



# MOVE THE MIND

EMPOWERMENT FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING THROUGH SPORT.

## LEARNING UNIT A.5 – ONLINE VERSION

COMMUNICATION TO FOSTER A  
POSITIVE MENTAL WELL-BEING CULTURE IN SPORT CLUBS



**LEARNING OUTCOMES.**



After this learning unit you will ...

- understand why communication is a key aspect related to mental well-being.
- know basic principles of communication and positive communication.
- understand why mental well-being should be communicated in sports clubs.
- know how to communicate about the topic.
- understand how to initiate a positive mental well-being culture in your club.





**COMMUNICATION –  
A KEY ASPECT RELATED  
TO MENTAL WELL-BEING.**

Communication is a dynamic and powerful force in shaping personal behaviour and organisational culture. Something as simple as a smile while introducing oneself can set a good base for a trustful relationship. So, let's find out why communication also plays a key role for mental well-being.





Communication is a key aspect related to mental well-being, because ...

- Understanding information about health, positively impacts our own health and well-being.
- People who enjoy appropriate communication tend to experience greater mental well-being than people who are exposed to problematic or ineffective communication.
- Positive communication leads to greater well-being; with less injuries in the sport sessions, healthier personal relationships, and a better work environment.
- An increase in knowledge and understanding of mental well-being also predicts to increase intentions to offer support to club members who have challenges with mental well-being.





**SOME BASICS ABOUT  
COMMUNICATION.**

Although communication is as old as humanity and it is used by all of us on a daily basis, we often face the challenge of defining what communication really means. So it is good to create a common language and define what we mean when we talk about communication.





What is communication? And what are its main elements?

- In simple words, communication means the exchange of information and the creation of meaning through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour. (cf. Gordon 2021, Merriam-Webster 2022)
- It involves a sender and a receiver, a message, the interpretations of meaning on both ends, and feedback during and after the message. (cf. Shannon & Weaver)
- Communication can be verbal, nonverbal or paraverbal. It can be interpersonal (between individuals) and intrapersonal (with ourselves).

The definition of communication makes it clear: communication is complex. It is interrelated to and made up of personal experiences, cultural imprint, and how we perceive the world. It means that communication faces a variety of challenges that may lead to misinterpretation and miscommunication. So let's explore what are examples for potential barriers in communication.



