

# Supporting mental wellbeing in community sport

## A guide for responding

This is a four-part suite of resources designed to help sporting organisations support the mental wellbeing of young people aged 12-24 years.

It includes a:

**toolkit:** containing eight actions, this toolkit aims to provide sporting organisations with a clear framework and some practical tools to ensure that they are supporting young peoples' mental health and wellbeing

**checklist:** once you have read the toolkit, use the checklist to tick off the ways your club can provide a safe and inclusive environment for players

**guide:** a practical guide to identifying and helping young people with signs of mental ill-health

**video:** a discussion featuring a young person, coach and research expert on how to have conversations about mental health in community sport.

If you're involved in community sporting groups – such as being a coach, parent, volunteer or official – this guide may help you look out for the signs that a young person may be struggling with their mental health, and to get advice on how you can act on anything you notice.

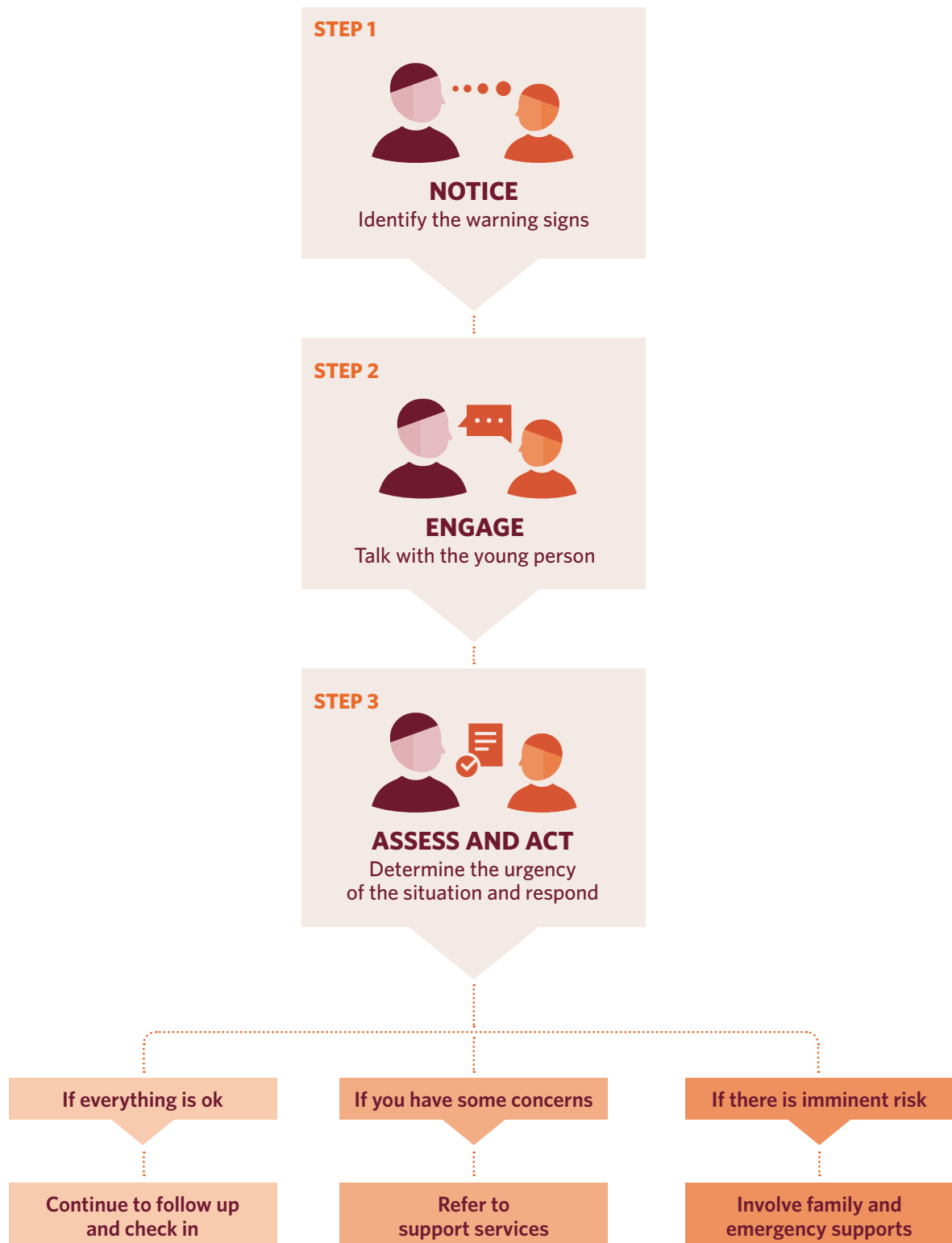
### How do I approach a young person if I'm worried about their mental health?

The main thing to remember is to talk with a young person and to listen. This may seem scary at first because you might not know how to respond if a young person tells you something worrying. This first step is important in supporting the young person to seek appropriate help, as you may be the only person who has given them an opportunity to ask for help. Often, young people struggling with a mental health problem are looking to be steered towards resources or people who can help them, but won't always know how to start the conversation. As a member of the community your role is to support the young person to seek appropriate support, rather than feeling as though you alone need to solve the immediate problems the young person presents with.

