

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING TOOLKIT

for coaches looking to inspire  
the next generation of girls to  
be physically and mentally active  
and healthy through sports



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING TOOLKIT

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Queer Sista Platform

Community Psychosocial Support Organisation (CPSO)

Right to Play Canada

Skate Like A Girl

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# INTRODUCTION

## How did this toolkit come to be?

In 2019, Women Win, in collaboration with Skateistan, launched the **ROLL Models programme**. By engaging young coaches and leaders across Europe in leadership workshops and a small seed grants programme, this initiative aimed to;

**Strengthen the leadership, agency and autonomy of young women and non-binary persons**

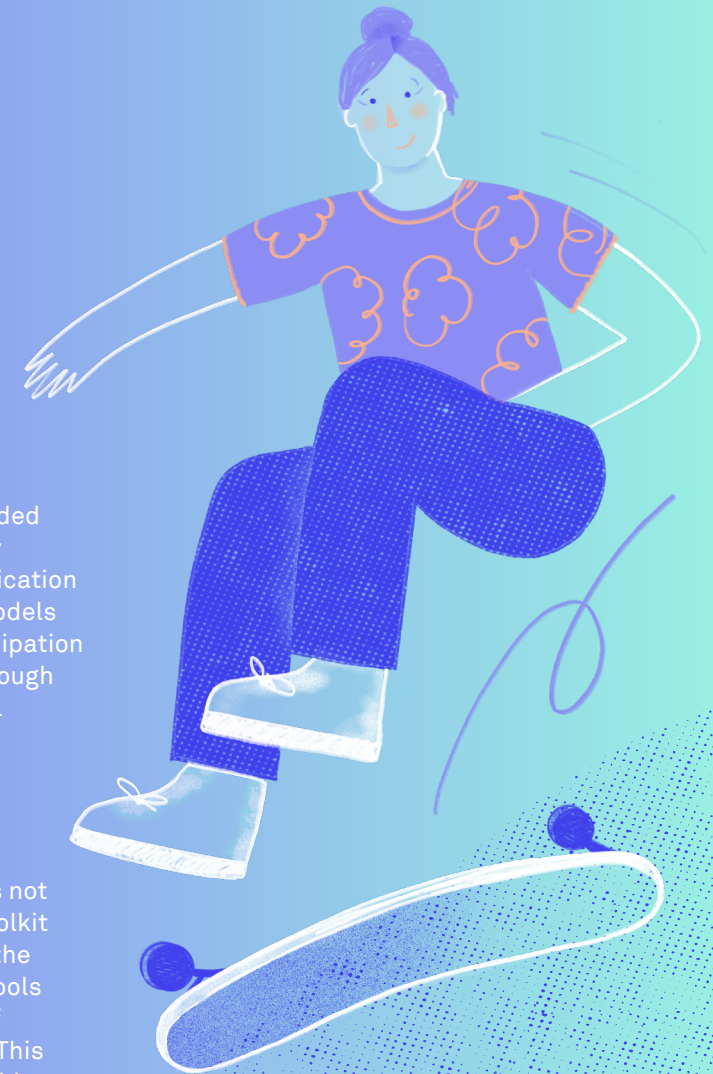
**Provide funding for selected ROLL Models to design and deliver local social skateboarding initiatives with the objective to get more girls on their boards**

**Challenge gender stereotypes and improve gender equity within skateboarding, a typically male-dominated sport**

While the primary objective of ROLL Models aims to address the absence of female leadership in sport —a vital precondition to girls' greater participation and retention— an additional component of ROLL Models was supporting participants' mental health and wellbeing through the creation of a toolkit.

While mental health and wellbeing was not intended to be a key focus of the programme, what quickly became apparent through the programme's application process was how intrinsically linked the ROLL Models saw mental health and wellbeing and their participation in skateboarding. This was further confirmed through open and honest conversations during which ROLL Models shared personal experiences of how skateboarding was a pivotal factor in supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

While the correlation between positive mental health and wellbeing and participating in sport is not new, as we began conducting research for the toolkit and exploring this topic further, we saw a gap in the availability of coach and organisation-oriented tools to inform and support work at the intersection of mental health and wellbeing, sport, and gender. This toolkit aims to explore this intersection and provide practical resources and activities to support mental health and wellbeing in girl-centred sports programming.



## What is this toolkit?

Harnessing all of the learnings from ROLL Models and WW partners globally who focus on mental health and wellbeing within their sports programmes, this toolkit will act as an on-the-go 'toolbox' for coaches looking to generate discussions around mental health and promote mental health and wellbeing, inspiring the next generation of girls to be both physically and mentally active and healthy through sport.

Knowledge is power. Inspired by this feminist value, this toolkit will provide information regarding the physiological link between playing sport and positive mental wellbeing, as well as intentional mental health and wellbeing practices that can be easily embedded within sports programming.

## Who is it for?

This toolkit is aimed at women and non-binary coaches and leaders who are delivering existing sports and life skills programmes and who want to actively incorporate practices that maintain and support their participants' mental health and wellbeing.

## Why now?

Historically, the power of girls and women to address issues, drive change and transform communities has been underestimated. More recently, there has been a significant shift in the visibility of youth-led activism, with girls and women working tirelessly to address diverse issues such as; climate change, education for women, period poverty, and child marriage. Across the world, the voices of girls and women are finally being heard. WW believes that girls and women are fully equipped with all the skills and expertise to change and transform their communities. Through sport, girls and women can embody leadership and exceed the gender limits placed upon them.

Mental health has increasingly become a significant topic to address among girls, women and non-binary people. Recent studies have shown that mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are becoming more prevalent, with the former being the leading cause of illness among adolescents globally. Additionally, the development of this toolkit coincided with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, which has had severe repercussions on communities around the world. While we are only beginning to understand the various impacts that COVID-19 has had around the world, it has become clear that mental health issues in girls, women, and

non-binary people have been significantly exacerbated as a result of isolation, social restrictions, stress, and loneliness.

In a survey of

**98**

**social skateboarding projects worldwide by Skateistan in 2021,**

**42%**

of respondents reported an

**INCREASED FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

for their staff and participants to help manage the negative effects of COVID-19.

The convergence of these two factors has driven the development of this toolkit, which aims to support young women and non-binary coaches to embed mental health and wellbeing practices in sport programmes.

## How do you use it?

The toolkit aims to be an ‘on-the-go’ resource that can be used by coaches to guide them in addressing mental health and embedding practices into existing sport sessions that address different aspects of mental health and wellbeing. The toolkit contains a catalogue of various activities that coaches can use to generate conversations around mental health and encourage both participants and coaches to prioritise their mental health and wellbeing.

Women Win understands that strategies to address mental health and wellbeing are not one-size-fits all, and encourages coaches to contextualise these practices to the needs and understandings of the groups and communities they engage with.

## Limitations

While we have conducted thorough research and collaborated with partners who are experienced in the field of mental health, it is important to note that Women Win is not a mental health expert. This toolkit aims to support coaches to incorporate mental health and wellbeing practices into their programmes and should not be used as a substitute for professional advice, particularly for severe mental health issues and disorders. Women Win encourages coaches to seek the advice of a mental health professional or other qualified service provider with additional questions regarding mental health diagnosis or treatment.

The research for this toolkit has primarily relied on the experiences of Women Win’s partners who work with girls and young women in a variety of regions and contexts. We acknowledge the importance of understanding how other marginalised genders and the intersection of other identities (e.g. girls with disabilities, Indigenous girls, girls of colour, refugee girls, mestizas) impacts the way young people experience sport and mental wellbeing. Women Win strives to continue learning about the experience of other marginalised genders and how to reflect those lessons as this toolkit continues to evolve.



# GLOSSARY



## ANXIETY

Anxiety is an emotion characterised by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.<sup>i</sup>

## COACH

Girls, women and non-binary individuals who implement their own projects or activities, or those of the organisation at which they work or volunteer.

## COGNITIVE

The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.<sup>ii</sup>

## CORTISOL

Cortisol is our body's stress hormone. While short-term release of cortisol is important in supporting your body during stressful situations, raised levels of cortisol over long periods of time have a detrimental effect on the body and can lead to anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders.

## DEPRESSION

Depression is a medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed.<sup>iii</sup>

## DOPAMINE

The hormone responsible for allowing you to feel pleasure, satisfaction and motivation. When you feel good that you have achieved something, it's because of a surge of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is also involved in memory, focus, mood, sleep, motor control and stress response.

## ENDORPHINS

Endorphins are hormones that help manage stress and fatigue, regulate sleep patterns, and lower your perception of pain. The feeling of happiness you experience after finishing exercise is largely due to endorphins being released.

<sup>i</sup> "Anxiety", American Psychological Association.  
<sup>ii</sup> "Cognition", Cambridge Cognition.  
<sup>iii</sup> "Depression", American Psychiatric Association.  
<sup>iv</sup> "Euphoria", Cambridge Dictionary.  
<sup>ii</sup> Cambridge Cognition.  
<sup>iii</sup> American Psychiatric Association.

# GLOSSARY



## EUPHORIA

Extreme happiness, sometimes more than is reasonable in a particular situation.<sup>iv</sup>

## GIRLS

When WW refers to girls, we include; all cis, trans, non-binary and all other underrepresented groups and communities such as black, indigenous, mestizas, people of colour, LGBTQIA+, refugees, and migrant girls and women with or without disabilities.

## MENTAL HEALTH

WW defines Mental Health as a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own abilities and resiliency to cope with the normal stresses of life.

## NOREPINEPHRINE

A key hormone for mood regulation, norepinephrine is also responsible for increasing concentration and ability to focus and perform a task, emotional management and stress response.

