



MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT



WELCOME TO BRITISH EQUESTRIAN AND SPORT IN MIND'S MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT.

We believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience the joy and connection found through equestrian activities, which can have a profound impact on our mental health.

We've created this toolkit to promote mental wellbeing through the power of equestrian activities, so that we can all understand and support each other.

Equestrian centres across the UK offer a range of opportunities for anyone looking to be more active, spend time with horses and learn new skills. From therapy sessions and recreational riding to competitive training and volunteering, there's a way for everyone to be involved.

Sport in Mind provides additional resources, workshops and community support to help everyone maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle and enjoy positive mental wellbeing through sport and physical activity.



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP – OUR JOINT MISSION

We're proud to unite our strengths and share a powerful joint mission – to transform lives through the harmony of equestrian activities and mental wellbeing.

Our collaboration aims to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where everyone can experience the profound benefits of physical activity and the healing power of nature.

Together, we are committed to improving the lives of individuals experiencing mental health challenges through the joy and connection found in equestrian activities. We believe everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive, and we are dedicated to making these benefits accessible to all.

Jim Eyre, British Equestrian CEO

Neil Harris, Sport in Mind CEO

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit has been created for everyone, including coaches, parents and volunteers, to help you understand a little more about mental wellbeing and the problems you or others may face. The first step in becoming more comfortable in supporting those around you is to gain knowledge.

Please note: Reading this toolkit does not make you qualified in mental health first aid or to run specific sessions. It is a guide to support you.

DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year¹.

OUR PARTNERSHIP: CASE STUDY

An equestrian centre in southeast England found their involvement with the British Equestrian and Sport in Mind project to be immensely rewarding by providing opportunities to help those struggling with mental health:

"My aim is to build confidence. The participants may be a little fearful and anxious to start with – a lot of them haven't sat on a horse before – but it's something they want to do. You watch them slowly go from being quite nervous about climbing on a horse to, 'Oh, look, we're trotting, we can steer.' It's a massive sense of achievement. Their personality starts to shine through and when you see the smiles on their faces and what they get out of it, you know it's super-worthwhile."

– Ruth Gardiner, centre owner

"My life involved looking after my husband and was very isolating. I'd also suffered a couple of injuries from accidents and my mental health was struggling. Coming to the session has helped me physically and mentally and I want to do more. I was spending my spare time sitting down, but now I want to go out for walk and be more active around horses."

– Participant

Scan the QR code to find out more



THE TRANSFORMATIVE BENEFITS OF BEING ACTIVE

Equestrian activities offer a unique advantage that sets us apart – the partnership with horses. The impact of horse riding, along with off-the-horse activities, on mental health is becoming increasingly evident.

Of the young people taking part in physical equestrian activities through the Together Fund, 82% said the project helped them manage their mental health².

Some of the unique benefits of equestrian activity include^{3,4,5,6}:

- **Calming the mind and lifting mood** – The calm presence of horses can help reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression. Working with horses and being active provides a natural energy boost and improved quality of life.
- **Building confidence and self-esteem** – Gained from increased levels of physical activity connecting with horses and socialising with others around you.
- **Connection with nature** – Equestrian activity means spending more time outdoors and surrounded by nature which enhances overall wellbeing.
- **Improved physical health** – Horse riding and other off-the-horse activities count as physical activity, improving strength, balance, mobility and cardiovascular fitness.
- **Encouraging mindfulness and concentration** – Horses respond best when we're present and calm. This encourages focus, mindfulness and better emotional regulation – skills that can help in everyday life, too.
- **Supporting better sleep** – Regular physical activity promotes better sleep quality.
- **Sense of belonging** – Equestrian activities bring people together, with shared passion and experiences developing strong community bonds.

LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH

Talking about mental health or mental illness can be daunting for many of us, but the truth is that 1 in 4 of us in the UK is affected by mental health problems each year – that's approximately 15 million people.