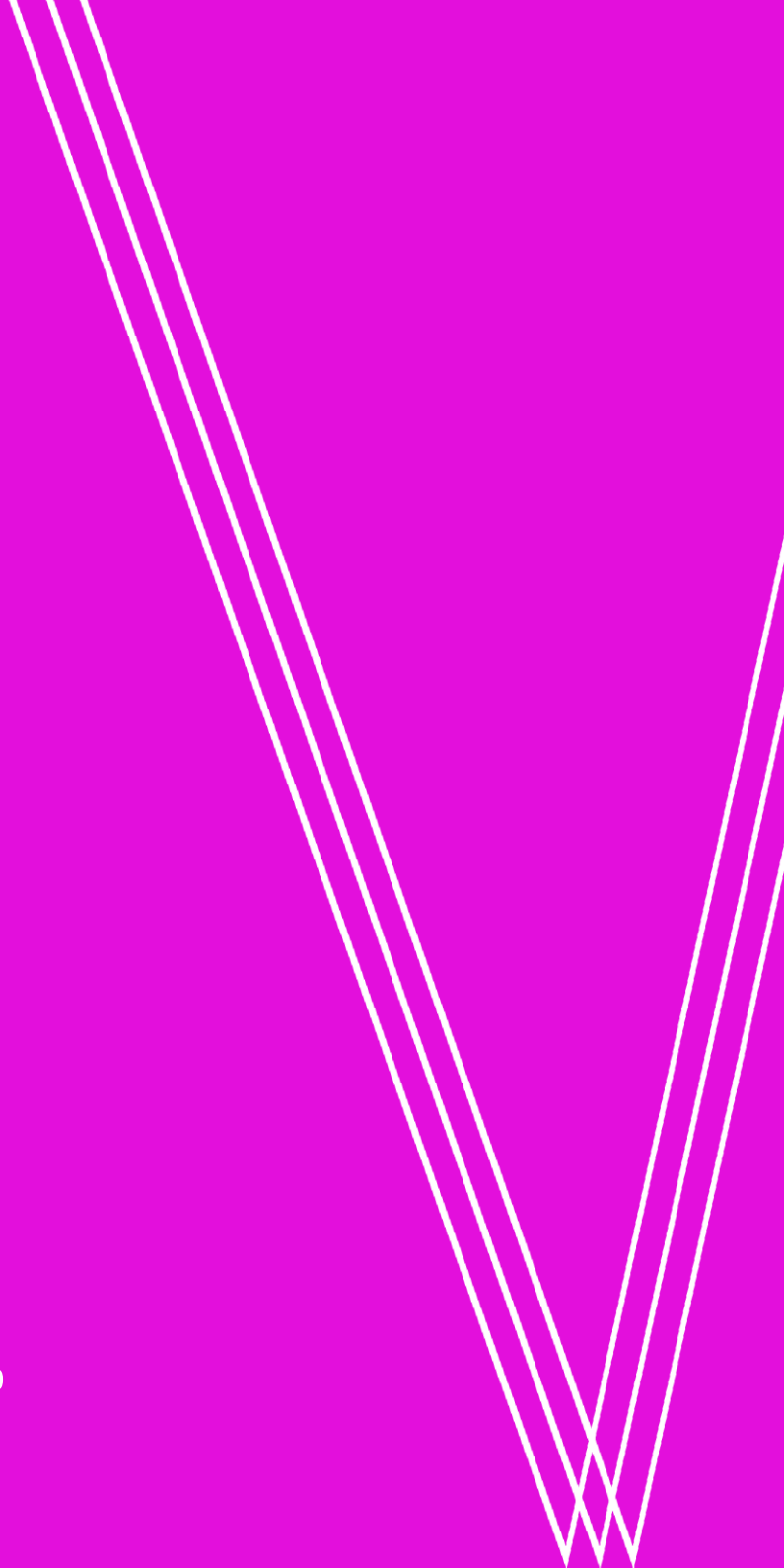


## What are challenges in communication?

- The need for a common language is a big barrier. Yet, speaking the same language does not mean that one can understand another person perfectly.
- The interpretation of meaning and the meaning people give to words is influenced by the context of the message, the environment it is given in, and the experience with these words.
- People often generalize their own perceptions of reality or perceive it to be true for everyone, without really knowing the whole picture of a situation.
- People often have difficulties to really listen. Because they are thinking about something else or already designing what to say next - without fully listening to the other person.
- Especially text-based communication can easily be misinterpreted!



**POSITIVE  
COMMUNICATION.**



We now know what communication means and that communication has multiple facets and peculiarities. Talking about communication related to mental well-being, a specific focus is set on what we call positive communication. So let's explore what this really means.





## What does positive communication mean?

- Positive communication is more than the absence of negative communication: It is an active fostering of positive, enhancing, and facilitative verbal and nonverbal communication. (cf. Pitts & Socha, 2013)
- Positive communication yields the potential to inspire and to achieve higher moments. It has great ability to generate physical, social, and mental well-being.
- Positive communication is often reduced to interpersonal communication, but it also applies to intrapersonal communication: Positive self-talk has proven benefits for mental well-being. It helps identifying own strengths and to accept compliments for what one has achieved.



**HOW TO  
COMMUNICATE ABOUT  
MENTAL WELLBEING.**



Having set the scene of communication principles, let's explore how to communicate about mental well-being with your course participants in practice.







## How should we communicate about mental well-being?

- We need to talk openly and avoid stigmatisation. Yet, we must not force any participant to talk about mental well-being challenges.
- Everyone is different. So, the communication with our participants should be appropriate for them. There is no one-fits-all solution or standard messages.
- Our communication should be appreciative. We need to keep in mind that everybody has something to say and that all opinions are valid and should be represented.
- A proper balance between giving and receiving information and being conscious of how we give and receive messages is key to creating a healthy environment for communication about mental well-being.



## How should we communicate about mental well-being? (*continued*)

- Asking appreciative questions and listening is sometimes better than giving advice.
- When listening, we should listen deeply and fully. We should stay focused on the person who is speaking. This includes paying attention to their words, tone, and gestures.
- When speaking, we should express ourselves with clarity, empathy, and the common goal in mind. We must avoid spiralling into any patterns of blame and misunderstanding.
- Putting personal context helps to understand what is being communicated and not only what is being said. Yet, we must avoid to making others believe that we already know (better) how they feel and what they need.

