) of young women said they didn't feel in control of their lives.

- Amongst these young women, **69%** said that lack of self-confidence was one of the key things that held them back.

"Rugby provides a supportive and inclusive environment that welcomes everyone which is so important to mental wellbeing. The opportunity to meet new people, travel to new places and develop friendships for life is what makes rugby so great. The rugby family provides a network of friends, coaches, mentors and rivals that helps you become a better player and a better person."

- Maria Crowfoot,
Coach of The Lichfield
Womens Team.



Young women are three times more likely than men to experience common mental health problems.



Young women are more likely to experience anxiety related conditions than any other group.

3X

Women are more than three times more likely to experience eating disorders than men.

COACHING TEAMS

COACHING IS A MULTI-FACETED ROLE, ESPECIALLY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY GAME.

Often coaches can find themselves taking on several roles. A diverse skill set may be needed on top of the performance requirements, which can increase stress, such as the need to build and maintain relationships with a large group of people and having to make reactionary and immediate decisions.

COACHING CAN BE CONSIDERED A PERFORMANCE, AND THIS MAY BRING PRESSURE AND WORRIES OR ANXIETIES OF ITS OWN.

■ **Player selection**

Having to be the one who makes the selection decisions about the team can sometimes be the hardest role within the club, especially if there's friendships, close community relationships and injury to consider too.

■ **The local community**

Navigating rivalries, club supporters and perhaps local press opinions and maybe even having your performance as the centre of attention in a close-knit community.

■ **Life balance**

Managing work, family, other commitments and coaching. Sometimes a coach's passion can spill over into other areas of their life, it's often harder to maintain boundaries when it's voluntary.

Within clubs there are many different roles many of which are voluntary: team managers, coaches, physios and off-field administrators to name just a few.

These roles come with their own unique pressures, especially when there are performance demands such as players getting back to fitness.

It is important to recognise these potential vulnerabilities and create a culture in which club volunteers and the backroom staff can be supported too.



MATCH OFFICIALS

There are three teams on a rugby pitch, the two competing teams and the match officials. Without the match officials there is no rugby game, they are an essential part of rugby.

There are many pressures faced by match officials, some of the pressure is a natural part of the game and the reason they are involved, but some is unnecessary and sometimes even abusive.

“It can be a challenge: working alone each week, moving to a different club each time, only seeing other refs now & again.”

- Match Official

Match officials may encounter the following things which could cause them worry, stress, anger and even distress:

- **Intense scrutiny** – from players, spectators, coaches, members of players’ family and social media.
- **Outside influence** – many people wanting to give their opinion, or influence the official’s decision-making process, sometime even before the game begins.
- **Less recognition** – when a match official performs well, they rarely receive recognition for their work. However, they are far more likely to receive negative feedback when a performance is deemed to be sub-par. This lack of recognition can be tough as good work goes unnoticed and referees can be scrutinised and disliked for decisions and poor performances.
- **A lack of respect** – whilst rugby prides itself on respect and is one of the better sports at respecting officials, disrespect does happen and can become abusive.
- **Isolation** – they are in the minority, often alone. This can be quite isolating, and there often isn’t the same level of post-match social activity for an official.





THE SUPPORTING ROLE

OF THE RUGBY COMMUNITY

FROM OUR SURVEY, 93% OF RUGBY CLUB MEMBERS AGREE THAT BEING PART OF A RUGBY CLUB IS POSITIVE FOR THEIR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH.¹

It can be hard to know what to do when supporting someone experiencing a mental health issue. It is important to note that being there for them, having conversations and keeping normality is the best thing you can do.

Mental health problems are so misunderstood that someone who acknowledges your problem, continues to accept you and treats you with compassion is doing something extremely important.

“We often find people coming for support at crisis point, we want to create a club culture where people ask before then.”

-RugbySafe Lead

This will happen when we make it more normal to talk about mental health in clubs. Just like we ask how sore our bodies are after a match, we could be checking in on how a teammate's physical rehab is going or how they are after the knock they picked up in training.

