

# MENTAL FITNESS CHARTER



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football. The AFL acknowledges the impacts of colonisation on the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Peoples and is committed to addressing racism and providing culturally responsive wellbeing services that support the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and staff.

## SUPPORT

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needs support, contact:**

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**13YARN:** (13 92 76) [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 or [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

**headspace:** 1800 650 890 or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

# MORE INFORMATION ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT AFL

## Play AFL

Mental Health & Wellbeing | Play AFL

## AFL Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub

Mental Health and Wellbeing - [AFL.com.au](https://www.afl.com.au)

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## PARTNERS

### MATTERWORKS



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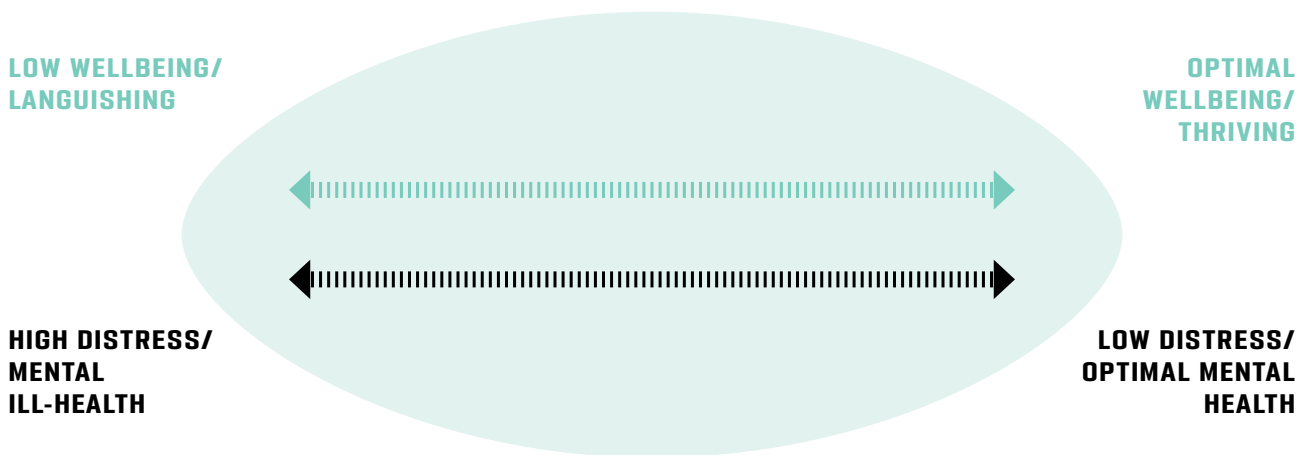
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# WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

The term mental health is an umbrella term for the full spectrum of human psychological and social experiences. It's about our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, how we feel about ourselves, relate to others, and function in our day-to-day life. Wellbeing refers to feeling good, functioning well, having positive relationships, and a sense of a purpose and meaning in life. It is common to describe individual mental health and wellbeing across two continua.



**Figure 1. The two mental health and wellbeing continua**

If we take a closer look, the first continuum ranges from optimal levels of mental health at one end of the scale, through to experiences of significant psychological distress and mental ill-health at the other end of the spectrum. Mental ill-health is very common. We all move up and down this continuum and may experience the many signs and symptoms of mental ill-health in response to various life challenges. 1 in 4 Australians will experience a mental illness at some point in their life. Mental ill-health impacts functioning across many parts of our life and some of the signs and symptoms include: changes to motivation, sleep and appetite; impacts on our thinking and how we experience emotions; changes to physical experiences in our bodies; different behaviours; impacts on how we relate to others and how we perceive ourselves and the world around us.



