

# TIPSHEET

## SAFE LANGUAGE TO REDUCE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STIGMA

The purpose of this **Safe Language to Reduce Mental Health Stigma Tipsheet** is to provide you with some practical guidance how you can reduce stigma and create a supportive sporting environment through the actions you take and language that you use.

### WHAT IS STIGMA?

Mental health stigma is when someone is unfairly judged, treated, viewed in a negative way, or inaccurately stereotyped due to their mental health and wellbeing.

This often happens because people don't understand mental health and wellbeing issues, and are not operating off an accurate and informed position.

#### Examples of stigma in action:

- When someone with depression is told to “just harden up”.
- An individual with a mental health issue is referred to as ‘weak’, ‘weird’ or ‘unsafe’.
- Excluding someone with a mental health issue from being part of the team or group activities.
- An environment where people feel judged, unsafe, or where mental health is seen as a taboo or not talked about subject.



## TIPS TO REDUCE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STIGMA

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### FOSTER A POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING ATTITUDE

Your attitude, and the way you talk about (or don't talk about) mental health and wellbeing can impact how comfortable your members feel about speaking up about mental health and wellbeing issues, or seeking help within your sporting organisation.

Some ways to foster a helpful attitude towards mental health issues, are to:

- Read a range of literature, listen to podcasts, or watch programs on information and/or lived experience of mental health issues.
- Practice withholding judgement and listening with empathy and an open mind when mental health and wellbeing issues are discussed.
- Role model a positive, understanding, and supportive attitude no matter your personal beliefs.
- Proactively and respectfully challenge assumptions, misconceptions, and misinformation when you notice it in yourself or others.

2

### ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Promote open and respectful discussions about mental health and wellbeing issues, challenging any stigmatising or derogatory language.

3

### DEMONSTRATE SUPPORTING OTHERS

Provide support to those experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues, and encourage others to do the same. Remember to respect boundaries and privacy when supporting others.

4

### MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AWARENESS EDUCATION

Use a range of communication and engagement channels (such as information seminars, guest speakers with a professional background, informational multimedia and factsheets) to help the community understand the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues, and provide informed and accurate information.

To find an appropriately trained and supported lived experience guest speaker, contact the [Consumers of Mental Health WA \(CoMHWa\)](#).

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### USE EVIDENCE-BASED RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Ensure that any presenters or guest speakers are appropriately qualified and trained to talk in a safe manner following best practice. It is essential that mental health issues are discussed in a safe, professional, and respectful manner. Invite a safe, evidenced-based and professional organisation to talk to members or present at any event you run.

The [Assessment Criteria for External Mental Health Programs and Service Providers](#) is a tool available to help decide whether an organisation is suitable to engage.

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### USE SAFE TERMINOLOGY

The language we use when discussing mental health and wellbeing can have a significant impact on how individuals perceive and approach mental health. As such, using appropriate and respectful terminology is one of the strategies that you can use to help reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help and support.

Check out the below guide for recommended language and phrases to avoid when discussing mental health and wellbeing.

## REFERENCES TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

USE	AVOID
Mental health issues	Mental health concerns
Mental health conditions	Mental health illness
	Mental ill-health
	Mentally unwell
	Mental disorder
Mental health	Mentally healthy
Mental health and wellbeing	Mental fitness
Mental wellbeing	
Social and emotional wellbeing	
Experiencing or having difficulty	Struggling
	Suffering

## PHRASES TO AVOID STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

USE	AVOID
Has or lives with a mental health issue/condition (rather than 'is' the mental health issue)	Mental
	Mentally stable or unstable
May need support	Do something about it
Access treatment and support	Sort it out
Receiving treatment and support	

## REFERENCES TO SUICIDE

USE	AVOID
Took their own life	Successful suicide
Ended their own life	Committed suicide
	Commit suicide
Non-fatal or make an attempt on his/her own life	Unsuccessful suicide
	Failed suicide
	Suicide bid
Concerning rates of suicide	Suicide epidemic
Refrain from using the term suicide out of context	Political suicide
	Suicide mission

Preferred terminology when referring to someone who is grieving the loss of someone who took their own life:

- Bereaved by suicide.
- They have lost someone to suicide.
- They are coping with losing someone to suicide.

### TOP TIP

Check out the [Sport Administrator eToolkit for Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) for more information on the types of mental health and wellbeing awareness events that you could run and guidance on how to do this.

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