THE USE OF SPORT AS A TOOL FOR MENTAL HEALTH

A step-by-step guide

Training Renunțare la răspundere: “The use of Sport as a tool for mental Health”

Dates: 16-17 November, 2023

Location of the Meeting: DNA Cascais - Rua Cruz de Popa, 2645-449 Alcabideche, Portugal

Participants: 10 on site, 20 online

All participants had a sports background and between the ages of 20 and 35.

Training material: provided in the agenda

Conclusions: The training event "The Use of Sport as a Tool for Mental Health" provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of the vital link between sports and mental health. By actively participating in discussions, sharing personal experiences, and collaborating on activities, participants felt a sense of involvement and connection with their peers. This collaborative atmosphere fostered a supportive environment where individuals felt comfortable exploring their own mental well-being in the context of sports. As the event progressed, participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to recognize and address mental health concerns within their sports communities. They appreciated the practical tools and strategies shared during the training.

Through engaging activities, discussions, and practical exercises, participants gained valuable insights into the importance of self-awareness, effective communication, and proactive support in fostering a mentally healthy sports environment. The event underscored the need for ongoing education and training on mental health awareness and support for coaches, trainers, and sports administrators. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue promoting awareness and implementation of mental health support strategies within sports organizations to ensure the well-being of athletes. Overall, the training event served as a significant step towards creating a supportive and inclusive sports culture that prioritizes the mental well-being of athletes.

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What is Mental health

Mental health refers to a person's psychological, emotional, and social well-being. It encompasses various aspects of life, including how individuals think, feel, act, handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Good mental health doesn't necessarily mean the absence of mental health challenges; rather, it reflects a state of balance where individuals can cope with everyday stresses, work productively, maintain healthy relationships, and contribute to their communities.

Key points to describe mental health:

Emotional Well-being: Mental health involves experiencing and managing a wide range of emotions in a healthy manner. It includes recognizing and understanding one's feelings, as well as coping with the challenges and changes that life brings.
Resilience and Coping Skills: It's about the ability to bounce back from adversity, cope with stress, and adapt to changes. Developing resilience involves utilising coping mechanisms and support systems to navigate through difficulties.
Positive Relationships: Mental health is influenced by the quality of relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and the community. Strong, supportive relationships contribute to mental well-being.
Healthy Behaviour Patterns: Engaging in healthy behaviours like regular exercise, adequate sleep, nutritious diet, and avoiding harmful substances can significantly impact mental health positively.
Self-Esteem and Self-Worth: Having a positive view of oneself, feeling confident, and recognizing one's own value are vital components of mental health.
Seeking Help When Needed: Being aware of when professional support might be necessary and being open to seeking help from mental health professionals is a crucial aspect of maintaining mental well-being.

It's important to note that mental health exists on a spectrum. Just as physical health fluctuates, mental health can also vary over time. It's normal to experience periods of stress, sadness, or anxiety. However, when these feelings persist, interfere with daily life, or cause significant distress, it may indicate a mental health concern that requires attention and support.

Day 1 - Session 1	**Objectives:** Facilitating participants in acquainting themselves with one another. Encouraging participants to express themselves freely.

	Establishing a secure learning atmosphere through ice-breaking exercises and team-building activities Fostering an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. Grasping participants' expectations and concerns, and motivating their active involvement Introducing the purpose and goals of the participants, enabling them to navigate through the activities seamlessly Incorporating engaging activities that provide an emotional release and break down initial barriers. Creating moments of shared laughter or accomplishment to promote positive emotional experiences. **Materials Needed:** Sports trivia questions related to a variety of sports. Small prizes Flipchart or whiteboard and markers. Sticky notes Pens **Name game:** (15 minutes) Ask participants to form a circle, ensuring everyone can see and hear each other easily. Start with your name then next participant repeats your name followed by their own name **Icebreaker: Sports Trivia Challenge** (30 minutes) Divide participants into teams. Explain that each team will be answering sports trivia questions related to various sports. Pose a series of sports trivia questions, allowing each team to discuss and provide their answers. Keep the atmosphere light and encourage friendly competition. After each question, allow a brief discussion within teams to decide on the answer. Emphasize that collaboration and teamwork are essential for success in the trivia challenge. After the trivia challenge, facilitate a discussion: Ask each team to share one interesting fact they learned during the trivia challenge. Discuss the mental health benefits of engaging in sports. If you have small prizes or tokens, consider awarding them to the winning team or individuals who provided particularly insightful responses.

