

Guide 1: Understanding mental health

Sport and physical activity for people with
mental health problems: a toolkit for the sports
sector



Guide 1: Understanding mental health

This guide covers

- What mental health is.
- What causes mental health problems.
- How mental health problems are diagnosed.

What is mental health?

Just as we have physical health, we all have mental health too. The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.¹

What is mental wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing describes the wider set of thoughts and feelings that influence our emotions and day-to-day behaviour. Just as we can look after our physical health, we can do to take care of our mental wellbeing too. Looking after our mental wellbeing can play an important role in developing our ability to cope with the ups and downs of life. More information about mental wellbeing can be found on [Mind's website](#).

What are mental health problems?

Approximately 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in any given year.² Common mental health problems include depression and anxiety, while less common problems include schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

If you experience low mental wellbeing over a long period of time, you may be more likely to develop a mental health problem. If you already have a mental health problem, you're more likely to experience periods of low mental wellbeing, but that doesn't mean that you won't also experience periods of feeling well. Mental health problems can affect the way you think, feel and behave. They can affect anyone regardless of age, race, religion or income. Physical health problems tend to be better understood than mental health problems, and there is still stigma and confusion around mental health diagnoses.

1 World Health Organization. *Mental Health: a state of well-being*. Available at: http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/ (Accessed June 2017)

2 *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2007* (England) Available at: <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/psychiatricmorbidity07> (Accessed June 2017)

What causes mental health problems?

Mental health problems can have a wide range of causes that can be complex and interrelated. In most cases, no one is precisely sure what the cause of a particular problem is – it's likely to have been a combination of factors.

A list of common causes can be found on [Mind's website](#).

Some people may also be more likely to develop mental health problems because of their background and life circumstances. It can be hard enough living with a mental health problem, but when a person also faces stigma and discrimination because of their ethnicity, sexuality, disability or other, things can be even harder. As a result, a person may be at a greater risk of developing a mental health problem because of their:

- Age
- Race
- Faith
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Disability or long-term health condition
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Marriage or civil partnership

Support services may have little understanding of what people from different backgrounds and life circumstances need. Because of this lack of understanding many people who already face multiple barriers then become more unwell and reach crisis point.

More information about people who face multiple barriers and discrimination can be found on [Mind's website](#).

Mental Health Myth Busters

Lots of myths and misconceptions surround mental health. These can make it more difficult for people with mental health problems to seek and find appropriate help and advice. Myths and misconceptions also make it more difficult for the public to fully understand mental health, and can fuel the stigma that people with mental health problems often face.

The Time to Change campaign aims to raise awareness of mental health and works to end the stigma surrounding it. Run by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, it has a wide range of resources to help you discover more about mental health and separate the myths from the facts. [Take the Time to Change Mental Health Quiz](#) to see how much you know.

How are mental health problems diagnosed?

When diagnosing a mental health problem, doctors look for groupings of certain symptoms. For more common problems, particularly depression and anxiety, a doctor will normally conduct a short questionnaire with their patient to make an assessment.

Less common mental health problems are usually diagnosed by a specialist such as a psychiatrist or a psychologist. While there may be common symptoms associated with mental health problems, we must remember that the way people experience them can be very different. Labels and diagnoses do not define a person, nor do they shape a person's entire life.

There are a number of common mental health diagnoses, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Phobias
- Eating problems
- Bipolar disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorders

More information on each of these can be found on [Mind's website](#) and our [YouTube channel](#).

How are mental health problems managed and treated?

If you have a mental health problem there is a range of support and treatment available. Some of the most common are listed below. Different communities manage wellbeing in different ways, so it's important to deliver culturally appropriate support. For example this could involve delivering interventions in familiar surroundings by people from a similar background to your audience.

Arts therapies

Arts (or creative) therapies involve using the arts in a therapeutic environment with a trained therapist. The different types of regulated arts therapies include:

- Dance movement therapy
- Drama therapy
- Music therapy
- Visual art therapy

Ecotherapy / Nature-based interventions	<p>Ecotherapy and nature-based interventions cover a wide range of treatment programmes which aim to improve mental and physical wellbeing through doing outdoor activities. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gardening • Conservation • Physical activity in the natural environment <p>You can hear from people who have benefited from getting active in nature on Mind's YouTube channel.</p>
Peer support	<p>Peer support is when people use their own experiences to help each other. Forms of peer support include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community groups • Mentoring • Befriending • Self-help groups • Online communities • Support groups <p>Roseanne from the Swift Tees community running group talks about how she found peer support through sport in this video from Mind's Side-by-Side peer support programme.</p> <p>Further information about peer support can be found on Mind's website.</p>
Psychiatric medication	<p>Psychiatric medication includes all drugs which can be prescribed to treat different types of mental health problems, or to reduce the symptoms. There are four main types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antidepressants • Antipsychotics – drugs used to treat the symptoms of psychoses when a person perceives or interprets reality in a very different way from people around them • Mood stabilisers • Sleeping pills and minor tranquilisers <p>First-hand accounts about the effects of different forms of medication can be found on Mind's YouTube channel.</p>

<p>Sport and physical activity</p>	<p>In guide 1 of <i>Delivering a sport and physical activity service: a toolkit for mental health providers</i>, we looked at how physical activity can support physical and mental health.</p> <p>Mind's Get Set to Go programme is changing lives with support from Sport England and the National Lottery. In the heart of communities, our local Minds are providing bespoke Get Set to Go sports programmes to get people moving.</p> <p>These programmes are removing the barriers to physical activity that people with mental health problems often face.</p> <p>A collection of stories from people with mental health problems who have overcome barriers to getting active can be found on the Get Set to Go website.</p>
<p>Talking treatments</p>	<p>Talking treatments involve talking to a therapist about your thoughts and feelings. Common talking treatments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – a form of psychotherapy, which looks at how your feelings, thoughts and behaviour influence each other and how you can change these patterns. A video guide to CBT can be found on Mind's YouTube channel. • Counselling – a shorter and more focused treatment than psychotherapy that provides a safe and confidential space to talk about your thoughts and feelings.

To find out more about the different support available to manage and treat mental health problems visit [Mind's website](#).