CLUB CULTURE

Creating a club culture where it becomes normal for people to check in with each other starts with simply having conversations about wellbeing.

It's great to see many clubs already doing this.

If you aren't already, why not consider how you can integrate conversations and check ins more formally, here are some ideas about how:

- Using part of a training session to focus on mental wellbeing, integrate five minutes to ask a discussion question or give a top tip.
- Utilising monitoring forms which often record sleep, hydration and physical injury to ask about how players are feeling using a scale. Then delegate an appropriate member of the club to follow up with anyone if required.

HOW CAN WE NURTURE A KIND CULTURE?

Every club is unique, with its own culture, strengths, resources, and challenges. What works for one club might not work for another.

However, something every club can strive towards is kindness, and kindness doesn't mean being weak or battling on the pitch any less ferociously!

HOW CAN WE NURTURE A KIND CULTURE?

- Be proactive about checking in
- Ask people twice how they are, how they really are
- Prioritise the person before the performance
- Be present with people, not distracted
- Make an effort with those who don't always join in with social events
- Recognise unhealthy relationships and talk openly and sensitively about them
- Invest time in people
- Be generous with whatever you have – time, knowledge, skills etc.
- Really listen

“The Lancashire CB Cauliflower Ear Initiative ‘always there to lend a Cauliflower Ear’ is the beginning of our campaign to start conversations within clubs - asking the question of your team mates and club members “are you OK?”.

- Gary Morgan, RugbySafe Lead



BANTER

Fun and banter is such a strength of the rugby community, especially when there may be other pressures in our lives. However, we need to be careful with banter, sometimes it can mask what is really happening.

“Often at a rugby club it's about the banter. An environment where people wear their masks. But could an environment be created where people have the opportunity to say, ‘I am not ok’?”

- Rugby Coach



“What's banter to you may not be to someone else. Thinking before we speak and being quick to hold our hands up and apologise when we get something wrong is important.

We need to open the eyes of the rugby community to know when to stop the banter and when to put an arm around a team mate instead.”

- Rich Berry, Constituent Body Safeguarding Lead.

Rugby clubs all across England are doing great work, creating welcoming, inclusive and kind cultures. Sport provides a unique opportunity to do this and can positively impact many people's lives.

From our survey, 81% of rugby club members agree that other people at their club would listen to them and support them with emotional needs if they approached them.¹

ROLE OF THE COACHING TEAM

The coaching team has a really important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the players.

The head coach has the influence to set the tone for the team, to create a culture which encourages positive mental wellbeing. It is really beneficial if the club has the luxury to facilitate a coaching team, not just a coach in isolation, this enables peer support for the coaches and a more holistic approach in providing player support.

Sometimes clubs appoint a specific person like a RugbySafe or wellbeing lead or chaplain to help specifically with wellbeing.

As coaches, why not consider who could support you to lead this culture and ask the player group what they would value too.



“Teaching coaches to think ‘human’ before ‘player’ is really important, as is getting to know those on your squad so you can be aware of any changes from their normal behaviour.”

- Age grade rugby coach.

Ultimately, at the heart of good mental health and wellbeing practice is the understanding that the person comes first before their identity as a player or their performance.

There are key times when a player’s mental health and wellbeing becomes more vulnerable, it is good to be proactive in recognising these times and being prepared for them.

Communicate with club members that you know there will be tough times in people’s personal and playing lives and that as a club you want to not only acknowledge those but have things prepared to support.

These times may be:

- Selection
- Injury
- Retirement
- Key times throughout their player journey
- Relationship pressures and breakdown
- Insecurity in employment, academic, financial and other areas of life
- Illness



INJURY

When a player gets injured, this can affect their emotional wellbeing which, in turn, impacts on the injury recovery.

When injury happens, it can leave them feeling isolated and that they're no longer part of the team. This can be a frustrating time when they are unable to change things in the short term. Keeping in touch with the team, coach and other players, as well as physical rehabilitation can help recovery from injury.

