

# Information for grassroots clubs

## **Why is mental health important for mainstream community clubs?**

Mental health problems are extremely common. One in four people will experience a mental health problem in any one year, and over 10% of people have depression at any one time.

The examples of Robert Enke, Frank Bruno and Marcus Trescothick show that mental health is relevant to everyone in sport, even at the elite level.

When players have a physical injury like a broken leg, clubs can't do much except for wait for it to heal. Mental health problems are harder to see. But the way that coaches and team-mates behave can make things much better or worse - so it's important for clubs and coaches to have an awareness of mental health. Your club also has a legal obligation under equality law; people with mental health problems must be treated fairly.

## **What are mental health problems?**

It's easier to think of mental health as a scale, with good mental health at one end, and poor mental health at the other. People move about this scale on a daily basis – with most of us having reasonable mental health for most of the time.

Some people will develop mental health problems for a period of time, possibly in response to prolonged stress, a bereavement or other life-changing event. Some mental health problems are recurrent, such as bipolar – there are periods, possibly several years, between episodes. Some problems are more permanent conditions, such as schizophrenia – but these can be managed so that people can get on with their lives for most of the time. Sport and physical activity has benefits for everyone's mental health.

## **Why should clubs welcome people with mental health problems?**

There are probably people with mental health problems in most football clubs. However, the stigma around mental health means that often people are not comfortable about talking about it.

Often discrimination, or the fear of being discriminated against, is as big an issue as the mental health problem. As a result people with mental illness can often find themselves withdrawing from normal activities and being isolated. This can make mental health problems worse. Football can help to break this isolation and include people more in everyday life and their communities.

[The FA](#) has been working with [Time to Change](#) to deliver awareness training, helping to mainstream clubs to be inclusive and welcoming to people with mental health problems. Any further training sessions will be advertised here and promoted through County FAs. You can also download the training packs and resource packs with additional information.

## **Tips for coaching people with mental health problems**

No-one expects coaches to be experts in mental health. However, coaches should be comfortable in changing their practice to meet players' mental health needs. While there aren't firm rules that can be applied to everyone, the tips below should be helpful:

- It's good to talk about mental health! Getting things out in the open can be a huge help.
- Coaches might be robust or assertive when dealing with under-performance or poor technique – this may be less appropriate for players with mental health problems.
- Be prepared to provide alternative exercises if players aren't comfortable in a group situation.
- Transport can be a cause of extreme stress, particularly when getting to new places – can team mates provide assistance?
- Make sure that if players know if they don't feel able to train or compete that they can just come along and 'be' in the group if that helps.
- Get additional information about a diagnosis or the effects of a medication if you think that will help your coaching.

There are lots more information for sports coaches in The FA and Time to Change training workbooks and resource packs that can be downloaded here: <http://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/equality/mental-health>

You will also find resource documents containing contacts of useful Mental Health organisations.

## **What are the legal requirements for clubs?**

Under the 2010 Equality Act, mental illness can be a 'protected characteristic' in the same way as a physical disability, ethnicity or sexuality. This means that you can't exclude people or disadvantage them because of their mental health problem.

There is more detail on the Equality Act at the [Government Equalities Office website](#), and they've produced a [guide specifically for private clubs](#) such as football clubs.