	Fears, Expectations and Contributions: (25 minutes): Begin by explaining the purpose of the activity: to explore and acknowledge fears and expectations. Provide participants with sticky notes and ask them to individually write down any fears and expectations they have and what will be their contributions for training. Gather all sticky notes. Facilitate a discussion by displaying fears and expectations. Invite participants to discuss
Day 1 - Session 2	**What is Mental Health?: Myths and Facts** **Objectives**: Ensure participants gain a clear understanding of what mental health is. Identify and discuss prevalent myths surrounding mental health to highlight misconceptions that contribute to stigma. **Materials Needed:** Markers Large sheet of Paper Soft ball or object to toss **Energizer - Breathing Ball Toss:** (5 minutes) Use a soft, lightweight ball or object. Participants stand in a circle and toss the ball to each other. Each time someone catches the ball, they take a deep breath in and out before tossing it to the next person. **Introduction to Mental Health:** (20 minutes) Use a small brief presentation and discussion to introduce basic concepts of mental health, common challenges, and the prevalence of

	mental health issues. Emphasize that everyone faces challenges, and it's a normal part of the human experience. **Myth Busting:** (20 minutes) Divide participants into small groups. Each group is assigned a common mental health myth (e.g., "Mental health is a sign of weakness"). Each group will prepare a short presentation. (20 minutes) Each group will have to debunk the myth and present their findings to the larger group.Encourage open discussions and fact-checking, allowing participants to challenge and reshape misconceptions about mental health. **Closing and Resource Distribution** (10 minutes) Conclude the activity by summarizing key points, expressing gratitude for participation, and distributing handouts with information on local mental health resources.
Day 1 - Session 3	**Mental Health Challenges: Normalizing Conversations** **Objectives:** Create an open and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable discussing mental health issues and emphasize the importance of seeking help and support. **Materials Needed:** Flipchart Box or Bowl Markers and Pens Sticky notes **Energizer - Two Truths and a Lie:** (10 minutes) Have each participant come up with two true statements about themselves related to mental well-being and one false statement. Participants take turns sharing their statements, and the group guesses which statement is the lie. This adds a fun and personal touch to the session.

	Personal Reflection: (10 minutes) Provide each participant with small cards or sticky notes. Ask them to anonymously write down a mental health challenge they've faced or someone close to them has experienced. Collect the cards in a box or a bowl. (15 minutes) Discuss the challenges as a group without disclosing individual identities. This helps participants see that they are not alone and that mental health struggles are widespread. **Scenario Role-Playing:** (25 minutes) Divide participants into small groups. Ensure that each group has diversity. Each group will find two topics about mental health challenges and write them on a small paper. After that each group will put those papers in a box or a bowl. Each group will draw two papers and choose one of the topic to create a scenario. Each group will create a scenario. Encourage participants to consider the emotions, challenges, and decisions faced by the individual in the scenario. (30 minutes) Each group will then perform a short role-play based on their scenario. They can decide among themselves who will play each character in the scenario. Encourage every participant to actively contribute to role-play. (15 minutes) After each role-play, facilitate a group discussion. Ask participants to reflect on the choices made by the characters, the challenges they faced, and the potential outcomes of seeking help. Ask participants to reflect on what they learned about the importance of seeking help through this interactive experience.