# About the guide

This guide offers a simple, step-by-step approach to supporting young people's mental health within a sporting organisation. It includes tips on how to engage with young people and act on the things they tell you. It can be used by coaches, administrators, teachers, and other adult role models.

**FIGURE 1** A guide to responding





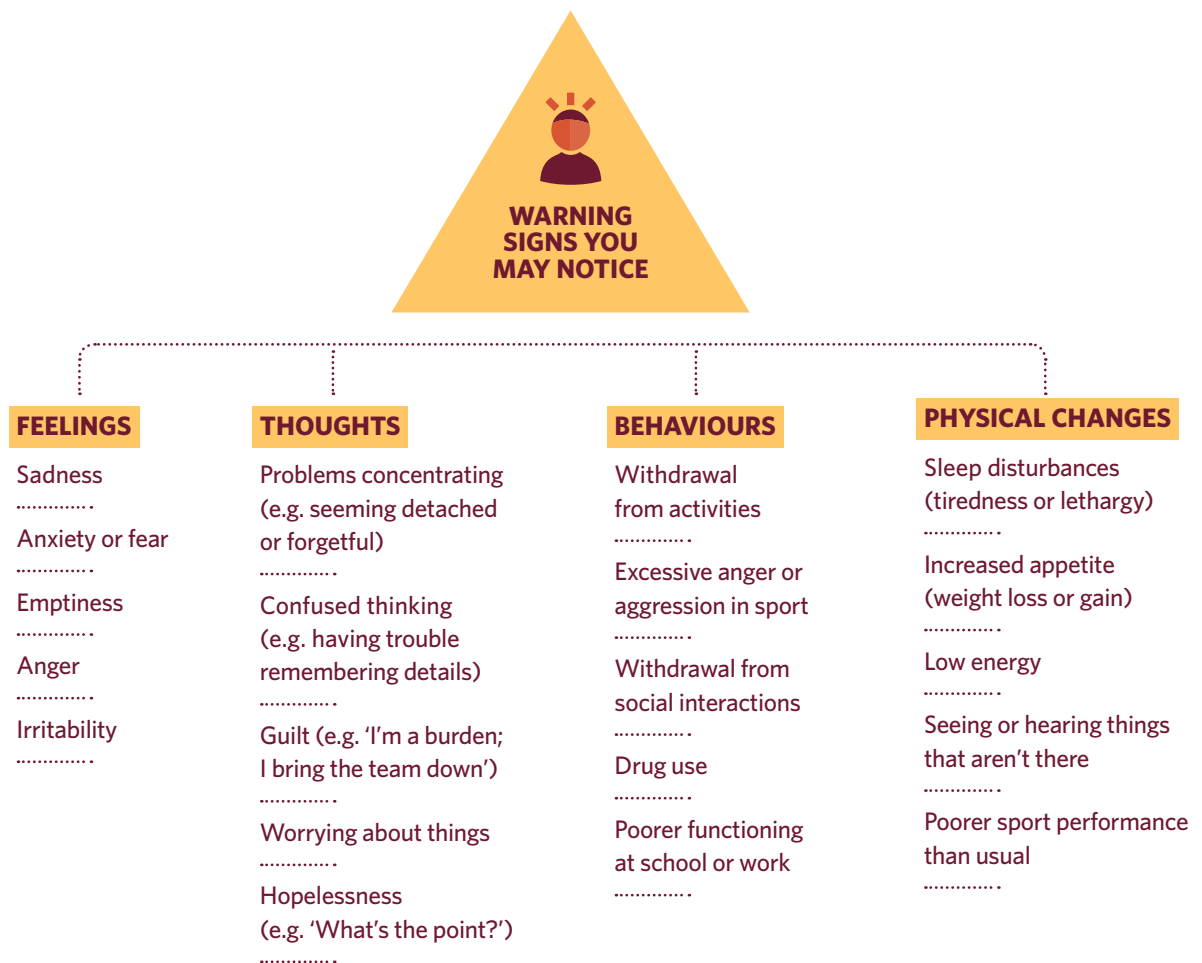
# STEP 1. NOTICE

## Identify the warning signs

The first step involves looking out for behaviours that seem out of the ordinary for a particular young person. These can be called 'warning signs' and might suggest a young person would benefit from mental health support. Although there is no single sign that indicates mental ill-health, here are some key factors that you can use as a guide:

- Sometimes when a person is going through a difficult period, they withdraw from others, either by not attending their sports activities or by not participating as actively.
- When you have developed a relationship with a young person, you can begin to notice signs of change. For example, changes in how they are communicating, their appearance, their emotions, or their interactions with others.
- Risk can be a key warning sign and may encompass:
  - statements or behaviours reflecting thoughts or an intent to harm oneself, or that life isn't worth living
  - statements or behaviours that reflect an intention to harm other people
  - behaviours that might put someone in risky situations. For example, drug use, or reckless behaviours.

