



# Academy Mental Health Policy and Action Plan

NEWPORT COUNTY AFC

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At Newport County AFC Academy, we are committed to ensuring that we support positive mental, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing across our workforce, players, participants, and spectators. From those who represent us on the pitch, to those who work for us and with us.

As the 4<sup>th</sup> EFL Club to commit to the Mental Health Charter for Sports and Recreation, it is vital that we demonstrate a strong commitment to everyone's mental wellness and promote positive physical and emotional wellbeing across all areas of the Club. We want everyone to be encouraged and supported to look after their own mental and emotional wellbeing, and we want to equip individuals with the skills to be resilient and recognise when they might be struggling and know what support is available to them.

### **What is mental and emotional health, and wellbeing?**

Everyone has mental health. It includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps to determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental Health is important at every stage of life, through from childhood and adolescence into adulthood.

Over the course of life, everyone may experience poor mental health, where their thinking, mood and behaviour could be affected.

Many factors contribute to poor mental health including:

- Biological factors, such as brain chemistry or genes
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

*Whereas mental wellbeing can be affected by factors such as:*

- Living conditions
- Discrimination and violence
- Education
- Community connectedness
- Social acceptance and participation
- Access to economic resources

Emotional wellbeing is the ability to practice stress-management techniques, be resilient and able to generate the emotions that lead to good feelings. The components of emotional wellbeing are also contributors to mental well-being. These are individual factors involved in emotional regulation, such as the ability to cope with stressors as well as communication and social skills needed to maintain connection with others.

Types of mental health conditions can include:

- Anger
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Bipolar disorder
- Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)
- Borderline personality disorder
- Depression
- Dissociation and dissociative disorders
- Drug use and addiction – recreational drugs and alcohol
- Eating problems
- Hearing voices
- Hoarding
- Hypomania and mania
- Loneliness
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic attacks
- Paranoia
- Personality disorders
- Phobias
- Postnatal depression and perinatal mental health
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Psychosis
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)
- Self-esteem
- Self-harm
- Sleep problems

- Stress
- Suicidal feelings
- Tardive dyskinesia
- Trauma

Around 1 in 4 people in any given year will be affected by mental health. We all have mental health, and just like physical health, we need to take care of it. Experiencing poor mental health or a mental health condition is often upsetting, confusing and frightening at first. It can happen to people of all ages and from all walks of life, however with support, self-care, and treatment, over time you can get better.

We pride ourselves on facilitating an open and supportive culture, where people feel safe to talk about any areas of concern that they have, knowing that they will never be discriminated against for talking about their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Some signs and symptoms of someone struggling with poor mental health can include:

- Feeling sad, low, or tearful
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy
- Low self-confidence
- Being agitated or irritable
- Dependency on alcohol, drugs, gambling to cope
- Loss of appetite
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Problems sleeping, or sleeping too much

We recognise that to reach out for help and support takes courage and is a huge sign of strength. We are working to develop relationships with key partners and stakeholders to ensure that we are working in collaboration to support better outcomes for individuals.

We recognise that mental health and emotional wellbeing is just as important as good physical health. We are committed to ensuring that we will do all that we can in a preventative space to create strong resilient minds, to promote good mental health and emotional health, but also support those, who at times may need more help to move back to wellness. We are passionate about

breaking down barriers and seek to drive a culture where there is parity between mental, emotional, and physical health.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Board are collectively responsible for providing club-wide strategic leadership to assist the Club in developing and delivering its mental health and emotional wellbeing action plans, ensuring that these areas remain a priority at Board level.

The Chief Operating Officer responsible for ensuring that the mental health and emotional wellbeing of everyone at the Club is a key priority. He will be supported by the Club network of Mental Health First Aiders to support individuals' wellbeing, whilst holding the responsibility for managing any concerns and flags around work-related stress, stress absence management and support.

The Club has in place several qualified Mental Health First Aiders who provide staff and players of all ages with the opportunities to discuss any concerns or worries in confidence from a work or personal perspective and can help to signpost to professional organisations for additional support and help. They are as follows:

Chris Silver – Academy Player Care Officer – [player.care@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:player.care@newport-county.co.uk)

Ryan Morley – Academy Assistant Manager – [ryan.morley@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:ryan.morley@newport-county.co.uk)

Donna Linton – Supporter Liaison Officer – [office@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:office@newport-county.co.uk)

We continually strive to create an environment where everyone feels safe and supported to speak up about any concerns and issues they may have. Mental and emotional wellbeing is aligned to the Club's safeguarding approach, and we expect all our staff, players of all ages, participants, and spectators to look out for each other and report any concerns they have about an individual immediately to the safeguarding team. Our aims and objectives will be monitored through delivery of our safeguarding strategy and action plan.

We want to provide opportunities for open conversations around religion and faith. We recognise the positive contribution that spirituality can have, and we are committed to ensuring that we have a proactive approach to spiritual health and support spiritual and religious needs of individuals across the Club.

No individual should be discriminated against on the grounds of their mental, emotional, or spiritual health, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation at our football club. We are committed to embedding strong equality, diversity, and inclusive practices across everything we do in line with the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights legislation. Safeguarding, mental, emotional health and equality and diversity are all closely aligned to ensure that every person is supported, protected and individual needs are always considered. We expect all our staff, including those engaging with children, young people, and adults at risk to work to our equality principles and behave in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from unfair treatment and discrimination and covers mental health.