**Knowing what to look out for with these signs and symptoms is an important part of mental health literacy. So is knowing how to manage or prevent signs and symptoms from worsening as well as where to go for help.**

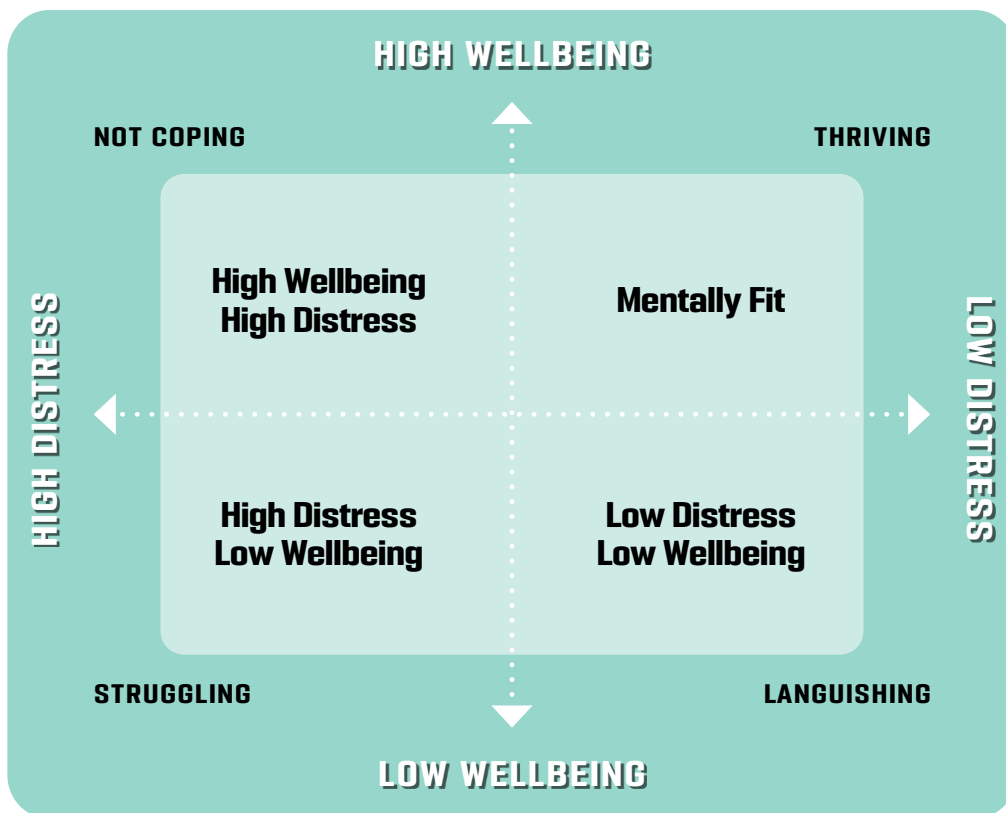
Mental health, like physical health, is more than just the absence of illness. The second continuum ranges from optimal wellbeing - flourishing and thriving - through to low wellbeing (languishing). Knowing how to optimise our wellbeing acknowledges the fact that mental health is far more than the absence of signs and symptoms of mental ill-health. Like physical health we can optimise our wellbeing through practice and training. To thrive in life means we feel connected, engaged, motivated, energised, experience positive emotion and find meaning and purpose in our lives. We contribute to others and our communities and we bounce back from life challenges.



**Knowing how to optimise our wellbeing is called wellbeing literacy and at the AFL it's an important part of mental fitness.**

Supporting our own mental health and wellbeing is important at all stages of both continua.

This model of mental health acknowledges we can maintain wellbeing even while living with a mental illness. We can experience poor wellbeing in the absence of mental illness.



**Figure 2. The four categories of mental health and wellbeing according to the dual continua model (adapted)**



**Mental Fitness is a positive state that is characterised by feeling good emotionally, functioning well socially and psychologically, and having a sense of meaning and purpose in life. At the AFL, we believe mental fitness is equally important to our game and our participants as physical fitness.**







# WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

**Good mental health and wellbeing is a vital individual and community asset.**

It's the fuel that allows us to feel good and function well in our studies, work, relationships and life. High levels of mental health and wellbeing help us to deal with life's changes and challenges, perform at our best, be productive, fulfil our potential and contribute to others. By contrast, mental ill-health causes distress and may disrupt our relationships, interferes with our day-to-day functioning, and if severe, may lead to psychosocial disability. It can also contribute to death by suicide. Community wellbeing is protective for individuals and their families. It is the combination of social and environmental conditions that allows whole communities to thrive. At the AFL we believe that our mental health is equally as important as our physical health, and it's something that we need to actively support, individually and collectively, to promote and protect our mental health and wellbeing. We can do this by looking after our own mental health and actively supporting people who are experiencing mental health challenges. We can also do this by working together to create mentally healthy environments in the places that we learn, work, live – and play sport.