Another way of helping them when they are recovering from an injury is to buddy up and to have Injury Rehab Clubs.

Contacting another player who is, or has, experienced similar difficulties in the past, will leave you feeling less isolated.

As a buddy you give as much support as you gain from the relationship. Just being able to talk about how you're feeling with someone who is injured, or has been through an injury, is a way of coping with the situation. It also lets you keep in contact with other members of the team whilst you are unable to train and play.



“In my third year of university I sustained a knee injury that ruled me out for my final rugby season with my uni team. For three months I was on rest, meaning I couldn't train, run or exercise.

This took a massive toll on all aspects of my health as I used and relied on rugby and exercise to stay fit and as an outlet for stress and anxiety.

Suddenly my main coping mechanisms had been taken away from me and I could feel my mental health starting to decline. My teammates and coaches encouraged me to attend every rugby session despite being unable to train, and this meant that I could still be actively involved with the team and start to develop in a coaching role.

My teammates were the only people who could fully understand the struggle of being ruled out by injury and being able to seek advice from people who had been in my position really prevented an isolated feeling that could have taken hold.”

- Nina Dawe,
former Bath Spa University
RFC, current Crewkerne RFC

“Rugby has always been a huge part of who I am and what I do and has been the vehicle to many of my best friendships. It has introduced me to a network of hugely supportive people. When I was 21 I had an accident and was told I couldn't play rugby anymore.

I was actually really lucky and have been able to play again but when the accident first happened it left me feeling very lost and alone. At the time, rugby was a huge part of how I identified myself and how I valued myself as a person. It took some really great people (almost all of whom I had met through rugby) and a lot of time to realise that rugby wasn't who I was. That it had given me so many amazing experiences and shaped me as a person and that it was these experiences, the values, confidence, passion and most importantly the people rugby gave me that contributed to who I am as a person.

The amazing thing about that realisation is that it was a reminder that all these values and positivity exist in rugby clubs everywhere whether you are a player, coach, official, spectator or volunteer and extend well beyond a rugby context.”

- Katie Trevarthen
Loughborough Lightning
CofE Coach, Loughborough
Uni BUCs Head coach
Loughborough Town Ladies
Head Coach



COACHING AGE GRADE

“As an age-grade coach it is vital to notice every individual player within your session. Through rugby we have a wonderful opportunity to help shape the emotional health of our young people within a safe and fun environment.

Allow failure within a session, let them feel their emotions and know it's ok to feel them – the good and the bad, but most importantly empower them and remind them that they can do hard things. Equally, allow creativity and imagination in your sessions by getting them to solve problems, not giving them the answers they might want and help them build that resilience to overcome adversity.

Every young person should leave your session feeling they've been heard, seen and they matter.”

- Claire Jackson,
Old Rutlishians RFC

SELECTION

Selection is part of sport, we compete and we strive to win. The coach's role and specialism to is to select the best team to win. Simply acknowledging that selection can impact a player's mood is really helpful. Where possible clearly communicating the choice and providing feedback for areas for improvement can support players' mental wellbeing.

“Many members of the team/ coaching staff making it clear that they are always available to talk to. Just by discussing the topic of mental health it has made me feel more supported.”

- Rugby club player.

RETIREMENT

If a player needs to retire, perhaps through injury, helping them transition through that is really important, offering them to stay part of the club and giving them ideas of how they can continue to be a part of the community.

THE WELLBEING OF THE COACHING TEAM

The coaching team often make great sacrifices, it is important we give them recognition for all their seen and unseen work that enables rugby clubs to continue, and club members enjoy all the benefits rugby brings.

A TEAM AROUND THE TEAM

It's beneficial for the coach to have individuals or a team around them to support and encourage, especially when the role can be isolating around selection decisions or more sensitive issues. Finding people who can listen non-judgementally and show empathy can be helpful in maintaining mental wellbeing.