Day 1 - Session 4	**Understanding Common Mental Health Issues:Empathy and Education** **Objectives:**To increase awareness and understanding of common mental health issues, reduce stigma, and emphasize that these challenges are prevalent and treatable. **Materials Needed:** Flipchart or whiteboard Markers Sticky notes Bingo cards Printed information on common mental health issues **Energizer - Human Bingo:** (10 minutes) Create bingo cards with mental health-related statements (e.g., "Has experienced stress," "Knows someone with anxiety"). Participants mingle to find individuals who match each statement, encouraging conversation and connection. **Common Mental Health Issues Overview:** (20 minutes) Introduce common mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Break down each issue, discussing symptoms, prevalence, and the importance of seeking help.Give participants printed booklet **Small Group Discussions:** (30 minutes) Divide participants into small groups to discuss specific mental health issues. Encourage open sharing of experiences, perceptions, and questions within the groups. **Empathy-building Activity - "Walk in My Shoes":**

	(30 minutes): Assign participants a specific mental health issue and ask them to research and present a short scenario. Others listen and offer empathy, fostering understanding and compassion.
Day 2 - Session 1	**Navigating Mental Well-being: A Journey of Self-Discovery** **Objectives**:Encourage participants to explore their thoughts, emotions, and sensations during the guided meditation, fostering self-awareness about their mental states **Materials Needed:** This activity requires no materials. **Energizer - Progressive rock-paper-scissors** (10 minutes) Organize a quick and fun rock-paper-scissors. Everyone starts as an “egg” stage (squatting/crouch position) and hops around the room looking for other eggs to play in rock-paper-scissors. Winners of that round will progress to fish (gets up a little) and look for other fish to play. Eggs will play with other eggs until they win. Fish that win against other fishes will progress to the monkey(gets up a little more) stage and look for other monkeys to play. The winner will then become a human. Continue playing until most of the group reaches the final stage. (10 minutes) Summarize the previous day’s activities

	Meditation (25 minutes) Welcome participants to the meditation session and briefly explain the purpose: to explore personal mental well-being in relation to sports through a guided meditation Ask participants to find a comfortable seated position, either on a chair or on the floor, encouraging them to sit upright with a relaxed posture. Guide them to close their eyes or maintain a soft gaze, whichever is more comfortable for them. Start the guided meditation by instructing participants to focus on their breath. Ask them to take deep, slow breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. encourage them to notice areas of tension or relaxation without trying to change anything.Allow a brief moment of silence to transition from the meditation to the discussion. Gradually shift the focus to mental states, asking participants to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgement, allowing them to come and go like passing clouds. Slowly guide participants back to the present moment, inviting them to gently open their eyes or bring their awareness back to the room. (30 minutes) Initiate an open discussion by inviting participants to share their experiences during the meditation. Encourage them to reflect on any insights, feelings, or sensations they experienced. Facilitator can guide this session using question below; 1-How did the meditation experience make you feel physically, emotionally, or mentally? 2-Did you notice any changes in your awareness of body sensations, thoughts, or emotions throughout the meditation? 3-Did you notice any changes in your awareness of body sensations, thoughts, or emotions throughout the meditation? 4-Did the meditation experience remind you of any challenges or strengths related to mental well-being in your sports activities? 5-How might practices like meditation contribute to mental well-being in the context of sports?

Day 2 - Session 2	**Nourishing Mind and Body: A Self-Care Exploration** **Objectives**: To explore and emphasize the importance of self-care, exercise, adequate sleep, and nutrition in maintaining good mental health. **Materials Needed:** Large Sheet of Papers Pens or Markers Flipchart **Energizer - Human Knot:** (10 minutes) Participants stand in a circle, and each person grabs the hands of two different people across the circle, creating a "human knot." The goal is to work together to untangle the knot without letting go of hands. **Introduction to Self-Care:** (10 minutes) Start with a small brief about the concept of self-care, its importance, and its direct impact on mental health. Ask the group questions like: What does self-care mean to you personally? What are the examples of self-care activities that you currently incorporate into your life? In what ways do you think self-care can impact mental health? How can we create a culture that values and promotes self-care, both in our personal lives and within our communities? What role does self-awareness play in effective self-care? How do you know when you need to prioritize self-care? What are your personal signs of burnout or stress? Are there cultural or societal factors that influence how self-care is perceived or practiced?

