

Rethink
Mental
Illness.



Supported by



Rethink Activity.

A physical activity toolkit
for support groups

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Text

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Rethink Activity: An introduction

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Introduction

Rethink Mental Illness is a leading charity provider of mental health services in England. No matter how bad things are, we can help people severely affected by mental illness to improve their lives.

Our mission is to lead the way to a better quality of life for everyone severely affected by mental illness, including those with lived experience, carers, families and friends, by changing attitudes and policy.

People with experience of mental illness are at the heart of everything we do. They shape our expert advice, information and training and around 200 services – everything from housing to community-based services. And they drive our campaigning to change the law and tackle discrimination. Together, we run over 130 local groups which provide vital peer support in the community.

Physical activity is proven to benefit physical and mental wellbeing, as well as having positive social and economic benefits. It is well documented that regular physical activity can reduce the risk of developing a range of illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers¹.

It is estimated that taking part in regular physical activity and sport could save between £1,750 and £6,000 in health costs for an individual². Sport brings a lot to the economy too with many jobs being physical activity or sport-related and many people choose to volunteer in the sector³.

Socially and culturally, physical activity helps bring people together for a shared purpose, encouraging social cohesion and collaboration³.

Most importantly for us physical activity can play a huge role in our mental wellbeing. Being active has been shown to improve mood, feelings of wellbeing and help reduce feelings of depression and anxiety¹.

Recent research showed that physical activity can contribute to improvements in symptoms, including mood, alertness, concentration, sleep patterns and psychotic symptoms. Physical activity can also contribute to improved quality of life through social interaction, meaningful use of time, purposeful activity and empowerment⁴.

Evidence shows that people living with severe mental illness die, on average, 15–20 years earlier than the general population. This is known as the mortality gap.

It is important to note that people severely affected by mental illness do not die earlier than the general population simply because of their mental illness; it is due to the secondary illnesses they develop, such as stroke, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Side effects of medication, including lethargy, increased appetite and reduced motivation, also play a significant role in the mortality gap.

The good news is we can help prevent the development of further illnesses and reduce the mortality gap by being active and leading a healthy lifestyle.

Research shows that people severely affected by mental illness spend more of their time being inactive during the day in comparison to the general population⁵. In order to reduce the chance of people severely affected by mental illness developing secondary long-term conditions and reduce the mortality gap, they need to be supported and encouraged to be more active. This is what Rethink Mental Illness is trying to do.

Sport England are a public-funded body which has a vision that everyone in England, regardless of age, background or ability, feels able to take part in sport or activity. They have provided funding to Rethink Mental Illness and other charities within the Richmond Group of Charities to better understand how to support people with long term conditions to be more active.

The learning from this project, and others, will help Sport England and other stakeholders provide opportunities in the future that will meet the needs of people severely affected by mental illness and those with other long-term conditions.

Rethink Mental Illness, funded by Sport England, have co-produced this toolkit alongside people with lived experience to support people severely affected by mental illness to be more active and improve their health and wellbeing.

“It’s very uplifting... these physical activities give me energy and positivity and I feel better in myself”

Group member

Who and what is this toolkit for?

This resource is aimed at support group coordinators and members, and anyone supporting people severely affected by mental illness who want to be more active. It is designed to be a ‘first stop shop’, your first reference point, to help you on your journey to support your group members to be more physically active. The content of the toolkit has been co-produced in partnership with people severely affected by mental illness.

This toolkit is designed to be user-friendly, easy to understand and provide all necessary information and guidance on how to start offering opportunities to your group members to be more active to benefit their health and wellbeing.

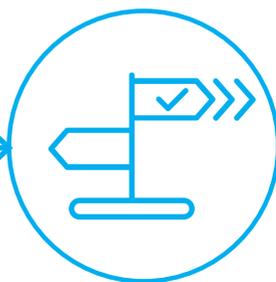
If you’re just starting out on your journey, or you want to explore other activities and need to know the best people to contact, this toolkit can help you. You can use the step by step guide on how to best start the conversation about physical activity with your group, and selecting activities, right through to useful contacts and how to raise awareness about your activities.

This resource is simply a guide and is by no means prescriptive. Every group is different and the needs of members are different too so it is important to speak to members to meet their needs. You should use the toolkit to get an understanding of how to start delivering physical activity sessions and who you can speak to, to help you on your way. Being creative with your ideas and approach is welcomed and encouraged.

- 1 Department of Health and Social Care (2016) *Start active, stay active*. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countries-chief-medical-officers>
- 2 Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2013) *CASE programme*. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-programme>
- 3 Sport England (2013) *Economic value of sport in England*. Available here: <https://www.sportengland.org/media/3174/economic-value-of-sport-summary.pdf>
- 4 Alexandratos, Barnett and Thomas (2012) *The Impact of Exercise on the Mental Health and Quality of Life of People with Severe Mental Illness: A Critical Review*
- 5 Vancampfort et al (2017) *Sedentary behavior and physical activity levels in people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder: a global systematic review and meta-analysis*



Steps to take on your physical activity journey



Step 1

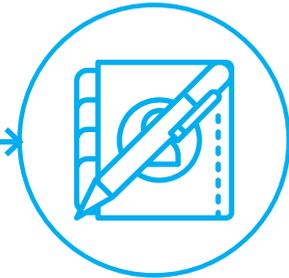
Speak to group members

- Confirm they are interested in taking part.
- Find out what their motivations are to take part.
- Find out about any barriers to participation (i.e. what stops them being active).
- Ask what activities they may be interested in.
- Find out the best day/time of week for members to participate.

Step 2

Decide on an activity

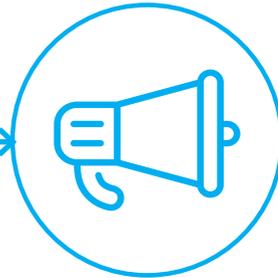
- Discuss what activities group members are interested in and agree a shortlist of options (3 or 4 activities).
- Contact relevant organisations that could help (see 'Useful Contacts' section).
- Consider arranging a taster session with lots of activities for groups members to try then choose one to continue with.



Step 3

Organise sessions

- Consider frequency and duration of sessions (weekly? 30mins/1hr?).
- Decide who will facilitate the sessions – could be a group lead/member or external deliverer (is training required?).
- Confirm the regular time, date and venue of sessions.



Step 4

Promote your sessions

- Promote sessions to group members and the wider community.
- Have fun and enjoy yourself!



Step 5

Get feedback

- Check in with members to see how they are getting on with the activity.
- Do members want to try other activities?



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Understanding physical activity

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What is physical activity?

Physical activity is defined by the World Health Organisation as “any bodily movement that requires energy expenditure”. In short, this essentially means any activity that involves movement that uses energy, burns calories and raises your heart rate.

Physical activity can be in the form of ‘active recreation’ (dance, gym workout, walking, casual cycling, etc) and ‘sport’ (traditional team sports, regular cycling, swimming, tennis, etc). You can also incorporate physical activity into your everyday life, such as walking instead of driving, getting off the bus a stop early and walking the rest of the way, taking the stairs instead of the lift.

“I always feel when I come in and when I leave here, a much better person.”

Group member

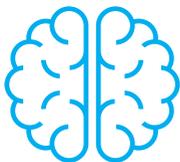
There are guidelines from the Chief Medical Officer on how much activity we should do;

- 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity for adults
- 60 minutes per day for children and young people

You don’t need to try and go from doing nothing to 30 minutes per day. You can do small bouts of 10 minutes each time and build up from there. This works particularly well for people who find it difficult to find a block of time to be active in the day. Remember – every minute of activity adds up and everything counts.

Why is it important to be active?