# HOW CAN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL CLUBS AND COMMUNITIES POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

**Football environments can play a pivotal role in enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of their communities by pledging their commitment to the Mental Fitness Charter.**

Endorsing the AFL Mental Fitness Charter demonstrates a club's commitment to maximising the mental health benefits of participation in community sport and creating a club environment which promotes wellbeing - where people feel safe, valued, and supported. It is a voluntary commitment to a set of five principles, backed by a set of resources, that clubs can use to promote the mental health and wellbeing of players, coaches, umpires, members, supporters, and others involved in their club. It also helps clubs support people who are experiencing mental health difficulties.



**The AFL encourages community football clubs to pledge their commitment to the Charter to demonstrate their commitment to promoting and protecting people's mental health and wellbeing.**

**Mental health and wellbeing is good for individuals, good for clubs, and good for our communities.**






# STAYING MENTALLY FIT


## **Staying mentally fit in life requires knowledge and skills about how to protect and promote wellbeing.**


Mental fitness helps us cope with stress and life challenges. Mental fitness is something we can build, maintain and grow individually and collectively. Growing and maintaining mental fitness requires action across many different areas, such as:


 Getting good quality sleep


 Regularly keeping physically active


 Eating a high-quality diet


 Avoiding cigarettes and illicit substances, and avoiding or limiting alcohol


 Learning the social and emotional skills to cope with life stress and solve problems in life


 Spending time in nature such as green and blue spaces


 Learning the psychological skills that help us to relax our body and regulate our emotions


 Learning and maintaining a realistic mindset and managing unhelpful thoughts


 Building positive and respectful relationships, engaging in quality social connections through footy and accessing social supports when we need them


 Getting involved in work, hobbies and activities like playing or officiating footy that build our self-confidence and give us a sense of pleasure and accomplishment

 Contributing to work, hobbies and activities like playing or officiating footy that give us a sense of direction, meaning and purpose in life

 Giving to others and contributing to a charity or cause

 Treating others with compassion and respect and calling out stigma about mental ill-health, along with bullying, racism, and discrimination

 Learning to recognise when we are struggling and may need professional support, and knowing where to go for support

 Learning to recognise when others are doing it tough and having the skills to reach out to help them access the help they need.

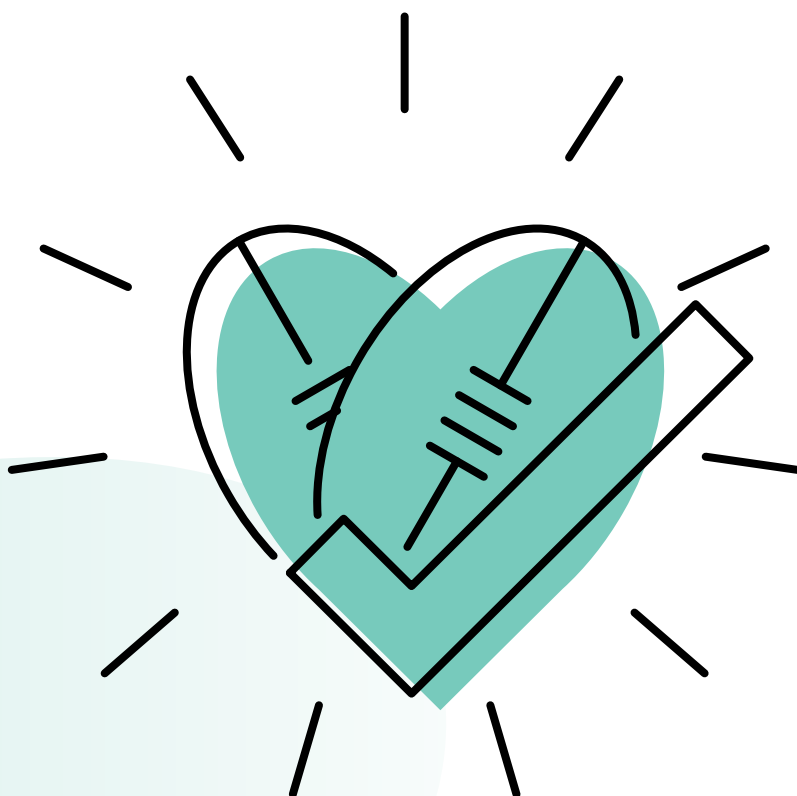
**Doing these things on a regular basis can enhance our mental fitness and reduce our risk of experiencing mental health challenges. They can also save someone's life.**