	Discussion: (25 minutes) Divide participants to groups. Give them a large sheet of paper and markers. Each group will discuss and prepare a sheet for all types of self cares as: Physical self-care Emotional self-care Mental self-care Social self-care Spiritual self-care Professional self-care They will find what they are doing in their daily life for self care. After each group discussed they will discuss those findings to the larger group. **Nutritional Wellness Discussion:** (15 minutes) Engage participants in a discussion about the relationship between nutrition and mental health. Share information on brain-boosting foods and the importance of a balanced diet. **Sleep Hygiene Discussion:** (15 minutes) Discuss the impact of sleep on mental health and offer practical tips for improving sleep quality.
Day 2 - Session 3	**Connections Matter: Impact of Relationships on Mental Health** **Objectives**: To explore and understand the impact of both positive and negative relationships on mental health, fostering awareness and promoting the importance of healthy connections. **Materials Needed:** Papers Tape Flipchart or whiteboard Large sheets of paper Colored markers, pens, and sticky notes Projection Laptop

	Energizer - Laughing Yoga: (10 minutes) Lead a brief laughter yoga session. Encourage participants to engage in forced laughter, which often turns into genuine laughter, promoting relaxation and mood elevation. **Introduction to Relationship Dynamics** (20 minutes) Discuss how both positive and negative relationships can impact emotional well-being. **Personal Reflection and Relationship Mapping:** (30 minutes) Ask participants to reflect on significant relationships in their lives. Provide large sheets of paper and markers for participants to create relationship maps, highlighting positive and negative aspects. **Personal Story Sharing:** (15 minutes) Watch a recorded video of health professional or someone with personal experience to share insights on how relationships have impacted mental health. **Positive Affirmation Exchange:** (15 minutes) Each participant will tape a paper to their back and every other participant will write some affirmations or compliments. In the end participants can take home the notes as memory
Day 2 - Session 4	**Coping Strategies and Evaluation** **Materials Needed:** Scenario cards Additional resources for those seeking more information. Pencils, coloured pencils, charcoal, graphite sticks for drawing. Erasers and sharpeners. Watercolour paints, acrylic paints, or tempera paints. Paintbrushes of different sizes. Palette for mixing colours.

	Various sizes and types of paper to accommodate different preferences and artistic expressions. Coloured markers, fine-tip pens, or gel pens for detailed work. Easels(optional) **Energizer - Mirror, Mirror!:** (10 minutes) Ask participants to stand in an open space with enough room for movement. Designate one person as the "Leader." This person will initiate movements for the group to mirror. The Leader starts by making a simple, repetitive movement (e.g., clapping hands, stomping feet, or waving arms). The movement should be easy for the group to follow. Instruct the rest of the participants to carefully observe the Leader and mimic their movements exactly. Emphasize that participants should try to synchronize their movements as closely as possible. After a few minutes, choose a new Leader. This can be done in various ways, such as passing an object or simply pointing to the next person. **Interactive Coping Strategy Exchange:** (20 minutes) Divide participants into small groups and ask each group to share their favourite coping strategies. Encourage them to exchange ideas and discuss how different strategies work for different people. **Art Therapy Session:** (30 minutes) Set up an art therapy session where participants can express their emotions through creative activities such as drawing, painting, or sculpting. Discuss how engaging in art can serve as a therapeutic coping strategy. **Saying No with Confidence:** (15 minutes) Share strategies and tips for saying no assertively and without guilt. Conduct role-playing exercises specifically focused on saying no in different situations. Distribute a scenario card to each participant. Ask participants to find a partner. If the group is large, they can form small groups of three. Ask participants not to reveal their scenarios to others.

	Conclusion: (30 minutes) Recap key points Emphasize that mental health is a shared responsibility Encourage ongoing conversations and support within the Erasmus Plus community Invite questions and discussions from the audience Provide additional resources for those seeking more information
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Pictures


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