Being regularly physically active has a range of physical, mental, social and economic benefits.

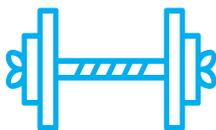


Mental health benefits

Being active can improve mental wellbeing:

- Reduce feelings of depression.
- Increase confidence and self-esteem.
- Improve mood.
- Mitigate side effects of mental health medication.

Physical activity can help increase levels of the “feel good” chemicals, known as endorphins and serotonin. You can’t see this happening but it happens when we are active inside our bodies.



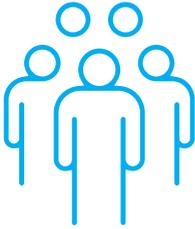
Physical health benefits

Physical activity has lots of physical health benefits:

- Ease side effects of medication, including weight loss, improves sleep and reduces lethargy.
- Increase fitness levels.
- Makes you stronger.

Physical activity also reduces the risk of acquiring a range of physical illnesses and conditions, including:

- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- type 2 diabetes
- some cancers



Social benefits

Physical activity can also have a positive social impact:

- Meet new people.
- Reduce social isolation.
- Build community links.
- Increase social cohesion.
- Fun and enjoyment.



Economic benefits

The economy can benefit from physical activity:

- Jobs in the leisure and sports coaching industry.
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Generate income.
- NHS savings.
- Improved health leading to more people able to work.



Individual benefits

Physical activity can benefit individual development:

- Improve confidence to try new activities.
- Improve motivation to set and achieve goals.
- Improve quality of life.
- Increase self-esteem.
- Development of soft skills, e.g. leadership and teamwork.

Why consider offering physical activity opportunities

Each group will have different reasons for starting to facilitate physical activity opportunities to group members.

It could be because there is demand within the group but, as a group coordinator, you are not sure how or where to start, or you have provided opportunities in the past but not able to sustain provision, or, you want to set up a new support group focussing on physical activity. Whatever the reason, there is a lot groups can get out of it;

- **Improve the physical, mental and social wellbeing** of people in the community severely affected by mental illness.
- **Provide existing members a new opportunity** to try out different new and fun activities in a supportive setting.

- **Build group membership** by attracting people from outside the group who are interested in taking part in physical activity with other people severely affected by mental illness.
- **Build links with other organisations** within the community to support the delivery of physical activity and raise awareness of severe mental illness.
- **Volunteering and training opportunities** for group coordinators and group members, for example, training to become a walk or run leader, group member volunteers to support with the organisation of sessions.



Barriers

There are many reasons why some people don't take part in physical activity. This is often down to internal and external barriers – things that stop people taking part.

It is important to understand some of the barriers that members have faced which have prevented them being active. These may apply to you too.

Internal Barriers

Description	Solution
Confidence and self-esteem	
Many people, not just those severely affected by mental illness, lack the confidence to be active or engage with the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage their peers in sessions.• Encourage members to bring a friend, relative or carer from outside the group to a session for support.• Provide reassurance before, during and after sessions.• Start with small steps and goals.
Anxiety	
Some people may feel anxious trying new activities and being in new environments, even when with people they know	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a supportive environment where members help each other.• Consider whether a buddy or mentor scheme could work.• Avoid competitive situations, particularly at first when trying an activity for the first time.

Description	Solution
Motivation	
<p>Having the inner motivation to exercise can be a challenge, even for those who are regularly active</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain focused and have a clear goal. Allow for any set-backs, e.g. if a goal takes longer to achieve due to illness. • Doing an activity with others to motivate and support each other.
Medication side effects (e.g. drowsiness, dizziness, weight gain)	
<p>Some medications can have significant side effects. Experiencing weight gain, sleepiness, restlessness and blurred vision can be common</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of the medication members are taking and work with them to ensure they do not exceed their limits. • Explain how being active can support with these side effects; physical activity can help weight loss, release of endorphins can increase energy and mood.
Fitness level	
<p>Lack of fitness can be associated with the perception that physical activity is “too hard”, “too painful” and “not for me”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start slow and increase duration and intensity gradually. • Go at the member’s rate. • Encourage members to take a break at any point if they feel the need. • The fitter you get, the easier it becomes. So be patient.

Description	Solution
Fear of judgement	
<p>The perception of others can impact on someone's motivation to exercise. The fear of "looking silly" or "not being as good as others" is often a barrier identified by people. Fear of judgement based on clothing may also be a barrier for some</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind members that even the most fit and active people had to start somewhere • Often the worry of "looking silly" or thinking people are judging, is an internal fear and not reality • Encourage members to wear any clothing that is comfortable for them to move around in
Not sure how	
<p>It is sometimes difficult to know where to go to find opportunities. Knowing the rules of a game or how to safely exercise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting activities with support group removes the need for individuals to find their opportunities on their own • Through the support group sessions members will gain an understanding of where and how they can be active • Often your GP or Local Authority will be able to advise

External Barriers

Description	Solution
Cost	
<p>There are a lot of activities that incur some sort of cost. Whether that be paying to take part in a fitness class or buying a bike to go cycling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider activities that have little or no ongoing cost, such as jogging, walking, football in the park with friends.• Where funding is required, consider ways to raise necessary funds through fundraising activities and/or small charges for members.• There are lots of ways to be active for free – try to be a little creative, e.g. walk instead of drive (or get off the bus or train a bit earlier and walk the rest of the way), take the stairs instead of the lift.• Purchase low cost equipment to support members to be active, e.g. rounders equipment, football, pop-up table tennis set
Accessibility	
<p>Knowing where to go to be active can be difficult for some. As well as knowing that the session instructor is aware of how to support people severely affected by mental illness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most trained instructors will have an appreciation of the needs of people with long-term conditions. If necessary, you can contact instructors prior to sessions to ask any questions you may have.• Some activities do not require a trained instructor and can be facilitated by a volunteer or group coordinator.

Description	Solution
Stigma	
<p>People severely affected by mental illness may feel there is a stigma attached to their diagnosis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't let stigma create a feeling of self-doubt or shame – people severely affected by mental illness are not defined by their illness. • Someone with mental illness should never feel forced to disclose their diagnosis if they do not want to.
Clothing	
<p>There is often the perception that you need to wear particular clothing or some activities require a kit which some people may not have or being able to afford</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless you're joining a competitive team sport or activity, you don't need specific clothing. • Comfortable shoes and clothing is suggested. That doesn't mean men must wear shorts and women must wear leggings. As long as members are comfortable and can move freely that's most important.

A lot of these barriers could be overcome by embedding physical activity into your support group and making physical activity accessible, enjoyable and more achievable. Taking part with their peers in a familiar setting may help motivate members, improve confidence, remove the fear of judgement and removing the need to try and work out how to do it alone.

It is a good idea to talk to members and find out what some of their barriers might be. Sharing experiences with each other will show everyone that they are not alone and others may have the same experiences.

Meet Simon...

Simon is the group coordinator at Medway Area Rethink Support (MARS) group in Kent. He was first introduced to the physical activity project by his Rethink Group Development Officer and was keen to find out more about the project and how to get involved.

Simon said, “myself and my group deputy thought that this was a very good and interesting initiative and we wanted to find out more about it and how we could introduce it in to the group”. Having received support and guidance, they soon started their activity.

The project aims to encourage people severely affected by mental illness who are inactive to achieve at least 30 minutes per week of physical activity. There are lots of ways this can be achieved. MARS group decided to split the 30 minutes into small blocks of activity and embed it into their weekly 2-hour group meetings.

Simon explains, “we started 3 x 10 minutes sessions of Medical Qigong (a form of Tai Chi) which my deputy leads each week”.

