

# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Helping someone with a mental health problem can be very rewarding. But it can also be time-consuming and emotionally overwhelming.

Here are five evidence-based tips<sup>1</sup> to support your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.

No	Tip	Description	For example, for referees:
1	<b>CONNECT</b>	Feeling close to, and valued by, people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world. Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend County FA training events;</li> <li>Join the local Referees' Association (LRA);</li> <li>Complete fitness training with other referees, rather than on your own;</li> <li>If you're a referee, be proactive in contacting your coach or mentor;</li> <li>Form networks with other match officials, particularly those at similar stages of development;</li> <li>If you have access to HIVE, contribute and be active;</li> <li>Connect away from refereeing, e.g. make sure you spend time with your family, walk the dog, socialise with friends etc.</li> </ul>
2	<b>BE ACTIVE</b>	Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups. Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete fitness training regularly.</li> <li>Officiate as much as you are able, ensuring balance with other commitments.</li> <li>If feasible, continue to play (this will also help your refereeing);</li> <li>Be active away from football, e.g. play other sports that absorb and relax you.</li> </ul>
3	<b>TAKE NOTICE</b>	Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can strengthen and broaden awareness. Studies show that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing and savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare properly for matches (e.g. ensure you have the necessary kit and equipment).</li> <li>Set yourself realistic goals for each match and training session.</li> <li>'Do your homework' on the teams you will be refereeing (e.g. check out positions in table).</li> <li>Treat every match as your most important of the season.</li> <li>Provide leadership on match day to other match officials in your team (e.g. assistant referees).</li> <li>Don't allow yourself to be distracted from the job in hand when training or on matchday;</li> <li>Check in with how you're feeling. Focus on your breathing.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>From the New Economics Foundation 'Five Ways to Wellbeing': [www.neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d\\_uzm6b1n6a.pdf](http://www.neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d_uzm6b1n6a.pdf)





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4	<b>KEEP LEARNING</b>	Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning in particular, has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend County FA, Referees' Association and (if applicable) FA training events;</li> <li>Learn from others through HIVE (if applicable);</li> <li>Continuously self-reflect on and analyse your own performances;</li> <li>Be proactive in seeking advice from other match officials, including mentors and coaches;</li> <li>Engage in post-match feedback sessions with observers, mentors and coaches;</li> <li>Push and prepare yourself to attain the next level through the promotion system;</li> <li>Take up a hobby or interest away from refereeing.</li> </ul>
5	<b>GIVE</b>	Research shows that giving makes you happier. People with a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank the other members of the match officials' team post-match;</li> <li>If refereeing youth football, encourage the players during matches;</li> <li>Give some time to help develop other match officials (e.g. through mentoring or tutoring).</li> </ul>

Day-to-day, try to:

- Take a break when you need it to put football and refereeing into context. It's a game which should be fun and enjoyable;
- Talk to someone you trust if you're not feeling well;
- Set limits and be realistic about what you do;

### DEALING WITH PRESSURE/STRESS IN A REFEREEING CONTEXT

Certain amounts of pressure are good for referees. The right amount of pressure can help you perform which, in turn, can support your wellbeing. However, too much pressure could push you towards stress which might mean you become tired, irritated and experience heightened anxiety.

There may be times when you are refereeing that something happens that makes you feel stressed. For example, you might be verbally abused by a parent or you might have given an incorrect, match-affecting decision. Wanting to progress or having to maintain the required levels of fitness might also cause you to be stressed.

Outside refereeing, you might be feeling stressed as a result of day-to-day life (e.g. exams, relationships or work) or having to balance your refereeing with everything else you do.

Stress isn't a medical diagnosis but severe stress over a long period of time may lead to depression or anxiety. Therefore, recognising that you are stressed and acting early is important to your wellbeing.



## HOW DO YOU MINIMISE POTENTIAL STRESS?

1. **Be organised:** e.g. plan your journey, leave on time, pack the right kit – don't leave anything until the last minute.
2. **Have a planned pre-match routine:** Visualise particular situations e.g. meeting the coaches pre-match, dealing with players wearing incorrect kit and even plan key timings before the game.
3. **Have a 'what if' plan to help deal with potential stressors** e.g. plan what you're going to say and do if you are verbally abused by a parent, or how you might deal with dissent from a coach.
4. **Look after yourself:** e.g. eat the right food, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, breathing exercises. There's lots of information about this on the Mind website [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/).
5. **Do something different:** Rather than focusing all your energies on refereeing, do something different and distracting, e.g. spend time with friends/family, engage in different activities.
6. **'Control the controllables':** Accept that there are some things you can't change/influence and try not to worry about them e.g. a low mark from an Observer or a club.
7. **Postpone your worries:** Rather than thinking constantly about things that are worrying you, write them down (in a 'Worry Diary') and deal with them at one point only for a fixed time period (e.g. for 15 minutes each evening).
8. **Get support for your refereeing from your family:** (and, if applicable, your employer) to reduce any worry about being away from them.
9. **Put things in perspective:** For most referees, it's a hobby. Also, don't be afraid to say 'no'. If you really feel like refereeing will make you feel worse, don't do it.
10. **'Self-talk':** Have a set phrase or set of words to help you through potentially stressful situations in a match and to help you remain positive – could be something as simple as "come on Jimmy/Jane" or even counting to 10.
11. **Use association:** If you feel down or anxious pre-match listen to some music that you associate with happiness to boost your mood.
12. **Turn off social media:** What are you really going to gain from knowing what clubs think post-match?

There's also lots more tips on managing stress on the Mind website: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress#.Xh8vl8j7SUK](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress#.Xh8vl8j7SUK)

To take it one step further, there's also a template for a bespoke Wellness Action Plan you can download from the Mind website, to help keep your mental health on track: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/)





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“I had suffered from undiagnosed depression for many years and really struggled between college, uni and part-time jobs. I eventually got into teaching assistant work, and also started a refereeing course and loved it. But the depression didn’t go away. I made some suicide attempts, and was hospitalised.

“With the right care, I started to recover and got back into refereeing. The FA really supported me and told me to take my time. I also had the support of my coach and Anthony Taylor, my FA regional core leader, kept in contact with me after visiting me in hospital.

“Getting support is so important, even if it’s just a chat. Football is such a huge binding force in this country – let’s all use it to create better mental health for everyone.”

**Lucy Briggs, Referee**

