



Creating Mentally Healthy Sporting Clubs and Community

A partnership between Read the Play, AFL Barwon and the Committee for Geelong



**Read
the
Play**

FOUNDING PARTNER
KEMPE
ENGINEERING





**Read
the
Play**

This framework contains information, tips and resources to help you, your club and your members both on and off the field and court to navigate mental health in 2022.

You may find some of the resources helpful and informative, but if you or anyone you know requires any urgent support, you should contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467. If it's an emergency, then call 000.

Why is support for mental health and wellbeing in community sport important?

Community sport offers an ideal space to support mental health and wellbeing, particularly for young people. Sports play a central role in Australian culture, and this is reflected in the fact that a majority of young people participate in organised sport. Participation in sport can have direct benefits for physical and mental health by encouraging regular exercise along with providing an opportunity for a sense of community and wellbeing to be cultivated (Orygen, 2019).

Community support offers an ideal space to support Mental Health within local communities, particularly for young people. It often provides a safe space and a trusted network where people feel socially connected.

High numbers of young people participate in organised sport, meaning that clubs, leagues and associations can provide an important context outside schools where positive messages, mental health education and guidance regarding support services can be provided.



Creating Mentally Healthy Sporting Clubs And Community

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Creating Mentally Healthy Sporting Clubs And Community

Clubs, Coaches and Officials

Why selecting the right mental health and wellbeing program is vital

There is a rapidly increasing number of organisations offering mental health and wellbeing support services to sports organisations in Victoria, from guest talks to education programs.

Clubs have a duty of care to ensure that the providers they select are safe and do no harm to the health and wellbeing of their participants. Selecting the right Mental Health & program provider is vital and will enable you to deliver the best possible program and support to your members.

How do we become a mentally healthy sporting Club?

Becoming a mentally healthy sporting club doesn't have to be a new initiative that clubs spend time and resources supporting – most clubs are already doing work in this area. This document is designed to help you identify what you are already doing, opportunities to broaden your offering and how you share this information with your members.

It's about a way of thinking, it's about your culture and it's recognising that sporting clubs are a great place to help break down stigma and start conversations on mental health.

The following process and checklist have been designed to make it easier to step through what can be a confusing space.





Creating Mentally Healthy Sporting Clubs And Community

SUPPORTING MENTALLY HEALTHY SPORTING CLUBS

A checklist for community-based sporting organisations

RAISE AWARENESS

- Do you promote Mental Health and wellbeing on socials?
- Does your club have connections to local mental health providers? If so, what providers?

BUILD A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

- Has your club experienced any mental health crisis events?
- Does your club have player wellbeing officers? If so, how many?
- Have they completed online training?
- Has your club provided mental health awareness training to coaches and committee members?
- Do you display Mental Health awareness posters such as Read the Play in the clubrooms?

IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR CLUB

- Does your club promote mental health champions amongst your own club?
- Does your club have policies in place relevant to health and wellbeing?
- Does your club discuss mental health and identified risks for your club at club meetings?

OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION

- Does your club run Read the Play sessions?
- Does your club take part in the Read the Play round?
- Does your club ensure support is available from multiple people within the club?

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

- Does your club emphasise sport is about enjoyment?
- Does your club follow up with families when young people disengage?

EMBRACE DIVERSITY

- Does your club have policies/procedures in place to address bullying, racism, vilification, or intimidation?
- Are any policies/procedures in place regularly reviewed?
- Are any policies/procedures easily accessible to all members?
- Does your club consult with young people about what will help them feel included?
- Does your club have processes to welcome new people and offer support?

BUILD LINKS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

- Does your club understand what external well-being services can offer and how you can collaborate?
- Do you have clear responsibility within the club to maintain relationships with well-being services?
- Does your club compile a list of key well-being supports on your website and keep this up to date?
- Would your club be interested in a free web based mental health framework which provides information and resources to players, coaches and parents at local football clubs?

Special Rounds

Each year, AFL Barwon clubs will be involved in a Read the Play round for their junior players. Clubs will receive information from AFL Barwon and details will also be available on the AFL Barwon website and social media channels.