After a short period of time, Simon started seeing the positive impact being active has had on his group members. “As group lead, I have seen on a weekly basis a real passion from almost all who attend the group meeting to participate in the Medical Qigong sessions and this also includes 3 non-English-speaking members. Some members have done some activity before but for many this activity is the first activity that they have ever done.

Without this opportunity, many would continue to be inactive”. One group member, who has been attending the group for 6 months, said, “I find the activity relaxing and relieves pressure on my mind. Attending the group has improved my mental health and wellbeing”.

The activity has already had a wider impact on group members with some doing their own activity at home, as Simon explains, “several group members have said that they are really starting to benefit from the sessions and how much they are enjoying doing this, not just at the group, but in between group meetings at home too.” Through the support from the group lead, and the delivery of activity by the deputy group lead, group members feel empowered and confident to start being active in their spare time.

Most activities can be adapted to suit various needs. And this is the case at MARS group’s sessions too, as Simon explains, “the session lead always asks if anyone would like to remain seated during the activity and, if so, he tailors the activity so they are still able to participate”.

Being inactive himself, at first Simon would watch his group members take part in the activity. “For a while I just used to stand back and watch the group doing the Medical Qigong as I was not feeling up to participating due to being uncertain about my health issues and whether I would be up to the activity”.

But he was soon inspired to start taking part after seeing the impact the activity was having on the group. Simon explains, “recently I have been trying to participate and I hope like other members I begin to feel that the sessions prove beneficial”.

The opportunity to introduce physical activity is available to all peer support groups, both new and existing. For any groups who are thinking about offering physical activity to their group members, Simon has some useful advice; “To any group who are looking at being more active, Rethink’s physical activity project and toolkit gives you a unique opportunity to do just this.

Your group decides on the type of activity that you do and how you are going to implement this, whether it’s during your group meetings like our activity, or whether you do the activity on a separate occasion from your regular group meetings.

“Talk to your group members to find out what sort of activity that they would like to do, then you can agree when and where. Then have fun and enjoy whatever your group chooses to do to be active regularly.”

3

Understanding the member journey

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Introduction

Before you start with the planning process, it is first important to understand your members and the personal journey they will go on. This section will focus on how group leads can support group members to enjoy the benefits of physical activity.

Most people know that physical activity is good for them and say that they want to be more active. However, often life gets in the way and many of us beat ourselves up about not doing anything about it but don't actually act on it – this is referred to the intention-action gap. Recent research tells us that around a quarter of the population intend to engage in more physical activity but fail to follow through with that intention.

“The social side here is so important, it's a very, very important side of it”

Group member

How to make it easier for members to be active

When starting something new everyone goes through a thought process. From not even thinking about doing something, to starting to look into it, to actually doing it. Think of this as stages in a process. Group members will be at different stages throughout and they may move back and forth through the stages or get stuck in a stage.

At whatever point in the process a person is, we ultimately want to help them get to the stage of 'getting started', then 'sticking with it' and helping them stay there.

The member journey



Not on my radar

"I'd rather play computer games"



Thinking about it

"I've been thinking about running but I'm not sure how to start"



Planning to do something soon

"I've signed up to a new dance session"



Getting started

"I'm trying to go cycling once a week but it doesn't always happen"



Sticking with it

"I walk 15 minutes to work everyday no matter the weather"

**People can move back
and forth through stages**

You may find there are people in your group that were active in the past but don't do physical activity currently. Things happen in life which mean getting out of a routine, such as moving to a new area or being unwell. Others may not have done any physical activity before so preparing for doing some is a big, daunting step. That's okay. Some people might need support to get back into it. People who don't do any activity are often in the first two stages in the diagram. Talking to members will help identify their barriers to support them to take part.

When working with and supporting people it's important to engage them, but it's also important to understand how to support them. Consider what steps a member would need to take to move towards being active and staying active. For example, the 'planning to do something' stage can often be about how to get somewhere, what to wear, what to bring etc. It's important to remember to speak to members regularly so they feel supported. Helping them set personal goals will help keep them engaged, motivated and have something to work towards.

When people make a choice about doing something they make decisions based on two things

1 **Thinking it through logically** – using information, facts and figures

2 **'Gut instinct'** – using emotions

Some people will use their emotions more when making a decision, whereas others rely more on gathering all the information before making a decision.

For example, when considering whether to take part in your group activity, one person may immediately love the idea and want to get involved, whereas someone else might want to consider the opportunity first before deciding whether to be involved. It is important to understand this and allow people to take their time if they need to.

Meet Paul...

Paul is a member of Canterbury and Coastal Rethink carers support group (C&CRCSG), which has been running for over 40 years. He has been a carer for over 30 years for his wife who has bipolar disorder.

Over the years, there have been times where Paul's wife's health deteriorates, impacting on her quality of life. It has also affected Paul, "As a carer I found and still find these occasions very hard to deal with."

Paul decided he wanted to give back to the group that has supported him over the years, so decided to raise funds by being active. He says, "I decided to stage a sponsored cycle ride for our charity in our local community which was a particular challenge for myself having not ridden a bike for well over 40 years, am a smoker and desperately needed to get fit!" Paul wanted to encourage others, including carers and service users, to get involved so organised a sponsored cycle event.

Cycling has had an impact on both Paul and his wife, "I encouraged my wife to take up cycling...hoping to go out on many bike rides together and both benefitting from the healthy activity. We found that riding also with family and friends to be so enjoyable and have forged many other great friendships also with other carers and those suffering from poor mental health." Due to medications Paul's wife was on, he needed to find a way to make sure she was stable on her bike.

“Through our membership of the C&CRCSG we were able to sign our carers group up with a local cycling organisation called ‘Wheel Potential’, they are local to us and provide adapted bikes for the disabled and have a wide range of other bicycles including standard and even tandems!”

Paul and his wife took a particular liking to the tandem and it worked well for them, “the tandem was our particular choice as my wife could then safely enjoy riding together... Pedalling together now over the last six months being tandem newbie’s and now only slightly wobbling is so satisfying, we chat along the way, stop for refreshments, enjoy the surroundings with only the odd stop for me to take a ‘fresh air’ break (cigarette). It is so satisfying, we always are left with a sense of achievement, a feeling we all need.”

His experience and enjoyment of cycling with his wife has led Paul to want to encourage others within C&CRCSG and in the community to take up cycling too by setting up a new cycling club called Bike, Ride, Talk.

Being more active has brought great benefits to Paul and his wife. He says, “we know this is no cure for my wife’s bipolar, but boy does it make a difference to our quality of lives! We are very fortunate that being retired we are able to choose when and how often we go out cycling together. However, when my wife is not very well and not able to go I still can.

“We have found cycling low impact on our ageing bodies and that it has strengthened our core muscles, reduced my own back pain and been an absolute stress buster, producing many a laugh along the way!”

Paul has some great advice for anyone wishing to be more active, whether you're a carer or living with severe mental illness; “be realistic about your choice of activity, consider your body as well as your mind and your financial circumstances, not all activities are expensive; choose an activity that you will not only benefit from but will be stimulating, rewarding and always leave you with a sense of; achievement, both physically and mentally for having taken up the challenge and succeeding.”

Through his determination to help not only his wife, but his own physical and mental wellbeing too, Paul has been able to find an activity that unites them both and has seen a huge improvement in their wellbeing and quality of life.

“Be realistic about your choice of activity, consider your body as well as your mind and your financial circumstances, not all activities are expensive”

4

Planning sessions: A step by step guide

4

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Introduction

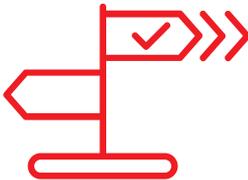
Now that you have decided as a group you want to start taking part in physical activity, how do you go about getting started?

