

# Premier League Inside Matters Handbook

Advice and tips for understanding  
and managing feelings of anxiety



Inside   
Matters

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Premier League Inside Matters Handbook. It contains tips and advice for things you can do on a day-to-day basis to understand and manage feelings of anxiety. It has been developed in collaboration between the Premier League, clubs and experts at Shout.

Shout is a free, 24/7 mental health text support service for people in the UK. Together, the Premier League and Shout are encouraging players, fans and communities to keep up the conversation on mental health.

Anxiety is the feeling of being worried, afraid, uneasy, or nervous, particularly about things we think are about to happen, or might happen in the future. It is natural to feel anxious at times and to worry about things that are out of our control.

If you are feeling anxious or struggling with your mental health, you can text **TeamTalk** to **85258** to speak to a trained Shout Volunteer. It's free, anonymous, confidential and doesn't appear on your phone bill.



# Foreword

"It is so important for people to look out for others and find time to check in regularly on the mental wellbeing of friends, loved ones and colleagues.

"Through the Inside Matters campaign, we want people of all ages to feel they can discuss their mental health and understand that support is available.

"A simple conversation can have a positive impact on those who are struggling with their mental health and we are pleased to be working with Shout to provide a confidential text service for anybody who feels they need extra support.

"Football is our national sport and is followed by millions of people. We are proud to use this platform to build on the wide-ranging mental



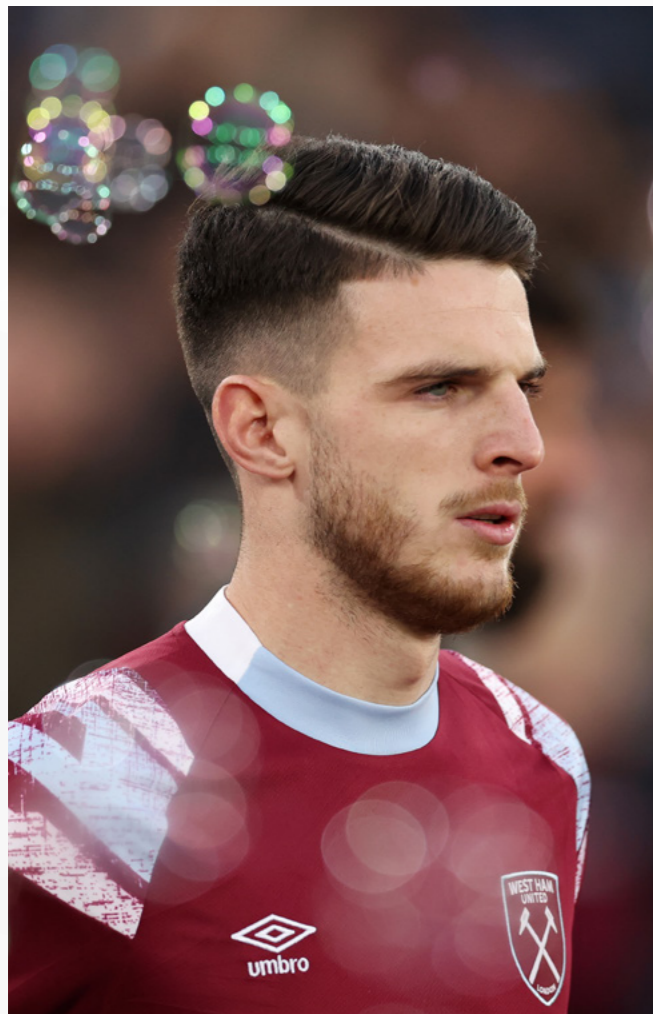
health initiatives run by the League and clubs, to continue supporting fans, players and communities."

**Richard Masters**  
Chief Executive  
Premier League

## Don't tackle it alone

Opening up about how you are feeling can be overwhelming, but it is important to remember that your thoughts and feelings are valid. The simple power of conversation – talking and listening to someone you trust such as a friend or family member – can be the first step to improve your mental health.

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“Everyone suffers from poor mental health at different times in their life and there’s so many people out there who feel like there isn’t a light at the end of the tunnel - but all it takes is a conversation. It’s about having that support network and having people you can speak to. Because no matter who you are or what you’re going through it should be easy to speak to the people you love. Just one conversation can make a positive difference.”

