



MENTAL HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS OF THE FOOTBALL WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

In partnership with
 **mind**
for better mental health



Heads Up
The FA For **ALL**

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MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK



While the physical and mental health of footballers is considered and scrutinised by millions of people around the world, little consideration is given to those who follow and report on the game for a living.

The typical working practices of football writers, such as long hours on the road, tight deadlines, the ongoing expectancy of delivering an exclusive and the various other stresses that come as part of the job can lead to mental wellbeing challenges.

The circumstances around Covid-19 have added further pressures on the football industry and the wider mental wellbeing of the nation.

This guide, additional resources and highlighted helplines are here to support you on your personal journey as somebody who earns their living following the game they love.

This guide is supported by mental health charity Mind



Heads Up

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It can be difficult to discuss mental health at work, especially in such a competitive field as sports journalism. Knowing who to speak to and planning what to say can help you feel in control of the conversation.

If you're feeling stressed, anxious or in crisis, text HEADSUP to 85258 for confidential text support, 24 hours a day.

UNUSUAL TIMES

Let's get this out of the way up front: life and work are very different now for football writers, as for many others, compared to only a few months ago. Although top-level football is back behind closed doors, for some it continues to be a time of anxiety: where is the next job coming from, and how can you get things done in a completely new working environment?

In such an uncertain time, social connections are hugely important for mental health – whether they're personal, professional, family or something else. And if you're freelance, being in contact with clients, colleagues and others in the industry is all the more important. They're your best source of ideas, and they're in the same boat as you.

Perhaps you're working from home when you didn't previously. Loneliness is a risk, so social links are just as important here. Make sure you have the opportunity for some physical activity, whether that's going out for exercise or just moving around regularly. And try to find a way to separate work from home life. Not everyone can set up a dedicated home office – but at least try to make sure it's somewhere different from where you sleep.

Leapers are the experts in working remotely, flexibly or independently – and have shared all their experience on **keeping yourself well when you find yourself working from home** ([click here](#)).

Maybe you're going out to work again or thinking about the time when you will. You might be worried about your safety or the safety of those around you, or about the current situation ruining your plans. Perhaps you're looking forward to it – but even then, it's been a stressful time and everyone's reserves have been depleted for one reason or another.

So, if you're returning to work, remember that it takes time to recover, and build up gradually if you can. And if you're already up and running, remember to think, every day, about your mental health as well as the physical precautions you'll be taking.

Going out to work while much of the country talks about staying at home can be a worrying thought. Mind has **lots of suggestions for keeping mentally well** ([click here](#)).

Life and work will eventually return to something closer to what we're used to. All the sources of help in this guide are available now - and will still be available then. In the meantime, as you think about more normal times, consider the ideas below for keeping yourself well in the future.



KEEPING YOUR EYE ON THE BALL

Staying up late to hit deadlines and then waking up early to gauge the public reaction to last night's piece. Checking your emails and starting to work on today's stories before you've had your breakfast. Sound familiar?

Being a football writer can be exciting, but it is important to recognise that you may be burning yourself out and to take time to think about your work-life balance, before it has a negative impact on your mental health.

Try and set realistic boundaries so you can differentiate between work and 'me' time and embed protective factors into your daily routine. That may mean committing to not checking your phone after a certain time; ensuring you have dinner or conversations with your family or friends each night; or carrying out daily exercise to clear your mind.

It might be hard for you to find time to fit in exercise while working, and that can impact your mood. **Tips on getting in some mood-boosting activities while working can be found [here](#).**

NOT A FAN FAVOURITE?



Just like players, football writers often face public scrutiny. Social media has significantly changed the way you write about and follow the game, and it's good to engage with your followers to share your work and spark good-natured debate. After all, as humans, the strength of connection we feel with other people can have a positive impact on our lives.

But some people may take it too far. Feeling insulted, or even threatened, by messages you receive can leave you feeling anxious, inadequate, isolated and even worried for your safety. All this combined can lead to

you spending more time – too much time – reading comments on social media than you realise, which comes with added strain on your mental health.

There are steps you can take to modify the amount of time you spend online, and help you refocus on the things that bring positivity to your life, if you feel it's negatively impacting your mental health.

Sometimes, being in the public eye can have an impact on your mental health. **This help page [here](#)** explores some things you can do if you, a colleague, or one of your reports is the target of a hate campaign

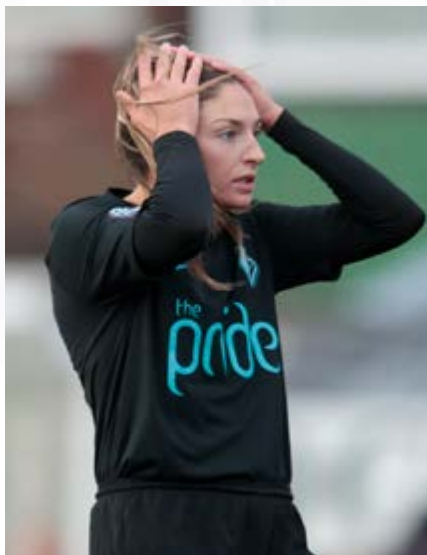
82% OF UK WORKERS SAID THEY WERE MORE LIKELY TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH THAN A FEW YEARS AGO.