# PROMOTING MENTAL FITNESS THROUGH AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

## Community football clubs have an important role to play in promoting people's mental fitness.

The Mental Fitness Charter is a call to action for football communities to value mental fitness as equal to physical fitness. Many mental fitness skills can be built through involvement in community football, like playing, watching, and officiating football. Footy is therefore a powerful means of building mental fitness. Other mental fitness skills can be taught by embedding mental health and wellbeing programs in football.

The AFL encourages community football clubs to play their role in promoting their community's mental health and wellbeing by signing a pledge to implement the five commitments of the mental fitness charter and building a Mental Fitness Quick Wins Action Plan. By becoming a **mentally fit club**, clubs can support the mental health and wellbeing of their communities.



# THE FIVE COMMITMENTS OF THE MENTAL FITNESS CHARTER

**Mentally fit clubs build a mental fitness quick wins action plan that follows these five commitments:**

## **1. Commit to build mental fitness skills**

Staying mentally fit in life involves our ability to use resources and skills to flexibly adapt to challenges (or advantages), so we can thrive. Mental fitness helps us cope with stress and life challenges.

Mental Fitness can be integrated into the club's everyday activities. Download the Staying Mentally Fit poster and promote wellbeing in everything the club does. If staying mentally fit is already a focus, take it a step further and implement an evidence-based program that teaches players and coaches the psychological skills that underpin mental fitness.

## **2. Commit to increase mental health literacy and challenge stigma**

Mental health literacy involves knowing the signs when you (or someone else) is struggling and knowing how to support them and where to go for help. An example would be knowing how to search information online about mental health self-help strategies or having the skills to have a supportive conversation to help someone access a mental health professional. Mental health literacy also involves having knowledge about risk factors and causes of mental ill-health and knowing how to protect and promote positive mental health.

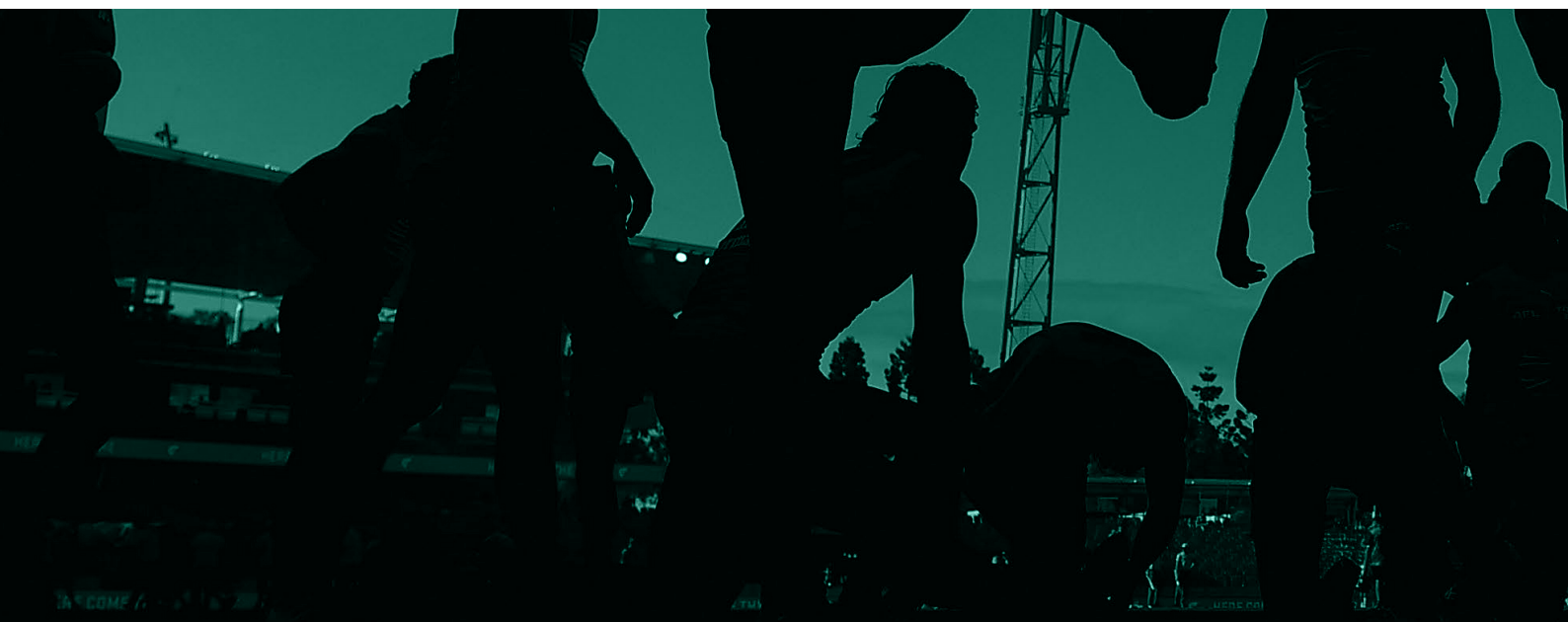
Challenging stigma refers to efforts to dispelling harmful myths and educating against inaccurate stereotyping surrounding mental health. Stigma towards others or yourself can prevent someone from reaching out for help. Challenging stigma is important to ensure individuals and communities are empowered to seek help when needed.