Celebrating the small successes and cultivating gratitude can also benefit mental wellbeing, taking the time to notice and recognise the good even amongst the harder things. Why not take a moment after each training session, team meeting and match when you have the headspace to recognise a positive and to celebrate the good you have achieved, however small, in your role?

THE WELLBEING OF OFFICIALS

The wellbeing of officials is just as important as any other member of the rugby community. In fact, as highlighted previously, it may need extra attention when a referee will travel between clubs and not sit consistently within a rugby club community.

Ensuring the club culture of kindness not only remains within the team or the clubhouse but impacts the whole club's interaction with the match officials is a great place to start. Treat them as you would your own team members.



MATCH OFFICIALS NEED SUPPORTERS TOO!

England Rugby ensures that young match officials in training have an adult support person on the touchline. This is such a great discipline to continue throughout your match officiating journey. To consistently have a friend or two, either physically on the touchline or ready for a phone call or catch up who can listen to and encourage you. Having other match officials who understand the role you play who you can talk to openly is also a huge support, there are also various organisations that provide specific support and guidance. It is so often said:

“ONLY TAKE CRITICISM FROM SOMEONE YOU WOULD TAKE ADVICE FROM.”

This is far easier said than done but trying to implement it is wise. Trying to control the controllable will assist in maintaining good mental wellbeing.

Having a pre and post-match routine, include things which will enable you to focus, to increase your positive feelings and to speak truth to yourself. These things could include a music playlist, positive self-talk, snacks or thinking about a time where you officiated which is a proud or favourite memory.

“It’s really important to understand mental health and the importance of looking after your own mental wellbeing. I am lucky enough my hobby is now my job. Before I would use rugby as my way of switching off but now that this is my job I know it is important to have something else to switch off with. I have found going for a long bike ride, walk or going for a coffee with friends is my way of looking after my mental wellbeing. Not only is it switching off to the pressures of my job but it is also taking time for me and to understand what I need.”

-
Sara Cox,
Professional Referee



ROLE OF PARENTS AND CARERS



THE EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH. GOOD MENTAL HEALTH ALLOWS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THE RESILIENCE TO COPE WITH WHATEVER LIFE THROWS AT THEM AND GROW INTO WELL-ROUNDED, HEALTHY ADULTS.

Things that can help keep children and young people mentally well include:

- **Being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise**
- **Having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors**
- **Being part of a family that gets along well most of the time**
- **Going to a school that looks after the wellbeing of all its pupils**
- **Taking part in local activities for young people.**

Other factors are also important, including:

- **Feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe**

- **Being interested in life and having opportunities to enjoy themselves**
- **Being hopeful and optimistic**
- **Being able to learn and having opportunities to succeed**
- **Accepting who they are and recognising what they are good at**
- **Having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community**
- **Feeling they have some control over their own life**
- **Having the strength to cope when something is wrong (resilience) and the ability to solve problems**

If children have a warm, open relationship with their parents or carers, children will usually feel able to tell them if they are troubled. One of the most important ways parents can help is to listen to them and take their feelings seriously. They may want a hug, they may want you to help them change something or they may want practical help.

It is important for children to have at least one 'good enough' relationship in their life, this may not always be their parent or carer, they

may have a brilliant youth worker, social worker, rugby coach or relative who could be the best person to listen and support them.

Children and young people's negative feelings usually pass. However, it's a good idea to get help if your child is distressed for a long time, if their negative feelings are stopping them from getting on with their lives, if their distress is disrupting family life or if they are repeatedly behaving in ways you would not expect at their age.

If your child is having problems at school, a teacher, school nurse, school counsellor or educational psychologist may be able to help. Otherwise, go to your GP or speak to a health visitor. These professionals are able to refer a child to further help.

Most of the time, the action that professionals recommend is not complex and it often involves the rest of the family.

Your child may be referred to a specialist who is trained to help them explore their feelings and behaviour. This kind of treatment is called a talking therapy, psychological therapy or counselling.

