

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy**

This policy describes the commitments of Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC to promote and maintain the positive mental health and wellbeing of all our members. It is our belief that positive mental health and wellbeing is vital for all our members and is instrumental in the strength and resilience of our club and of our community.

Scope: This policy applies to all members of Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC and to those availing of the Club facilities.

Context: Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC recognises the important function that involvement in Gaelic games at every level, whether as player, coach or supporter, has in achieving and maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. Involvement in Gaelic games provides not only an opportunity to maintain physical health and fitness but it also provides social connectivity for many: for some as a team member, a Club member or by association with the Club within the wider community.

As such, Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC recognises that whilst it fulfils this vital function, it has a unique opportunity that can be utilised to address the mental health and wellbeing needs of all Club members

Policy aims:

- To develop and maintain an environment and culture within the Club that supports mental health and wellbeing
- To prevent discrimination of any form that could undermine the mental health and wellbeing of members
- To challenge stigma surrounding mental health issues
- To increase the knowledge and awareness of mental health and wellbeing among members
- To encourage cognisance of the impact of competing demands on the mental health and wellbeing of members
- To support members to actively engage in initiatives that promote good mental health and wellbeing
- To access community based training aimed at increasing awareness
- To make available information regarding resources that promote good mental health and wellbeing and provide mental health support
- To provide support to those affected by a deterioration in their mental health and wellbeing

This policy is underpinned by the Club's adoption of the Mental Health Charter.

It is intended that the Mental Health Policy is read and actioned in conjunction with the following:

- Club Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- Equality Policy
- Anti-bullying/Harassment Policy
- Disability and Special Needs Policy
- Disability Sport Policy Statement

- Valuing Volunteers Policy
- Club Critical Incident Plan
- GAA Give Respect Get Respect ethos

## **Good Practice Guidance for Promoting and Maintaining Mental Health and Wellbeing**

### **Underage Players**

Spending time doing the sport that you love in the company of your teammates is really good for your mental health and wellbeing.

It is important that you enjoy your sport and that you find it fun.

Sometimes your team will win, sometimes you will lose and sometimes you might have a very hard game. That's ok- all the best players in the country have had days when it's been tough! Your team mates and coaches will come together to chat about the games – this will be a wonderful time when your team has won and it will help everyone cope with the disappointment of a loss.

Try not to blame yourself if you haven't played as well as you would have liked. Don't blame any of your team mates if they have made a few mistakes either. Everyone can make a mistake from time to time!

If you have any worries or concerns, let your parent/guardian know and it's also a good idea to let your coach know. They will be keen to try to help you. They want for you to enjoy your games and to be able to play as much as you can.

You might play for more than one code (football/hurling/camogie) or you may play for more than one team (different age/club and county). This can be a lot, especially when you are trying to keep up with your studies and the other things you enjoy. Let your coaches know the different demands that you have, or perhaps ask your parent/guardian to let your coach know.

Remember that you will be able to enjoy your sport more if you are feeling healthy and well. Here are some tips to help you do that:

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables. Try to limit sugary foods such as sweets and fizzy drinks –keep these as occasional treats
- Make sure to get a good night's sleep. Try to go to bed and get up around the same time each day
- Avoid using your mobile phone or device late in the evening, and for at least an hour before you go to sleep. This will help you to sleep better
- If you are not feeling well or feel upset, let your parent/guardian know. They will be able to decide how best to help you

You might use social media on your phone or device. Let your parent/guardian know immediately if anything you read or see on social media upsets or annoys you, or if you think that it just doesn't feel right. Sometimes people can use social media to bully others, or to try to make others do things that they are not comfortable with. Let your parent/guardian know if you see this happening to yourself or others. You can also speak to your Coach or to the Club Children's Officer. The most important thing is that you are safe at all times. Other people will understand and try to help you, so don't be afraid to ask for help when you need to.

## Senior Players

Spending time playing Gaelic games in the company of your teammates is really good for your mental health and wellbeing. Not only does it support your physical fitness but it can provide an outlet for you to have some downtime from your busy life, a bit of “craic” with your teammates and something important for you to work towards. The buzz of preparing for and playing in a match can give you a real lift. These factors can be instrumental in protecting our mental health.

You might play for more than one code (football/hurling/camogie) or you may play for more than one team (club and county). This can be a lot, especially when you are trying to maintain your studies, work and family commitments. Let your coaches know the different demands that you have and how you are finding managing them. Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC is committed to facilitating players to remain engaged fully in Club activities and supports the accommodation of players in this regard, with respect to training and games.