### **3. Commit to reducing risks to mental health**

There are many risk and protective factors for mental health that can vary from person to person and across different phases of an individual's life. Reducing risk factors can help reduce the risk of mental health problems first, and ensures everyone feels safe, valued and included. Common risk factors to mental health include exposure to bullying and harassment, social isolation and loneliness, and reduced coping skills. There are many opportunities to reduce risks to mental health through football communities which can help improve future mental health outcomes.

### **4. Commit to promoting a culture of wellbeing**

A culture of wellbeing refers to the environment and community beyond the individual that fosters psychological, social and emotional health. A culture of wellbeing supports people from all skill levels and backgrounds to enjoy the wellbeing benefits of playing, coaching, officiating, or watching football. A culture of wellbeing also contributes to on-field performance.





## **5. Commit to responding to risky events that have an impact on mental health**

Unfortunately, there are sometimes risky events in football communities which may negatively impact mental health, such as a mental health crisis or critical incident. A critical incident is an extraordinary situation such as a natural disaster or serious accident typically causing a significant impact on the collective wellbeing of the football club, its members, and the wider community. Ensuring response teams and plans are in place at the beginning of each season and readied to respond to critical incidents is important.

**The AFL has curated a set of programs, resources, and guidelines to assist clubs to implement the five commitments outlined in the Charter. These resources are described below. Clubs are free to implement these initiatives or choose others they believe can help them to fulfill their commitment to promote the mental fitness of all the people connected to their club. A Mental Fitness Quick Wins Action plan template has been developed, to help clubs plan how they will implement the Charter.**

# HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE MENTAL FITNESS CHARTER



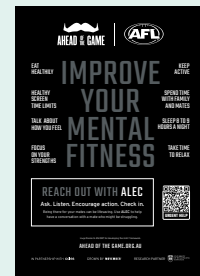
## 1. Build mental fitness skills

Any of these actions will contribute to mental fitness in your Club

- Deliver a mental health and wellbeing program. Use the AFL + Orygen guidelines **What works for mental health in sporting teams?** - to help you choose a program.



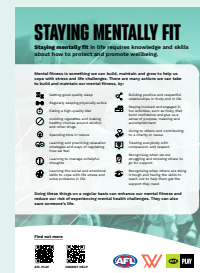
- Book **Movember Ahead of the Game**, an evidence-based, free mental health literacy and resilience program for young players and umpires (aged 12-18 years) and their support networks of parents, coaches, and club volunteers.



