



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS IN CRICKET



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Introduction

Mental health is a key aspect of our overall health. Like physical health, it is something that every individual has and must look after. We all enjoy times in our lives when we feel good and full of energy, and we all experience times that are more difficult.

Mental health can be affected by circumstances, challenges, environment and personal factors. Sport can bring extra pressures like competition, injury, performance demands, and media. These challenges can affect mental health at any level of the game. This is particularly important in elite sport as evidenced by a 2019 study which found that 1 in 3 elite athletes reported symptoms of anxiety/depression¹.

This resource aims to increase understanding of mental health, help spot the signs of potential poor mental health and provide guidance on how to look after one's own mental health.

Mental health is a topic that is often seen as difficult to speak about openly due to the attached stigma. This resource also aims to encourage open and supportive conversations on this important subject.



You will get help from people you never imagined, but we don't speak because we are hesitant. We don't want to be looked at as mentally weak. Trust me, faking to be strong is far worse than that. I'm not feeling any shame that I was feeling mentally weak.

Virat Kohli^{iv}



Understanding mental health

What is mental health?

Mental health is a dynamic state of well-being in which people can variably realize their potential, see a purpose and meaning in sport and life, experience trusting personal relationships, cope with common life stressors and the specific stressors in elite sport and are able to act autonomously according to their values.ⁱⁱ

In other words, mental health is something that we all have, all of the time, just like physical health, and it is normal for this to change over time.

How is mental health different to a mental health problem?

A mental health problem is a pattern of behaviour, experiences, thoughts and feelings that causes significant distress and/or impairment of daily functioning and/or difficulties in relationships with others. Such distress or impairments are most likely to be experienced over a period and are not easily alleviated by an individual's typical coping strategies.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, a mental health problem is not just having one bad day, rather it is experienced over time and significantly impacts daily life.

A helpful way to think about mental health is as a scale with mental health problems at one end and positive mental health at the other. It is normal for people to move up and down this scale of mental health over time. Small changes are often manageable but sometimes extra support is needed.



Spotting the signs of potential poor mental health

Spotting the signs of potential poor mental health

It might not always be obvious that someone is struggling, but there can be signs that might be more noticeable, such as:

- Saying they don't matter
- More tearful
- Being late to or missing things
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Tired
- Sleeping or eating more or less
- Changes in routine
- Not caring for themselves
- Talking about themselves negatively
- Withdrawn
- Unusually clumsy
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- Lacking in energy
- Restless
- Agitated

This is not an exhaustive list. It could be any change in their behaviour, meaning the better you know someone the more likely you are to notice this. We might also notice these signs in ourselves which could be a helpful prompt to look after ourselves or reach out for help and support.

Positive mental health starts with environments where people are able to ask, “are you okay?”. Noticing these changes can be the prompt for us to ask this question and this is something that we can all do with the people around us.

The extent to which you are involved in supporting others will differ depending on your roles and responsibilities. For example, a medical representative speaking to a player would likely speak to them in more detail about their problem and be more involved in helping them find the right support, than two teammates who may just have the initial conversation with each other.

[Find out more](#)

This video explains more about spotting the signs that someone is struggling.



Mental Health Awareness in Cricket



Positive mental health starts with environments where people are able to ask, “are you okay?”

Looking after yourself

Self-care refers to the things we can do to help maintain positive mental health. It could mean taking time to rest, eat well, stay active, connect with others, and do things that help you relax and feel good. It also includes recognising when things feel too much and knowing when to ask for help.

In international cricket this can seem tricky on the surface as you can't always stop or take time out, however it is about finding what works best for you. It is also important to plan self-care around specific times in the year that may be more busy or stressful. We can use the concept of the stress bucket to monitor our stress levels and remind us to use our self-care strategies regularly.