Looking after yourself well is as important for your mental health as it is for your physical health. Here are some tips to help you do that:

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables. Try to limit sugary and high fat foods –keep these as occasional treats
- Ensure that you get a good night’s sleep. This is the time when our body regenerates and heals. Try to go to bed and get up around the same time each day
- Avoid using your mobile phone or device late in the evening, and for at least an hour before you go to sleep. This will help you to sleep better
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol. Alcohol is a known depressant. It will compound low mood and is associated with increased self-harm in those that are vulnerable to feelings of depression.
- Avoid the use of any non-prescribed drugs or substances. These can interfere with mood and also with how we perceive things impact negatively on mood
- Avoid the use of gambling as a distraction or to provide a “buzz”. This can compound feelings of regret, guilt and shame which impact negatively on mental health
- Try not to bottle things up. Speak to a trusted friend or family member if you are finding things difficult. Also be aware of the services that are available to provide support. There are many organisations providing support in our community and the Club Mental Health Officer will be able to offer advice and assistance to access them.

You might use social media on your phone or device. Social media can be an excellent source of information and a really useful way to communicate and keep in touch. Unfortunately it can also be used negatively, for example, to abuse, shame or bribe others. It can be helpful to block anyone that you find to be abusive or take a break from social media. Others will understand and try to help, so don’t be afraid to speak to a Team Coach if you need to for support. You can also report online abuse to the social media platforms and to the PSNI.

A player or player's parent may let you know if they experience a specific health issue that impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Ask how this is likely to affect their engagement in their sport and how you can accommodate any particular needs within training and games. Encourage them to remain involved and reinforce that they are an important member of the squad. Let them know that they can keep you updated and you will do your best to work with them

Be aware that players will look up to you and may approach you or let you know in some way if they are experiencing any difficulty.

Giving a person the chance to open up about their concerns, and about their mental health and wellbeing, can be the first important step to seeking support.

A supportive conversation can make all the difference. Don't panic, even if you feel a little out of your depth. You are already being supportive by just being willing to listen. Here are some tips that might help:

Allow the person time to speak in a situation where their confidentiality is not compromised.

Keep your body language open and give the person your full attention – this is an important conversation for them

Avoid glib advice such as “pull yourself together” or “cheer up” as this may make the person feel that you don't really understand what they are trying to say

Be empathetic and take them seriously

Keep the chat positive and supportive, explore the issues they raise and how you may be able to help

Seek advice as soon as possible from the Club Mental Health Officer and let the person know that you are planning to do so

### **Some useful questions**

- How long have you felt this way?
- What kind of support might be helpful to you?
- How are you feeling at the moment?
- How can I best help you?

You might be able to offer practical solutions that will really help or you might be able to encourage the person that they need to speak to someone who has the expertise to help. See the list of mental health and wellbeing resources in Appendix 1

If the person tells you that they have thoughts of harming themselves, try not to panic. Sometimes people experience these thoughts and are distressed by them, but do not intend to act on them. The person needs to access professional mental health support so they can be assessed and have their needs best met. The person may have said that they do not wish you to tell anyone about their thoughts, but in this case your respect for their confidentiality is outweighed by your need to ensure their safety. Encourage them to seek immediate support from their GP or GP Out of hours service,

from Lifeline or the Samaritans. It is a good idea to let a family member know if you can. Ensure the person reaches a place of safety.

If the person tells you that they have intent to harm themselves or others, treat this as an emergency situation which needs immediate action.

- Don't leave them alone
- Remove bystanders from the area
- Seek help from others, for example, other coaches, other Club members, family members, the Emergency services using 999
- Ensure that you follow up with the person/family member as to how they are
- Debrief with your coaching colleagues
- Report such an incident to the Club Mental Health Officer, to the Club Chairperson and to the Club Children's Officer where a juvenile player is involved

## Coaches

Spending time being involved in Gaelic Games in a coaching capacity can be very rewarding and can mean that you can remain involved in the games that you love in a different capacity. Managing or coaching a team can provide an outlet from your busy life that can be really beneficial for your mental health, and the camaraderie can provide an invaluable social support. The role that you carry out on behalf of the team with whom are involved, and on behalf of the Club, is very much valued. Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC advocate a management team of at least 3 people to help share the responsibilities associated with these roles.

As well as the positive aspects of coaching, there are times that team management can be a difficult role to fulfil: managing teams where there are dual players, low player numbers, challenging games with disappointing results, listening to the views of others. These factors can make managing a team a lonely place to be!

Remember, you are the person giving of your time for the good of the team. Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC appreciate your dedication and effort and will support you to create the best training and playing opportunities possible for the team that you coach and for all teams representing the Club.