- Sign your school up for the **AFL Schools GOALS Program** developed with Matterworks. GOALS teaches primary and secondary school children mental fitness skills through curriculum-based learning.



- Display the **Staying Mentally Fit** poster at your Club.



- Promote headspace's **Tips for a Healthy headspace at your Club**

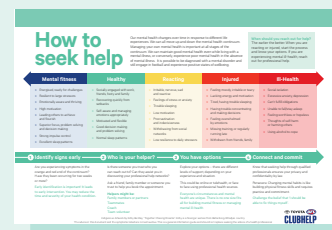


## 2. Increase mental health literacy and challenge stigma



Any of these actions will increase mental health literacy and challenge stigma in your Club

- Include **How to Seek Help** Tool and **Urgent help** links on your club website



- Appoint a **Mental Health First Aid** officer



- Host a **mental health guest speaker** at your next club night (Ensure they follow **Safe Storytelling**)



- Book **Movember Ahead of the Game**, an evidence-based, free mental health literacy and resilience program for young players and umpires (aged 12-18 years) and their support networks of parents, coaches, and club volunteers.



- Book **Tackle Your Feelings**, a free mental health training program available to coaches, committee members, senior players (18+) and umpires nationally.



- Host a **mental health charity match** or **support a public campaign** which contributes to mentally healthy communities.

### 3. Reduce risks to mental health



Any of these actions will reduce risks to mental health.



Support an **annual umpire respect campaign**



Refer to the **Member Protection and Integrity AFL policies** in the National Community Football Handbook for information on:



- Member protection
- Vilification and discrimination
- Safeguarding children and young people
- Safe use of social media



Support your coaches to participate in **ongoing coach development** in coaching practices that promote safe and supportive coaching



**Set standards** for adults to keep their cool when under pressure



**Call out disrespectful behaviours** towards club volunteers and officials



Use the **Good Sports resources** to help your club with alcohol management, smoking regulations, illegal drugs and safe transport.



Use **eSafety resources** to help your club with staying safe online



# 4

## Promote a culture of wellbeing



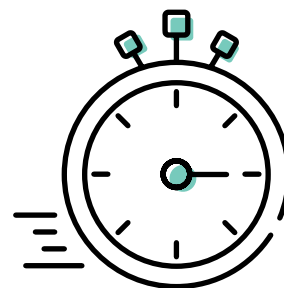
Any of these actions will contribute to a culture of wellbeing in your Club.

- Incorporate **mental fitness** into your training drills and coaching
- Start training with **mindful stretching and breathing**
- Actively teach players to **develop problem solving skills** on and off field
- Teach players to **maintain a growth mindset** as part of feedback conversations
- Start training with a **check in** - physically and mentally
- Model good mental fitness skills** to younger players
- Emphasise getting **enough sleep and eating well** is important to your game plan
- Talk to your team mates about **giving and receiving support** and having each other's back on and off the field
- Host family days and club nights** that promote connection and belonging to the club
- Share mindfulness tips** or **set wellbeing goals** as part of game preparation

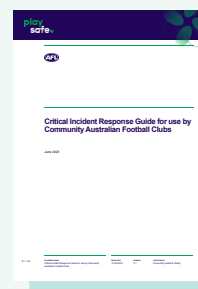


## 5. Respond to risky events

Any of these actions will prepare you to respond quickly and safely to risky events.



Use a **Critical Incident template** to plan in advance for how to respond to a death, serious accident or natural disaster impacting the club.

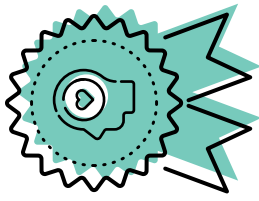


Use the **AFL's Guide for Clubs impacted by Suicide** to guide any response to suicide safely.