**Declan Rice**  
Midfielder  
West Ham United FC



“It is very important to talk and express yourself if there is something you are dealing with. Take a moment and reach out to family and friends. Talking from a young age will help with your mental wellbeing.”

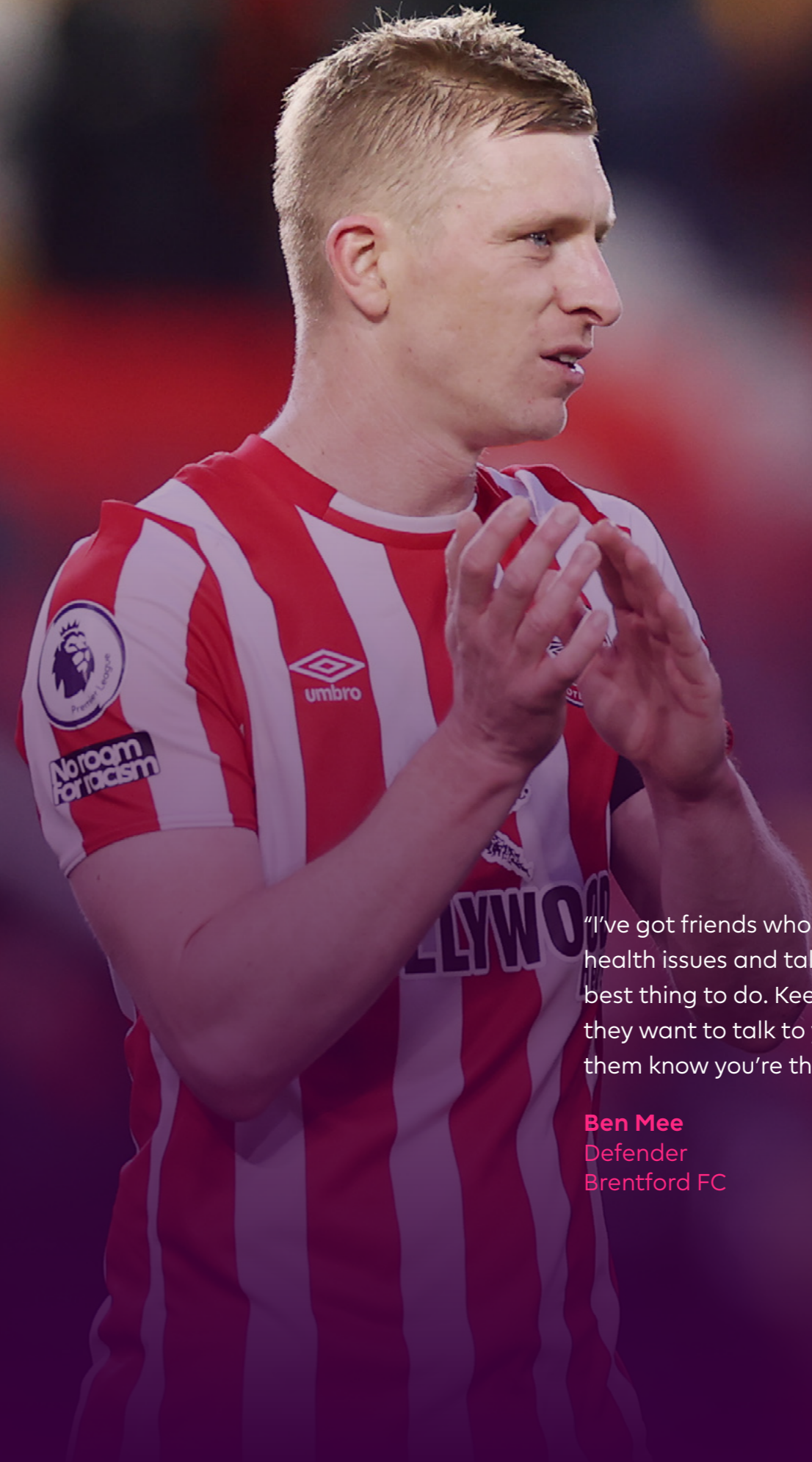
**Ricardo Pereira**  
Defender  
Leicester City FC

Staying connected with others, whether it is through football or other activities, is an important part of looking after your mental wellbeing. Some people find it easier to talk about how they are feeling when they are taking part in an activity.