Let's consider this in 4 simple steps



Step 1

Speak to group members



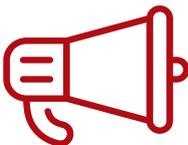
Step 2

Decide on an activity



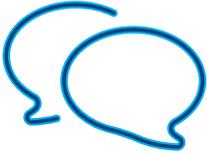
Step 3

Organise sessions



Step 4

Promote your sessions



Step 1 Speak to group members

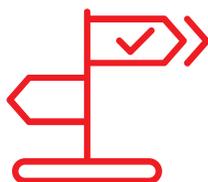
At your next group meeting you could raise it as an agenda item and raise the idea with group members. Or, it may have been raised as an idea at a recent group meeting and, as group coordinator, you want to help make it happen.

Ask the group questions

- How active are members at this point? Were they previously active but had to stop due to circumstance?
- What are their motivations to be more active? Why do they want to take part?
- What makes it difficult for them to be active?
- What activities would they be interested in trying? Maybe there is a preference for individual activities like yoga, dance or swimming, or team activities like football, basketball or rounders. Be creative with ideas, for example, trampolining or hula hooping!
- What day and time would suit everyone?
- Ask if anyone would be keen to take a lead on it and do some initial research.

“It gives me a sense of achievement by leading the group.”

Group lead



Step 2 Decide on an activity

It is really important that the activity options are discussed with the group and everyone (or at least the majority) agrees on the chosen activity.

Having everyone agree on an activity will make sure members feel included in decision making and it may help attendance rates – if it's an activity they have chosen, group members are more likely to attend. There is also the option to try a range of activities if the group decides and/or cannot agree on a single activity.

There are lots of activities to choose from. You do not need to choose a 'traditional' sport, such as football or running. Of course, these are perfectly good options, but you could be a little more creative with your decision if you wanted, such as Zumba, dance or rounders.

There is one key thing you should consider when selecting your activity – it needs to be active enough to increase your heart rate. This is referred to as 'moderate intensity activity'.

Remember though, short bouts of 10 minutes may be enough for members to reach this moderate level of intensity. Go at their level and their pace. Members who have a lower level of motivation or fitness, will find 10 minutes more achievable than 30 minutes. There is a good way to measure whether you are reaching this level of intensity⁶.

Remember the talk test:



Can talk, but not sing = moderate intensity activity



Difficulty talking without pausing = vigorous intensity activity

⁶ Department of Health and Social Care (2018), Start Active, Stay Active. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-infographics-on-physical-activity>

There are some activities that group leads may not be able to deliver themselves or would need some support with. Based on your chosen activity, you could get in touch with relevant organisations that could support you.

You should consider what support or information you would need then contact organisations that could help. If you're not sure who is best to contact, your local authority or Active Partnership is always a good starting point as they have knowledge of your local area. There is a template letter/email in this toolkit which you can use when contacting organisations.

Think about the nature of your chosen activity and some of the possible steps you could take.

“Being involved in it, has helped my confidence”

Group member

“I just feel that it has given me a sense of achievement”

Group lead



Example 1 – Rounders

What do I need?

Equipment – bat, balls, cones or poles for the bases.

Venue – this could be an indoor hall at a school, university, community centre, or an outdoor area at a park, sports field or school field.

Where can I find information and support?

Local Authority Sport Development or Leisure teams – your local council will have information on possible venues you can use for free, local rounders clubs in your area that could help deliver sessions or provide a venue or equipment for free, likewise schools who may have equipment and a space you can use on agreed terms.

Active Partnership – a regional organisation focussing on physical activity and sport opportunities in their area. They can help with a range of things such as local clubs, venues, community organisations, coaches who can support with delivering sessions. They will also have good links with schools and colleges to access facilities and equipment.

Rounders England – they are the national governing body for rounders. This means they govern the sport and try to get more people playing. They could help you find your local club, help with equipment, help find a space, provide training and information.

Local college or university – your local authority should be able to help you find your local college or university, or you can just use sites like Google Maps to help you. You can contact them to find out if there are any students who are studying a sport course and may be interested in getting some coaching experience by helping to deliver your sessions. They will likely offer this for free in exchange for the experience.

Can I facilitate sessions myself?

On the basis you are not necessarily looking to develop the skills of members, merely provide an opportunity to be active, you could deliver sessions yourself.

Top Tips

You could have a local person from a college, university, club or freelance coach to come to the first few sessions to give advice and support until you feel confident enough to deliver it yourself.

Make sure you understand the basic rules. Contact Rounders England for advice on rules, games and possible training opportunities to confidently deliver sessions. There is a Rounders Activator course you might want to attend.

Include a warm up and cool down before and after each session – this could be a short jog around the pitch and some stretches.

Break the session down into phases;

- Warm up
- Throwing and catching with a partner
- Hitting practice
- Informal match
- Cool down
- Like with any group activity, you should consider any risks. There is a risk assessment template available for you to use.
- Consider insurance implications with your activity. Your chosen activity may be covered by your group insurance. It is worth checking if you're not sure. If you are setting up a spoke group, i.e. an additional physical activity group which is linked with your main group, be sure to register it with your Group Development Officer to ensure you have the appropriate insurance cover. See FAQs section for more information on insurance.

Example 2 – Dance or exercise class

What do I need?

Equipment – music player.

Venue – space large enough for everyone.

Where can I find information and support?

Local Authority – you may be able to use the same space you normally use for your group sessions. If this won't work your local authority may be able to help you find another suitable space, such as a church hall, community centre, school, etc.

Active Partnership – a regional organisation focussing on physical activity and sport opportunities in their area. They can help with a range of things such as local clubs, venues, community organisations, coaches who can support with delivering sessions. They will also have good links with schools and colleges.

Exercise Move Dance UK (EMD

UK) – they are the recognised governing body for group exercise, including aqua aerobics, Zumba, dance, circuit training, aerobics, tai chi, yoga and lots more.

Local college or university –

your local authority should be able to help you find your local college or university, or you can just use sites like Google Maps to help you. You can contact them to find out if there are any students who are studying a sport, dance or performing arts course and may be interested in getting some coaching experience by helping to deliver your sessions. They will likely offer this for free in exchange for the experience.

Can I facilitate sessions myself?

Exercise classes need to be carefully delivered to avoid any injuries so it's probably best to be delivered by a professional. You could have an instructor lead your session or follow an online tutorial if facilities allow.

Dance sessions could be delivered by a member (or a relative, carer or friend) who has a keen interest in dance. You could also find a student who would be happy to help.

Top Tips

- If facilities allow, online videos, such as via YouTube, could be used.
- Like with any group activity, you should consider any risks. There is a risk assessment template available for you to use.
- Consider insurance implications with your activity. Your chosen activity may be covered by your group insurance. It is worth checking if you're not sure. If you are setting up a spoke group, be sure to register it with your Group Development Officer to ensure you have the appropriate insurance cover. See FAQs section for more information on insurance.

Example 3 – Walking/Jogging/Running

What do I need?

The great outdoors – park, open space, street.

Where can I find support?

Local Authority – your local council may have information on local walking/jogging/running routes of varying length.

Active Partnership – a regional organisation focussing on physical activity and sport opportunities in their area. They can help with a range of things such as local groups, community organisations, leaders who can support with delivering sessions.

England Athletics – the national governing body for athletics, including jogging and running. They will have information on local routes you could take. There may be a local jogging/running group already taking place in your area which you could join. These are generally lead by volunteers and have members of varying fitness levels.

Walking for Health – England's largest network of free group health walk schemes led by trained volunteers. These are geared towards people with long-term conditions. You could tap into an existing walk taking place in your local area, organise a dedicated group with one of the trained volunteers or train to become a walk leader yourself.

