

Section one

Setting up a mental health champions scheme

What are mental health champions?

A mental health champion is someone who takes action to raise awareness of mental health and challenge stigma. Stigma is when we make assumptions about how a mental health problem will affect someone's behaviour. In turn, this makes it more likely that they will be labelled as different, strange, or even dangerous.

In some cases, and where trained appropriately, champions can help those who are experiencing mental health problems by signposting them to appropriate support services.

Mental health champions aren't expected to be experts in mental health, or to diagnose mental health problems. Instead, their role is to promote positive mental health and to signpost to relevant support and help, where appropriate.

Who can be a mental health champion?

Anyone can be a mental health champion

Champions don't need personal experience of mental health problems. Those who do have lived experience of mental health problems may find it helps them to start conversations and challenge stigma. Any action that a champion takes – no matter how big or small – helps to end stigma and raise awareness.

What's involved?

Being a champion is a voluntary role, so it's important to give careful thought to how you can best use your champions to bring about positive change.

As with any volunteer role, people are choosing to invest their time, so it should be a positive experience for both the champion and the organisation, club or group. You can help by:

- having a clear purpose for the role
- providing a positive experience and a feeling of achievement
- encouraging your champions to bring their own skills and experiences to the role
- empowering them to develop new skills and experiences
- setting and maintaining boundaries
- being clear on the help available to support their own, and other people's, mental health.

Important note

Champions aren't expected to be mental health experts – neither are they Mental Health First Aiders unless they have completed the appropriate training. Advice, support and counselling should only be provided by professionals. Instead, champions can help people find the right professional support through appropriate signposting.

With input from sport and physical activity organisations, we have identified two important mental health champion roles for the sport and physical activity sector:

- 1 Workplace mental health champions**
Encouraging positive mental health and challenging stigma within the internal workforce – both paid and voluntary – and workplace. This role is covered in Section two.
- 2 Community mental health champions**
Promoting the benefits of participating in sport and physical activity to maintain and improve mental health within local communities. These champions might work or volunteer within a club or activity group. This role is covered in Section three.