Different things will work for different people, so find what makes you feel most comfortable. Here are some things you can try to get started:

- Find your safe space to have a conversation - do you prefer to be at home, out for a walk, or taking part in an activity?
- Ask for any distractions such as phones to be put away or on 'do not disturb' mode so that you and the other person can focus on the conversation
- If you can't put into words what you are thinking or feeling, try describing how you feel on a scale of 1-10
- Keep the communication open - if you are providing support to a friend, family member or colleague, make sure to check in again
- If you are supporting someone and want some advice on helpful tips to support their wellbeing, you can always text **TeamTalk** to **85258** for a confidential conversation

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"I've got friends who have had mental health issues and talking about it is the best thing to do. Keep being a friend; if they want to talk to you, they will. Let them know you're there for them."

**Ben Mee**  
Defender  
Brentford FC

# Make meaningful connections

Making meaningful connections with people who help us to feel good is one of the most important aspects of mental health and stops us from feeling lonely or isolated. Social media can be a great tool to help you make new connections or keep in touch with old ones, but it is important to ensure you have a balance and meet friends and family in person when you can.

There are lots of ways to make connections that can have a positive impact. Why not set up a Walk and Talk group with friends and family when travelling to a match?



“Sometimes football is the place where players can be totally free from their struggles but sometimes you see clearly that something is not right with someone’s performances and we need to be really careful how we judge them. Wellbeing is linked to your performance so these things are crucially important. That’s why we create safe spaces for our players to go to where they can have conversations. Plus our player-care team are around the pitch, where they can really spot different behaviours.”

**Per Mertesacker**  
Academy Manager  
Arsenal FC



“I’ve definitely had some tough times through my career, with long injuries and trying to fight my way back. I think having people around me, like my wife and my two young boys, has been really good for me, especially day-to-day once I’ve left that football environment and gone home. I think being able to focus your mind on something different, and keeping yourself busy, can always help.

“Leaning on someone can really be a helping hand and can make you feel better in those really tough moments. There’s a saying that ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’ and I think it’s true that when you talk about things with someone else, whoever that might be, it can definitely make the situation easier. It is so important to remember that you’re not on your own, and you have nothing to lose by opening up to somebody and sharing how you’re feeling!”

**Adam Forshaw**  
Midfielder  
Leeds United FC

A photograph of Dominic Solanke, a footballer for AFC Bournemouth, wearing a red jersey with black accents. He is smiling and has his hands clasped over his chest. The background is blurred, showing a stadium setting.

“When things are not going so well, there will always be negative things said – you know how social media is for example – but it makes it even more important then to keep focused, ignore it and think about the positives.”

**Dominic Solanke**  
Striker  
AFC Bournemouth

A photograph of Harry Kane, a footballer for Tottenham Hotspur, wearing a white jersey with blue and yellow accents. He is clapping his hands and looking upwards. The background is blurred, showing a stadium setting.

“It’s just as important to look after our mental health and wellbeing, as it is to care for our physical health. Although awareness has improved, we need to change the way our generation thinks about it.

“I believe in normalising conversations to help tackle stigma and promote positive habits. I’m hoping to encourage people to look after their mental health, accept we might not always be at our best but that’s okay, and not be afraid to ask for help. Connecting with a friend, family member, or anyone you trust can really help.

“I’m proud to be working with Shout, which exists as a free, confidential, 24/7 support service for anyone who needs to talk through their worries or if they need help in a crisis. It’s important to know you don’t have to go through things alone.”