Sustrans – provide details of pre-calculated walking routes around the country. There are lots of different routes you can try.

parkrun – weekly free runs in local parks for people of all abilities. You could utilise the free C25k (Couch to 5k) resources and work towards completing a parkrun. If you don't want to run or jog, you could walk instead. There are also volunteering opportunities. You can find your nearest parkrun on their website.

Active 10 – An NHS funded free walking app that can help track the duration and intensity of your walk. Walking briskly for just 10 minutes counts as exercise and you can use this app to help. Search for the Active 10 in the App Store.

Can I facilitate sessions myself?

You can access official training to become a walk or run leader.

You should consider safety elements, for example, you may need a volunteer at the back at all times to keep the group together, consider the terrain.

Top tips

- Walking, jogging and running are some simple activities that anyone can do, in any place, free of charge.
- Like with any group activity, you should consider any risks. There is a risk assessment template available for you to use.
- Consider insurance implications with your activity. Your chosen activity may be covered by your group insurance. It is worth checking if you're not sure. If you are setting up a spoke group, be sure to register it with your Group Development Officer to ensure you have the appropriate insurance cover. See FAQs section for more information on insurance.

Example 4 – Table Tennis

What do I need?

Equipment – bats, balls, table, net

Where can I find support?

Local Authority – your local council will be able to help you identify local clubs, community groups, schools and colleges who may be able to offer support with venue, equipment or delivery of sessions.

Active Partnership – a regional organisation focussing on physical activity and sport opportunities in their area. They can help with a range of things such as local clubs, venues, community organisations, coaches who can support with delivering sessions. They will also have good links with schools and colleges to access facilities and equipment.

Table Tennis England – the national governing body for table tennis will be able to give you useful tips and guidance on how you can start sessions and anyone in the community who can support you, whether that be with equipment, venue or session delivery.

Can I facilitate sessions myself?

Table tennis is just one example of where the governing body, Table Tennis England, has developed what is known as a ‘product’. Rather than purchase a dedicated table tennis table or go to a venue which has one, you could purchase an ‘Instant Ping Pack’, which includes a net which can be set up on any table, bats, ball and game cards. It requires no training or previous experience.

Top tips

- Like with any group activity, you should consider any risks. There is a risk assessment template available for you to use.
- Consider insurance implications with your activity. Your chosen activity may be covered by your group insurance. It is worth checking if you’re not sure. If you are setting up a spoke group, be sure to register it with your Group Development Officer to ensure you have the appropriate insurance cover. See FAQs section for more information on insurance.



Example 5 – Cycling

What do I need?

Equipment – bicycles, safety equipment.

Venue – park, enclosed area, cycle track, street.

Where can I find support?

Local Authority – your local council will be able to help you identify local community groups who offer cycling opportunities, as well any designated routes which you could follow.

Active Partnership – a regional organisation focussing on physical activity and sport opportunities in their area. They can help with a range of things such as, venues, community organisations, coaches who can support with delivering sessions. They will also have knowledge of initiatives in your area which you could tap into, such as those listed in the ‘product activities’ section.

Wheels for All – a national programme that supports all children and adults with differing needs to engage in a quality cycling activity. They have their own specially adapted bikes to suit all abilities and offer provision around the country. There may be sessions near your group which you can attend or arrange your own session.

Sustrans – provides pre-calculated cycling routes around the country which you could use. There are lots of different routes you can try.

Can I facilitate sessions myself?

If members have access to their own bike you can follow one of the cycling routes on the Sustrans website, or plot your own.

Top Tips

- With activities like cycling it is important to consider safety – how confident are members? Is road cycling the safest method for unconfident riders? Consider the impact of some medication on stability.
- Like with any group activity, you should consider any risks. There is a risk assessment template available for you to use.
- Consider insurance implications with your activity. Your chosen activity may be covered by your group insurance. It is worth checking if you're not sure. If you are setting up a spoke group, be sure to register it with your Group Development Officer to ensure you have the appropriate insurance cover. See FAQs section for more information on insurance.

“The table tennis activity has helped me build more confidence both with people and the game which encouraged me to start playing competitively as I’ve enjoyed it so much”

Group member

'Product' activities

Some national governing bodies have created a 'product' to help people try their activity.

All of these activities you can access in your local area or you can try yourself by learning the rules and using basic equipment. There are also courses you can attend if you want to get more knowledge on how to deliver sessions yourself. Of course, if you prefer you can stick to the traditional version of an activity.

These are just some of the activities you may want to try. There are lots more which you could search online or speak to your local authority or Active Partnership to help.

No Strings Badminton

www.badmintonengland.co.uk/play/court-time-we-put-our-name-to/no-strings-badminton

60 minutes of 'you time' on a badminton court – time to socialise, to de-stress, to keep fit, to compete, to challenge yourself.

Cardio Tennis

www.lta.org.uk/cardiotennis

Cardio Tennis is a fun, sociable group fitness class set on a tennis court and open to people of all ages and abilities.

Training available if you are a qualified tennis coach, fitness instructor or PE teacher.

Walking Netball / Back to Netball

www.englandnetball.co.uk/walking-netball
www.englandnetball.co.uk/backtonetball

Walking Netball is a slower version of the game; it is netball, but at a walking pace. The game has been designed so that anyone can play it regardless of age or fitness level.

Back to Netball sessions are delivered across England and provide women of all ages with a gentle re-introduction to the sport.

O2 Touch Rugby

www.o2touch.co.uk

O2 Touch is a fun and friendly environment for both men and women of all abilities to get involved in touch rugby. Whether it's about honing your fitness or having a great time exercising as a group, this is social fitness at its best.

No specific training for this activity but you could learn the rules and play yourself.

Squash 101

www.englishsquash.com/squash101

Squash 101 is a new, alternative way to play squash that gets groups of people on court together more regularly. Squash 101 is a regular session for adult players that is fun, inclusive, social and easy to get started.

Walking Basketball

www.walkingbasketballuk.com

Walking Basketball is a walking version of the game we know and love!

Whilst the focus is on those that may struggle to participate in regular basketball Walking Basketball is suitable for all ages, sizes and abilities.

Walking Football

www.thewfa.co.uk

Walking football is different to regular Association Football in many ways. It has very specific rules that outlaw all running and allows no contact between players. Over-head height restrictions and indirect free kicks ensure that the activity is played safely. As a result of these rules, games are played at a slower pace. This allows people who have always loved football to once again safely get back to playing and also introduces the sport to people who perhaps have never considered playing before.



Step 3 Organise sessions

By this point you will have selected which activity (or activities) your group would like to do and made contact with appropriate organisations to support you with starting your sessions.

If, rather than joining existing community provision, you are setting up your own sessions at your group base or elsewhere, you will need to decide;

How long will sessions last?

Each session should be a minimum of 30 minutes long. If you are only able to deliver session on a fortnightly basis they should ideally be at least an hour in length. You can build this up gradually to cater for the needs and abilities of group members, i.e. you could start with 10 minutes and work up from there.

How often will sessions be delivered?

The ideal is for sessions to run on a weekly basis. This will help members achieve the greatest health benefits and encourage a behaviour change to being more active on a weekly basis. We do appreciate this may not always be possible due to reasons beyond your control. Where weekly provision is not possible, you should work towards sessions every 2 weeks. On the weeks there are no sessions you can support members to be more active in their day-to-lives, such as encouraging them to walk instead of getting the bus, take the stairs instead of the lift, take a walk during lunch.

How will sessions be funded?