Signs to look for

MENTAL HEALTH SPECTRUM



GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

- Experiencing a full range of emotions, the good and bad
- Coping with normal life stressors
- Engaging meaningfully with your community



POOR MENTAL HEALTH

- Increased stress in life
- Feeling overwhelmed, sad, frustrated
- Maintaining relationships, joyful activities and responsibilities is more difficult



MENTAL ILLNESS

- A diagnosable condition that impacts a person's thoughts behaviours and emotions
- May significantly impact a persons ability to maintain relationships, joyful activities and cope with stress

Common warning signs:

- Moodiness and irritability
- Loss of interest in life and previously enjoyable activities
- Withdrawing from friendships and family
- Changes in appetite
- Excessive or reduced sleep/irregular sleeping pattern
- Lack of energy and motivation
- Difficulties with memory and concentration
- Mind racing
- butterflies in your stomach
- Restless
- Panic attacks, increased heart rate, shortness of breath



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How to book a Read the Play session

Read the Play is a FREE mental health literacy program for junior members of sporting clubs. It is an innovative program which addresses the health and well-being of young people. The program is designed for the junior levels of sports clubs and imparts information about mental illness through engaging the young players in fun and interactive games, thereby helping to remove the stigma and increase help seeking behaviour. The program was founded in Geelong and all programs are delivered by a local mental health professional in your clubs.

The purpose of Read the Play is:

- **To deliver innovative programs in partnership with sporting clubs that empower young people to take control of their mental health and wellbeing.**

The RTP programs aim to break down the barriers that prevent young people from seeking help. The primary barriers that RTP aim to address are:

- **The stigma associated with mental ill health**
- **The lack of knowledge about mental health/illness**
- **The lack of language/literacy to engage in conversation on the topic**
- **A common reluctance to engage with adults as part of teenage development**

The aim of the Read the Play programs is not to prevent mental ill health or alcohol/drug use, but rather, promote and facilitate help-seeking behaviour in young people. Rather than ignore the inevitable fact that young adults have a high prevalence of mental ill health and explorative use of alcohol and illicit substances, we acknowledge its presence and aim to provide a program focussed on mental health literacy, techniques to support peers, information on the harmful effects of alcohol, drugs and cyber bullying and the provision of appropriate avenues to seek help when needed.





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Under 15 Netball and Under 16 Football Programs: Huddle Up:

One in four young Australians (12-24yo) will experience a mental illness in any one year and research indicates that lack of mental health literacy may increase the risk of mild/moderate mental health conditions. Cyber bullying is also a significant contributor to mental ill health with 88% of adolescents reporting experiencing cyberbullying (Lenhart et al. 2011).

Huddle up is a community-based program for young adolescents (13-16yo: football and netball players), that aims to increase knowledge on mental health, promote help seeking behaviour and influence beliefs and attitudes related to identifying and responding to their peers who may be at risk of mental ill-health or cyber bullying.



MVP:

One in four young Australians (12-24yo) will experience a mental illness in any one year and research indicates that lack of mental health literacy may increase the risk of mild/moderate mental health conditions. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young Australian 14-24 years old and research indicates that people do not have the confidence or knowledge to appropriately respond to a peer having suicidal thoughts.

MVP is a community-based program for young adolescents (13-15yo: U15 football and netball players), that aims to increase knowledge on mental health, promote help seeking behaviour and influence beliefs and attitudes related to identifying and responding to their peers who may be at risk of mental ill-health or suicide.

Under 17 Netball and Under 18 Football Program: Play On:

One in four young Australians (12-24yo) will experience a mental illness in any one year and research indicates that lack of mental health literacy may increase the risk of mild/moderate mental health conditions. The AIHW National Drug Strategy Survey has indicated that 26.4% of Australians over the age of 14 yo have exceeded safe alcohol consumption for single-occasion risk in the past year. Specifically, young Australians are far more likely to drink in harmful amounts than the rest of the adult population.

Play On is a community-based program for adolescents (15-18yo football and netball players), that aims to increase mental health literacy and knowledge of the impact underage alcohol use can have on mental health outcomes within local sporting communities. The program will have strong focus on influencing beliefs and attitudes towards underage drinking and increasing confidence in being able to respond to peers who may benefit from support for their drug and alcohol use.





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What to expect

As a component of the Read the Play program, each club is required to identify a Player Wellbeing Officer (PWO) who will then play an integral role in maintaining wellbeing at the club. Player Wellbeing Officers participate in online training which equips them with mental health knowledge. They are encouraged to become supporters for young people identified as having, or potentially developing a mental health program, and guiding them to appropriate sources of help. PWOs are not mental health clinicians and the training undertaken aims to enhance their knowledge of mental health, equipping them to have positive conversations and ultimately ensuring that they are able to direct the young person to the appropriate supports as required.