**Harry Kane**  
Striker  
Tottenham Hotspur FC

# Get moving

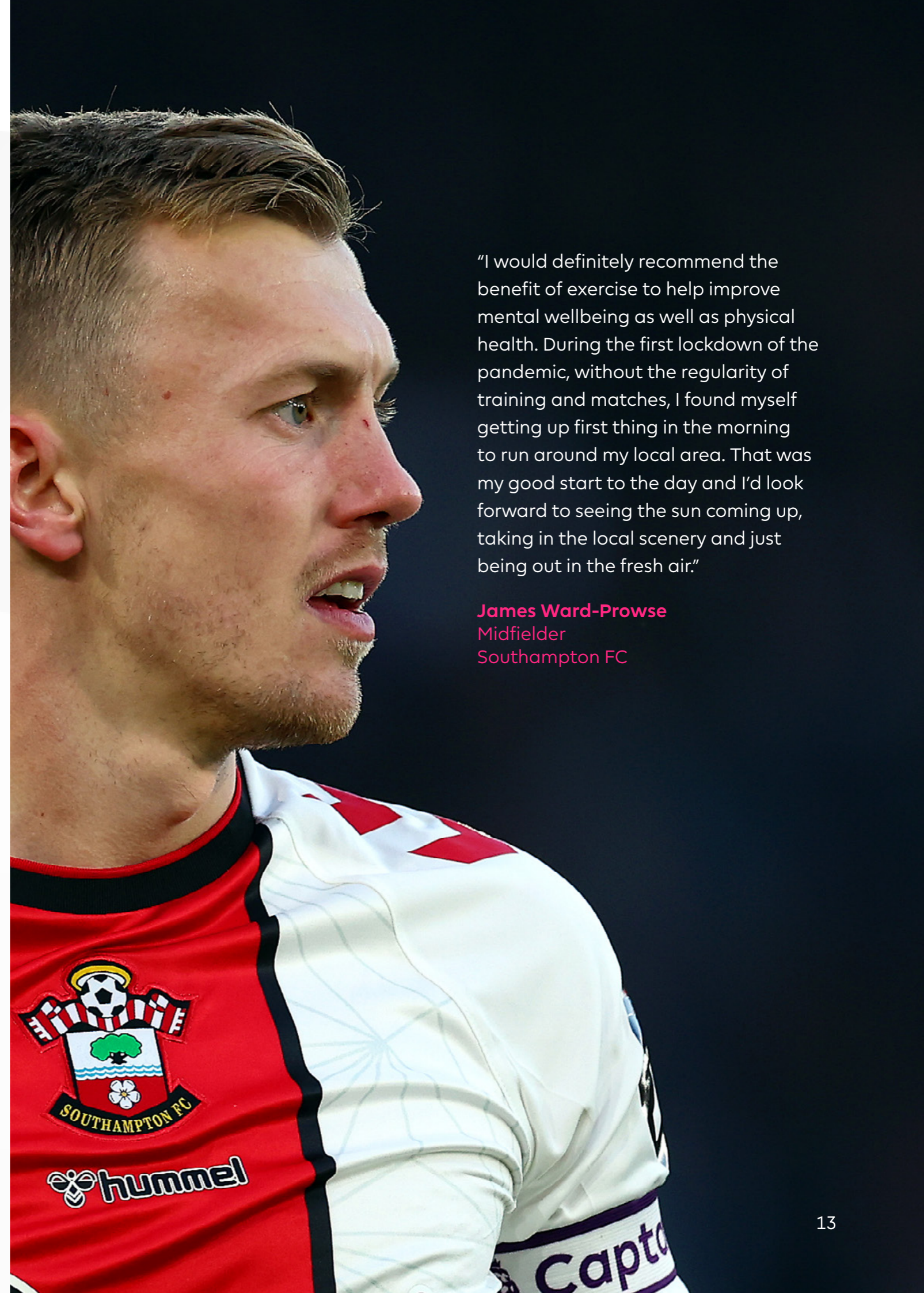
Being active is a great way to release feel-good hormones that can help improve your mood. Physical activity has been shown to help manage anxiety and stress and can help provide a positive distraction to intrusive thoughts.

Try and find an activity or exercise that you enjoy, such as signing up to a local five-a-side, joining a running group, or going for a swim.



“Doing physical activity can improve both your mental and physical wellbeing. There are loads of ways you can get moving, including doing simple exercises during your everyday activity. For example, doing squats while you brush your teeth or work on your balance while you put on your socks. By keeping one foot off the floor bend over to pick up your sock and put it on without holding on to any support. Balance is a key exercise we should implement especially as we age.”