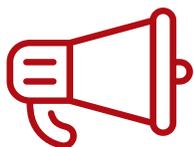
If you are able to organise a session that has no cost to members that's great. But there may be some activities that include a cost, such as if you need to pay for a venue or an instructor. Think about how this will be funded. Maybe you can fundraise as a group or charge members a small fee. If charging members, this should be agreed with them and be clear from the start that there will be a charge.

Finalise the details of sessions

Confirm the time, date and venue of sessions. Make sure members agree. Wherever possible, try to keep this consistent and avoid last minute changes as this could cause the routine to break for some members.

Member safety should be prioritised. Some may need to consult with their doctor prior to starting any physical activity if they have an existing medical condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, etc. It is a good idea to have members complete a Physical Activity Readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) to confirm they are physically able to take part. There is a template PAR-Q in the Resources section of this toolkit. This is especially important where members have a physical health condition and/or are taking medication for their mental health, which can have significant side effects.

You should also keep a register of members who attend sessions. This will help you keep track of who is attending and identify if any members stop coming. If you are incentivising members, your register will help you keep track. There is a template available in the Resources section of this toolkit for you to use.



Step 4 Promote your sessions

You are now at the point where sessions are ready to start. Once everything has been organised now is the time to start promoting the session.

You can inform existing group members in any format that works best and will reach everyone, e.g. email, text, posters, social media, etc. You can also use the opportunity to promote your group to the wider community to try to attract new members who are severely affected by mental illness but do not attend your support group. Using the template poster provided by your Group Development Officer you can print and display copies around your local community such as in supermarkets, libraries, GP surgeries, and community notice boards. You may also wish to promote via social media.

The key thing to remember at this point is that, as support group coordinator, you have created new opportunities for people severely affected by mental illness which will positively improve their wellbeing. You should enjoy the experience and encourage members to enjoy it too.

“Some people are not only doing the exercises once a week at the group, but also they’re doing them when they’re at home as well.”

Group lead

Safeguarding and Health & Safety

Risk Assessment

As with any activity you do as a group, safety is of paramount importance. For your activity, you should complete a risk assessment. This will help you highlight any potential risks associated with your activity and start thinking about how you can reduce the potential risk of harm or injury.

The risks will depend on the nature of the activity and venue. As a guide you should consider the following;

- **Playing surfaces/venue** – if indoor, are there any items around the room which could be a trip hazard? Have you considered where the closest fire exit is?
- **Equipment** – is equipment safe and fit-for-purpose?
- **First aid** – is there a trained first aider present? Do you have appropriate provisions to hand?
- **Health considerations** – do members have any injuries or conditions that could affect their participation?

You will find a template Risk Assessment in the Resources section. You can also contact your Group Development Officer for support.

DBS checks

It is advised that with any session being delivered there should be someone present who is DBS checked. All group coordinators will be DBS checked. If you are having an external instructor deliver sessions, it is sensible to check with them they have a DBS.

If you're not sure whether you need a DBS check, contact your Group Development Officer.



5

Top tips

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Starting physical activity sessions is a new concept for some and you may be a little unsure at first. Here are some handy top tips to help you.

Think outside the box

When speaking with members about what activities they would like to do, encourage them to think a little outside the box. It's easy to gravitate towards traditional activities, such as football, swimming or tennis – which are all good options – but alternative activities may appeal to more people, particularly those that do not do any form of physical activity. Examples might include boxercise, aerobics, chair-based exercise, martial arts or skating. Remember the tool mentioned previously in section 4 to help you know are moving at a moderate intensity – as long as the activity is enough to get out of breath enough to be able to talk but not sing.

Taster sessions to try activities

You may find yourself in a situation where members have selected 3 or 4 activities and you're not sure which one to go with. Why not try them all? There are a few options you could try;

- Organise a 1-hour session where members can try a few different activities in a rotation.
- Have a different activity each week before selecting the most popular option.
- Deliver a new activity every 3–4 months. Bear in mind here that this may increase the risk of members dropping out, so you should only select this option if members have suggested this is what they would like. If they do not want to change activity, then don't. Listen to members.

Start slow and build up

Going from no activity to a 30 minute or 1 hour session may be too difficult or daunting for members. You can start with shorter sessions of 10–15 minutes and as members build their confidence, you can increase the duration.

Be flexible

You might start with weekly sessions but it becomes too difficult for some to attend each week so you can change it to sessions every 2 weeks instead.

Or, you start with fortnightly sessions and there is demand from the group to move to weekly sessions. Make sure all members are informed of any changes.

Don't let funding be a barrier

Depending on the nature of the activity, there may instances where there is a cost. If this is the case, you should consider ways to reduce the cost or remove it completely. The following table gives some ideas about how you can overcome barriers associated with cost.

Cost	Solution
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact your local authority, local schools, colleges, universities, clubs, community organisations to see if they have any equipment they can loan or donate.• Contact the national governing body of your chosen activity for support.• Fundraise and purchase basic equipment.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact the national governing body of your chosen activity, local authority or Active Partnership for support. There may be funded training opportunities they can offer for free or a discounted rate.

Cost	Solution
Coach/ instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact your local secondary school, college or university to find students that are studying a relevant course (fitness, sport, coaching, dance) who may be able to offer free sessions in exchange for the experience. • Consider whether someone in your group can deliver sessions. • Contact your local authority or Active Partnership for support. Ask about any local organisations or individuals who may be willing to deliver sessions for free. • Contact the national governing body of your chosen activity for support. They may be able to help find someone to help deliver your sessions or provide some training.
Venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether there are any open spaces you can freely access, such as parks or local fields. • Contact relevant organisations in the community that could offer use of their venue, such as church halls, community centres or schools. • Link with another local group that has a suitable facility. • Some venues, such as leisure centres, may offer reduced rates during their quieter periods. • If you find a student to deliver your sessions, there may be the chance to negotiate use of a space where they study. • Contact the national governing body of your chosen activity for support.

If none of the above solutions work for you, consider other forms of fundraising or you could charge members a nominal fee to participate. The amount you charge could be dictated by members – charging, however, should not be a barrier to anyone taking part.

You could use physical activity as a tool to raise funds for sessions or the group as a whole. For example, you could do a sponsored walk or cycle.

Speak to your Group Development Officer for fundraising support.

Purchase basic equipment

Similar to the 'Instant Ping Pack' example described previously, you may find other 'pop-up' equipment packs in high street retailers. This is a fun alternative way of being active without the need for organised structured sessions.

Link with other local support groups

Speak to your Group Development Officer about whether there are any other support groups locally who may want to combine resources and deliver activities together.

Send reminders to members

Do you get a text message to remind you about your GP appointment? Your appointment at the hairdresser? Your car MOT?

Text message reminders are commonly used these days to remind people about something that is coming up with the intention to gently remind members so they do not miss or forget the date and time.

The same theory could be applied to this. You could send your members text messages to remind them of the date, time and location of your upcoming session. Or, you could set up a private group on WhatsApp or Facebook where you can remind members but also encourage them to engage and interact to create a social environment. If you're not sure how to create a private group on social media, find out whether someone in your group is familiar or speak to your Group Development Officer. Before setting up any private groups, you should get permission from all members to ensure they are happy to be part of it.

How do you currently communicate with group members? Consider adopting the same method to let everyone know about the sessions and send reminders.

Incentivise attendance

Consider the possibility of providing members with incentives for attending your sessions. This may act as a physical motivation tool to reward members for making the effort to attend.

There are lots of different ways of going about this. You could provide all members with a badge or wristband for attending their first session. Followed by a water bottle or a t-shirt for attending 10 sessions (a total, not consecutive sessions) for example. Longer term incentives could help with working towards a goal, giving members something to work towards. Achieving realistic goals will also help maintain motivation.