## PHYSIOLOGICAL

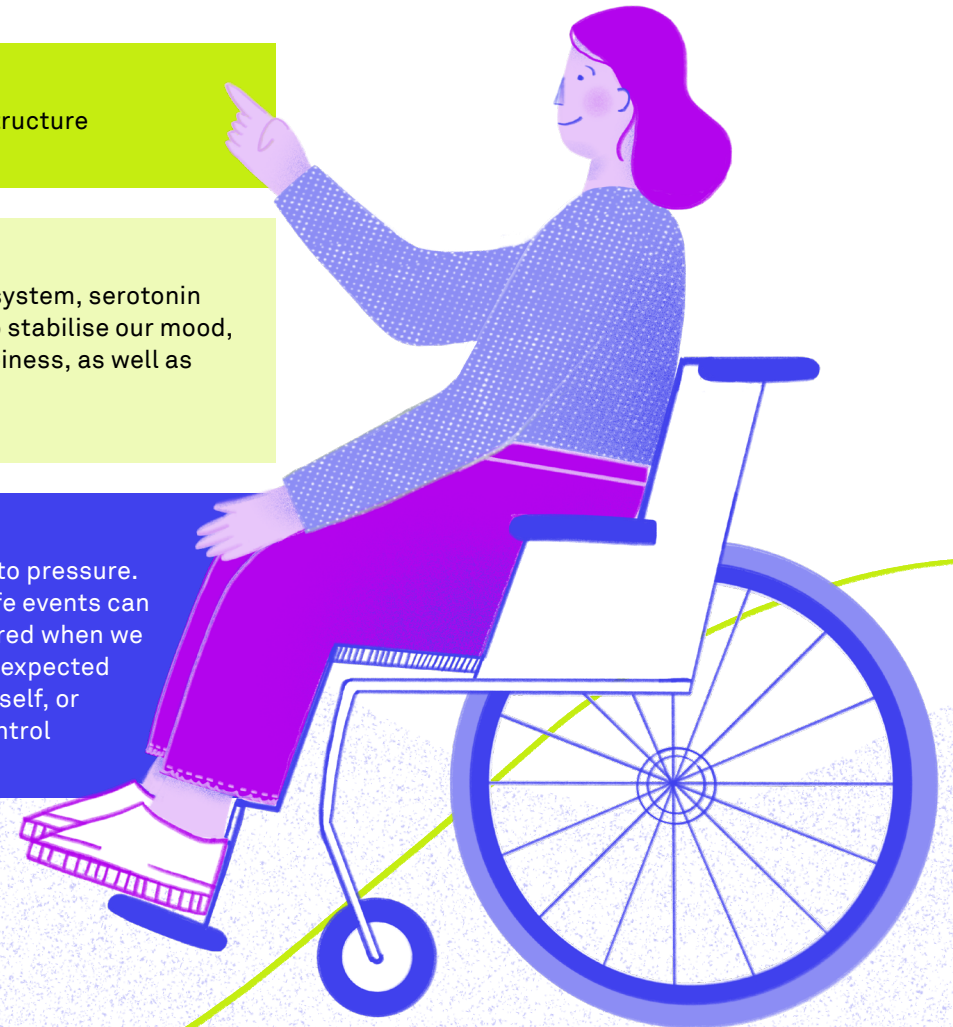
Relating to the function and structure of our bodies.<sup>v</sup>

## SEROTONIN

Mostly found in the digestive system, serotonin is a key hormone that works to stabilise our mood, feelings of wellbeing and happiness, as well as regulate anxiety.

## STRESS

Stress is our body's response to pressure. Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation.



<sup>v</sup> [“Physiological”](#), Cambridge Dictionary.

<sup>iv</sup> [“Stress”](#), Mental Health Foundation.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND SPORT



Working with the feminist understanding that knowledge is power, this section aims to provide a simplified overview of some of the biological processes that take place within the body when we exercise and explain why and how this can improve mental health and wellbeing.

When this toolkit refers to physical activity and exercise, we include any activity in which you use your body, work your muscles, and expend energy.

# SPORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The positive impact between being physically active and mental health has long been established, and research has shown that regular participation in physical activity and sports can lead to:

IMPROVED MOOD

REDUCED STRESS

INCREASED SELF-ESTEEM

IMPROVED SLEEP

But precisely how does sport and being physically active contribute to these positive effects on our mental wellbeing?



## The Science

As you exercise, your brain starts to produce several different neurotransmitters and hormones. These act as your body's chemical messengers, travelling in your bloodstream to carry vital information between your nervous system and the rest of your body.

Physical activity releases chemicals from your brain called **endorphins**, which are often referred to as 'feel-good' chemicals because of the feeling of euphoria they produce. The feeling of happiness you experience after finishing exercise is largely due to endorphins being released. Endorphins help manage stress and fatigue, regulate sleep patterns, and lower your perception of pain. In addition to endorphins, physical activity also stimulates your brain to produce: **serotonin**, **dopamine** and **norepinephrine**, alongside endorphins, all play a vital role in regulating our mood and supporting our mental health. Additionally, it is important to note that exercise also works to reduce **cortisol**, our body's stress hormone. While short-term release of cortisol is important in supporting your body during stressful situations, raised levels of cortisol over long periods of time have a detrimental effect on the body and can lead to anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. Regular physical activity works to reduce stress, improve overall health as well as sleep quality, which works to lower cortisol overtime.

As you can see, there are various, complex biological processes within the body that take place during exercise, all of which work to regulate mental health and wellbeing.

# SPORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

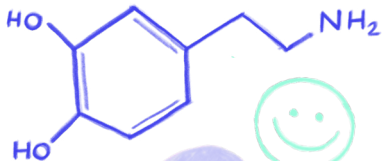
## SEROTONIN

Mostly found in the digestive system, serotonin is a key hormone that works to stabilise our mood, feelings of wellbeing and happiness, as well as regulate anxiety. Considered a natural mood stabiliser, low levels of serotonin have been associated with low mood and depression. Serotonin impacts every part of your body and is also responsible for stimulating parts of the brain involved in sleep.

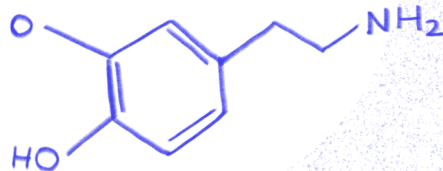


HAPPINESS

regulates ANXIETY



Low MOOD DEPRESSION



well being

ANXIETY  
depression



## NOREPINEPHRINE

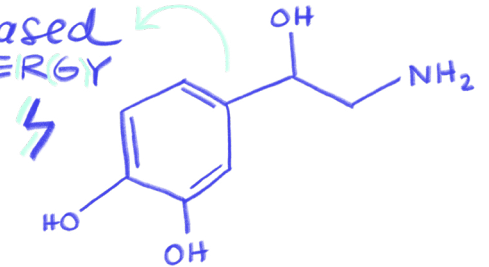
A key hormone for mood regulation, norepinephrine is also responsible for increasing concentration and ability to focus and perform a task, emotional management and stress response. In addition, during physical activity, norepinephrine is vital for increasing energy by signaling to the body to break down blood-sugar levels. Low levels of this hormone have been linked to anxiety and depression.



CONCENTRATING | /  
FOCUS

PERFORM TASKS ✓  
TASKS ✓

increased ENERGY



better MEMORY

pleasure\*



Sleep

Satisfaction

## DOPAMINE

A neurotransmitter and a hormone, dopamine is responsible for allowing you to feel pleasure, satisfaction and motivation. When you feel good that you have achieved something, it's because of a surge of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is also involved in memory, focus, mood, sleep, motor control and stress response.

# SPORT, MENTAL HEALTH, AND GENDER

Gender is a critical determinant of mental health and wellbeing, and there are gendered differences in the rates of common mental health issues such as depression<sup>1</sup> and anxiety. Women are nearly twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression. This is in part due to the differential power that women and men have over the socioeconomic determinants of their mental health, including their exposure to certain mental health risks such as income inequality, social position, gender-based roles, and the responsibility for the care of others.<sup>2</sup>

Adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to higher risks of developing mental health issues as they experience hormone changes during puberty, stress from navigating their emerging sexuality and identity issues, conflicts with parents or friends, and increased pressure in school, sports, or other areas of their life.<sup>3</sup> Because girls often reach puberty at an earlier age than boys, they often develop depression and anxiety earlier than boys do.

<sup>1</sup> [“Depression in women: understanding the gender gap”, Mayo Clinic.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [“Gender and women mental health”, World Health Organization.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [“Depression in women: understanding the gender gap”, Mayo Clinic.](#)

## Partner Case Study

### RIGHT TO PLAY, PAKISTAN

Right To Play (RTP) is a global organisation that works to protect, educate and empower children to rise above adversity using the power of play. Working in a variety of geographies, RTP supports children to stay in school and graduate, resist exploitation and overcome prejudice, keep themselves safe from disease, and heal from the harsh realities of war and abuse.

RTP began working in Pakistan in 2008. Since then, they have implemented a range of play and sports-based programmes to improve the quality of education, strengthen child protection, empower young women and girls, and promote social cohesion.

Due to the sensitive context in which RTP Pakistan operates, including the conservativeness of parents and caregivers, the organisation has decided to address any mental health related activities under psychosocial wellbeing. In their experience, mental health is not openly discussed in Pakistan. There is a pervasive stigma around people, including girls and young women, who visit psychologists or psychiatrists.

## Partner Case Study

### QUEER SISTA PLATFORM

Queer Sista Platform is an NGO initiated by queer women in Armenia guided by the vision of a safer and inclusive Armenia for LB womyn\*, queer\* and trans\* people. Its mission is to create safe spaces for LB womyn\*, queer\* and trans\* people promoting solidarity, mutual support and wellbeing. The platform aims to host different queer initiatives and become a space for queer women’s self-expression, self-organisation and collective peer and professional support.

Queer Sista Platform tries to stay away from strict definitions around wellbeing, as this is “not something that you “have” but it is a muscle that you need to work on constantly”. For them, wellbeing is “simply feeling good, a combination of skills that a person can gain to have opportunities to lead their lives better for themselves”.

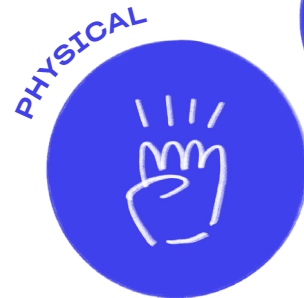
# SPORT, MENTAL HEALTH, AND GENDER

## Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences<sup>4</sup>

### HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



### ABUSE



### NEGLECT



Extensive research has shown that physical activity and sport enhance girl's and women's physical and mental health, including fewer chronic illnesses, reduced risk of obesity, healthier periods, stronger bones, and reduced substance use.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the physical benefits, there are psychological benefits to participating in sport for adolescent girls and young women. Sport can enhance mental health and wellbeing by offering girls an improved sense of self-esteem, positive body image, increased self-confidence, and tangible experiences of connection and competency.

#### Partner Case Study

#### QUEER SISTA PLATFORM

Queer Sista Platform sees sports as the starting point for individuals to think about their wellbeing, especially from a body awareness and social inclusion perspective. Therefore, sports play a fundamental role in the activities they carry out. Particularly team sports are used as community-building and organising strategies for LB womyn\*, queer\* and trans\* people.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> "The Importance of Mental Health in Women's Sports", World of Happiness Foundation.

# COACHING FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



This section of the toolkit is intended to offer coaches guidance for creating safe spaces in and through sport programmes that prioritise mental health and wellbeing in a healing-centred way. This section is not a methodology on formally treating or addressing serious mental health issues. As a coach, the information in this section should increase your capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of participants in your programmes, provide guidance on how to identify when professional mental health intervention may be needed, and institute restorative practices to safeguard your own mental health and wellbeing.

