

Overcoming barriers to activity for people experiencing mental health problems

The table below provides some tips on how you can work with participants to help them overcome some of the common barriers they may face.

Your first step should be to ask the participant about their needs. By empowering the participant to provide this information, you will be in a better position to understand the barriers they face and find the appropriate solution for them.

Barrier		Possible solutions
Physical	Participants may have other health conditions or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure coaches are aware of any disabilities or health conditions of participants in the session, and that a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) or health questionnaire is completed. Coaches should be aware of participants' needs and differentiate the session accordingly. ● With PAR-Q information, consider how this personal data is stored and used. You can find guidance in Guide 7: Measuring the impact of a physical activity and mental health service.
	Medication may make participants feel particularly tired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer sessions at a range of different times. ● Encourage participants to consider when they feel most energetic and to sign up to sessions taking place at those times (where possible).
	Medication can cause increased sensitivity to the sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remind participants to bring sun cream and a hat to the sessions especially during the summer.

Barrier	Possible solutions	
Physical (continued)	Medication can increase thirst levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage participants to bring their own water but provide water if possible. ● Encourage participants to take breaks during the session.
	Medication and certain mental health problem symptoms such as hearing voices may make it difficult for participants to concentrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask the participant what support they require so you can adapt activities accordingly. ● This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing shorter, fun, have-a-go type sessions and regular breaks. – Making activities easier and less demanding. – Keeping instructions clear and concise and avoiding jargon.
	Having to travel long distances to access the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If no local service is available, could you provide travel support? ● Work with partners to provide sessions in a range of community venues.
	Participants not comfortable attending sessions in person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deliver sessions online or virtually. ● Record or broadcast sessions taking place in person.
Technical	Participants may not understand the rules, or feel intimidated by technical instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer short taster sessions. ● Make sure rules are clear and simple, and keep them relaxed.
	Coaches and officials may not understand participants' needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure you provide appropriate training for coaches if needed. The first step should always be to ask the participant about their needs.

Barrier	Possible solutions
Psychological	<p>Participants may feel anxious about trying a new experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide images or videos of the venue, facilities and staff who deliver the activity to help reduce anxiety for new participants (see pages 21-22 of Mind's Developing peer support in the community: a toolkit for a template). You could also create a video tour of your venue, such as this one from Kimberley Leisure Centre. ● Ensure images on your promotional material accurately reflect the session. ● Arrange a phone call or send an email before the first session to explain what the participant will be doing. Answer any questions and explain what they will need to bring and what will be provided. ● Invite them to 'buddy' with an experienced participant or a volunteer with personal experience of mental health problems. ● Provide positive case studies showing examples of other people who have gone through the same experience. You can find some on the Mind and We Are Undefeatable websites. ● Encourage them to use the Side by Side online peer support site where they can ask community members for tips, advice or encouragement to help them take that first step.
	<p>Participants may feel anxious about being in a group setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Speak to participants who are anxious about engaging in a group to find out what you can do to reduce their anxieties. ● Have a point of contact participants can speak to ahead of their first session, at the start of activities and for the first few weeks and months. This can help to reduce their anxieties and provide a welcoming experience for everyone. ● If existing participants are happy to do so, you could showcase the benefits they have experienced from taking part. You could present this as a video or case study.

Barrier	Possibly solutions	
Psychological (continued)	Participants may find decision making difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage them to see taking part in a sport and physical activity service as a good opportunity to practice decision-making skills. ● Provide opportunities for participants to improve their decision-making skills. For example, is there the opportunity for participants to support an official during a match?
	Participants may have bad days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure coaches are trained in how they can support someone if they're not feeling well. ● Provide a quiet room or space. ● Make sure another coach or volunteer is available to take over the session if needed. Find more guidance on our website.
	Safety and hygiene concerns, especially if activities are taking place indoors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clearly communicate the steps that you and your partners are taking to ensure participant safety. These may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Protocols you have put in place at the venue concerning physical distancing and hygiene. – The protocols the coach will put in place before, during and after the session. – Reducing the need for participants to complete paperwork.