**BUILDING A  
POSITIVE CLUB CULTURE  
OF COMMUNICATION.**



Next to creating a positive communication culture about mental well-being in your own training sessions, it is important to also lift up the topic to the sport club's organisational and leadership levels. This will allow for a transition towards a positive mental wellbeing club culture, which ensures a safe and healthy environment for all club members. But how to start this journey?





How do you start building a culture of positive mental well-being in your club?

- A first step is that the club leaders needs to acknowledge that positive mental wellbeing is an important part of our general health. It concerns all the sport club members, whether it is the sporting participants, the coaches, the club leadership, the employees or volunteers.
- It means that we need to value mental well-being to the same degree as physical health.
- The club's leadership needs to acknowledge that mental wellbeing and a safe club culture are important to the club's success, as regards membership and staff development.
- To support an effective transition towards a positive mental well-being culture, the next step is to fully understand how the club is currently performing in terms of mental well-being strategies.



How do you start building a culture of positive mental well-being in your club? *(continued)*

- When scoping a positive mental well-being strategy, the club needs to understand that not all persons with mental well-being issues are equally impacted. Yet, for all club members, it is important that they feel safe to disclose potential issues.
- Be aware that a positive mental well-being culture may involve promoting a cultural shift away from a solely valid “win-at-all-costs” narrative. Yet, it does not mean that competitive sport is negative per se.
- When implementing your strategy, be prepared to lead by example and to find appropriate words matching your general club culture. The term "resilience" – for example – sometimes may be more effective than "emotional well-being" or "mental health“.

Last but not least, be aware that a positive mental well-being culture is no offer for mental health therapy. For club members with mental health challenges, you may give support by providing them information about where to get specific therapeutic support. Yet, it is not the club's mission to refer members to therapy.

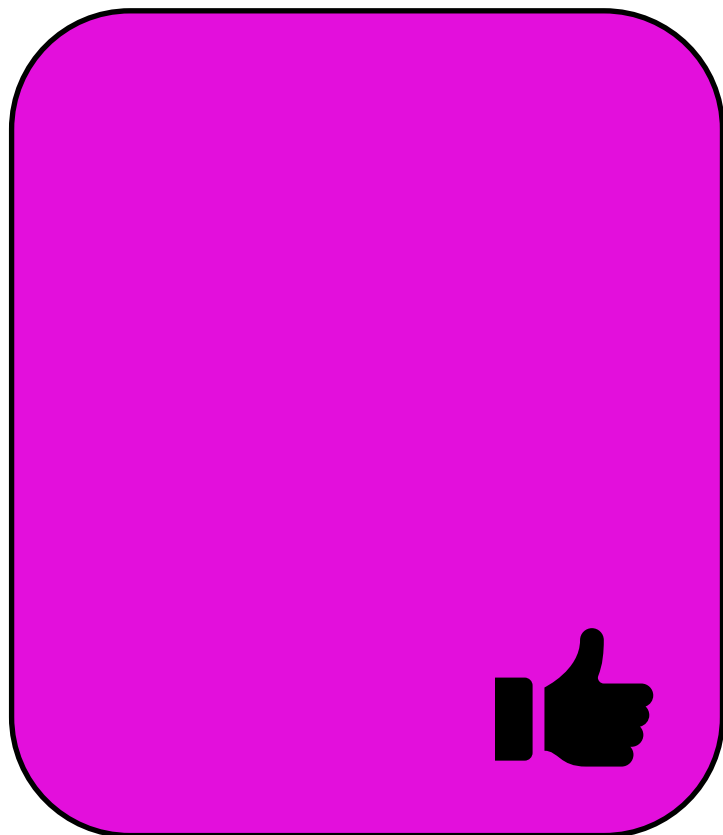


**A SHORT ASSESSMENT.**



## QUIZ

Why is communication key to foster a positive mental wellbeing culture? Please drag and drop.



People who enjoy appropriate communication tend to experience greater mental well-being.

Communication helps us to identify the members with mental health challenges and we can then isolate them and refer them to therapy.

Increased knowledge of mental wellbeing predicts to increase intentions to offer support to club members who have challenges with mental well-being.

Communication helps us to value mental well-being to the same degree as physical health.

When people are forced to talk openly about their mental well-being challenges, they will notice that their challenges are not much of a problem.

Positive communication leads to greater well-being.

## QUIZ – SOLUTION

Why is communication key to foster a positive mental well-being culture? Please drag and drop.