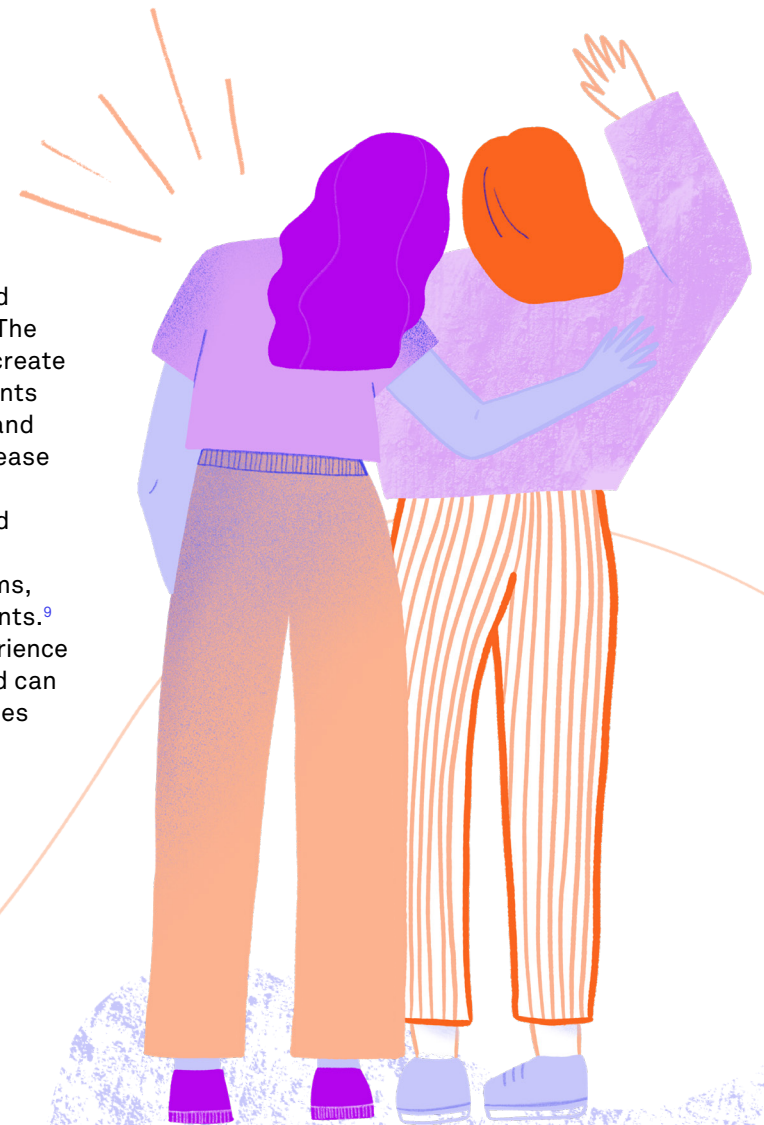
It is important to note, however, that as a coach you are not (necessarily) a mental health expert, nor responsible for “fixing” mental health issues for your participants. Understanding the limitations of your role as a coach can help you focus on the ways in which you can encourage your participants to prioritise their mental health and wellbeing and support them in seeking help when they need it.

# HEALING-CENTRED COACHING<sup>6</sup>

Mental health and wellbeing is a holistic concept that includes emotional, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects related to personal growth and development. Research increasingly shows that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—a combination of exposures including abuse, neglect, and household challenges—are linked to poor physical and mental health. Specifically, having a greater number of ACEs has been associated with increased risk of many physical, mental, sexual, and behavioural health problems.

Young girls are faced with additional risk factors, as gender-based roles and stressors are significantly related to depression, anxiety, and other common mental disorders. These include interconnected risk factors such as gender-based violence, socioeconomic disadvantage, low income/income inequality, and caretaking responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) around the world often face various and interrelated types of trauma<sup>8</sup> ranging from physical and sexual violence and abuse, emotional abuse, substance abuse, child marriage, human trafficking and forced sex work.

With this in mind, as a coach it is important to be aware of trauma and its impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of your participants. The goal of coaching with a healing-centred lens is to create a safe, non-violent environment in which participants can be empowered to make choices, collaborate, and learn. Sport and play are powerful vehicles to increase resilience, which enables participants to respond to future stress and trauma in positive, healing and healthy ways. Supportive coaching practices can lead to increased resilience and coping mechanisms, and a reduced fear of failure among your participants.<sup>9</sup> As a coach, you can have a large impact on the experience of your participants in your sports programme, and can play a huge role in creating safe, empowering spaces for girls to engage in activities that promote their mental health and wellbeing.



<sup>6</sup> [“Trauma Informed Coaching”, Women Win.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [“The Importance of Mental Health in Women’s Sports”, World of Happiness Foundation.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Psychological or emotional trauma can be defined as damage or injury to the psyche after living through an extremely disturbing or distressing event, and may result in challenges in functioning or coping normally after the event.

<sup>9</sup> [“Mental Wellbeing or Ill-Being through Coaching in Adult Grassroots Sport: A Systematic Mapping Review”, National Library of Medicine.](#)

# HEALING-CENTRED COACHING

## Partner Case Study

### COMMUNITY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION (CPSO)

Community Psychosocial Support Organisation (CPSO) works in South Sudan and Uganda to provide psychological and psychosocial support for victims of war and other violence. Their Women on the Move programme provides sport and play activities to enhance life skills and coping strategies, as well as offering counselling services to women and their families. Women and adolescent girls have the chance to play sport, create art, share experiences and support one another.

CPSO notes that active involvement in sports and play helps participants relieve stress, and participation in their psychosocial activities helps to relieve tension, nightmares, angers, and generally stabilizes the mood and recovery of participants. Psychosocial education helps to create self-awareness for mental health issues, strengthen positive coping skills, and identify participants who may be in need of mental health and psychosocial support.

## Partner Case Study

### RIGHT TO PLAY, CANADA

Through Right to Play Canada's Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program, Indigenous communities hire a local child-and-youth worker —a Community Mentor— who understands the needs of the community and can deliver a safe and inclusive play-based program intended to increase physical activity, teach positive coping skills, connect youth with local languages and culture, and build transferable life skills.

The specific challenges faced by RTP Canada's target groups are a result of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation and forced relocation of Indigenous communities that have eroded traditional family, community, political, and economic structures. Through using strategies that encourage youth to build coping strategies to manage challenges in their lives and support their overall wellbeing, PLAY programmes can help youth start to address intergenerational trauma within Indigenous individuals and communities.





# COACHING STRATEGIES



This section includes coaching strategies and practices that you can include in your programme or in the way you coach to support participants' emotional and mental health and wellbeing. There are undoubtedly other strategies that will support the mental health and wellbeing of participants in your programme, so please take these as guidance.

# CREATE A SUPPORTIVE TEAM CULTURE

Creating a team culture that values mental health and wellbeing will open up lines of communication for participants who might be struggling or need some extra support. Talk to your participants about the type of team environment they want to be a part of, as their input is crucial to creating a team culture they feel a sense of ownership in. Questions could include:

**What does it mean for you to really care about your teammate? What does that look like in practice?**

**How do you want to feel when you come to practice? How do you want to feel when you leave?**

**What does an emotionally safe space feel like?**

**When you feel overwhelmed, how do you calm yourself down? How can we, as teammates, help you through that process?**

**What types of things fill your emotional tank? What drains your emotional tank?**

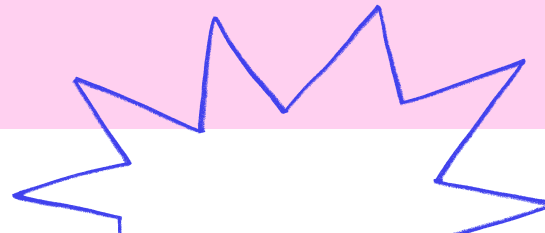
As a coach, one way you can influence your team's culture around mental health is to make time to talk about mental health and wellbeing and emotions during or after sports sessions. This can be through providing space for a few minutes of silence to practice mindfulness or meditation after practices, or having discussions around emotions before games. Sessions and activities can be found in the [Activities](#) section of this toolkit.

## Partner Case Study

### RIGHT TO PLAY, CANADA

Some RTP Canada programmes address wellbeing through the use of Indigenous cultural practices, such as the Anishnaabe medicine wheel, to discuss holistic health and wellbeing. This wheel is split into four quadrants (spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental), and symbolises the importance of balance between our inner aspects, and interconnectedness of ourselves to others and the earth.

Approaching self-care from these four quadrants includes nurturing each part through different strategies and self/community-care activities.



# CREATE A SUPPORTIVE TEAM CULTURE



## Partner Case Study

### QUEER SISTA PLATFORM

Queer Sista Platform has a variety of strategies to engage and support the mental health and wellbeing of LB womyn\*, queer\* and trans\* people. These include:

#### Camps and mini-camps on wellbeing and self-care.

In preparation for these activities, community members identify the key needs that should be addressed. In the past, these have included self-acceptance, self-awareness, fears and anxiety.

**Queer Home.** This serves as Queer Sista's work space and as a safe space where queer community members can convene for activities and events, or attend on a daily basis.

**Feedback strategies.** Queer Sista Platform is very active on social media. They have leveraged its survey functions to create a snowball effect for feedback where community members will ask around and collect feedback from their networks.

## Partner Case Study

### COMMUNITY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION (CPSO)

To create safe spaces to address trauma and mental health and wellbeing, CPSO coaches and psychosocial assistants are trained to develop trust with their participants and community members (parents, community leaders, etc.). Some of their strategies include:

**Training** psychosocial assistants and coaches to facilitate the weekly sessions and discussions

**Create** ground rules for safe spaces where participants and facilitators observe confidentiality and respect for one another

**Emphasize** that the ownership of the space is the responsibility of the beneficiaries, and that the psychosocial assistants/coaches only act as facilitators of the space

**Encouraging** participants to rely on the social support network that exists in their communities

**Organization staff** are given support for caregivers to relieve them from stressors

## PREDICTABLE ROUTINES

Incorporating predictable routines during your sport practices can help reduce the stress of participants because familiar patterns are calming. Patterns do not require participants to wonder what is going to happen next or to feel some level of anxiety in preparation for something unexpected to occur to or around them. Of course, you are encouraged to change the content of the practice as much as needed, but the general flow of the sessions should be consistent. Some examples of consistency in practice include:

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Introducing and discussing the daily objectives of the session before you begin a practice

---

Warming-up and stretching every session\*

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Practicing new drills for 20 minutes and then moving to the next activity

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Having a water break every 15 minutes

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Always ending with a team circle and then high fives

\*Although the warm-up portion may vary from session to session, and its content might be different from the past, participants in your programme will know that this component will be present and therefore, will provide a sense of stability and predictability.

## TEAM CIRCLES

There are several theories as to why humans have a tendency and preference to gather in circles. One theory explains that humans associate geometric shapes with emotions, and that circles correspond to happiness.

In sports, when included in a team circle, a shift in power moves from the coaches and most talented participants, to an equal feeling of involvement and empowerment for all those involved. A circle provides the team an opportunity to look each other in the eye and share in the moment, and allows members to identify themselves as a cohesive unit.

There are many opportunities to use circles in games, matches and sport practices. Examples include doing a team circle so that participants can check-in before practice, using the team circle as an opportunity to implement a quick connecting activity, and even using it during closure at the end of the practice.