THE BENEFITS OF PLAYING RUGBY

Rugby can be a vital tool in building the valuable life skills for young people - teamwork, leadership, communication, and social confidence to name a few. If we can incorporate enjoyment- a key value of rugby- into age grade training, we will retain more young players, and ultimately have stronger communities at our grassroots clubs.



“We're acutely aware at Oldfield RFC of the importance of the health and wellbeing of the children in our youth section. Creating a fun, engaging and inclusive environment for everyone ensures the children feel part of a community and form friendships outside of their school groups.”

- Jason Humphries, Oldfield RFC Club Safeguarding Officer & U15s Coach.



“I’ve played rugby for 30 plus years. It is a fantastic team game. Rough and tumble on the pitch, but what cements it is that what goes on, on the pitch stays there and the camaraderie socially afterwards is brilliant. I have always been more than happy to introduce my own son into the rugby family and let him help with water carrying etc, he has also experienced the after-match scene and understands the safe environment he is in. All the players know him and look out for him.



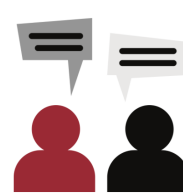
Rugby is a family in the true sense of the word, I’ve played around the country and now watch my son and it is very rare I don’t on my travels to different clubs see someone I know. We may have been fierce rivals on the field but always shake hands, greet each other and catch up. I think this above all else sets rugby apart from other sports.”

- Paul Green Player (Aged 47) and Rugby Dad, Longton Rugby Club.





SPOTTING THE SIGNS



It's not our place to diagnose mental health, it is important that we signpost onto professionals.

Signs and indicators are highly individual and someone may be struggling with their mental health but still seem OK.

Some signs and indicators may be:

- **Mood changes**
- **Sleep disturbance**
- **Becoming withdrawn**
- **Changes in eating or drinking**

Signs and indicators we may see in a rugby club environment include:

- **Being out of character in social environments, perhaps more withdrawn or perhaps a noticeable change in their alcohol drinking habits**

- **Struggling to focus as normal in training and games**
- **Struggling to accept that they can't control every area of their performance**

If you recognise some of these signs and indicators or are concerned about someone then have a conversation with them, chat with them after training or reach out and drop them a message or phone call. Maybe offer to go for a walk, get a coffee or some food, whatever would be a normal way to spend time with them, and take the time to check in and listen. Take a look at the next section for further information on having a conversation.

“As a club Chairman I saw the need to ensure we got closer to our members mental health and wellbeing following an increasing number of suicides and attempted suicides across rugby clubs. We needed to create a safe and well environment where mental health was as important as physical health, as it often goes unnoticed and can seem quite a daunting area to jump into. We started by focusing on happiness and harnessed technology to create the Wellbeing Check In that gets us closer to members on a regular basis, helping us prioritise the conversations that matter.”

- Richard Lucas,
Chairman,
Hitchin Rugby.

TIPS ON TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Opening the conversation around mental health will show that you care, however, with some mental health issues it may be necessary to get professional help and treatment.

8 tips for talking to someone about their mental health...

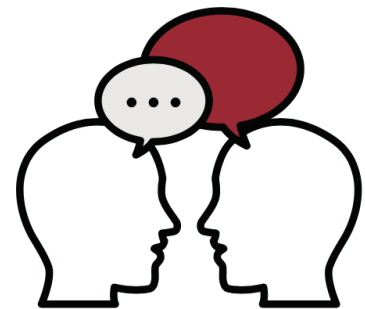
- Listen carefully to what they tell you
- Don't try to diagnose
- Don't try to second guess their feelings
- Set time aside with no distractions
- Let them share as much or as little as they want to
- Keep questions open ended
- Talk about self-care
- Offer them help in seeking professional support



GOOD CONVERSATION STARTERS

Asking someone...

- "How are you?" Ask twice, maybe "How are you really?"
- "How are you sleeping at the moment?"
- "How are you feeling? Is everything ok with you?"
- "On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being your very lowest how are you doing?"