**Katrina Webb**  
Health Development Assistant  
Fulham FC Foundation



“I would definitely recommend the benefit of exercise to help improve mental wellbeing as well as physical health. During the first lockdown of the pandemic, without the regularity of training and matches, I found myself getting up first thing in the morning to run around my local area. That was my good start to the day and I’d look forward to seeing the sun coming up, taking in the local scenery and just being out in the fresh air.”

**James Ward-Prowse**  
Midfielder  
Southampton FC



# Getting enough rest

Getting enough rest is an important part of looking after your mental wellbeing. It gives your body and mind the opportunity to relax, recover and rejuvenate.

A good night's sleep is fundamental to positive mental health. Exercising and eating well can help improve your sleep, as can avoiding screens before bedtime and establishing a relaxing bedtime routine.

Some of our top tips for a good night's sleep include:

- **Regular sleep hours:** try going to bed and getting up at the same time each day to establish a routine and promote a better sleep pattern
- **Natural sunlight:** exposure to natural light during the day is proven to have a beneficial impact
- **Cut down on caffeine:** try cutting down on caffeine, particularly from the afternoon onwards. Caffeine acts as a stimulant so it can keep you awake for longer and disrupt sleep patterns
- **Exercise:** even a small amount of aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling, can improve night-time sleep quality
- **Remove distractions:** try to limit how much you are scrolling on your phone or looking at social media just before bed, as this can increase your alertness and keep you awake
- **Try a mindfulness activity:** there are lots of meditation techniques you can use if you wake up in the middle of the night with racing thoughts and then struggle to get back to sleep

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"Sleep is crucial when it comes to my mental and physical wellbeing. As part of my commitment to prioritising my mental health, sleep is one of the most important."

"Taking time to rest and reflect helps me with my mental wellbeing. I often use some of my downtime at home to reflect on the good things or people that I have in my life."

**Trent Alexander-Arnold**  
Defender  
Liverpool FC



# Take five for yourself

Mindfulness looks different to different people, but essentially it is a way of switching off your mind from intrusive thoughts. When you are struggling with racing thoughts and feelings, taking some time out for yourself can help guide you to a place of calm. Building in a few minutes for yourself each day can be a helpful way to boost your wellbeing and resilience.

Here are some activities that may help you feel more positive:

- Take a shower or bath
- Read a book
- Have an early night
- Walk with friends or family
- Have a hot drink/cup of tea
- Watch TV
- Listen to music
- Meditation



"Here at Brighton & Hove Albion we are fully committed to supporting the mental wellbeing of all our players and staff. Being aware of your mental health is so important, and part of that is recognising the signs of anxiety. If you start to notice an increased heart rate, a feeling that you are losing control, or hyperventilation, these could be signs that you're feeling overwhelmed. If you find yourself feeling this way, take yourself out of the situation you are in, step out into the fresh air and concentrate on your breathing; it can be helpful to breathe in gently through your nose, counting steadily from 1 to 5 and then exhaling gently through your mouth counting from 1 to 5 again. It also helps to share how you are feeling so speak to friends, family or colleagues. There is a lot of support out there, you are not in this alone."

**Rose Read**  
Head of People & Culture  
Brighton & Hove Albion FC



"It helps me a lot to meditate and find an inner peace. It makes me feel calm and gives me tranquillity."

**Erling Haaland**  
Striker  
Manchester City FC

It's important to take time out to relax and do simple things you enjoy, such as watching a film or your favourite TV series, to help take your mind off things and change your mood if you are struggling.

You don't have to do this alone and could invite friends or family to watch a football match or have a movie night with you.

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"Life can be very busy, but it is so important to take some time to do the things you love. Spending time doing things you enjoy can help put you in a better mood.

"My advice would be to put a little bit of time aside each day and spend it doing something you enjoy, something that makes you feel good! This doesn't have to be extreme, simple things such as reading and watching TV are great things to enjoy."

**Megan Walters**  
Senior Health Officer  
Wolverhampton Wanderers FC



"You can get to a certain level in football through ability. But mentality is the rest. For me, when I get a setback, my mental strength switches on, kicks into overdrive and I always will come back in a better place.

"I sometimes watch YouTube videos, motivational ones, and they can often pick you up and make you feel a little bit better, make you believe in yourself once again."