If you decide to reward members, you can use any structure you wish. It is suggested, however, that you avoid incentivising generic goals such as ‘most sessions attended’ or ‘attending 10 consecutive sessions’ as this could have the opposite effect. There may be situations where members are unable to attend for a period of time due to reasons out of their control. So we don’t want anyone to miss out on a reward because of something they cannot control. You may want to encourage individuals to set their own personal goals if that will help them; but not necessarily for everyone.

If used, incentives should encourage attendance, increase and maintain motivation, and help with setting and achieving personal goals.

Setbacks are normal

Reassure members that setbacks are completely normal. Being active is not an all or nothing approach. Thinking in advance of what problems may get in the way of being active helps to overcome these when/if they do happen.

Keep hydrated

When we sweat, we lose water so it's important to replace this. Particularly in hot weather when we sweat more. Encourage members to bring water with them to sessions to make sure they keep hydrated. Some indoor venues will provide access to free water so find out if they provide this if you are using a venue to deliver sessions.

Get help from others

Trying to organise any activity or event can be challenging at times. Consider getting support from others. Maybe another group coordinator or member is keen to help. There may be interest in helping with things other than organising sessions, such as greeting members at sessions, taking registers, setting up equipment, promoting sessions, etc. You may also want to speak to other groups to get them involved or promote the opportunity externally.

Ask for help

No matter what point you're at, whether you have been running sessions for a few weeks or months, or you're just starting out, there is support for you. If some members stop attending and you need advice, or you encounter problems, your Group Development Officer and Physical Activity Programme Manager are there to support you.

Meet Shaun...

In November 2017, Shaun set up a peer support group in Southend where he is currently a group co-ordinator. Shaun was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in his twenties. He has experienced extreme low episodes which have led to suicide attempts, as well as extreme high episodes which have led to psychosis.

Shaun's bipolar disorder has had a significant impact on his life; "mental illness has led me to shorter periods of employment, unemployment and gaps in my employment history". As well as struggles with employment, side effects of medication also impacted on Shaun's physical health and exacerbated his mental illness; "...I had put on considerable weight as a result of the side effects [of medication]. Going for a simple walk became more strenuous and I became sedentary which further fuelled by depressive episodes".

In 2016, after a spell in hospital, Shaun felt motivated to lose the weight he had gained in the years prior. Shaun says, "I decided to start running short distances outside by myself as it's free and very effective exercise to burn calories." Shaun started off doing small, short runs at his own pace and slowly built up the intensity and duration of his runs. It wasn't long before Shaun saw the physical benefits of being active, "...within 6 months I had lost 5 and a half stone."

Being more active highlighted just how much of an impact medication has on motivation and energy levels. A change in medication in 2017 impacted on Shaun's ability to continue being active, "...I experienced drowsiness, anhedonia [reduced ability to feel pleasure from things like eating and engaging with others] and akathisia [restlessness]". But he knew how important it was to exercise, so he took action.

"Discussion with my psychiatrist led to medication changes and the dosages being tinkered. These changes helped me and resulted in me doing a 10km race and I am now training for a marathon with any funds raised going to our support group".

Shaun's story highlights how important medication is for managing mental illness, but how the side effects can result in a negative change in physical health.

Shaun wholly believes in the importance of trying to combat the side effects of medication; "I believe a lot of the medications prescribed for mental illness which are often helpful, unfortunately increase the chances of secondary physical health issues, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. Therefore, those of us taking these medications need to be a bit more physically active to combat any side effects".

"I am now training for a marathon with any funds raised going to our support group".

Not only does being active benefit physical health, it also improves mental health, and can be used alongside treatment. Shaun has found this in his experience; “I personally have found running to be an extra treatment in managing my bipolar disorder. When my mood is low I find completing a run lifts me and gives me a sense of achievement. When my mood is high, and I feel energised I find running gives me the opportunity to free myself and expend energy healthily.”

During his runs, Shaun’s body was releasing the “feel good” chemicals, known as endorphins and serotonin. This helps lift his mood, gave him energy, and generally makes him feel good. You can’t see this happening, but it happens when we are active inside our bodies.

“When my mood is low I find completing a run lifts me and gives me a sense of achievement. When my mood is high, I find running gives me the opportunity to free myself and expend energy healthily.”

With any new activity or opportunity sometimes inner confidence can be a big barrier to get started. But by overcoming that barrier you will start to see the benefits. Shaun experienced this when he first started running. Now, he has applied that experience to other aspects of his life.

He says, “when I first started running I always thought I couldn’t do it, but as I progressed my thoughts started to change that it was ‘possible’. I have since applied this kind of thinking to other areas which has been very helpful despite the setbacks and disappointments life can throw.”



6

Useful contacts

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There are some activities that group leads may not be able to deliver themselves or would need some support with. Based on your chosen activity, you could get in touch with relevant organisations to support you.

Group Development Officers

Why contact?

Your Group Development Officer can provide relevant support to your group, both for physical activity sessions and your wider development.

How to contact?

There are Group Development Officers who cover a different region across England.

You will need to liaise with the Group Development Officer that covers the region where your group is based. If you're not sure who your Group Development Officer is, contact the team at **groups@rethink.org**

Physical Activity Programme Manager

Why contact?

The programme manager will be able to provide specialist support for your physical activity sessions.

How to contact?

Email the programme manager, Mel Islin, at **mel.islin@rethink.org**

Local authorities

Why contact?

Your local authority can provide information based on your local area, including finding venues, contacting schools and colleges, sourcing an activity instructor, plus lots more. Many will also have information on community groups and organisations. They should generally be your first point of contact for any local information.

How to contact?

You should contact the local authority that covers your area. Contact the main switchboard and ask to be put through to the Sport Development (or equivalent) team or leisure team. If you're not sure who your local authority is, visit

www.gov.uk/find-local-council

and you can search using your postcode. Remember, you should use the postcode of where your group meets not your home postcode, especially if you live within another local authority boundary.

Active Partnerships

Why contact?

Active Partnerships aim to increase physical activity participation in their area. They will work with a range of local and national organisations which they could connect you with. For example, local sports clubs, schools and colleges, community groups, venues for hosting activities, local authorities, national governing bodies, plus lots more.

How to contact?

www.activepartnerships.org

All Active Partnerships operate differently so contact the main office using the information provided on their website and explain why you're getting in touch. The most appropriate person will then be able to help.

National Governing Bodies (NGBs)

Why contact?

NGBs have specialist knowledge and information on their activity. They can support in a multitude of ways, including, finding local groups, facilities, instructors, equipment, training opportunities, plus lots more.

How to contact?

www.sportengland.org/our-work/national-governing-bodies/sports-that-we-recognise

There are lots of governing bodies for a range of sports and activities. The best way to find out who the NGB is for your chosen activity is to visit the 'sports we recognise' section Sport England website and scroll down to the 'Sports and governing bodies we recognise' tab for a list of activities and governing bodies. Or you can do a web search for [activity] governing body, for example, 'dance governing body'.

Leisure centres

Why contact?

Leisure centres are generally at the heart of a community. They will have a range of facilities that will vary based on the size and area, but generally they will have a multi-purpose hall, gym, swimming pool, multi-use rooms, fitness suites. Some will also have outdoor space.

How to contact?

Your local authority or Active Partnership will be able to provide you with information on your local leisure centres. Where local authorities run their own centres, often these will be listed on their website. There are a number of national providers across England, some of which are listed below.

Parkwood Leisure

www.parkwoodleisure.co.uk

Better

www.better.org.uk

Everyone Active

www.everyoneactive.com

Local community centres and groups

Why contact?

Community centres and church halls can be used to host activities. They may also have their own equipment you could utilise. Similarly, community groups (including sports clubs) will use a local venue, have equipment and could provide an instructor to support the delivery of your sessions.