To support the PWOs in their roles they were further supported with the development of a trivia quiz night which enables them to introduce themselves to the players and also impart the much-needed mental health information. The Read the Play nights are held in conjunction with the Read the Play round which aims to consolidate the learnings from the trivia nights and further highlight the qualities of a mentally healthy sporting club.

The Player Wellbeing Officer (PWO) at a sporting club plays an integral role in maintaining wellbeing at a sporting club. Belonging to a sporting club provides a sense of community, safety and comradery for a young person, whilst also providing them an outlet to engage in physical activity and social support. In their role as a PWO, they may need to:

- **Listen and act as a sounding board**
- **Listen actively: reframe/paraphrase/validate concerns and worries**
- **Offer to provide details for formal mental health supports such as counselling**
- **Make themselves well known to all players, coaches and parents**
- **Follow up and check in with people whom they have supported in the past**

How to Host

Read the Play is mandatory for all AFL Barwon clubs

- **All clubs are required to complete 1 session of Read the Play with each of their Under 16 Football / Under 15 Netball teams per year.**
- **Read the play sessions can be booked in advance.**
- **A Read the Play session generally takes around 1 hour.**
- **The sessions are usually held in lieu of or immediately after a training session.**



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Preparation required

- The PWO has the role of setting up the room for the Read the Play session. Read the Play will liaise with them a week or so before the session to make sure that they are clear about the requirements for the session.
- The rooms are set up in up to 6 tables to allow for young people to play in teams.
- The maximum number of participants is 40 however the preferred number is around 25
- It's important to communicate with parents/guardians about what happens in the session and provide them with information about what they should do if this session raises any concerns with them or their child. A sample letter to parents/guardians is attached that you can change to suit your club.
- Gain confidence to have mental health conversations

Sample Letter to Parents

Our club will be running a Read the Play session for all footballers and netballers in the under 15 age group on <date> at <venue>.

Read the Play's purpose is "To deliver innovative programs in partnership with sporting clubs that empower young people to take control of their mental health and wellbeing."

The Program has been very successful and is recognised as a major mental health initiative in the Geelong Region supported by the Geelong Football and Netball Leagues. Our club is thrilled to be working with them again this year to increase knowledge about mental health and local support services. The program also:

- **Increases confidence in ability to respond to people with mental health problems**
- **Increases confidence to assist people to access appropriate support**
- **Improves attitudes towards mental health problems**
- **Improves attitudes towards help seeking**

Their interactive games-based session is all about equipping kids to better understand mental health issues and know where to get help when needed.

They will introduce our volunteer Player Wellbeing Officer (PWO) <insert name> to the kids. <PWO> will provide an ongoing, club-based resource for kids and parents. They won't lecture the players – they will empower.

They know that families are the most important cog in the support network and they're available to help you, too. Further information and resources are available on their website – www.readtheplay.org.au

If your child has any further questions after attending this session, please feel free to call Read the Play on 0422 669 892 for support.

Signed – Junior President





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How to book a Tackle Your Feelings session

Tackle Your Feelings is a training program designed for local footy clubs just like yours. It strives to improve understanding and awareness of mental health as well as build skills within your coaches to foster an environment where athletes are supported to effectively manage their emotions.

The program aims to provide community coaches with the tools to understand, recognise and manage signs of mental health. More broadly, the program seeks to:

- **Raise awareness of mental health in the footy community**
- **Reduce the stigma associated with mental health (self and social)**
- **Change the behaviours associated impacting one's mental health (help seeking)**

Managed by Leisure Networks, this program is made available to a number of clubs each year at no cost through a partnership with the Federal/State Government?

To register your interest or find out more information please refer to the Tackle your Feelings website:

<https://www.tackleyourfeelings.org.au/>

Mental Health Training

Training available:

There are training sessions available for both parents/guardians as well as the Player Well-being Officers on the Read the Play website:

<https://training.readtheplay.org.au/courses/parent-mental-health-training/>

<https://training.readtheplay.org.au/courses/player-wellbeing-officer-training-2/>

Both sessions will take you through the basics of:

- **Understanding how to maintain mental wellbeing**
- **Learn about different mental illnesses - the signs and symptoms**
- **When and how to offer support**
- **Get the tools and knowledge to help your kids**

Resources - [Click here to go to Resources Page](#)



Creating Mentally Healthy Sporting Clubs And Community

Players

General Information About Mental Health

Mental health affects the way people think, feel and act. Taking care of our mental health is just as important as having a healthy body.