**Callum Wilson**  
Striker  
Newcastle United FC

# Resources and support

There are lots of resources and support available for those looking to aid their own and others' positive mental wellbeing. The Premier League Stay Well Hub offers people access to free online content on mental health, nutrition and exercise and can be a good first port of call for advice. For more information, visit [premierleague.com/stay-well/mental-health](https://premierleague.com/stay-well/mental-health)

It is also worth trying techniques such as a grounding exercise or taking the step to speak to your GP.

## 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique

- **What are five things you can see?**

Look out for small details or things you might never have noticed around you before.

- **What are four things you can feel?**

Think about things such as the clothes you are wearing, the objects in front of you, the chair you are sitting in.

- **What are three things you can hear?**

Pay attention to the things your mind has tuned out, such as a clock ticking, the wind blowing, the birds singing.

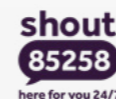
- **What are two things you can smell?**

Try to notice things around you, like air freshener, the smell of coffee or freshly cut grass.

- **What is one thing you can taste?**

Think about and savour any flavours you can taste.

If you are feeling anxious, stressed or overwhelmed, remember you can text **TeamTalk** to **85258** to talk to a trained volunteer. It's free, 24/7, confidential, anonymous and won't appear on your phone bill.



"Once you become okay with accepting how you feel, it becomes part of your path to improving your mental health. Even if it's a small chat to get something off your mind, it can be a great release and you quickly learn it's not embarrassing and it's natural.

"Mental health is really important, check in on friends and family, the men and women in your life. Let people know that you care and you're there for them. Give them a feeling of belonging either through a text or phone call."

**Tom Davies**  
Midfielder  
Everton FC



“Going through a tough period let me know that there’s a resilience that’s in us all, and if you’re put in a situation, you can deal with it. It may be tough, but whatever situation you’re in, you’ve got the tools to overcome it, it’s just about finding them. Some situations are more difficult than others, but the fact is that us as humans, we’ve got it in us – you just have to find it and pull it out. It may be difficult, it may be tough – but it’s there.”

**Eberechi Eze**  
Midfielder  
Crystal Palace FC



“Firstly, I would say there is no right or wrong way to feel. Allow yourself to feel it and give yourself time to recover. By telling ourselves to just power through, we only risk burning out and putting ourselves at risk of further problems. Talk about your feelings with someone you trust. Make sure you take time to rest, exercise and look after yourself. Most importantly, if your feelings become overwhelming or are long lasting, please seek professional support.”

**Claire Henson**  
EDI Manager  
Nottingham Forest Community Trust



“Through workshops and one-to-one sessions, the Aston Villa Foundation is able to provide education, support and wellness techniques that can help people manage stress, build social connections and access the appropriate support. Through raising awareness and normalising discussions about mental health, we strive to reduce stigma and promote empathy and understanding.”

**Olivia Hunt**  
Wellbeing Practitioner  
Aston Villa Foundation

# Supporting others

We will all experience moments in life when we find things challenging or experience difficult emotions, but by being part of a team and supporting others, we can ensure no one has to face their problems alone.

If you think a friend might be struggling, check in and let them know that you care. Sometimes just reaching out for a chat, or to catch up over coffee can make a positive difference.



“Part of your role as a leader is to show your own insecurities and vulnerabilities and the people around you will do the same.

“Your mental health is just as important as your physical. Take active measures to talk about mental health and help lift the stigma associated with it.”

**Nick Cox**  
Head of Academy  
Manchester United FC



“Everyone is different, not only in football but in life, so I try to help everyone as much as I can. Whether that is my teammates or family and friends, I try to be consistent when helping others. It’s very important to talk, mental health is the same as any physical health, so I also always try to speak out if I have any issues.

“Away from football, I spend time with the kids and walk the dogs, which helps me switch off from football, especially as I have to go into dad mode and that helps with any anxieties I may have.

“If you are struggling with your mental health, try to find someone who you can trust and express yourself. Don’t hold anything in, speak out and it will help solve the issue.”

**Cesar Azpilicueta**  
Defender  
Chelsea FC

**Text**  
**'TeamTalk'**  
**to**  
**85258**

**for free, confidential**  
**support, 24/7.**

The supplier, Shout, is responsible for the delivery of the Shout services