

## Setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries and providing support to your champions

Boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that define acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for your workforce, participants and champions.

Boundaries exist to protect people. Setting clear boundaries is necessary for all services, and it's a crucial step when designing your mental health champions initiative. It's vital to establish what expectations you have for the role.

Relationships with colleagues and participants will vary depending on the other roles your champions have within your organisation. Your champion may also be a coach, leader, safeguarding officer, development officer or line manager. These multiple roles will have an impact on the way other people interact and respond to them in a champions role – both positively and negatively.

Your organisation, group or club's policies (HR, equality, lone working, safeguarding, codes of conduct, etc) should support you to establish clear boundaries for your champions so that they can have positive conversations about mental health awareness.



## Things you need to consider



### Time

Understand how much time champions can offer. Don't pressurise them to overcommit, and support them to maintain a focus on their own wellbeing.



### Skills and experience

Be clear about what professional skills, knowledge and experience your champions have. Encourage them to use these skills in the champions role, and provide training and support to address gaps in their knowledge.



### Sharing personal contact details

How will champions interact and communicate with people? You might want to consider setting up a separate email address for the champions role, or to provide dedicated contact details.



### Social media activities

What is your organisation, club or group's policy about interacting with people online and via social media? It may be appropriate to develop guidelines, or to revise them to help champions fulfil their role successfully. It's common for people to reach out for support through social media, but this is likely to be outside of the boundaries in your existing policies.



### Sport and physical activity sessions

Your champions scheme may involve delivering new activity sessions to engage people with mental health problems. Are your champions, coaches and volunteers knowledgeable and confident to work with people with mental health problems?



### Confidentiality

Be clear on what champions can and cannot keep confidential, and the circumstances in which things that have been shared with them may need to be shared elsewhere. Look for this information in your data protection and confidentiality policies. You'll find more information in our guide to [safeguarding and managing risk](#).



### Supporting your champions' mental health

Champions will need support to manage their own mental health. Think about the support that's already available, that you can put in place before starting a champions scheme.

- Encourage the champion to prioritise their own mental health by developing a wellness action plan (WAP).
- Regular support and supervision from a line manager, supervisor or coordinator of the champions scheme. This could include a regular check-in, or adding a question about personal wellbeing.

- Peer support network – where champions can share their own experiences and challenges, either face to face or online through a closed group on Facebook.
- Signposting to mental health services available nationally and locally (see Annex G).
- Formal or informal buddy systems to give your champion the chance to talk to someone other than their line manager or champion scheme coordinator.

You may also have access to additional support in-house or through partners via an employee assistance programme or other tailored mental health and wellbeing support programme. These benefits may include:

- Free or subsidised private medical insurance.
- Access to counselling at work.
- Access to mentors, coaches or sports chaplains.

## Tips for maintaining appropriate boundaries within your champions programme

This toolkit has already outlined roles and actions that may not be appropriate for a champion to fulfil. Below are more examples, that may not be appropriate for champions to fulfil, to help you define and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries for the role:

- Being contacted outside of work or volunteering hours – including through social media – to provide emotional support with mental health and wellbeing.
- Providing people with lifts to GP/therapist appointments, etc.
- Providing mental health therapy or counselling support.
- Diagnosing people, offering medical or clinical advice or interventions.
- Dealing with challenging behaviour such as abuse or threats.

It's important to be clear on what you expect from your mental health champions. Create a role description, offer training and written guidelines to help them fulfil the role, and provide ongoing support, mentoring and training to deal with any questions they may have.

Providing a positive experience for your champions will help to ensure you retain them. Fulfilled champions can help your organisation raise awareness of mental health problems, and engage people in physical activity to encourage and maintain positive mental wellbeing.

## Tips for maintaining appropriate boundaries within your champions programme

### 1) Maintaining clear boundaries starts with understanding and defining the role

- Identify the kind of activities your champions will be responsible for delivering.
- Be clear about what activities they will undertake.
- Encourage them to stay within the remit of the role.
- Encourage champions to use any skills they may have gained from training such as Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity, Mental Health First Aid or ASIST suicide prevention.

BUT always remember that the champion's role is to raise mental health awareness, reduce stigma and discrimination and engage people in sport and physical activity for wellbeing.

NOT as a counsellor or mental health nurse. You may have champions who are trained counsellors or mental health professionals, but a champion's role is to listen and signpost, not to make a professional judgement.

### 2) Signpost people to further information and support

- Encourage champions to ask: "What would you like to happen?" This helps to empower and encourage the person to take the course of action that's right for them.

### 3) Be clear about what champions can do, as well as what they can't

- Consider what supervision or support is available to champions. Do you have champion network meetings? Who is the dedicated contact person for champions working in the community with clubs and groups, who they can talk to for advice?
- They may be able to offer support and advice locally via mental health expert organisations or charities.

### 4) Explain the champion's role and its limits to colleagues and participants so you can manage people's expectations

- Be clear what activities champions will be undertaking as part of their role. For example, they could say, "My role as a mental health champion is to share information that promotes awareness of how to keep yourself mentally well through physical activity".

### 5) Communicate the reasons for the boundary

- If someone asks for direct advice or help beyond the limits of the role, champions could say: "I don't have the right knowledge, skills or experience to help you with this, but I can suggest other sources of support you might find helpful."

### 6) Ensure champions don't make promises they can't keep

- For example, don't tell someone that you'll keep everything they tell you confidential if there's a chance you might need to alert someone else in your organisation, club or group.