## PROGRESS VS. OUTCOME GOALS

Loosely defined, outcome goals are a result you'd like to achieve, and progress goals are the objectives that you set for yourself in order to improve. Although outcome goals can facilitate short-term motivation, they often lead to anxiety before and during practice or competition. Too much focus on a specific performance goal can create outsized anxiety.

Therefore, when interacting with participants in your programme, you should ensure setting progress goals for the team and/or for participants individually. It is important you celebrate participants' progress goals. For instance, congratulating a participant for how hard they were training or how well they listened in a particular training session (and not necessarily for the amount of goals they scored).

# POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Self-talk is the constant stream of unspoken thoughts that are running through your head. This can often be either positive or negative, and can have a great impact on your sense of self, motivation, and capacity. Below are some examples of positive and negative self-talk:



I've never done it before

It's too complicated

I'm too lazy to get this done

It's too big of a change

I'm not going to get any better on this

No one bothers to talk to me

There's no way it will work



It's an opportunity to learn something new

I'll tackle it from a different angle

I wasn't able to fit it into my schedule, but I can re-examine some priorities

I'll take a chance

I'll see if I can open the channels of communication

I can try to make it work

I'll give it another try

As a coach, it's important to help participants in your programme understand that they can turn negative thinking into positive thinking, and that this process of creating a new habit will take time and practice. This is especially true during sports, when participants can engage in negative self-talk after they make a mistake. This can have an impact on their view of themselves and the game. When coaching, here are some tips for guiding participants in your programme to practice positive self-talk:

- 1 Create positive thoughts by framing your words as positive. If you say "Don't let them score!", their main thought is on avoiding a negative action, whereas if you say "Play tough defence!", it creates a successful mental image of what they should do.
- 2 When giving feedback, try to start with constructive criticism, and end with what they did well. This will leave your participants with a picture of what they did right and how to be successful.
- 3 For every 1 negative piece of feedback you give, try to make 4 positive comments. This is because negative feedback will often weigh heavier in the participant's mind. You don't need to do this every time you interact with them, but over time (e.g. a week, or a month), as over-complimenting will not be effective if the positive feedback is not genuine.

<sup>10</sup> ["Positive thinking: Stop negative self-talk to reduce stress"](#), Mayo Clinic.

# POSITIVE SELF-TALK

What works for each participant may vary, but it is generally advised that self-talk is positively phrased and focuses on what they should do rather than on what they should avoid doing. Here are some ways to practice positive thinking and positive self-talk for you and your participants:

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Treat and speak to yourself as if you were speaking to someone you deeply care about.

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During the day, check in with yourself and evaluate what you're thinking. If you feel your thoughts are mainly negative, think about some positive affirmations.

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Identify areas of your life that you find yourself thinking negatively about or experiencing negative self-talk (e.g. school, sports practice, taking tests). Focus on one area to approach in a more positive way.

---

If a negative thought enters your mind, take a deep breath, try to think about it rationally rather than emotionally, and respond with affirmations about yourself or think about things you're grateful for in your life.

---

Be gentle and encouraging with yourself, and practice patience!

---

## Partner Case Study

### SKATE LIKE A GIRL

Skate Like a Girl uses the acronym SHRED (self-confidence, humble, radical, equitable, determined) themes to focus on specific messages to communicate with youth during their sessions.

Coaches break down these concepts, provide real-life examples through skateboarding practices, and discuss these themes with their participants.

If you are interested in learning more about their work check out the [Skate Like A Girl Toolkit](#). Pages 25 to 27 provide a comprehensive overview of how to address trauma and behavior in a skateboarding programme.



# IDENTIFYING MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

As a coach, you are often in constant contact with participants in your programme in a way that others may not be, and therefore have a unique insight into their day-to-day lives. If you see something about one of your participants that concerns you around their mental health and wellbeing, it is important to notice, acknowledge, and check in with them about what might be going on. Depending on the severity of concern, you may need to get others involved to offer the participant the support they need.

The way that different people experience mental health struggles varies, but here are some signs that you may notice in your participants' behaviour that could signal they are struggling with mental health issues.

## DECREASED PERFORMANCE

- Strength and stamina losses
- Chronic fatigue

## COGNITIVE CHANGES

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lower performance in school
- Overreacting or misinterpreting events as dangerous or threatening

## BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

- Engaging in risk-taking behaviors such as partying, alcohol, and drug use
- Eating changes (diminished appetite or restricted eating)
- Sleeping changes (difficulty sleeping, or oversleeping)
- Becoming sexually active prematurely

## PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

- Elevated resting heart rate and blood pressure

## EMOTIONAL ISSUES

- Disinterest, moodiness, irritability
- Increased anxiety and depression
- Emotional detachment from others
- Difficulty with emotional self-regulation (outbursts)

## IMMUNE SYSTEM IMPAIRMENT

- Increased susceptibility to illnesses like the cold and flu



<sup>11</sup> Adapted from: Herrero, Cristina., et al. [“The Psychology of the Female Athlete: How Mental Health and Wellness Mediate Sports Performance, Injury and Recovery”](#), Annals of Joint.

# IDENTIFYING MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

## Partner Case Study

### COMMUNITY PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION (CPSO)

CPSO in Uganda works with women and children in refugee settlements who have experienced trauma from conflict, displacement, and loss of property and livelihoods. They note that trauma manifests itself in the populations they work with in the following ways:

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE / DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

QUARRELS

FIGHTS

REVENGE

CRYING EASILY

FAMILY CONFLICT

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS / TENDENCIES ISOLATION

ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE

## If you see something of concern:<sup>12</sup>

**Ask if they would like to talk about what they might be going through in a discreet way.** If they would like to talk, try to find somewhere where they feel safe, comfortable, and equal to you. Try to arrange your body posture so that you are open to them and at their same level - you may want to take a knee or sit down so that you can meet them at eye level.

*If they do not want to, you can't force someone to talk to you, or force them to get help. While it may make you feel distressed or powerless, it is important to accept that they are not ready or willing to share, and there are limits to what you can do to support them.*

**Listen attentively, and ask affective and open-ended questions.** Rather than placing blame on the participant or asking them to explain their behavior, ask them reflective questions about how they are feeling. If you'd like tips on how to start this conversation, check out [Tips on having conversations around mental wellbeing](#) on the next page.

**Reassure them that they're not alone.** Reinforce that you care about them and their wellbeing, as well as their teammates and peers.

**Encourage them to seek advice, where appropriate.** Ask if they're aware of sources of support, and signpost them to relevant information and help. It can be helpful to do a Community Resources Mapping exercise with your participants to discuss the options available to them for support.

**Tell a mental health professional or other specialist if you believe urgent action is needed.** This includes if they are putting themselves or someone else at immediate, serious risk. Make sure that you have the contact information for mental health specialists, emergency response, and local medical centers memorised or easily accessible.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from The FA's Mental Health Guidance Notes For Coaches and Managers in Adult Football Clubs.



# IDENTIFYING MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

## Tips on having a conversation around mental health and wellbeing:<sup>13</sup>

If you are worried about the behaviors or actions of a girl in your programme, and you would like to talk to them but are unsure of where to start, here are some tips to help guide you through the conversation.

Ask discreetly if they would like to talk, and respect their answer. If they say no, let them know you are there if they ever want to talk.

Choose a place where both the participant and you feel comfortable, safe, and equal.

Start by asking how they are feeling. Encourage them to share their feelings as descriptive as possible, using words that go beyond “good” or “okay”.

Actively listen to them. Keep eye contact, open your body and face to them, and let them explain in their own words how they're feeling.

Once they have finished sharing, summarise what they have said and ask if there is anything else they would like to share. With space and time to talk, people are more likely to open up.

Thank them for trusting you and sharing with you what they are going through, acknowledging their courage and efforts to deal with their situation.

If you feel comfortable, share a personal story to start the conversation. The purpose of this is not to centre the conversation around you but to build trust between you and them.

Avoid asking too many questions, especially those that start with “Why” or that can be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The conversation shouldn't feel like an interview or an accusation. As much as possible, try to expand on what they share with you by following up with open questions.

You can share practical ways in which you look out for your mental health and wellbeing. For example, going out for a walk, sharing with others, sports, breathing exercises, practicing gratitude, or art therapy.

Don't pressure yourself to come up with answers or solutions to their struggles. The best thing you can do for them is to listen.

Ask them what they would like to have happen next - this can be empowering and encourage them to feel more in control of their situation. If relevant, help them identify sources of support and again, recognize their efforts in reaching out for help.

If you need to wrap up the conversation, do it in a friendly and unhurried way. Summarize your conversation and the course of action they decided on, and then thank them for sharing with you. If they aren't sure of what they want to happen yet, you can also encourage them to take the time to reflect on what you have discussed and to consider how they want to move forward.

<sup>13</sup> [“How to have conversations about mental health”, Mind.](#)

# COACHES' MENTAL HEALTH

As a coach, you must first take care of yourself before you are truly able to engage with and empower girls through coaching. Showing up exhausted, emotionally drained, frustrated, or unhappy will not allow you to coach as your best self. Looking after yourself will set a positive chain reaction within the participants in your programme, as they will see their role model coping with stresses of day-to-day life in a positive and healthy way.

**TIP:** As a coach, it's important to remember to check in on yourself regularly and monitor your own mental health and wellbeing. Knowing when you need to take a break or ask for help is crucial for maintaining positive mental health.

Encouraging the participants in your programmes to practice self-care, or instituting self-care practices into your sessions or programming, can be great ways to support the mental health and wellbeing of your participants. Signaling that it's a priority for your organization or programme can allow girls to open up and explore their own mental health and wellbeing and what works for them.

As a coach, it's important to recognize that you can't be everywhere, all of the time. You are not (necessarily) a therapist, psychologist, or parent to your participants,

and therefore should not feel pressured to "fix" mental health issues for your participants. Recognizing the limitations in your role as a coach will allow you to provide support in important ways without overstepping boundaries in treating mental health issues. Creating safe spaces

to discuss mental health and wellbeing, prioritizing the mental and emotional health of your participants, and signposting them to professional resources are all ways in which you can support your team!



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING ACTIVITY DIRECTORY



This activity directory aims to support you in incorporating mental health and wellbeing conversations into your sports programmes through various activities, which focus on different components of mental health and wellbeing. For this toolkit, the activities are designed to be carried out within an existing sports and/or life skills session but they can also easily be carried out individually, by programme participants at home. Feel free to adapt activities to the needs and realities of participants in your programme. Things to consider can include the context in which you operate, the age of your participants and their lived experiences.