Be mindful to look after your own needs as you dedicate your time to training, matches and the 'behind the scenes' work for your team.

You know the squad of players well –their strengths, their development needs and how they interact together. You may be aware of the demands that are on your players, both within the Club and outside of it, such as education, exams, work, playing for a number of teams or codes, family commitments or health issues. Try to support each player to manage these demands successfully. They may need freed up from training on occasions or they may need time out from matches. Keeping players engaged to their optimum level is key.

Welfare of our players is crucial. This may at times necessitate working alongside the coaching teams of other codes or age groups to compromise on training times and match fixtures to safeguard against players being expected to deliver more than is reasonable for them and their families. Clear and timely communication between coaches, those involved in the organisation of fixtures and those involved in overseeing the use of the Club facilities is vital to ensure that player welfare is at the heart of all we do.

Players can often sustain physical injuries as a result of involvement in our games and this can cause a range of feelings for the player: they may be keen to play despite injury, they may be anxious about compromising an injury in future games or they may be frustrated that they cannot play. It is important to be aware of the situation and to negotiate an acceptable management plan that effectively addresses the issues for both player and management.

You may be playing alongside others that you have known for a very long time. That can often make it easier to speak to a teammate or coach if things are difficult for you, or you may find that another player speaks to you about issues that concern them.

If you disclose information to your coach about how you are feeling, and in particular, if you have any mental health concerns, you can expect:

- To be listened to
- To be supported to remain involved in training and games at the level that suits best
- To be given advice regarding the range of services that are available for support
- That your safety and wellbeing will be the most important concern



## **Committee Members**

The role that you carry out on behalf of Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC is very much valued and the time that you dedicate to the Club is greatly appreciated. The Club Committee operates on the principle of respect, with all Committee members views and experiences being equally sought and considered.

Be mindful to look after your own needs as you dedicate your time to meetings, club activities and the general organisation and running of the Club. It is the position of Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC that the individuals who make up the Committee work together to help and support each other in their wide-ranging roles. It is encouraged that Committee members feel able to ask for help and support in carrying out their duties and roles.

As with any group of people working together for a common goal, there may be times when there is disagreement and conflict among members. At times, differences of opinion can make it challenging to reach consensus and this can create stress for all involved. Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC is committed to supporting all Committee members to fulfil the roles that they have taken on, as the survival of our Club and its games depends on all of our collective efforts.

Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC advocate open and honest communication between committee members which is based on a position of mutual respect, and which is conducted in line with the processes of the GAA.

Aghaderg GAC and Ballyvarley HC are governed by the rules and regulations of the GAA and all business is conducted accordingly. This includes the mechanisms for dealing with any disputes or conflicts and for addressing any breach of discipline.

In their capacity as Committee member, an individual may be approached by a Club member who is experiencing distress or concerns with their mental health and wellbeing. The guidance for coaches above is also relevant for committee members in these circumstances.

The Mental Health Officer or Chairperson should be informed of any circumstances arising within the Club whereby a member's mental health and wellbeing has been a cause for concern. In circumstances where this involves a juvenile member, the Children's Officer should also be informed. The Mental Health Officer will offer their support to the individual involved, their family members as appropriate, and to the Coaching team/other members who may have been impacted. The Mental Health Officer will ensure that all measures, as recommended above, have been followed to maintain the individual's safety and wellbeing. In addition, the Mental Health Officer will attend to the needs of other members involved and offer them the opportunity to debrief and avail

of support, internally or externally to the Club. Where appropriate, the Club's Critical Incident Response Plan will be actioned.

Organisations that other support can be found in Appendix 1.

## **Examples of Good Mental health and Wellbeing Practice Happening in Our Club**

- Recognition by both the Healthy Club Committee and the Coaching and Games Committee of the importance of having a Mental Health and Wellbeing policy that underpins and supports members to support each other. Members of these sub-committees worked together to identify the key issues that may affect members
- A group message sent to all parents of an underage team:  
“Training this evening 6.30-7.30. Know there were other Club games that some of the lads played in last night. Good if they can make tonight, they can take it easy and sit out some drills, but if they need a rest, then that’s Ok too”
- Joint working between code leads and sub-committees, to ensure that the needs of dual players are catered for, in relation to training expectations and availability for matches.

**References:**

- The GAA Mental Health Charter: Promoting Positive mental Health & Wellbeing through the GAA
- Action for Happiness 10 Keys to Happier Living
- MHFA England #Hands up for Healthy minds
- Southern Trust Mental Health Resources leaflet