The links between physical activity and enhanced mental health and wellbeing is widely accepted and promoted through communities.

As a player, we encourage you to consider how you can:

- **Contribute to creating a mentally healthy workplace for players, volunteers and members at your club**
- **Create a positive environment for sports participation**
- **Be inclusive and supportive of people with mental health issues**

I Need Help

Need help? Call a helpline.

Lifeline 13 11 14

24/7 online and phone crisis and suicide support and counselling for all Australians.

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

24/7 advice and support for mental health concerns.

Suicide call back service 1300 659 467

24/7 phone or online professional counselling to people who are affected by suicide.

Kids help line 1800 551 800

24/7 phone and online counselling service for people aged 5-25.

e-headspace 1800 650 890

9am-1am free online and phone support for people aged 15-25.

Mensline Australia 1800 789 978

24/7 online and phone support for men who are seeking emotional support or experience relationship concerns.

Q life 1800 184 527

3pm – midnight, 7 days a week online or phone LGBTI peer support and referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

SANE Australia 1800 187 263

Support service for people experiencing complex mental health issues.

The butterfly foundation helpline 1800 ED HOPE

8am – midnight, 7 days a week support for eating disorders and body image issues.

Resources - [Click here to go to Resources Page](#)

Parents & Guardians

General Information About Mental Health

Mental health affects the way people think, feel and act. Taking care of our mental health is just as important as having a healthy body. As a parent or guardian, you play an important role in your child's mental health. You're a vital cog in the support network.

You can promote good mental health by the things you say and do, and through the environment you create at home.

You can also learn about the early signs of mental health problems and know where to go for help.

So, how can you support their child's mental health?

- Help children build strong, caring relationships
- Help children and youth develop self-esteem, so that they feel good about themselves
- Listen, and respect their feelings
- Create a safe, positive home environment
- In difficult situations, help children and youth solve problems



Signs to Look For

MENTAL HEALTH SPECTRUM



GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

- Experiencing a full range of emotions, the good and bad
- Coping with normal life stressors
- Engaging meaningfully with your community



POOR MENTAL HEALTH

- Increased stress in life
- Feeling overwhelmed, sad, frustrated
- Maintaining relationships, joyful activities and responsibilities is more difficult



MENTAL ILLNESS

- A diagnosable condition that impacts a person's thoughts behaviours and emotions
- May significantly impact a persons ability to maintain relationships, joyful activities and cope with stress

Common warning signs:

- Moodiness and irritability
- Loss of interest in life and previously enjoyable activities
- Withdrawing from friendships and family
- Changes in appetite
- Excessive or reduced sleep/irregular sleeping pattern
- Lack of energy and motivation
- Difficulties with memory and concentration
- Mind racing
- butterflies in your stomach
- Restless
- Panic attacks, increased heart rate, shortness of breath

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How do I speak to a young person about mental health?

So you've seen some warning signs or symptoms and you need to take action... here are some tips for having a conversation..

- Choose a safe and comfortable environment to start the conversation.
- Ensure you have time to listen and avoid distractions or interruptions.
- Listen without judgement and do not be critical.
- Use open-ended questions
- Reflect back what they say by paraphrasing or summarising what they are concerned about
- Use the same language when describing the person's experience.
- Be aware of your body language and facial expressions.
- Practice actively listening and be non-confrontational.
- Referencing conversations or experiences you have had with other young people (whilst maintaining confidentiality) and the benefits those young people found from seeking help for their mental health may help motivate a young person to take action. Anecdotal evidence that peers are also experiencing difficulties can both be validating and de-stigmatising.
- Use scale questions such as: 'On a scale from 0 to 10, 0 being the worst you could possibly feel and 10 being the best you could possibly feel, how are you feeling today?'

TALKING TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



EDUCATE YOURSELF

It is important to be aware of common mental health conditions for your children's age, signs, symptoms etc. Knowing support services your child or you can access may also be helpful.

START SMALL

This is an extremely important topic to address but don't feel as though you need to set aside hours to talk about it. Keep it simple, informal and don't put too much pressure on your child or the young person you are speaking to. Keep in mind that you may have to try a number of times before they are ready to talk to you about it.



ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Ask questions or make statements that need more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer. This will help your children to put things in their own words and keep the conversation flowing.

DEMONSTRATE EMPATHY

Be sure your child is aware you are there for them. They may feel awkward when they talk about these kinds of things, and may worry about expressing feelings like anger, sadness and embarrassment. Let them know that you understand that it may be difficult for them to talk, but you aren't going to judge them and are there for them.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
WWW.READTHEPLAY.ORG.AU

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Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

24/7 advice and support for mental health concerns.