Despite millions of us being affected each year, there's still a great deal of misunderstanding about mental health, and speaking about this needn't be seen as scary, taboo or something to avoid. The reality is, mental health conditions are part of everyday life and, at some point in our lives, all of us will be touched either directly or indirectly by mental health problems. This means that it's important to speak openly about these conditions and find ways that work for us to help improve our mental health, such as being active – our particular favourite!

TINA COOK

This eventing rider has represented Britain at numerous international events and openly shared the difficulties of competing at a high level, including how important it is for riders to seek help and take mental health seriously.



PIPPA FUNNELL

She has publicly shared her experiences with mental health, including the emotional challenges of overcoming personal and professional setbacks. She's spoken about how difficult it can be to maintain motivation and confidence after losses or injuries and how important it is to have a strong support network.



DID YOU KNOW?

In England, 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression, in any given week⁷.

LEARNING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act, our relationships with others and how we function on a daily basis. Some people call mental health 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing' and it's just as important as good physical health.

Our mental health can vary throughout our lives, depending on a number of factors, such as:

- Significant life events
- Stressors and demands
- The amount and quality of sleep
- Physical health
- Diet/nutritional intake
- Relationships with other people
- Environmental, societal and cultural factors
- How much we participate in leisure activities, hobbies and interests.

Not everyone will experience a mental illness in their lifetime, but everyone will experience a change in their mental health. Sometimes, a change in mental health can result in a mental illness. People can have a significant, diagnosed mental illness and, with the right coping resources, they can be in good mental health and manage daily life.

Being mentally healthy doesn't just mean that you don't have a mental health problem or illness. If you're in good mental health, you can usually:

- Make the most of your potential
- Cope with life
- Play a full part in your family, workplace, community and among friends.

It's important to state that mental illness can be treated and people can recover from it. Mental illness can be managed with various types of support and might be short-lived or more enduring.

COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Mental illnesses are often split into different categories. Some of these categories are called mood disorders (such as depression), anxiety disorders, personality disorders and psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia).

It can feel overwhelming when taking that first step in your own research, so we've provided useful, bitesize knowledge about some common mental health problems. Use the QR codes below to access online info sheets on some common mental health problems.



Anxiety



Depression



OCD



Schizophrenia



Psychosis



Eating problems



Bipolar disorder



Self-harm



PTSD

NEURODIVERSITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term that recognises natural variations in how people think, learn and process information. Conditions such as ADHD and autism can be considered part of this diversity.

For many individuals, these differences are simply part of their identity and can bring strengths. For others, their experiences can be much more challenging, for example impacting significantly on their relationships and ability to function at work or school.

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition which is associated with difficulties in attention, activity levels and doing things without thinking them through. These differences usually begin in childhood, although they may only be recognised later. ADHD is understood to arise from a combination of genetic and other factors.

People may experience:

- difficulty sustaining attention
- distractibility
- restlessness or fidgeting
- impulsivity, such as acting or speaking quickly
- challenges with organisation or completing tasks

Not everyone experiences all features, and some people primarily have difficulties with attention without feeling hyperactive. ADHD can often be associated with other conditions such as sleep difficulties or anxiety. Experiences of misunderstanding or criticism from others can also affect self-esteem and wellbeing.

AUTISM

Autism, also defined as a neurodevelopmental condition, affects how a person communicates, processes sensory information and experiences social interaction. It is a spectrum condition, meaning individuals vary widely in their strengths and difficulties. Some people are able to

manage themselves and learn ways to cope in the world around them, and others may need more support.

Common traits may include:

- highly focused interests
- sensory sensitivities (to sound, light or busy environments)
- differences in interpreting social cues or expressing emotions
- a preference for routine and predictability

These traits can be experienced in many ways, and having one or more does not by itself mean someone has autism. While people with autism can have good mental health, they are also at increased risk of conditions such as anxiety or depression, often related to stress, misunderstanding or lack of appropriate support.



TOP TIPS FOR COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

Particularly when coaching those with more complex mental health challenges, there are a few useful things to ensure everyone feels as comfortable as possible. It's about adapting your methods to try to meet their needs, rather than abandoning your usual coaching style.