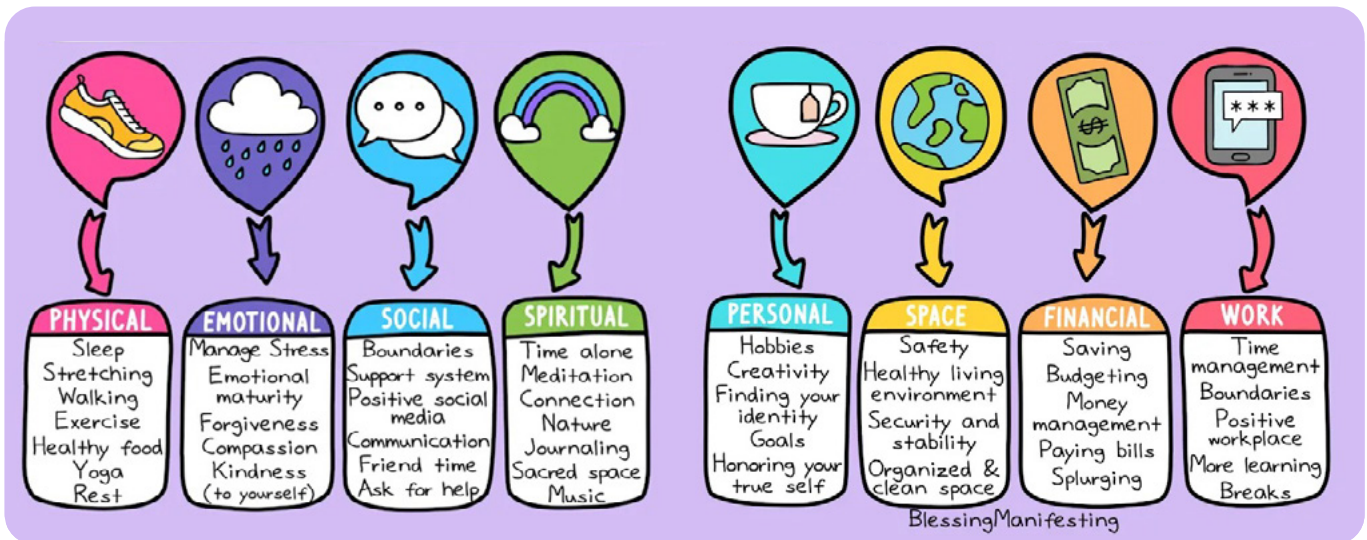
What fills and what empties your bucket?



[Find out more](#)

self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you.

It's important to have a good understanding of how to take care of yourself, especially as you approach high pressure periods. This could be before you prepare to travel for a long trip away, or at the end of a challenging series. A few suggested self-care techniques are listed below. While this is not a complete list, you may find that some of these ideas help you relax, reduce stress, and support overall wellbeing.



Having a personalised plan for keeping yourself mentally healthy will have a big impact on your ability to remain focussed, manage pressure and perform at your best. We recommend following the steps below to help you do this.

1. Assess

Identify what you currently do or could do/aim to do to stay physically and mentally healthy and consider which combination of things work best for you.

2. Plan

The next step is to design a plan to put this into action. One tool that can help you to assess and plan your self-care is the UKSI Energy Plan. A copy of this, filled out as an example, is available in the appendix.

3. Share

Sharing your plan will help you to follow it, allow others to better support you and help you to role-model behaviours which promote positive mental health. Think about who you would want to share your plan with – this will likely be people who are involved in your plan and who are able to support you.

4. Review

Take opportunities to try out your plan and see how it plays out in practice, what works and what doesn't. It'll be much easier to follow your plan in a more intense environment if you're already comfortable with using it and confident that it will help you.

Following this process of Assess, Plan, Share and Review for your self-care can help ensure that when it comes to high pressure periods, we are fresh before, at our best during and rested and supported after.



Looking after others

This final section will look at how we can support others with their mental health. As shown in the last section it is important to take care of yourself and your own mental health first, to be able to help others.

We can all play a role in promoting positive mental health by having supportive conversations with others, particularly after noticing concerning signs.

Below are some helpful dos and don'ts for having these supportive conversations:

Dos...

Create **time and space** for conversations

Show **concern and empathy**

Be curious about others

Listen and try to understand

Role-model and encourage **good self-care**

Ask if they are worried about hurting themselves or others

Ask what they **think will be helpful**

Be **clear and realistic** about what support you can and cannot offer them

Let them know **what you will do next**, this could be another conversation or letting someone else know

Don'ts...