# LIST OF ACTIVITIES

## MENTAL HEALTH

This section includes activities focusing on mental health more generally:

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**29** [Defining Mental Health, World Cafe](#)

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**30** [Mental Health Zine-Making](#)

*Relevant Handout: [General Tips to Improve Mental Health](#)*

## EMOTIONAL LITERACY

This section includes activities and tools that support participants in identifying their emotions:

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**32** [Group Emotion Check In](#)

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**34** [Daily Emotions Reflection](#)

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**36** [The Happiness List](#)

*Relevant Handouts: [Emotion Cards](#), [Emotion Tracker](#)*

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

This section contains activities that highlight the connection between the mind and body and supports participants to manage stress through movement. It includes relaxing techniques, mindfulness exercises and yoga stretches:

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**38** [Being Mindful](#)

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**38** [Mindful Breathing](#)

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**39** [Mindful Walking](#)

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**40** [Yoga Exercises](#)

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**44** [Body Scan](#)

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**45** [Belly Breathing](#)

---

**46** [Body Scan](#)

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

This section consists of activities that support participants to build their resilience through understanding their stress reactions, learning to prioritise and identifying support networks within their communities:

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**47** [Reactions to Stress](#)

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**49** [How to Prioritise](#)

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**51** [Mapping Support](#)



## MENTAL HEALTH

# 1.1 DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH, WORLD CAFE<sup>14</sup>

ACTIVITY TYPE	Group Discussion
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand what we mean by mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>To gather multiple perspectives and viewpoints on mental health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
MATERIALS	Flipchart paper and/or large sheets of paper, pens/markers

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 First open the discussion and ask participants if they can define mental health. You can share the following definition:

Mental health is a way of describing someone's social and emotional wellbeing. It is completely normal to feel worried, stressed, or sad, and there are healthy ways to deal with these emotions so that you can feel healthier and happier. Healthy eating and sleep routines, regular exercise, and developing emotional management skills are all ways to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing.

- 2 Divide participants into groups of four or five.



- 3 Pose the question "What does mental health and wellbeing mean to you?" and ask each group to discuss this.
- 4 Ask participants to write and draw key ideas on flipchart paper or large sheets of paper in the centre of the table.

- 5 After the first round of conversation, ask one person to remain seated as a host for the next round while the others move to a new group.



- 6 Those moving to a new group can bring key ideas, themes and questions to the next conversation. By moving through several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes will begin to connect.
- 7 After the second or third round, conversation groups will have shared various insights from their different conversations.
- 8 For the last round of conversation, people should return to their first group to share their discoveries.
- 9 After at least three rounds of conversation, ask everyone to share their discoveries and insights in a whole group conversation.

### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to gather multiple perspectives and viewpoints on a particular topic. In a circle, ask participants the following questions:

**What were the similarities and differences you noticed between the groups' definitions of mental health and wellbeing?**

**How do each of us define mental health and wellbeing?**

**Where do you think the similarities and differences come from?**

**Can you share any activities you practice to look after your mental health and wellbeing?**

**Do you consider mental health and wellbeing important? Why or why not?**

<sup>14</sup> [Girls in Motion Playbook](#), Women Win.

## MENTAL HEALTH

# 1.2 MENTAL HEALTH ZINE-MAKING

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Craft Activity
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand what we mean by mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>To gather multiple perspectives and viewpoints on mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>To visually represent mental health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Collage materials (magazines, paper, stickers, newspaper), glue, scissors, pens

Zines are self-published booklets, typically created by physically cutting and gluing text and images together onto paper, photocopying and then folding and stapling them together.

### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to gather multiple perspectives and viewpoints on mental health and wellbeing and to visually represent these. After participants have finished and if they feel comfortable, they can share and explain their collages/zine pages with the rest of the group. You can use the following questions to guide discussion:

What do you like most about your zine/ collage?

How did you find this process?

What are the similarities with other zines/collages?

What are the differences with other zines/collages?

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 First open the discussion and ask participants if they can define mental health. You can share the following definition:

Mental health is a way of describing someone's social and emotional wellbeing. It is completely normal to feel worried, stressed, or sad, and there are healthy ways to deal with these emotions so that you can feel healthier and happier. Healthy eating and sleep routines, regular exercise, and developing emotional management skills are all ways to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing.

- 2 Ask participants to reflect on what mental health and wellbeing means to them and using the collage materials represent this as creatively as they want.

**Adaptation:** Ask participants to make a collage focusing on what they do to promote their mental health and wellbeing to form a zine that has lots of different ideas and tips!

- 3 Participants can use different colours, cut out images from magazines/newspapers, use stickers, draw - the possibilities are endless!
- 4 As a coach and with consent from the participants, you can collate and scan each participant's collage together and form a zine, which can then be shared with the group.



## MENTAL HEALTH: Relevant Handout

# GENERAL TIPS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Handout
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To share general tips and ideas to improve and look after your mental health and wellbeing</li> </ul>

### Get better sleep

When we don't get enough quality sleep, we can see a drastic change in things like our mood and our ability to concentrate. Try to create a routine that you know will work for you.

### Get physical

Research has time and again proved that daily physical activity has a positive impact on your mood. It can help manage symptoms of depression and anxiety, relieve stress and feel more connected to your body. Make sure you choose something that you think you will enjoy and don't push yourself too hard. If you are not used to a lot of physical activity, start by taking a 20 or 30-minute walk every day. Be patient with yourself and progress as you start to feel more comfortable.

### Ask for help

As much as you like to be the one helping out others, allow yourself to reach out for the support you need.

### Set boundaries

Take a deep breath and reflect on the following: are you putting yourself last because you are too busy looking after others? Looking after yourself and setting boundaries, even if it's with the people we love, is not being selfish. It is a way of bringing the best and truest version of ourselves to everyone who surrounds us. We cannot take care of others if we are not doing okay.

### Check your social media patterns

How much time are you spending scrolling, liking and swiping? Social media has a real impact on our mental health. Too much time spent on it can often make you feel as if you're not doing as great as other people, it can make you anxious and can seriously have an impact on your self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. Pay attention to when you are grabbing for your phone. Is it when you are feeling anxious? How else could you be spending your time that might improve your mood?

### Practice gratitude

This can help you lower your stress levels and focus more on the present. Try to take at least 5 minutes every day to think about everything you are thankful for: your health, your body, and the people around you that accept and celebrate you for who you are. You can start by writing a few lines every day in your gratitude journal, either before you start your day or at the very end of it.

### Ground yourself

Enjoy this moment and stay present. It's hard to stay in the moment when things feel out of control. But as much as possible, challenge yourself to focus on the now as this is the only moment in time you can control.

### Look after your future self

It can be something as small as meal prepping on the weekend or joining that sport class that feels intimidating. As much as you can, try to think ahead of small things you can do for yourself that will bring you pleasure.

### Celebrate yourself

Oftentimes, we get caught up in the next big thing we want to accomplish without taking the time to look back at how far we've come and truly celebrate our efforts. Take a look in the mirror and be proud of yourself, and invite others to celebrate yourself, too.

## EMOTIONAL LITERACY

# 2.1 GROUP EMOTION CHECK IN

ACTIVITY TYPE	Group Reflection and Discussion
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify how we are feeling and acknowledge these emotions</li> <li>To encourage more open conversations around emotions</li> <li>To check in collectively</li> </ul>
MATERIALS	Printed Emotion Cards

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask participants to gather in a circle.
- 2 Show each of the printed [Emotion Cards](#) and say the emotion out loud as you place them in the middle of the circle (e.g. Happy, Sad, Frustrated, Joyful, Anxious, Angry etc.).
- 3 Pose the question, “How are we feeling today”?.
- 4 One by one, ask each participant to go to the middle of the circle and choose which card best reflects how they are feeling, “Today, I am feeling...”.
- 5 Participants can explain why they are feeling a certain emotion but they don’t have to share with the whole group if they don’t want to.
- 6 Emotions are complex so encourage participants to share if they are feeling more than one (e.g “Today I am feeling happy but also a bit sad”).

## Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to collectively check in, acknowledge our emotions and show support to one another. After you have carried out this activity, follow up with participants using the following guiding questions:

Was it easy or difficult to identify the emotions we were feeling today? Why?

Was it easy or difficult to choose only one emotion? Why?

Can you think of any benefits of checking in with each other on a regular basis? Why do you think these are beneficial?





## EMOTIONAL LITERACY: Relevant Handout

**EMOTION CARDS****Defensive****Happy****Excited****Joy****Calm****Angry****Frustrated****Nervous****Jealous****Surprised****Scared****Worried****Confused**

## EMOTIONAL LITERACY

## 2.2 DAILY EMOTIONS REFLECTION

ACTIVITY TYPE	Individual Reflection
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify how we are feeling and acknowledge these emotions</li> <li>To check in with ourselves</li> <li>To understand how external factors influence our emotions</li> </ul>
MATERIALS	Emotion Tracker Handout; pens/markers

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask participants to take a couple of minutes to check in with themselves.
- 2 Using the [Emotion Tracker Handout](#), ask participants to rate their current emotional state on a scale of 1-5, 1 being feeling very worried, stressed or sad and 5 being feeling very happy, joyful or excited. *How are you feeling today?*
- 3 Encourage participants to write down any notes about why they think they are feeling this way.
- 4 Share with participants that at the end of the week, they can compare their daily score with previous days. If they've marked yourself between 1 or 2 for a couple of days in a row, encourage participants to reflect on what's making them feel that way? Thinking about actions that they could take to improve how they are feeling. Perhaps going for a walk or speaking to a friend.
- 5 If they've marked themselves between 4 or 5 for a couple of days in a row, again ask them to consider why they are feeling this way? Is there anything that they have been doing? Encourage participants to take note of these for future strategies.
- 6 If participants wish to do this by themselves, they can use the questions in the handout sheet to guide the process.



## EMOTIONAL LITERACY: Relevant Handout

# EMOTION TRACKER

DAYS	1	2	3	4	5	NOTES
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

## GUIDING PROMPTS

In general, this week I have felt...

What's going well for me right now is...

What's not working for me right now is...