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SANE Australia 1800 187 263

Support service for people experiencing complex mental health issues.

The butterfly foundation helpline 1800 ED HOPE

8am – midnight, 7 days a week support for eating disorders and body image issues.

Mental Health Training

Training available:

Complete the Read the Play Youth mental health for parents training course (<https://training.readtheplay.org.au/courses/parent-mental-health-training/>) or you can access further information about warning signs and having a conversation through the resources tab.

This session will take you through the basics of:

- Understanding how to maintain mental wellbeing
- Learn about different mental illnesses – the signs and symptoms
- When and how to offer support
- Get the tools and knowledge to help your kids

Resources

There are many resources available in this space and if you'd like to look for additional opportunities or programs, you might find what you are looking for in this comprehensive list.

Something here about the benefits of accredited training

- Alcohol: <https://readtheplay.org.au/alcohol/>
- Cyberbullying: <https://readtheplay.org.au/cyberbullying/>
- Mental Health (sleep, exercise, food, self care, talk): <https://readtheplay.org.au/mental-health/>
- Supporting Someone Through Mental Illness: <https://readtheplay.org.au/supporting-someone-through-mental-illness/>
- Warning Signs and Seeking Help: <https://readtheplay.org.au/supporting-someone-through-mental-illness/>
- Information for Players: <https://readtheplay.org.au/players/>
- Information for Parents: <https://readtheplay.org.au/parents/>
- Information for Sporting Groups: <https://readtheplay.org.au/sporting-groups/>
- Youth mental health for parents: <https://training.readtheplay.org.au/courses/parent-mental-health-training/>
- Player wellbeing officer training: <https://training.readtheplay.org.au/courses/player-wellbeing-officer-training-2/>

RU Ok?

- Signs it might be time to start a conversation: <https://www.ruok.org.au/signs>
- Simple steps to a conversation: <https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask>

Beyond Blue

- Getting Immediate Support: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support>
- Suicide prevention and post suicide support: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention>
- National Help Lines and Websites: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites>



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Additional Training

In addition to the support services above, there is additional training available from a number of providers in our region:

Course Name: Youth Mental Health First Aid

<https://www.genutraining.org.au/program/mental-health-first-aid/>

Overview

The Youth Mental Health First Aid course will teach you how to assist adolescents who may be experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves, using a practical, evidence-based Action Plan.

Provider	Who ia it for?	Duration and Mode	Cost
genU/MHFA	Adults	14-hours 2x7-hour face to face 4 x3.5-hour face to face	GenU \$297

Course Name: Teen mental health first aid

<https://mhfa.com.au/courses/public/types/teen>

Overview

Teen MHFA is an education course that teaches teenagers about the different types of mental health problems and mental health crisis situations in young people. The course teaches participants how to recognise changes in a friends' thinking, feelings or behaviour that may indicate the presence of a mental health problem, how to offer initial mental first aid support and how to connect them with a trusted adult.

Provider	Who ia it for?	Duration and Mode	Cost
MHFA	Teenagers year 7-12 * The course can only be delivered in settings where adults have been trained in Youth MHFA*	3.5-hour (split into 3 sessions) Face to face	TBC



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Course Name: Mental health and wellbeing essentials workshop

<https://www.stjohnvic.com.au/first-aid-training/first-aid-courses/mental-health-and-wellbeing-essentials-workshop/>

Overview

This workshop covers topics including:

- Understanding mental health as a continuum
- Understanding protective factors
- Learn how stress affects us short term, long term and how you can improve the way you self manage stress
- Risk factors impacting mental health and ways to reduce your risks
- Identifying thought patterns and managing your thoughts to influence behaviours and outcomes (cognitive restructuring)
- Warning signs you or another person might need support
- How to access further resources and professional support

Provider	Who ia it for?	Duration and Mode	Cost
St Johns Ambulance	Adults	3.5-hour Face to face	\$125

Course Name: First aid for the mind eLearning

<https://www.stjohnvic.com.au/first-aid-training/first-aid-courses/first-aid-for-the-mind-elearning/>

Overview

This eLearning course is designed to arm you the tools you will need to support someone experiencing a mental health crisis

Provider	Who ia it for?	Duration and Mode	Cost
St Johns Ambulance		1.5-hour Online, self-paced	\$49