BEING MORE THOUGHTFUL

Remember that one in six of us is experiencing high levels of distress or a common mental health problem every week¹⁸ so being respectful and thoughtful in our mental health related language could do wonders for the emotions of people around us. Words can be used inappropriately and may even be offensive and discriminatory. If you want to understand more about specific terminology, please take a look at this website link.

- Don't let a concern about using the wrong language become a block to communicating
- Acknowledge that different people have different thoughts and feelings about the words we use
- It is always better to talk than not talk



Mental Health Foundation - Why Language Matters

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

SIMPLE ACTIONS CAN HELP YOU BE THERE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS OR RECOVERING FROM AN ATTEMPT TO TAKE THEIR OWN LIFE.

It's also important to know when to seek professional support, and when to step back to look after yourself.

Evidence shows asking someone if they're suicidal can protect them. By asking someone directly about suicide, you give them permission to tell you how they feel and let them know that they are not a burden.

People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it was to be able to talk about what they were experiencing.

If someone does let you know that they are having suicidal thoughts, always take them seriously. You don't have to be able to solve their problems. But, if you feel you can, offer support and encourage them to talk about how they're feeling.

This section has been reproduced from: **Samaritans - Supporting Someone with Suicidal Thoughts** with permission from and thanks to Samaritans. They also provide much more information on their website: [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

The advice **'WAIT'** is one good way to remember how you can support another person who may be suicidal.

It stands for:

- **W** - stands for Watch out: look out for signs of distress and uncharacteristic behaviour such as withdrawing from contact with other people, excessive quietness, irritability, uncharacteristic outbursts and talking about death or suicide.
- **A** - stands for Ask: are you having suicidal thoughts? You might worry that asking about suicide will put the idea into someone's head. But the opposite is true: asking about it makes suicide less likely and may start a life-saving conversation. Being able to talk about how someone is feeling will help the other person feel better.
- **I** - stands for "it will pass": you should assure the other person that their suicidal feelings will pass with time.
- **T** - stands for talk to others: encourage the other person to seek help from a GP or another health professional.



"Let me know what words you're comfortable with."

"Please excuse me if my language is clumsy."

"Please let me know if anything I say is unhelpful."



LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

It can be difficult sometimes to stop and think of the things we are thankful for, especially if things are going wrong or life is particularly stressful.

However, there is some research that suggests stopping to take notice of things in our lives we are grateful for can help to change our perspective and increase feelings of wellbeing.

KEEP ACTIVE

Being active doesn't have to mean doing sport or going to the gym. Physical activity can be anything that gets your heart rate up and makes you breathe faster. Try to think of how you can include more of this activity in your daily life in ways that you value and enjoy.

EAT WELL

The way we feel physically can affect how we feel emotionally. Research suggests that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fish and whole grains can play

a critical role in supporting good mental health.

“Being fit and healthy is essential for good mental health. Exercise increases self-esteem and being part of a team or playing sports generally is hugely beneficial for confidence. It gives you the opportunity to meet others, learn good teamwork and build a community which is what our game is all about.”

-Red Roses captain,
Sarah Hunter

HELP OTHERS

Evidence shows that helping others is beneficial for your own mental health and wellbeing. It can help reduce stress, improve your emotional wellbeing and even benefit

your physical health. Helping others can also create a sense of belonging and reduce isolation.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Having strong and supportive relationships with those around us is important for our mental health. Making and developing healthy relationships is a two-way street. It is important to be an active and non-judgemental listener to those we care about and in turn it is important we surround ourselves with those who listen and support us. Activities that get you out of the house and out with others is a place to start.

STAY CURIOUS AND OPEN TO NEW EXPERIENCES

There is good evidence that remaining curious about the world and continuing to learn throughout your life are good for your mental health. It doesn't need to be expensive or time consuming, it could be something as simple as visiting a new part of your town or city.

SPEAK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST FOR SUPPORT

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. Family and friends can be a vital source of support. Opening up to someone you trust, knowing who will be able to best understand and empathise with what you are experiencing.