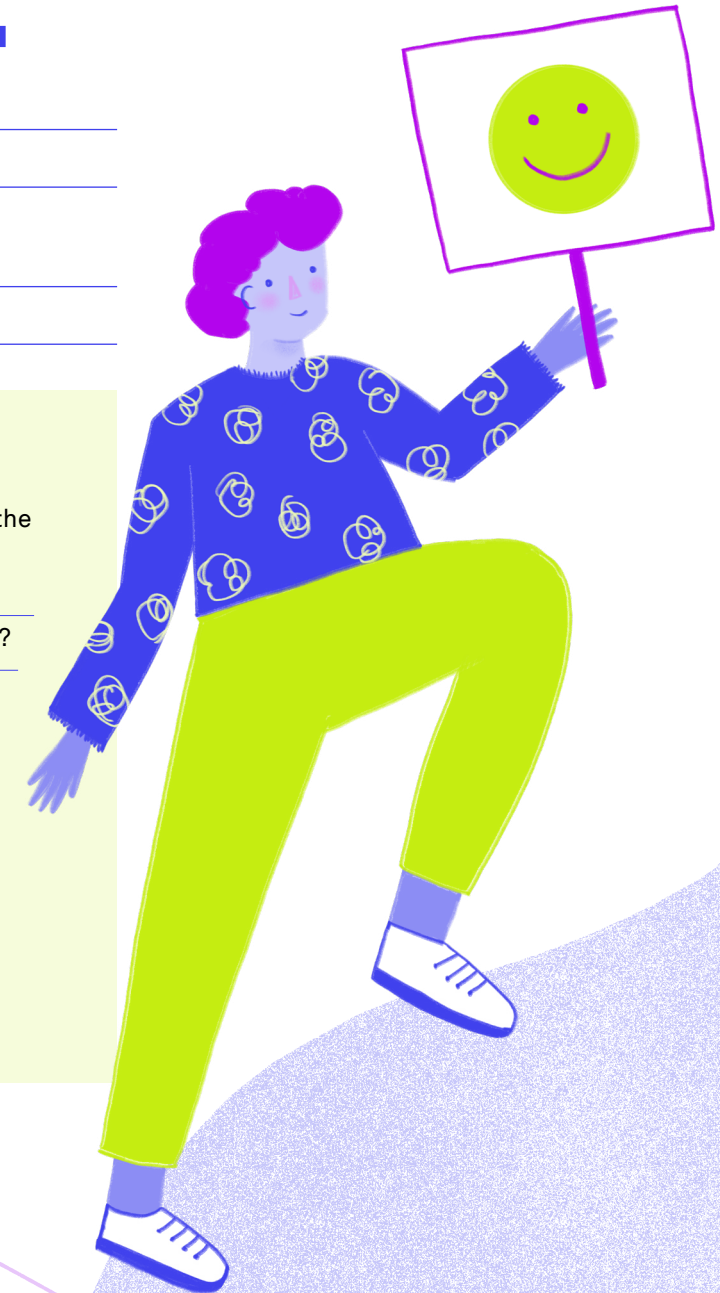
One thing that has supported me in feeling happy is...

One thing that has made me feel sad is...

## EMOTIONAL LITERACY

# 2.3 THE HAPPINESS LIST

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Individual Reflection
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify what supports us to feel happy</li> <li>• To think through how we can embed these things into our daily routine</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Paper, pens/markers



## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 For this exercise, share with participants that they will be identifying things they do on a daily or weekly basis that brings them happiness. Participants can focus on things they do by themselves, or with friends, family or community.

Ask participants to write down all the things that they do on a daily basis that make them happy. First, focus on things you enjoy doing by themselves.

Next to this list, participants should write all the things that they enjoy doing with their friends, family or community.

Finally, ask participants to write down ways they like to keep themselves active, this can include their favourite sport, going out for long walks, dancing or practicing yoga.

- 2 Once they have completed their list, ask participants to review and reflect on all of the things that bring them happiness. Pose the following questions:

Do you feel like you do these things enough?

Would you like to do specific ones more?

How could you organise yourself to make the time to do more things that bring you joy and pleasure?

EMOTIONAL LITERACY: Template

# 2.3 THE HAPPINESS LIST

## ALL THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME HAPPY

Fill this template to make your own happiness list.

Things I enjoy doing by myself

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Things I enjoy doing with my friends, family or community

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How I like to keep myself active?

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REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS:

Do you feel like you do these things enough?

Would you like to do specific ones more?

How could you organise yourself to make the time to do more things that bring you joy and pleasure?

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

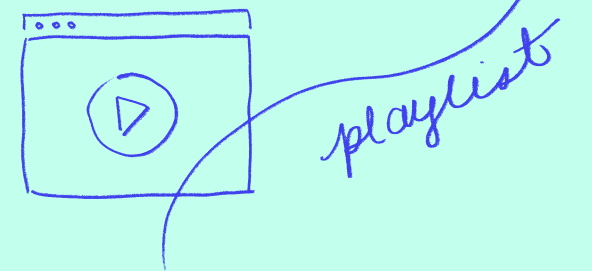
# 3.1 BEING MINDFUL

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Group or Individual Activity
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To practice mindfulness</li> <li>To slow down</li> <li>To learn techniques that can support with stress management</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	No materials needed but ensure that you carry out this activity so that each participant has enough space to move around

This activity includes both a **mindful breathing exercise**, as well as a **mindful walking exercise**. You could carry out one of these during your session or both. These activities are also possible to do individually and participants can be encouraged to practice them at home.

**NOTE FOR COACHES:**

Speak slowly, softly, and with an even tone. You don't need to adhere exactly to the time listed here, it is just a suggestion to keep you on track. If you don't feel comfortable reading the script, here is a playlist of [18 mindfulness videos](#) by an organisation called [Girls Leadership](#).



## MINDFUL BREATHING

- 1 Ask participants to spread out and get comfortable, they can sit or stand whatever they prefer.
- 2 Ask each participant to close their eyes and focus on their breathing, as you read through the following **script**:
  - Close your eyes or if you prefer keep them slightly open. (3 SECONDS)
  - Take a moment and allow your body to settle into a comfortable position. (5 SECONDS)
  - Take a deep breath in and out. (2 SECONDS)
  - Allow your spine to lift and your shoulders to soften, falling away from your ears. (5 SECONDS)
  - Today we will practice two minutes of mindful breathing. (3 SECONDS)
  - Begin by taking a full breath in and a long breath out. (5 SECONDS)
  - Repeat that big breath in, and long breath out, and keep breathing like this. (5 SECONDS)
  - With each breath, feel your chest and stomach gently rise and fall. (7 SECONDS)
  - We're now going to count our breaths silently. (3 SECONDS)
  - On your next inhale, count silently to yourself, one, and as you exhale, one. (2 SECONDS INHALE, 2 SECONDS EXHALE)
  - Now on the next breath count again to yourself, two, and as you exhale, two. (2 SECONDS INHALE, 2 SECONDS EXHALE)
  - Now continue counting your breaths for eight breaths. (30 SECONDS)
  - If you notice the mind is wandering away from where we are, just bring it gently back and focus on breathing.
  - Feel the passage of air through your nostrils and into your lungs
  - Feel your chest move as you inhale and exhale
  - Now with one final breath in and out, notice any sensations or feelings in your body. When you're ready, gently open your eyes. (20 SECONDS)

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.1 BEING MINDFUL

### MINDFUL WALKING

Mindful walking helps develop an awareness of your mental state and its connections to your physical body and environment. It can help you gain a sense of calm and connectedness, and can be done anywhere – even in a busy, crowded, or noisy place. You don't have to walk in any special way– it's more about where your attention is when you walk.

**1** Ask participants to spread out from one another in the large space.

**2** Read the **script** below as they walk around the large room or outdoor space. You should read loud enough for them to hear you as they walk, so they should not walk too far away from you.

- Feel the sensation of your feet in contact with the ground. Take one deep, slow, mindful breath – in and out.
- Begin walking at a natural pace.
- Place your hands wherever they feel most comfortable, whether that's at your sides, on your stomach, or behind your back.
- Think about each footstep as it lifts and falls.
- Feel the ground underneath your feet as you lift your foot.
- Feel the muscles in your feet and legs as you take a step.
- Notice the movement in your legs and the rest of the body as you walk forward.
- Notice if your body shifts from side to side.
- Feel how your foot rolls from heel to toe when you walk.
- If you'd like, you can count your steps up to 10, and then start again at 1.

- If you're in a small space, pause and choose a moment with intention to turn around.
- Whatever else captures your attention, come back to the sensation of walking. Your mind will wander, so without frustration, bring your focus back as many times as you need to the feeling of your foot on the ground.
- Look at the environment around you, take it all in.
- Pay attention to the sounds of the world around you. Without naming them or labelling them, think about the sound.
- Now bring awareness to your sense of smell. Don't push yourself to think anything at all about the smell, just bring yourself to focus on whatever smell you can sense.
- What can you see? Think about the colors and objects and whatever else you see. Stay natural, not daydreaming or drifting, but with constant awareness.
- Keep this open awareness of everything around you. Nothing to do, nothing to fix, nothing to change. Fully aware, and walking.
- Come back to the awareness of the physical sensations of walking, wherever else your mind found itself.
- Notice your feet again, touching the ground. Notice the movement of your body with each step.
- When you're ready to end your walking meditation, stand still for a moment, taking one deep slow mindful breath, in and out.
- As you finish, consider how you might bring this sense of awareness into the rest of your day.

### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to practice mindfulness and to share with participants techniques that can support stress management. After carrying out this activity, you can follow up with participants using these guiding questions:

- **How were you feeling at the beginning of the practice? Did you have any trouble focusing on your movements? Why?**
- **How did it feel to focus on your senses, such as hearing and smell? Was it easier than focusing on your movement?**
- **How did you feel at the end of the practice?**

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.2 YOGA EXERCISES

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Group or Individual Activity
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To slow down</li> <li>To learn techniques that can support with stress management</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	No materials required although mats make the yoga poses more comfortable

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Share with participants that they are going to be doing some yoga stretches with the aim to slow down and connect with their bodies and how they are feeling. Highlight that yoga is not about how flexible you are and is a great activity for intentional movement.
- 2 Ask participants to spread out and stand with their feet hip-width apart, hands by their sides. Move through some of the following poses with them:

### CHILD'S POSE

This calming pose is a good relaxing position. You can use the child's pose to rest and refocus before continuing to your next pose. It gently stretches your lower back, hips, thighs, knees and ankles and relaxes your spine, shoulders and neck.

**DO IT** When you want to get a nice gentle stretch through your neck, spine and hips.

**SKIP IT** If you have knee injuries or ankle problems. Avoid it if you have high blood pressure or are pregnant.

**MODIFY** You can rest your head on a cushion or pillow. You can place a rolled towel under your ankles if they are uncomfortable.

**BE MINDFUL** Focus on relaxing the muscles of the spine and lower back as you breathe.



### DOWNWARD-FACING DOG

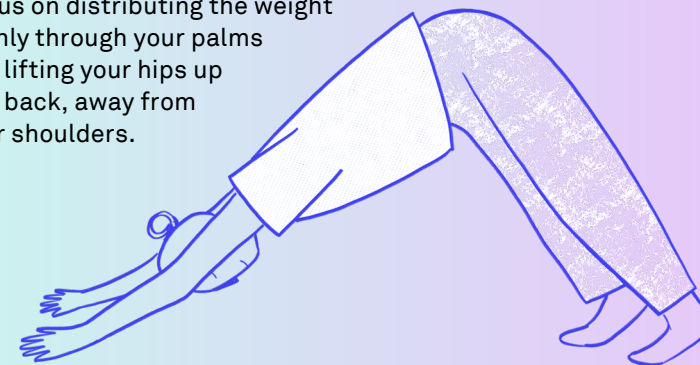
Downward-facing dogs strengthen the arms, shoulders and back while stretching the hamstrings, calves and arches of your feet. It can also help relieve back pain.

**DO IT** To help relieve back pain.

**SKIP IT** This pose is not recommended if you have wrist problems, have high blood pressure or are in the late stages of pregnancy.

**MODIFY** You can do the pose with your elbows on the ground, which takes the weight off your wrists.

**BE MINDFUL** Focus on distributing the weight evenly through your palms and lifting your hips up and back, away from your shoulders.