- Before the session, provide as much basic information as you can on clothing and equipment required to people feel comfortable and know what to expect.
- Collect information about participants before the session, including mental or physical health conditions, likes and dislikes.
- Welcome everyone warmly as they arrive and use positive language.
- Provide a safe and positive environment.
- Keep an open mind and be calm, patient and respectful of participants who are experiencing mental health difficulties.
- 'Read the room' – notice how people are and whether there are any differences in behaviour or countenance. Consider how to adapt accordingly.
- Differentiate activities depending on the needs of those participating. Try to ensure everyone feels acknowledged and included. If someone would prefer to sit away from the group, offer them a role (which they might not take up) to help them feel engaged and part of the group.
- Don't be discouraged by the amount participants engage or if they seem to take lots of breaks – this could be for many reasons and doesn't mean they're not having fun or benefitting from the session. If the venue allows, you might like to provide a 'quiet' area where participants can sit and watch instead of taking part.
- Listen and pay attention to what is being said and how the participant is in their body so you can learn to recognise when they might need more or less support.

When we strive to focus on everyone's strengths, we can ensure that everyone has the chance to participate in a way that helps them.

DID YOU KNOW?

When we work in a strengths-based way, it enables people to feel as though they're building on what they can already do. When we are trauma-informed, or trauma-sensitive, it means that we approach people from a kind and compassionate perspective – we show respect towards others and don't try to induce feelings of shame or guilt. If there is a time when a relationship breaks down between people, we're able to help others separate the person from the behaviour and recover, by being emotionally literate and support others to do so. When we work in an inclusive way, we involve everyone and seek to operate in a way that works for everyone.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

If your child is experiencing mental health problems, there are ways you can help make situations less stressful or daunting for them and their coach.

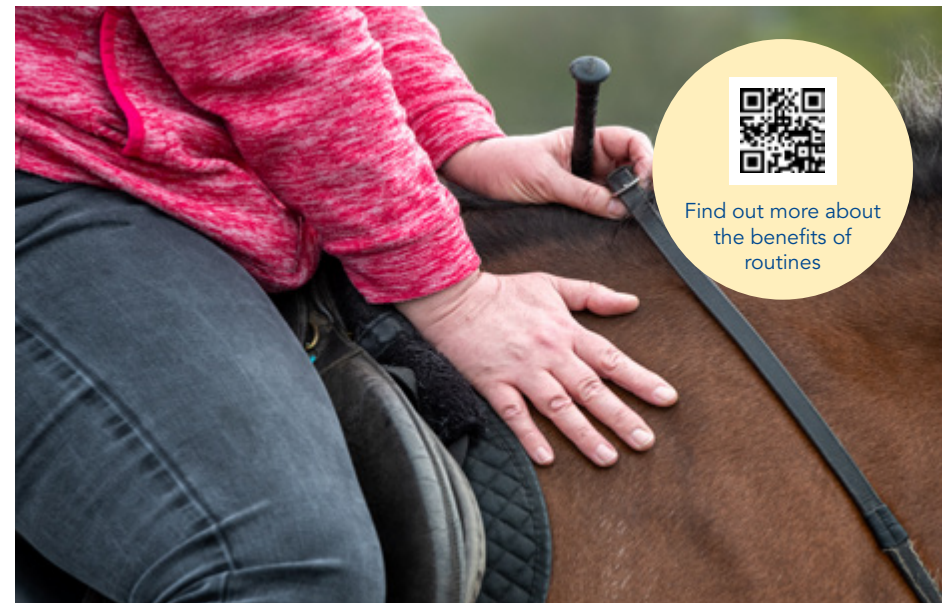
- Ensure you're fully informed about what your children's equestrian session will entail and any clothing or equipment they may need.
- Turn up in plenty of time for the session to start – help avoid stress and panic, while allowing time for your child to get used to the surroundings and meet the horses.
- Discuss any mental or physical health problems, or any other concerns, with your child's coach so they're fully aware. If you're able to, offer advice on how best to interact with your child.
- Discuss with your child any concerns they may have and work through any problems gently.
- Help your child get into a routine when getting ready for attending the session. This can help calm nerves allow them to mentally prepare for attending.