# MENTAL FITNESS QUICK WINS ACTION PLAN

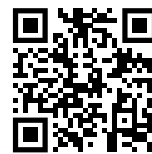


Club Name:

Date:

Club logo:

	ACTION PLANNED	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DATE SCHEDULED
1. Build mental fitness skills:			
2. Increase mental health literacy and challenge stigma:			
3. Reducing risks to mental health:			
4. Promote a culture of wellbeing:			
5. Respond to risky events that have an impact on mental health			



URGENT HELP



PLAY-AFL





# MENTAL FITNESS CHARTER



## PURPOSE

The Mental Fitness Charter recognises that football clubs can play a pivotal role in enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of their members. This Charter sets out the expectation that clubs will champion mental health and wellbeing guided by the following five commitments.

Club logo:



Build the mental fitness skills of our members and community



Increase mental health literacy and challenging stigma



Reduce risks to mental health



Promote a culture of wellbeing



Respond safely to events that have an impact on mental health

## THE WHY

As a signatory of the Mental Fitness Charter,  acknowledges

- good mental health and wellbeing is a vital individual and community asset
- our mental health is equally as important as our physical health
- this football club has an important role to play in enhancing the mental fitness of our community

## PLEDGE

We,  commit to:

- creating and implementing a Mental Fitness Quick Wins Action Plan
- building the mental fitness skills of our members and community
- increasing mental health literacy and challenging stigma
- taking steps to reduce risks to mental health
- promoting a culture of wellbeing
- responding safely to events that have an impact on mental health

## SIGNED

Club President

Date



# GLOSSARY

**Mental health challenges:** Describes changes in emotion or behaviour that can impact anyone's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. These changes can result from life stressors. These changes often resolve with time or when a person's situation changes.

**Mental ill-health:** A term that encompasses changes in emotion or behaviour that can impact a person's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, but not to the extent that it meets the criteria for a mental illness diagnosis. These changes may develop into a mental illness if they persist or increase in severity.

**Psychological distress:** an emotional state with where someone is overwhelmed or distressed to the extent that it affects daily life activities. Psychological distress can result in several negative symptoms, such as sadness, distraction, and anxiety. It is often a very normal response to major life events, trauma or stressors.

**Recovery:** Recovery means being able to create and live a meaningful life and contribute to your community, with or without mental health issues.

**The dual mental health continua:** The dual continua model's four quadrants are based on the presence or absence of symptoms of mental ill-health and the level of mental health and wellbeing, ranging from minimal (languishing) to optimal (thriving). The model highlights that people can attain mental health and wellbeing, even when living with or recovering from a mental health condition.

**Mental health** is our psychological, social, and emotional health, and affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we reach our potential, handle stress, relate to others, and contribute to our community.

**Mental fitness** refers to the way we intentionally build and maintain skills to adapt to challenges (or advantages), so we can thrive. Mental fitness helps us cope with stress and life challenges. Mental fitness is something we can build and maintain individually and collectively. As with physical fitness, mental fitness skills must be practiced regularly over time for maintenance and gain.

**Mental health literacy** involves knowing the signs when you (or someone else) is struggling and knowing how to support them and where to go for help. An example would be knowing how to search information online about mental health self-help strategies or having the skills to have a supportive conversation to help someone access a mental health professional. Mental health literacy also involves having knowledge about risk factors and causes of mental ill-health and knowing how to protect and promote positive mental health.

**Wellbeing literacy** involves knowing how to optimise wellbeing.

**Resilience** is about adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences. Resilience can be cultivated and practiced - like building a muscle, resilience takes intentional practice.

**Social connection** means feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people.

**Flourishing/Thriving** is when we feel connected, engaged, we experience positive emotion and find meaning and purpose by cultivating our strengths.

**Languishing** means feeling dissatisfied, disengaged, empty or stagnated. We feel disconnected or disillusioned.

**Wellbeing** refers to feeling good, functioning well, having positive relationships, and a sense of a purpose and meaning in life.

# INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

## For more information about Mental Health & Wellbeing at the AFL

Play AFL

AFL Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub

AFL Integrity Portal

Managing Club Incidents and Conflicts

Coaches Play AFL

Safeguarding Children & Young People - Play AFL

## Find out More

Beyond Blue: A guide to what works for mental wellbeing

Mental Wellbeing Index – Smiling Mind

MH Consumer Guides

Evidence to Practice: Universal, community-based approaches to enhance young people's wellbeing.

## If you or anyone you know needs support, contact:

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**13YARN:** (13 92 76) [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

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