We recognise that there may be times in a player's career when circumstances can make them more susceptible to experiencing poor mental health or emotional wellbeing. We are committed to

reaching out to these players during this time and will actively promote pathways to support. Players who may be considered susceptible to poor mental or emotional health will receive information as to how to access support at the club and the contact details of confidential support away from the club.

We are committed to positive parent engagement to support our young players. As part of promoting good mental health, we recognise that we have a role to raise awareness with parents around realistic reinforcements, positive messaging and how important it is to pass any early concerns of poor mental health on.

### **Appendix One: Academy Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan**

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to set out a clear plan of action about how staff will manage the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the children and young people at Newport County AFC's Academy. The action plan will be used to ensure all staff within the Academy or who work alongside the Academy are aware of their responsibility to ensure that the children and young people receive the correct emotional support and care to look after their mental health dependent on their needs. It will also communicate to children and young people that there is a structure and support network for them to use should they need to.

#### What is mental health?

Mental Health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, feel, act, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence throughout adulthood.

#### What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is described as the state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy.

#### Why is it important that we look after players mental health and wellbeing?

All members of staff in the Academy at Newport County AFC have a duty to ensure that children and young people are happy and healthy, and that they are looking after their mental health as well as their emotional wellbeing. To do this, staff must be confident that they are taking the right steps to identify any concerns that there may be with individuals or teams.

#### Who is responsible for looking after children and young people's mental health?

Every single person who works with our Academy players has a responsibility to Safeguard and care for their wellbeing and mental health, it doesn't matter what role you hold within the Academy.

#### How do players look after their own mental health and wellbeing?

Children and young people should also feel that the Academy is an open safe place where they know who they can speak to if they are worried or concerned about anything that may be affecting their mental health. It's important that they know that we care, and that we want to see them have the best possible chance to succeed, the club undertake to make sure that players understand how to be responsible for their own mental health and wellbeing and that suitable training is given to them about what support is available. As part of children and young people's education and development whilst at the Academy, the club will offer a range of educational packages to help them develop and recognise coping strategies in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

#### How are Academy staff going to support children and young people's emotional and mental health?

Staff are expected to:

- Build relationships with children and young people that make you become somebody who can be approachable and supportive;
- Raise any non-urgent extra support needs or concerns to the designated safeguarding officers or with the Head of Safeguarding;
- Provide validation to children and young people that it's ok to ask for help if they need it;
- Educate children and young people that it's ok not to be ok;
- Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings with you;
- Don't treat them any differently to others just because they may have an ongoing wellbeing or mental health issue.

#### How to raise a concern about a child or young person?

Staff must use the procedures that are in place within the Academy to recognise and acknowledge those in need of support, these are:

- Reporting all your wellbeing and safeguarding concerns to the safeguarding staff;
- Recording any concerns or incidents on the MyConcern system;
- Talk with parents and staff when necessary to keep lines of communication open;
- Refer to internal or external support where necessary as listed in this document.

#### What will the club do to support a child or young person once a concern has been raised?

The club's safeguarding staff will acknowledge any referral made and suitable action will be taken or sign posting will be made as required.

The club have access to the following support for all children and young people in our academy:

- An independent mentor/listener;
- Qualified counsellors who can see players outside of the academy;
- A psychologist;
- Sporting Chance councillors are available for any players registered with the PFA;
- Access to the Club Doctor at any time that staff feel concerned about a player's health.

#### What are the club doing to improve mental health and wellbeing for children and young people in the Academy?

Wellbeing team: The club now have Designated Safeguarding Officers working with the Player Care Officer across the Academy, each can communicate with the Head of Safeguarding and can discuss any issues or concerns they may have for players.

Player Voice: Giving players a voice in the work of the Academy is embedded in everything we do, from training to match days. Players are encouraged to be respectful, open and honest when contributing to discussions, which are held before, during and after sessions. Players are informed of the people with different roles such as player care and safeguarding and can contact them in various ways if they're feeling concerned about their mental health, as well as talking to phase leads and coaches if there's anything on their mind that they want to discuss.

Parent/carer voice: We hold player and parent inductions at the start of each season to inform about the various policies and processes we have in place to support player care and wellbeing, which are followed on by regular parent/carer forums which provide an opportunity for general concerns to be explored. Aside from forums, parents are enabled with various ways to contact internal support within the Academy, including the Academy Manager and Head of Safeguarding, who will either respond directly to concerns or signpost inside or outside the Academy depending on the nature of the issue to secure the best available support.

#### Who can I contact?

Internal support:

##### **Senior Safeguarding Manager**

Shaun Bowden

[shaun.bowden@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:shaun.bowden@newport-county.co.uk)

[safeguarding@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@newport-county.co.uk)

##### **Academy Manager**

Jordan Hughes

[jordan.hughes@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:jordan.hughes@newport-county.co.uk)

Chris Silver – Academy Player Care Officer

[player.care@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:player.care@newport-county.co.uk)

Ryan Morley – Assistant Academy Manager

[ryan.morley@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:ryan.morley@newport-county.co.uk)

Luke Durbin – Youth Development Phase Lead

[luke.durbin@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:luke.durbin@newport-county.co.uk)

Joe Abbandonato – Foundation Development Phase Lead

[joe.abbandonato@newport-county.co.uk](mailto:joe.abbandonato@newport-county.co.uk)

External support:

##### **The PFA**

Email: [wellbeing@thepfa.com](mailto:wellbeing@thepfa.com)

Tel: 07500 000 777

##### **Sporting Chance**

Tel: 07500 000 777

Email: [support@sportingchanceclinic.com](mailto:support@sportingchanceclinic.com)

**The Samaritans**

Tel: 116 123

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