TIPS FOR YOURSELF

If you're experiencing mental health problems, there are things you can do to help feel calmer and supported by those around you:

- Be as honest and open as you feel you can be with your coach or peers – most people are keen to support and help where they can. This also helps to avoid misunderstandings or misreadings of your behaviour.
- Allow yourself plenty of time to arrive at your allotted session time. This will help reduce stress on arrival and give you time to adapt to the surroundings.
- Be present – focusing on the task or horse in front of you can help calm nerves and improve mood by giving you a different focus.
- Get into a routine – having a regular day or time for your session and a routine for getting ready for it can create a soothing effect.
- Notice your thoughts and feelings – being mindful about how you currently feel is the first step to understanding and manage our emotions.



WHAT DOES SPORT IN MIND DO?

Sport in Mind's innovative programmes are delivered in partnership with the NHS and are co-designed by people with personal experience of mental health problems and healthcare professionals. We deliver sessions to support the recovery of children, young people and adults living with mental health problems in the community and in-patient care as we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity irrespective of how unwell they are.

We are the UK's leading mental health sports charity and deliver physical activity (sport, walking, dance and movement, gardening and exercise sessions) projects in partnership with the NHS in order to aid recovery, promote mental wellbeing, improve physical health, combat social isolation and empower people to move their lives forward in a positive direction.

Sport In Mind has over a decade of experience encouraging sedentary people with long-term mental health issues – we have supported over 30,000 people and have worked with hardest-to-reach people to promote ways to move and be physically active again. We really understand what works well and how we can promote and facilitate these principles in everything we do.

We use solution-focused thinking and coaching techniques to effect change in all our participants. We focus on what works well and do more of that, rather than focusing on problems, although we acknowledge that problems still exist and feel very real for those experiencing them. We encourage anyone who feels reluctant to join in and gently focus on how they might benefit from moving more. And we move together in the direction of success rather than having a specific goal to achieve.

Simply put, we hold hope for everyone, particularly for those who might not be feeling hopeful. We celebrate achievements, however small, and are able to encourage consistency. Ultimately, our approach is to allow time and space for people to leave their worries at the door and provide a safe, positive and fun experience for everyone.

At Sport In Mind, we promote safety – both physical and psychological, which is when people feel that they can participate without judgement or fear of negative consequences. When people feel safe, they are better able to participate fully and gain numerous benefits; they will feel supported and more able to make progress that is right for them.

www.sportinmind.org | 0300 102 1400 | info@sportinmind.org

DID YOU KNOW?

In any given week in England, there will be:

- 8 in 100 people with mixed anxiety and depression
- 6 in 100 people with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)
- 4 in 100 people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- 3 in 100 people with depression
- 2 in 100 people with phobias
- 1 in 100 people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Fewer than 1 in 100 people with panic disorder⁸



SIGNPOSTING

If you'd like more information about mental illness, start by contacting your GP. If you have a support worker, speak to them. If you'd prefer to contact an organisation, here are a few that may help:

- Samaritans – Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)
- Mind – Support and advice for people living with mental illness. Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)
- Rethink Mental Illness – Support and advice for people living with mental illness. Phone: 0300 5000 927 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)
- CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) – For men aged 15 to 35. Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight)
- Riders Minds – Open to equestrians of all ages, levels and experience. They offer a wealth of practical information and a 24/7 helpline. Phone 0800 088 2073 or text 07480 488 103

ACRONYMS YOU MIGHT COME ACROSS

- CMHT – Community Mental Health Team
- AMHT – Adult Mental Health Team
- OT – Occupational Therapist
- CPN – Community Psychiatric Nurse
- PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- BPD – Bipolar Disorder
- OCD – Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- ADHD – Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- ADD – Attention-Deficit Disorder
- ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder
- SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder
- DBS - Disclosure and Barring Service (Formerly CRB)
- PIP - The PIP test is what the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) use to decide whether you are entitled to Personal Independence Payment.

SOURCES

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