GET CLOSER TO NATURE

Nature can be anything from a garden or local park to a beach or open countryside. There is also evidence that walking or running outdoors in a natural environment helps to reduce feelings of anger, tiredness and sadness. Sometimes, the places that seem to be good for us are described as 'green' and 'blue' - the colours of trees, other plants and water. Time around animals and wildlife can also help too.

From our survey, 99% of rugby club members agree that being outside in nature to play/watch/officiate/support rugby benefits their emotional and mental health.¹

HAVE SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Try to prioritise planning activities that you enjoy. Physically setting aside time to spend on activities we find fun can help us to make them a priority and do more of the things that make us feel good. Our research suggest that people feel better when they plan and do activities that they enjoy and find relaxing, whatever those activities may be.

DEVELOP AWARENESS OF YOUR FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

Name one feeling you are experiencing right now. Do not judge it but focus on how it feels in your body and your thoughts around it. The more you practice being aware of your feelings and how they change in different situations, the better your ability to understand and manage them. It will help with the actions you take and beliefs you form based on those situations. It can help you build closer relationships.

GET MORE FROM YOUR SLEEP

Sleep makes a huge difference to our physical and mental health. Adults typically need between seven and nine hours a night whereas children need eight to ten hours a night. Some people find sleep easier than others but there are simple steps you can take to improve the quality of your sleep: get into a routine, wind down before going to bed, reduce light and sound, don't stress and get up if you're not tired.



"Being physically active is proven to be beneficial for mental health, and rugby is a great way of meeting the physical activity guideline. Being part of a team is like having another family, with the support they can offer when you're having a bad day. Sleep is essential, and helps us to recover from both physical and mental exertion. There is emerging evidence that good nutrition may contribute to the prevention of mental health problems and in managing recovery from mental health issues."

-Dr Katy Hornby
England Women's
Senior Team Doctor



BUILD MONEY SKILLS AND SEEK FINANCIAL SUPPORT IF YOU NEED IT

Learning how to manage your money and dealing with financial issues head on can help you improve other parts of your life, such as sleep, work and relationships, which may be affected by money worries. One in five adults in the UK live with debt and money worries. Debt can sometimes be unavoidable but if you feel yours has got out of control, then consider getting advice. It is never too late to ask for help.

TAKE CONTROL

One way of managing stress in life is to take a little control. There will be things in life that you cannot change and have to accept, and there are other things that you have some influence over. Try not to waste your energy worrying about the things you cannot change, instead concentrate on the things that you can.

Simply writing a list of things that are worrying you can help. This is a way of taking them out of your head to give you perspective on them and is the first step in making a change. The more in control of your life you feel the less you will worry about the things that are out of your control.

SET REALISTIC GOALS

When injury happens it is important that as you begin the recovery process, you may very well have to learn to measure your successes very differently than ever before, perhaps in millimetres now instead of meters. It may mean that you have to start all over again back at 'square one' to

build up arm or leg strength and endurance. Keep focused on your **NEW** goals and leave the old ones in the **PAST** for now, where they belong. Once you've fully recovered from your injury you can start entertaining your old goals.

“When you’re coming back from injury you know the destination you want to get to and it can feel far away, but it’s the small steps that get you there. Focusing on the little, practical things you can do every day means that even if things aren’t progressing how you would like you’re still ticking off goals, which will help give you a sense of achievement. The better you feel mentally, the more motivated you will be to rehab and return. And find yourself a buddy, they’re great for sharing the moments of frustration, but also celebrating the breakthroughs in recovery.”

-Simplyhealth ambassador,
Dylan Hartley

FIND YOUR BALANCE

A passion for playing rugby should be balanced with a passion for something outside playing the sport too. Spending time doing other things that you enjoy, like being with family, socialising with friends and spending time with pets, will help you achieve a balance in life that maintains good mental health and wellbeing.

Consider some other activities outside rugby that are of interest to you and commit some time to exploring them.