People who enjoy appropriate communication tend to experience greater mental well-being.

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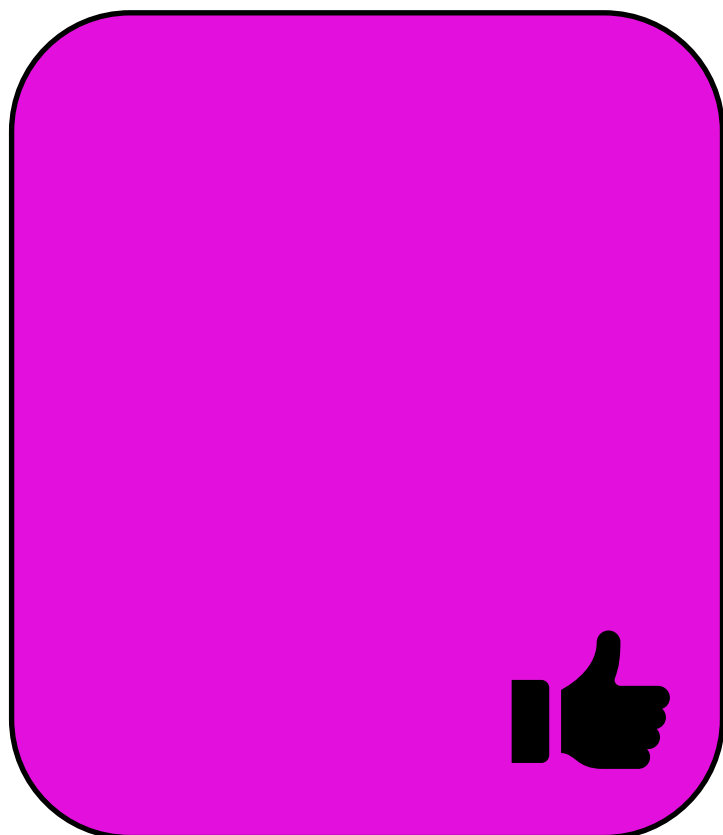
Communication helps us to identify the members with mental health challenges and we can then isolate them and refer them to therapy.

When people are forced to talk openly about their mental well-being challenges, they will notice that their challenges are not much of a problem.



## QUIZ

How should you communicate to foster a positive mental well-being culture? Please drag and drop.



We need to talk openly and avoid stigmatisation. Yet, we must not force any participant to talk about mental well-being challenges.

We can use pre-made one-fits-all solutions and standard message to resolve any mental well-being challenges of our participants.

Our communication should be appreciative with a proper balance between giving and receiving information.

We should make our participants aware that we know very well how they feel and how we can easily help them.

Giving concrete solutions is always better than asking questions.

When listening, we should listen deeply and fully.

## QUIZ - SOLUTION

How should you communicate to foster a positive mental well-being culture? Please drag and drop.

We need to talk openly and avoid stigmatisation. Yet, we must not force any participant to talk about mental well-being challenges.

Our communication should be appreciative with a proper balance between giving and receiving information.

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**ADD-ON:  
A PRACTICAL EXERCISE.**



As an add-on, we provide you with an example of a practical exercise that you can integrate in your practical sessions. It is not specific to mental well-being but helps to raise awareness about the necessity and impact of positive communication. The exercise is called: *Positive Gossiping* (cf. Houston 2022)





## POSITIVE GOSSIPING

**SETTING:** Any place. 15-30 minutes, depending on the group size. Bigger crowds can be split into groups of minimum 3 persons. No tools needed.

**AIM:** The positive gossiping activity aims to create a climate of appreciative feedback by focussing on the positive behaviour, accomplishments, and achievements of other persons.

**BACKGROUND:** Gossiping is a behaviour that everyone encounters and intuitively understands. However, there are two types of gossip: (A) Negative gossiping means sharing information that has (potentially) damaging effects on an (mostly) absent person. (B) Positive gossiping fosters relationships by sharing positive information with good intentions about a present or absent person. It demonstrates support, builds trust and strengthens bonds in groups.



## POSITIVE GOSSIPING *(continued)*

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The exercise is done after a training session. Each group member will take turns playing one of three roles: The Recipient (role 1) will be the focus of the positive gossip. The Positive Gossiper (role 2) shares positive gossip about the recipient's behaviour, abilities, accomplishments, or contributions. The Listener (role 3) listens quietly without interrupting.