(Accenture, 2018)

HALF (48%)
OF ALL EMPLOYEES
HAVE EXPERIENCED
A MENTAL HEALTH
PROBLEM IN THEIR
CURRENT JOB. ONLY
HALF OF THESE
PEOPLE HAVE TALKED
TO THEIR EMPLOYER
ABOUT THEIR MENTAL
HEALTH. .

(Mind, 2018)

COMPETITIVENESS



While many writers are part of a team, the role is naturally competitive and individuals can find themselves looking for the powerful story or headline to put them a step ahead. This competitive nature can cause rising pressure and tension amongst your colleagues, which in turn can, at times, resonate in forms of bullying or abuse. Women in particular may also face sexual harassment or misogynistic comments.

It's important to always raise any issues in the workplace with your line manager or editor so they can be resolved helpfully, and so your team can get back to working towards the same goal with the right intentions. Even if you see or hear something that doesn't directly impact yourself, keep an eye out for those around you.

A visible show of support for colleagues with mental health problems is a great way to reduce stigma and get people talking. **This campaign** aims to help create more inclusive workplace cultures, and anyone can take part.

AWAY FROM HOME



Being on the road for work can be disruptive to your sleep, and this can leave you feeling on edge. [This guide](#) explores ways to ensure you get a good night's rest, even when away from home.

During normal circumstances, football writers often find themselves being posted to all parts of the country and beyond for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. Spending significant amounts of time away from your

friends and family can lead to you feeling lonely or isolated. While the football and match reports will keep you busy for a few hours, it's the long journeys and empty hotel rooms that follow where you can find this lifestyle taking its toll on your mental health.

While working away, try setting a regular - if inevitably moveable - time to contact your loved ones, whether it's a daily phone call or video call, to ensure you stay connected. You could also look at alternative ways to help you relax and fill those quieter times, which don't include football, whether it's listening to podcasts, taking up photography while away in different locations, an active hobby or something else.

Being on your own a lot might leave you feeling anxious, lonely or depressed. [This website](#) offers ways to help you cope with these feelings in a variety of healthy, calming ways.

OVER
9 MILLION
ADULTS IN THE UK,
MORE THAN THE
POPULATION OF
LONDON, ARE EITHER
ALWAYS OR OFTEN
LONELY.

(Coop and Red Cross, 2016)

**A QUARTER
OF PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING A
COMMON MENTAL
HEALTH PROBLEM
ALSO HAVE FINANCIAL
PROBLEMS -
3 TIMES
MORE
THAN THE GENERAL
POPULATION.**

(Money and Mental Health
Policy Institute, 2016)

TACKLING YOUR FINANCES

It can be hard to keep on top of your finances, perhaps even more so if you're a freelancer without a regular income, or for those whose employment or finances have been hit during the Covid-19 crisis. Worrying about money can impact on your mental health, which is why it's extremely important to know where to turn to when you're in a difficult spot. It's also good to know that you are never alone in worrying about your finances – there are plenty of support networks out there which can help you get back on track.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

Firstly, if you can identify with any of these issues, you certainly aren't the only one. What is important is to not wait until they get on top of you. There is plenty of support which can help, whether it is through talking to someone or making small adjustments in your life. You don't have to be in crisis to pay attention to and improve your mental health.



WHERE TO START?

- Have a look at mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/footballwriters. We've collected tips, links and advice on staying well, especially for football writers. You'll find links to the resources we've mentioned here, plus more food for thought
- **CALM**, the Campaign Against Living Miserably, has a helpline open 5pm to midnight every day. They campaign particularly about male suicide, but they're open to anyone who's feeling down or has hit a wall for any reason. **0800 58 58 58**
- **Mind**, the mental health charity, can give you information on a range of topics, including types of mental health issue and where to get help. Check out their A-Z guide to mental health at <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/a-z-mental-health/>, or call their infoline on **0330 123 3393**, which is open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday
- **The Samaritans** are open 24 hours a day, providing a one-to-one listening service for anyone facing distress. **116 116**
- **Every Mind Matters**: You can get more self-care tips to use while staying at home from Public Health England's Every Mind Matters [website](#)
- **Find a local service**: You can find local organisations at hubofhope.co.uk – a free website and app which uses a person's location to pinpoint local and national mental health support, from anywhere in the UK
- Text **HEADSUP** to **85258** for 24/7, confidential support. This will connect you with a trained crisis volunteer who will chat to you by text message. This service is available 24/7 and free to text from most mobile networks



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