## STRESS MANAGEMENT

## 3.2 YOGA EXERCISES

## PLANK POSE

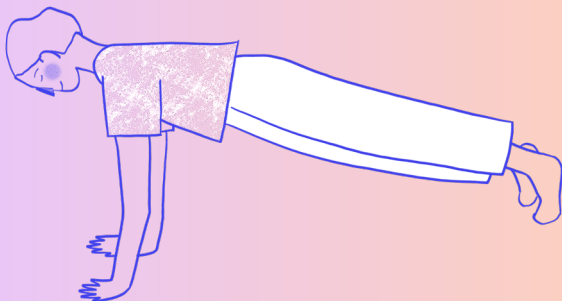
A commonly seen exercise, plank helps build strength in the core, shoulders, arms and legs.

**DO IT** Plank pose is good if you are looking to strengthen your abs and build strength in your upper body.

**SKIP IT** Avoid plank pose if you have pain in your wrists. It can be hard on your wrists. You might also skip it or modify it if you have low back pain.

**MODIFY** You can modify it by placing your knees on the floor.

**BE MINDFUL** As you do a plank, imagine the back of your neck and spine lengthening.



## FOUR-LIMBED STAFF POSE

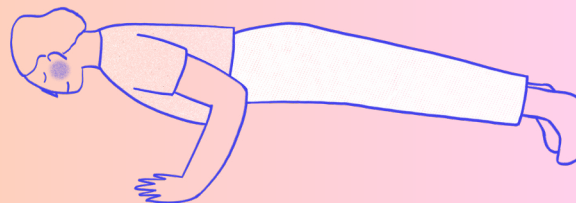
This push-up variation follows plank pose in a common yoga sequence known as the sun salutation. It is a good pose to learn if you want to eventually work on more advanced poses, such as arm balances or inversions.

**DO IT** Like plank, this pose strengthens arms and wrists and your abdomen.

**SKIP IT** If you have lower back pain, a shoulder injury or are pregnant.

**MODIFY** It's a good idea for beginners to modify the pose by keeping your knees on the floor.

**BE MINDFUL** Press your palms evenly into the floor and lift your shoulders away from the floor as you hold this pose.



## COBRA POSE

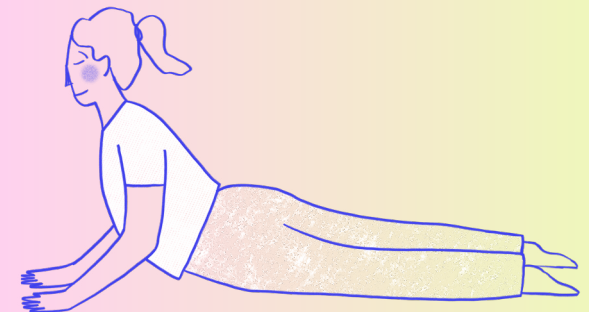
This back-bending pose can help strengthen the back muscles, increase spinal flexibility and stretches the chest, shoulders and abdomen.

**DO IT** This pose is great for strengthening the back.

**SKIP IT** If your neck or spine hurts, spine or neck, a low-back injury.

**MODIFY** Just lift up a few inches, and don't try to straighten your arms.

**BE MINDFUL** Try to keep your navel drawing up away from the floor as you hold this pose.



## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.2 YOGA EXERCISES

### TREE POSE

Beyond helping improve your balance, it can also strengthen your core, ankles, calves, thighs and spine.

**DO IT** Great for working on your balance and posture.

**SKIP IT** You may want to skip this pose if you have low blood pressure or any medical conditions that affect your balance.

**MODIFY** Place one of your hands on a wall for support.

**BE MINDFUL** Focus on your breath in and out as you hold this pose.



### TRIANGLE POSE

Triangle, which is a part of many yoga sequences, helps build strength in the legs and stretches the hips, spine, chest, shoulders, groins, hamstrings and calves. It can also help increase mobility in the hips and neck.

**DO IT** This pose is great for building strength and endurance.

**SKIP IT** Avoid this pose if you have a headache or low blood pressure.

**MODIFY** If you have high blood pressure, turn your head to gaze downward in the final pose. If you have neck problems, don't turn your head to look upward; look straight ahead and keep both sides of the neck long.

**BE MINDFUL** Keep lifting your raised arm toward the ceiling. It helps keep the pose buoyant.



## STRESS MANAGEMENT

## 3.2 YOGA EXERCISES

**SEATED HALF-SPINAL TWIST POSE**

This twisting pose can increase the flexibility in your back, while stretching the shoulders, hips and chest. It can also help relieve tension in the middle of your back.

**DO IT** To release tight muscles around the shoulders and upper and lower back.

**SKIP IT** If you have a back injury.

**MODIFY** If bending your right knee is uncomfortable, keep it straight out in front of you.

**BE MINDFUL** Lift your torso with each inhale, and twist as you exhale.

**BRIDGE POSE**

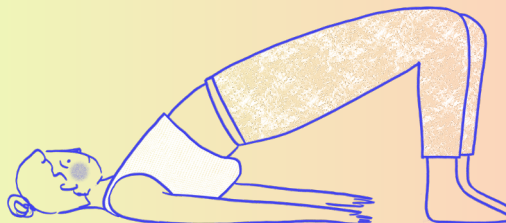
This is a back-bending pose that stretches the muscles of the chest, back and neck. It also builds strength in the back and hamstring muscles.

**DO IT** If you sit most of the day, this pose will help you open your upper chest.

**SKIP IT** Avoid this pose if you have a neck injury.

**MODIFY** Place a pillow between your thighs to help keep the legs and feet in proper alignment. Or you can place a pillow under your pelvis if your lower back is bothering you.

**BE MINDFUL** While holding this pose, try to keep your chest lifted.

**SAVASANA POSE**

Like life, yoga classes typically end with this pose. It allows for a moment of relaxation, but some people find it difficult to stay still in this pose. However, the more you try this pose, the easier it is to sink into a relaxing, meditative state.

**DO IT** Always!

**MODIFY** Place a blanket under your head, if that feels more comfortable. You can also roll up a blanket and place that under your knees, if your lower back is sensitive or bothering you.

**BE MINDFUL** Feel the weight of your body sinking into your mat one part at a time.



## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.3 BELLY BREATHING

Diaphragmatic, or belly breathing, is natural to all mammals (including humans). It's a state of deep breathing that's controlled by a large muscle in our abdomen called the diaphragm. When you take air in through your nose, it travels into your lungs. If you take a shallow breath, only the chest cavity expands. Breathing deeply involves more of your body—the diaphragm contracts and both the belly and chest cavity expand. Belly breathing and the “fight or flight” response to stress or anxiety (two feelings we all experience) can't occur at the same time. When our

bodies switch into “fight or flight” mode, we engage in shallow breathing. We're ready for battle. On the other hand, belly breathing reduces our heart rate and triggers a relaxation response. It slows us down.

It's best to start practicing belly breathing when you are already relaxed. This way you can build awareness of what being calm feels like. Once you have the feeling of belly breathing mastered (practice it daily), you can apply it to stressful moments.

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Group or Individual Activity
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To slow down</li> <li>To connect with our body</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	No materials required

### INSTRUCTIONS

**1** Ask participants to spread out from one another in the large space.

**2** Read the **script** below:

- Start by breathing normally. Do you notice anything? What parts of the body move as you breathe? What does it feel like?
- Now lie on your back, relax your muscles and place your hands on your belly.
- With your mouth closed, breathe in for four seconds or until you feel your whole chest fill with air, all the way down to your belly.
- Hold in the air for four seconds.
- Slowly blow the air out until it's all gone. If you are having difficulty breathing slowly, exhale through a straw.
- Repeat until the body feels relaxed. Do you notice anything different from before? What does it feel like?
- Connect.
- Include belly breathing as a regular part of your routine, when waking up or before going to bed. With practice, it can become a familiar strategy that you can use at any age to relax and reduce anxiety and stress in your life.
- Teach belly breathing to a friend or someone in your family. Try doing it together each morning or afternoon. During the day, when you feel your stress increasing, take a minute to do some belly breaths slowly and see if it helps lower your stress.

### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to strengthen our connection to our bodies. If you carried out this activity as a group you can wrap up using these guiding questions:

**How were you feeling at the beginning of the practice? Did you find it easy or difficult to focus on your breathing? Why?**

**How did you feel at the end of the breathing exercise? Did any emotions that you felt at the beginning of the practice disappeared or decreased?**

**Did you have any previous experiences with breathing exercises? Would you be able to incorporate these exercises in your day to day?**

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.4 BODY SCAN

The body scan is an activity that uses meditation. Meditation is a way to train the mind. Most of the time, our minds are wandering — we're thinking about the future, dwelling on the past, worrying or daydreaming. Meditation brings us back to the present moment, and gives us the tools we need to be less stressed, calmer and kinder to ourselves and others. Meditation is a training of our attention. It allows us to step out of distracted thought, and helps us arrive in the present moment in a balanced and clear way.

For many of us, stress not only has mental and emotional symptoms, it has physical symptoms too: headaches, back pain, and heartburn are just a few of the stress-related ailments we may experience. In fact, sometimes we are so caught up in our stress, we don't even realize our physical discomfort is connected to our emotional state. That's when a body scan meditation can be particularly useful and effective, allowing us to check in with our bodies.

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Group or Individual Activity
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To slow down</li> <li>To connect with our body</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	No materials required

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask participants to spread out from one another in the large space.
- 2 Read the **script** below:
  - Get comfortable. Lying down is preferable, particularly if you're doing a body scan meditation before you fall asleep. If that's not possible or comfortable, sitting comfortably is also an option.
  - Take a few deep breaths. Let your breathing slow down, and start breathing from your belly instead of from your chest, letting your abdomen expand and contract with each breath. If you find your shoulders rising and falling with each breath, focus more on breathing from your belly, as though a balloon is inflating and deflating in your abdomen with each breath. For more practice, try these breathing exercises.
    - Begin by bringing your attention into your body.
    - You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.
    - Take a few deep breaths.
    - And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
    - You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.
    - You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.
    - Notice your back against the chair.
    - Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
    - Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See if you can allow them to soften.
    - Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
    - Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.
    - Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
    - Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

# 3.4 BODY SCAN

### Tips:

Practice this body scan meditation anytime you feel stress or several times throughout the day as a regular practice.

If you don't have a lot of time, you can do an abbreviated version of this body scan meditation by just sitting and noticing any place in your body that you're carrying tension, rather than moving from part to part. This will become easier the more you practice body scan meditation.

The body scan meditation can promote body awareness, stress awareness, and relaxation. Practice it often. You can also try progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, or visualization exercises for releasing stress and tension in your body.



### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to slow down and connect with our bodies. If you carried out this activity as a group you can wrap up using these guiding questions:

Did you have any previous experiences with meditation exercises? Was it easy or difficult to focus on your body and its sensations? Why?

How were you feeling at the beginning of the practice?