The group selects someone at random to play the Recipient. The person to their right becomes the Positive Gossiper and shares one piece of positive gossip. The positive gossip should be specific and true, and ideally shows appreciation for something they did well during the training session.

For example, "I like that [name] listens when you speak," "I think that [name] is warm and friendly," or "[name] has incredible sporting skills."

The exercise is repeated until every group member has played the role of the Recipient.



## POSITIVE GOSSIPING *(continued)*

**REFLECTION:** When everyone has been the Recipient, the group should take a few moments to reflect about the exercise by, for example, considering the following questions:

*How did it feel to share positive gossip? How did it feel to listen to positive gossip? How did it feel to hear positive gossip about you? Did this effect your well-being?*

Afterwards you may raise the following questions for common reflection:

*What feedback did you appreciate the most? Which of the roles did you enjoy (most) and why? How do you think about gossip (now)? Did this exercise help you understand the value of positive gossip? How does the exercise relate to mental well-being?*



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**[WWW.MOVE-THE-MIND.EU](http://WWW.MOVE-THE-MIND.EU)**


WORKSHEET 1

COMMUNICATION TO FOSTER A MENTAL WELLBEING CULTURE IN SPORT CLUBS

**WHY IS COMMUNICATION KEY TO FOSTER A POSITIVE MENTAL WELLBEING CULTURE?**



**HOW SHOULD YOU COMMUNICATE TO FOSTER A POSITIVE MENTAL WELLBEING CULTURE?**



## A PRACTICAL EXERCISE – POSITIVE GOSSIPING

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**IMPLEMENTATION:** The exercise is done after a training session. Each group member will take turns playing one of three roles: The *Recipient* (role 1) will be the focus of the positive gossip. The *Positive Gossiper* (role 2) shares positive gossip about the recipient's behaviour, abilities, accomplishments, or contributions. The *Listener* (role 3) listens quietly without interrupting.

The group selects someone at random to play the Recipient. The person to their right becomes the Positive Gossiper and shares one piece of positive gossip. The positive gossip should be specific and true, and ideally shows appreciation for something they did well during the training session.

For example, *"I like that [name] listens when you speak," "I think that [name] is warm and friendly," or "[name] has incredible sporting skills."*

The exercise is repeated until every group member has played the role of the Recipient.

**REFLECTION:** When everyone has been the Recipient, the group should take a few moments to reflect about the exercise by, for example, considering the following questions:

*How did it feel to share positive gossip? How did it feel to listen to positive gossip? How did it feel to hear positive gossip about you? Did this effect your wellbeing?*

Afterwards you may raise the following questions for common reflection:

*What feedback did you appreciate the most? Which of the roles did you enjoy (most) and why? How do you think about gossip (now)? Did this exercise help you understand the value of positive gossip? How does the exercise relate to mental wellbeing?*

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE – SOME BASICS

- We need to acknowledge value mental wellbeing to the same degree as physical health.
- We need to talk openly and avoid stigmatisation. Yet, we must not force any participant to talk about mental wellbeing challenges.
- Everyone is different. So, the communication with our participants should be appropriate for them. There is no one-fits-all solution or standard messages.
- Our communication should be appreciative. We need to keep in mind that everybody has something to say and that all opinions are valid and should be represented.
- A proper balance between giving and receiving information and being conscious of how we give and receive messages is key to creating a healthy environment for communication about mental wellbeing.
- Asking appreciative questions and listening is sometimes better than giving advice.
- When listening, we should listen deeply and fully. We should stay focused on the person who is speaking. This includes paying attention to their words, tone, and gestures.
- When speaking, we should express ourselves with clarity, empathy, and the common goal in mind. We must avoid spiralling into any patterns of blame and misunderstanding.
- Putting personal context helps to understand what is being communicated and not only what is being said. Yet, we must avoid making others believe that we already know (better) how they feel and what they need.
- Be aware that a positive mental wellbeing culture may involve promoting a cultural shift away from a solely valid “win-at-all-costs” narrative. Yet, it does not mean that competitive sport is negative per se.
- Lead by example and find appropriate words matching your club or team culture. The term "resilience" – for example – sometimes may be more effective than "emotional well-being" or "mental health".
- Be always aware that a positive mental wellbeing culture is no offer for mental health therapy. For club members with mental health challenges, you may give support by providing them information about where to get specific therapeutic support. Yet, it is not your mission to refer someone to therapy.