**FIGURE 2** Examples of warning signs you may notice





## STEP 2. ENGAGE

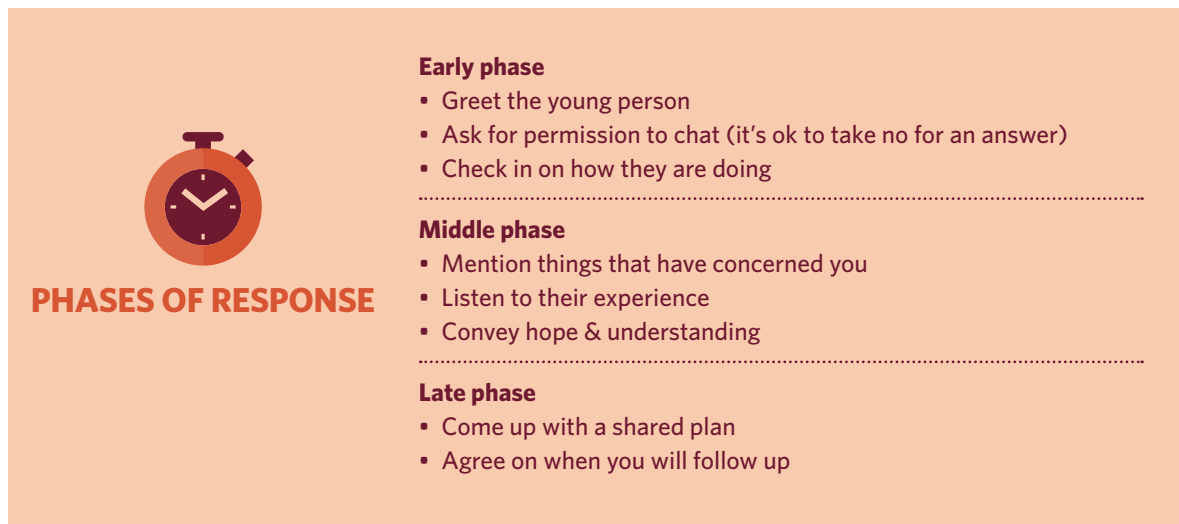
# Talk with the young person

Promoting mental health in community sports settings begins with opening up conversations with young people. This helps you get a better idea of what is happening for them, build up a trusting relationship, and if needed, make a sensible plan to support the young person.

Some of us can be uncertain when talking to young people about their mental health because we fear that once we raise the topic, we need to have all the answers.

But supporting a young person you're concerned about is as simple as starting a conversation and listening. Figure 3 offers some advice about structuring the conversation.

**FIGURE 3** 'Phase of response' during a conversation



## Communication style

When engaging with a young person, it's important to remember that *how* you speak with them can be just as important as *what* you are talking about.

Start out by choosing the right time and place for the conversation, with respect for the young person's preferences. For example, you might suggest speaking with the young person after training, rather than just

before a match or event. Being sensitive to the young person's needs will give them some privacy and ensure that you have enough time to go into some detail if required.

Once you're in an appropriate setting, be mindful of how you communicate and practice active listening. Figure 4 has some guiding principles:

**FIGURE 4** The art of the conversation





## STEP 3. ASSESS AND ACT

# Determine the urgency of the situation and respond

The message a young person conveys during your conversation is useful for determining what they need from you. Typically, there are three key messages that will emerge from your conversation. These messages are outlined below, along with suggestions for what to do.

### Message 1: everything is ok

If everything seems to be going fine, you can follow up with the young person at a later time to check in with them about how things are going. This is important as it conveys that your support is ongoing and builds a supportive and trusting relationship.

### Message 2: some concerns are present

If you have some concerns about their mental health, you can suggest to the young person that they seek help from local support services. These kinds of services vary by location, but might include:

- a general practitioner (GP) or family doctor
- [headspace](#): a service for counselling or other supports
- [ehedspace](#): for online mental health support.

### Message 3: imminent risk

Sometimes when talking with a young person, they might say something that suggests they are in danger or pose a threat to themselves or others. This is called 'imminent risk' and it requires an immediate response from you. Examples of imminent risk include when a young person:

- describes a specific plan to end their life at any moment
- behaves in a way that is violent towards others
- behaves in a bizarre manner that makes you feel that they may not be able to get home safely.

#### Responding to imminent risk

If you're concerned that a young person is at imminent risk, it's important to involve emergency supports, which can include:

- 000 for an emergency services response. This should be the first contact for situations of safety, such as an imminent risk to self or others
- a [local mental health crisis assessment and treatment \(CAT\) team](#).

These situations also warrant contacting a young person's family, or other key supports, to inform them of your concerns and involve them in planning for the care of the young person.

# Where can I get more help?

Be sure to check out the other resources within this suite, including the [checklist](#), [toolkit](#) and [video](#).

## Further resources

[Mythbuster: suicidal ideation](#)

[Mythbuster: self-harm](#)

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