How to contact?

There is no central database listing all community groups, community centres, sports clubs, etc. Your local authority should be your first point of call – their website may have information, or you can call the main switchboard. Use the information above to find your local authority. Your local Active Partnership may also be able to help, particularly with groups that deliver physical activity. Likewise, national governing bodies will be able to signpost you to local groups.

Primary and Secondary Schools, Colleges and Universities

Why contact?

Education establishments could be a valuable resource for your group. They will often have specialist indoor and outdoor facilities which are made accessible to community groups when not in use. They will also have equipment for a range of activities, some of which may rarely (or never) get used. Some students may be studying sport and/or fitness related courses, giving a ready-made resource to tap into for support with delivery of activities.

How to contact?

You can do your own web search for schools, colleges and universities in your area.

www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk

This website is useful to identify locations of schools, colleges and universities. You can also contact your local authority or Active Partnership who may have more detailed information, such as what facilities are available.

Activity Alliance

Why contact?

Activity Alliance are a national charity supporting organisations, such as leisure centres, and physical activity providers to be more inclusive for disabled people. They deliver a number of programmes and have a number of good training courses. The Activity Alliance can provide valuable support and information to help you get your sessions up and running.

How to contact?

You can visit the Activity Alliance website to learn more about what they do.

www.activityalliance.org.uk

Visit the contact us page for contact details. If you're not sure the best person to speak to, use the general head office contact details and the right person will get back to you.

Mind

Why contact?

Mind are another charity that support people with mental health conditions. They have done a lot of work using physical activity to support people to manage their mental health problems and have developed some really useful resources and guides.

How to contact?

Visit their website to access lots of useful information.

www.mind.org.uk/getsettogether

You can also contact the team at **sport@mind.org.uk**.



7

Frequently asked questions

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Session delivery

Q What frequency and duration should sessions be?

A The ultimate aim is to get everyone doing some sort of activity for at least 30 minutes per week on average.

If necessary, this could be achieved by delivering 1 hour sessions every 2 weeks. Don't feel obliged to go from nothing to 30 minutes per week straight away. Sessions can gradually increase in duration and intensity to meet the needs of members.

You could, for example, start by embedding 10 minutes of activity in your current meetings, then build up to a point where you can organise a designated 30 minute session per week.

Or you could divide a 1 hour session into manageable blocks over the course of 2 weeks. You can try different methods but must always ensure the needs of members are considered throughout.

Q Who can attend the physical activity sessions?

A The group sessions are primarily for people who are part of the support group, particularly those who do not currently do any form of physical activity.

However, if group members wish to take part but are already active they should not be turned away. They may decide they would like to act as mentors for others who are just starting on their physical activity journey. Likewise, groups are encouraged to promote sessions to the wider community to attract other people severely affected by mental illness who are not currently members of the support group.

This will help raise awareness of the support group, increase membership and improve links with the local community. If required, members with lived experience can bring a friend, relative or carer to sessions with them. For carer's groups, members should be able to bring along the person they care for to sessions too if they wish.

Q Can we just add some physical activity to our monthly meetings?

A Whilst we strongly encourage groups to include physical activity in their monthly meetings, in order to have the best health outcomes and benefit members, sessions should take place on a weekly basis (fortnightly if weekly is not an option).

If, as a group, you choose to attend a session already being delivered in the community on a weekly basis and simply incorporate activity in your group setting on a monthly basis, then that could be an option.

Q What happens if some members stop attending sessions?

A We fully appreciate, and expect, that some members will drop out of the activity.

This may be due to a variety of reasons. There is the expectation that group coordinators will support members to maintain attendance – even if that means missing some sessions but return when they are ready. However, there is no expectation that members are forced to attend against their will. Group coordinators will have access to a register template which you can use to track attendance and highlight who has stopped attending and when.

Remember, when collecting personal information from members, you should ensure you adhere to relevant data protection policy. If you're unsure about this, please speak to your Group Development Officer.

Q How long should we deliver sessions for?

A As long as possible. Groups should strive to provide regular opportunities to members.

The aim is for physical activity to be a regular offer for your group members. You may decide to change the activity every so often to meet the needs of members and keep them motivated.

Q As a group coordinator, can I lead activity myself and am I insured to do so?

A A group coordinator can facilitate physical activity session.

For example, set up equipment, run a simple warm up and a general, low risk activity, such as a walk, table tennis, football, etc. provided you;

- are happy and confident to do this.
- have carried out a risk assessment.

For riskier activities, such as trampolining, rock climbing, ice skating, etc, and if your members want more skilled coaching, it is advised you find a trained instructor or coach that can help with your activity and is insured to do so. Group coordinators may choose to attend training themselves too.

Groups

Q Our group is for carers/ siblings, rather than people with lived experience of severe mental illness. Can we use this toolkit?

A Absolutely. This toolkit is for any support group who wants to start doing some physical activity.

Q I am an individual and not part of a peer support group. I am interested in setting up a new group to offer physical activity to people in my area. How would I go about doing this?

A The first step would be to contact us at groups@rethink.org

We will be able to put you in touch with the Group Development Officer who covers your area. They will support you to set up your group. With the support from the Group Development Officer and using this toolkit, you can then start thinking about how to offer physical activity sessions.

Q I work for a local service and we want to start offering physical activity opportunities. How would I go about doing this?

A Services are welcome to make the most of this toolkit.

The same process as setting up a new group would apply here. Get in touch with us at groups@rethink.org and your local Group Development Officer can guide you through the process.

Health and Safety

Q If we set up a spoke group*, are we covered by our existing insurance?

A Yes, depending on the nature of your activity.

You would need to complete some forms to make your spoke group* official and ensure you are fully covered. Your Group Development Officer can help you with this.

Q Do we need to do a risk assessment for every type of activity?

A If you are organising and delivering your own session, then you would need to carry out your own risk assessment with the help of your Group Development Officer.

For example, if you're organising a walking and running group, you should walk the route you plan to take and note down any potential hazards.

If you are attending an activity that is already being delivered in the community, the individual delivering the session should have done their own risk assessment.

If you're not sure, contact your Group Development Officer.

* A spoke group is defined as an additional ongoing group activity or meeting which is linked to an existing Rethink peer support group.

Q Do session instructors require a DBS check?

A It is advised that anyone delivering sessions is DBS checked.

All group coordinators should have a DBS check, so if they are facilitating sessions or will be present at all sessions delivered by an external instructor, then no additional DBS checks are required. Remember: anyone who is not DBS checked should never be left alone with a group.

If you have any questions or you're not sure if you need a DBS check contact your Group Development Officer.

Q How can we make sure that our group members are safe to do physical activity?

A There is a questionnaire called the Physical Activity Readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) that members can complete.

It includes a few short questions about a person's health and indicates whether or not they should speak to their doctor before completing any activity.

Common sense should generally prevail in this situation. Members should be encouraged to raise any concerns or medical issues which might impact on their ability to be active. When in doubt, members should speak to their GP before taking part.

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Resources

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There are some activities that group leads may not be able to deliver themselves or would need some support. Based on your chosen activity, you could get in touch with relevant organisations that could support you.

You should consider what support or information you would need then contact organisations that could help. If you're not sure who is best to contact, your local authority or Active Partnership is always a good starting point as they have knowledge of your local area.

There is a template letter/email as part of this toolkit which you can use when contacting organisations. For a copy, please get in touch with your group development officer or contact us at groups@rethink.org.



Letter/email template

Template letter/email to local authorities, Active Partnerships and national governing bodies;



Letter/email template

Template letter/email to community organisations, sports clubs and education establishments;

Rethink
Mental
Illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Telephone 0300 5000 927
Email info@rethink.org



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