SUMMARY

OUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ARE DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER AND SO IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AS WELL AS YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH. GIVING YOURSELVES PERMISSION TO PRACTICE LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF IS ESSENTIAL IN BUILDING RESILIENCE TO COPE WITH LIFE'S STRESSES.

The resource gives evidenced based, practical and relevant guidance for everyone, prepared and researched by The Mental Health Foundation. Better mental health can lead to better performance levels because issues are tackled earlier. It can also lead to welcoming spaces for all and to be able to serve the needs of their communities.

We welcome the work already happening across England to harness the power of sport, community and of being outdoors, which we know are all important for our mental wellbeing.



SIGNPOSTING

RUGBYSAFE

W: englandrugby.com/rugbysafe

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

The MHF offers information on mental health, mental health problems, self-help and how to get help.

W: mentalhealth.org.uk

SIMPLY HEALTH

W: simplyhealth.co.uk

A: simplyhealth.co.uk/apps/simplyme.html

UKCOACHING

Provides guidance on how coaches can promote good mental health through their coaching.

W: ukcoaching.org/resources/expert-opinions/mental-health

THE SAMARITANS

A free, 24-hour helpline offering support and a listening ear whenever you need it.

W: samaritans.org

E: jo@samaritans.org

T: 116 123

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CHILDLINE

Especially for children. A free, private and confidential service where children can talk about anything, whatever their worry, whenever it is needed.

W: childline.org.uk

T: 0800 1111

NHS 111

24-hour advice on urgent medical concerns from a trained advisor that can help you connect to a nurse, GP or emergency dentist if needed.

T: 111

YOUNG MINDS

A charity specifically focused on promoting positive mental health in children and young people.

W: youngminds.org.uk

T: 0808 8025544

PARENTS AND CARERS

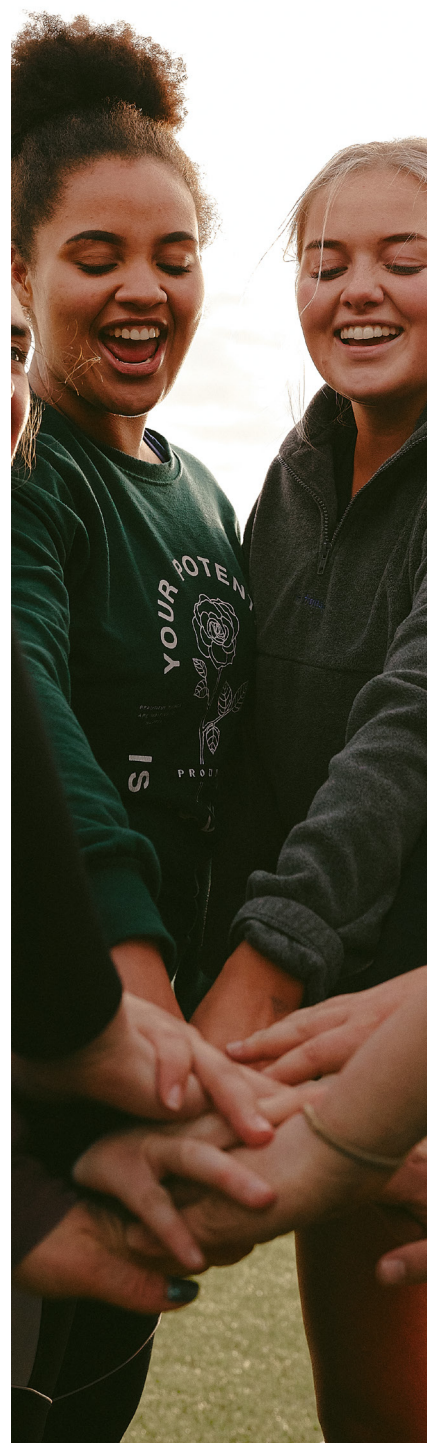
W: youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline

T: 0808 8025544

STUDENT MINDS

A charity that works with students and universities to improve the mental health of students.

W: studentminds.org.uk



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