Avoid the topic

Tell them to **'get on with it'** or ignore it

Tell them to **'keep busy'**

Assume the problem **will go away**

Think you need to **have all the answers**

Keep everything to yourself – whilst confidentiality is important, if you think there is a risk of harm to themselves or others you should break confidentiality and contact emergency services

Deal with things alone – some conversations can be difficult and it is important you look after yourself as well and get support if needed

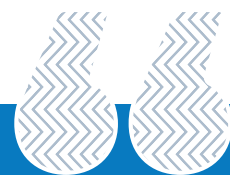


Beyond supportive day-to-day conversations, we can also think about when people might need more support and be proactive in checking in with them and letting them know what help is available.

For example, we might do this with a player following an injury, with an official under scrutiny from the media, someone struggling with personal relationships, teammate after an intense competition schedule or a player who has recently retired. All of these are examples of times when we could predict that mental health may be affected.

Whilst promoting positive mental health is everyone's business, it is not your responsibility to solve someone's problems or provide them with professional support beyond the scope of your role. Therefore, it is important to know where you can direct someone to receive additional support if needed.

Contact your employer for information on the mental health support services available.



It's quite powerful for people to see. Sometimes it's okay not to be okay, to ask for help is perfectly alright and a brave thing to do. For someone like Ben to do that - hopefully if there are people out there struggling or finding things difficult, they can gain the courage to ask for that help."

Joe Root

Discussing Ben Stokes' decision to take a break from cricket for his mental health [✓]







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ENERGY PLAN

This plan helps you notice and manage your energy so you can perform and feel your best. It can also help others understand and support you, should you choose to share it. If you need support filling out the plan reach out to someone in your support network for help.







 GOOD DAY	 BAD DAY	 BOOSTERS	 ZAPPERS	 SUPPORT	 ACTIONS
When things are 'good' I know because...	Things that can challenge or stress me...	The main things that give me energy are...	The main things that take energy from me are...	My go-to support person is...	I will commit to...
When things are 'good' others will see...	When things are 'bad' others will see...	Other factors that can make me feel better are...	Other factors that can make me feel worse are...	Other people I could seek support from are...	When I can't say how I feel I might show it by...
When things are 'good' others might not see...	When things are 'bad' others might not see...	Signs that my energy levels are increasing are...	Signs that my energy levels are decreasing are...	I will share my energy plan with...	I will ask for help when...

This document was created in collaboration with UKSI Mental Health, Performance Lifestyle and Psychology teams

ENERGY PLAN

EXAMPLE TEMPLATE

This plan helps you notice and manage your energy so you can perform and feel your best. It can also help others understand and support you, should you choose to share it. If you need support filling out the plan reach out to someone in your support network for help.

 GOOD DAY	 BAD DAY	 BOOSTERS	 ZAPPERS	 SUPPORT	 ACTIONS
When things are 'good' I know because... I am playing well and able to hit my targets in training.	Things that can challenge or stress me... Difficult playing conditions and long travel days	The main things that give me energy are... My family and my partner and spending time with them. Playing video games.	The main things that take energy from me are... Not being able to get enough sleep and not eating well.	My go-to support person is... My partner.	I will commit to... Checking in with my energy plan and updating it. Being kinder to myself on bad days.
When things are 'good' others will see... I am more outgoing and happy to chat to people.	When things are 'bad' others will see... I am more irritable and grumpy and don't want to talk to people.	Other factors that can make me feel better are... When my coach gives me praise on something that I have done well.	Other factors that can make me feel worse are... When the coach only points out things I did wrong and is overly negative.	Other people I could seek support from are... My sport psychologist, my parents and brother.	When I can't say how I feel I might show it by... Being quieter and not as loud. Not wanting to do things I usually would.
When things are 'good' others might not see... I am kinder to myself in the way that I think and feel.	When things are 'bad' others might not see... I have a lot of negative thoughts and feelings about myself and my performance.	Signs that my energy levels are increasing are... I start playing better and have more energy on the pitch. I am more up for social things.	Signs that my energy levels are decreasing are... I will be more withdrawn and don't want to hang around with other people.	I will share my energy plan with... My coach and my team mates.	I will ask for help when... My boosters are not helping me feel better.

This document was created in collaboration with UKSI Mental Health, Performance Lifestyle and Psychology teams



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