How did you feel at the end of the practice? Were you able to identify places in your body where you feel stress?

Did any emotions that you felt at the beginning of the practice disappear or decrease?

Why do you think it is important to connect our bodies and our minds? Can you think of any benefits of doing so?

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

# 4.1 REACTIONS TO STRESS

ACTIVITY TYPE	Individual
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify signs of stress</li> <li>To identify positive ways to react when in stressful situations</li> </ul>
MATERIALS	Reactions to Stress Handout

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Explain to participants that you will be discussing stress and the different ways stress can manifest in us individually.

Stress and anxiety can stem from many different sources in our lives. Situations where we are out of control or surrounded by unpredictable events can increase the stress and anxiety that we feel. COVID-19 has made all our lives feel a bit out of control. We don't get to see our friends as much and our normal daily routines have changed a lot. There are a lot of ways we can cope with the stress in our lives. Some of these are positive and some negative.

- 2 Share the [Reactions to Stress Handout](#).
- 3 After they have completed handout, ask if any participants would like to share their positive reactions to stress.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PHYSICAL SIGNS OF STRESS?

Possible signs may include:

**RACING HEART**

**SHAKING HANDS**

**SHAKY LEGS**

**CLENCHING FISTS**

**HEADACHES**

**REDDENING OF THE SKIN**

**TENSENESS**

**MUSCLE SPASMS**

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EMOTIONAL SIGNS OF STRESS?

Possible signs may include:

**GENERAL FEELINGS OF ANXIETY**

**FEELING OVERWHELMED**

**INABILITY TO FOCUS**

**AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOURS**

**INABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS**

**FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE**

**ACTING OUT**

## BUILDING RESILIENCE: USEFUL HANDOUT

# 4.1 REACTIONS TO STRESS

### WHAT ARE SOME HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY REACTIONS TO STRESS?

#### POSITIVE REACTIONS

- Ask for help from people around you that you trust
- Try to reflect on and understand your feelings through writing
- Find ways to relax (exercise, drawing, meditating, singing, dancing, creative activities, being outside)
- Keep your sense of humour (tell jokes and smile)
- Take action if you can (if you are able to avoid or get rid of the thing causing you stress, try to do so)
- Play with a pet animal
- Laugh or cry!
- Listen to music

#### NEGATIVE REACTIONS

- Getting into a fight
- Eating unhealthy foods
- Taking drugs or drinking alcohol
- Not talking to anyone and staying silent
- Sleeping too much and not moving our bodies
- Refusing to see friends
- Acting rude to others around us

Think about what you learned related to positive and negative reactions to stress in our lives and fill in the table below to help you come up with specific actions that you can use next time you are in certain stressful situations:

STRESSOR	MY ACTIONS Positive Reactions to Stress
Seeing violence in your community	
Being afraid you might catch a virus or someone in your family might catch a virus	
Being pressured by friends to do something you don't want to do	
Disagreeing with parents	
Being bullied at school	
Being assigned a task you don't know how to do	
Death of someone in your family or a close friend	
Getting delayed because of traffic	
Hearing a false rumour about a friend	
Being unprepared for a big exam	



## BUILDING RESILIENCE

# 4.2 HOW TO PRIORITISE?

In our day to day lives, there are many things that require our attention; family, school work, friends, a job, household chores to name just a few! Often trying to balance these many things can be overwhelming and can lead to stress. This activity aims to support participants in prioritising different actions and helps them feel more in control of their day to day.

<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Individual Handout
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To learn how to prioritise</li> <li>• To learn how prioritisation can support with managing stress</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Prioritisation Handout, Sticky Notes

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask participants to think of all the things they need to do this week. This could include; school work, household chores, exercise, seeing friends, working a job, spending time with family. The more detailed they can be the better!
- 2 Ask participants to list these in the To Do List table from the [Prioritisation Handout](#) and think about (1) how much time is required per activity and (2) how much of a priority is each activity?
- 3 Once they have completed this list, they can map each activity on the priority matrix. It can be helpful to rewrite each activity on a sticky note so that participants can easily move these around
- 4 After this participants should have identified actions by the following categories:
  - High Priority / High Time Intensity**
  - High Priority / Low Time Intensity**
  - Low Priority / High Time Intensity**
  - Low Priority / Low Time Intensity**
- 5 Ask participants to think of ways to incorporate these activities into their day to day, focusing first on category a and b activities. How can you make the time to cross them off your list? Can you organise yourself better at school or work? Is there anyone you can reach out to for support?.
- 6 Remind participants to be kind to themselves and stay present. Some days you will be able to be very productive and get through your to do list and other days will be more difficult and this is OKAY! They can keep going back to their list and re-prioritising as and when they need.

## BUILDING RESILIENCE: USEFUL HANDOUT

# 4.2 HOW TO PRIORITISE?

### To Do List

ACTIVITY	TIME	PRIORITY				
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
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		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5

### Prioritisation Matrix

The diagram shows a blank 2x2 Prioritisation Matrix. It consists of a vertical line on the right side and a horizontal line at the bottom, intersecting to form a grid with two columns and two rows. The top-left quadrant is the largest, the top-right is a narrow vertical strip, the bottom-left is a narrow horizontal strip, and the bottom-right is a small square.

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

# 4.3 MAPPING SUPPORT

Knowing where to go (or who to go to) in your community when you need an answer to a question, or support, is very important. In this activity, you will think about your community and what resources exist, both people and places, that you can reach out to when you need help or want to talk about an issue you are facing.

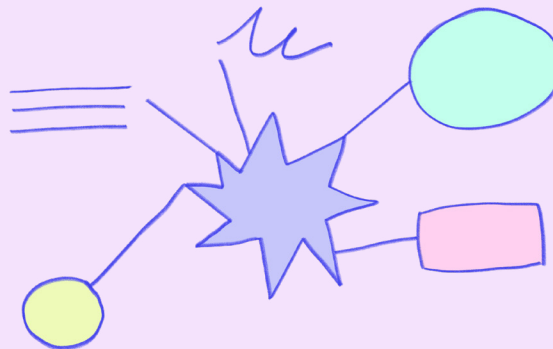
<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Individual / Mind map
<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To map and visualise available support</li> </ul>
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Paper, Pens/Pencils

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask participants to draw a central image on a large landscape page to represent themselves.
- 2 Next, ask them to draw at least four thick, tree-like branches radiating outwards from the central image using different colours for each. Each branch represents a key goal. This could be an area of their lives where they think they could use some support (sports, school, home) to achieve their goals.
- 3 Following this, ask participants to make a list of important places in their community where they can get help with an issue they are facing. Remember, these could be physical places or just people they know (such as their coach, their favourite aunt or the school counsellor), that might help them or have answers. Pose the following question to help them think through this process:

Where can you go to get help or advice on health related issues (questions about menstruation, changes inside and outside of your body, safe health practices)?

- 4 Ask participants to map this list of places and people in the second level of branches.
- 5 Encourage participants to make the finished mind map colourful, dimensional and imaginative. The visualisation can help make it memorable.



### Discussion Points to Wrap Up:

The objective of this activity is to identify where participants in your programme can access support to address their mental health and wellbeing needs. If you carried out this activity as a group you can wrap up using these guiding questions:

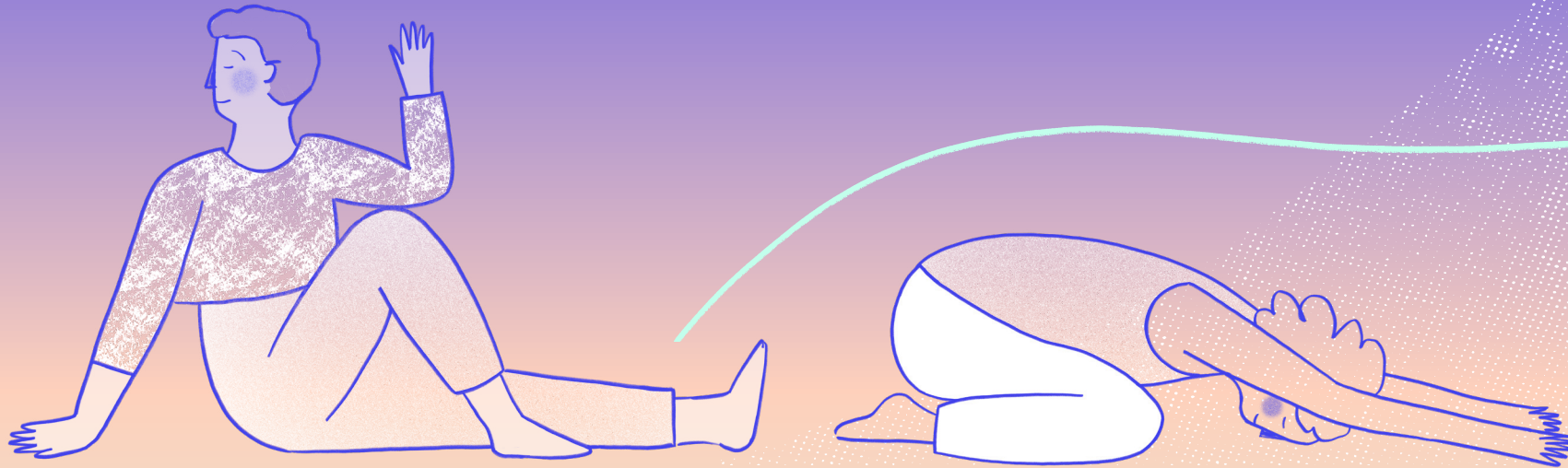
What are the similarities and differences between the mind maps of participants?

Did any participants identify support and resources where other participants did not? Are you able to add these to the mind maps?

Why do you think it is important to identify available resources and support?

Do you have any experiences you would like to share about reaching out to any of these mapped resources?

# EXTERNAL RESOURCES



[“Depression in women: understanding the gender gap”](#), Mayo Clinic.

[“Gender and women mental health”](#), World Health Organization.

[“Depression in women: understanding the gender gap”](#), Mayo Clinic.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

[“The Importance of Mental Health in Women’s Sports”](#), World of Happiness Foundation.

[“Trauma Informed Coaching”](#), Women Win.

[“The Importance of Mental Health in Women’s Sports”](#), World of Happiness Foundation.

[“Mental Wellbeing or Ill-Being through Coaching in Adult Grassroots Sport: A Systematic Mapping Review”](#), National Library of Medicine.

[“Positive thinking: Stop negative self-talk to reduce stress”](#), Mayo Clinic.

[Skate Like A Girl Toolkit](#).

Herrero, Cristina., et al. [“The Psychology of the Female Athlete: How Mental Health and Wellness Mediate Sports Performance, Injury and Recovery”](#), Annals of Joint.

[The FA’s Mental Health Guidance Notes For Coaches and Managers in Adult Football Clubs](#).

[“How to have conversations about mental health”](#), Mind.

[Girls in Motion Playbook](#), Women Win.

[Mindfulness videos](#), Girls Leadership.