

Back to Football: Anxiety Toolkit

For many people, football is an escape; a place they can go, feel a sense of community and forget their everyday life stresses.

Football can also be overwhelming at times, especially with the last 18 months of watching from the comfort of home.



Whether it be the crowds in a stadium, the pre-match social or travelling to get there - this toolkit will give you some tips for self care, as well as spotting and approaching someone else who may be experiencing severe anxiety.

Away days

Whether it be for away trips, or even home matches, travelling can be a key part in the football experience. With that, especially after months of limited to no travel, could come travel anxiety.

Travel with friends

If you can, travel with friends. Talk to them about how you are feeling before, and during the journey.

Plan for your worries

If you can pinpoint specific scenarios that make you anxious, plan for them. For example, plan a journey that if you miss a connection, the next train still gets you there on time.

Bring distractions

Something to keep your mind busy on the journey can massively help with anxiety. Many people listen to podcasts on their phone during journeys, such as the PO4cast and Total Saints Pod, or Solent Mind's men's mental health chat Let's Talk Mate.

Practice relaxation

Many breathing & grounding techniques can be done when you are travelling, and can help to reduce and control anxiety (This can apply to each section).

Keep your mind on the destination

Focus on what you are travelling for. Think about the chants you are going to sing, predict the team line up or keep an eye on the scores of the early kick offs.

Pre-match social

A massive part of football that was missed by many in the last 18 months was the social & community feel of being in a pub full of fellow fans, or the meal with friends to celebrate or commiserate. However, social anxiety disorder could make this more difficult for some, especially with the limited social interaction of recent times.

1. One step at a time

Ensure you go at your own pace. Start at a friend's house, or a quiet pub further away from the stadium, or a coffee shop. This could also apply to how many people you meet, start with just one friend and build your way up.

2. Stay outside

Find a pub that has outdoor seating, less crowded and allows you to be out in the open air. This could be a great first step in the earlier part of the season why the weather still allows it.

3. Table service

Many pubs that were forced into table service during the initial restrictions, take advantage of those who have kept it, especially ones that have apps.

4. Don't push yourself too much

If you are feeling like it'll be too much, don't go. Or if you feel you need to take a break, walk away and give yourself time to relax.

In the stands

For 18 months stands have been empty, or only at a fraction of the capacity. With restrictions lifted, stadiums are able to get back to their best, but for many this could seem daunting. Many people suffered with crowd anxiety before, and many more will have grown used to the lack of crowds during the pandemic.

Attend with a friend

Much like with the journey, attending games with friends can significantly reduce anxiety, especially when you can talk to them if you are feeling anxious.

Your seating

If you are able, think about how seating could help you. For example have the end seat so you have space on one side or if you are with friends have a seat between them so you aren't next to someone you don't know.

Get in before the crowds

The closer to kick off, the bigger the crowd gets. Get in early, find your seat, get comfortable and let the stadium fill around you. Get yourself a drink, some food, read the matchday programme and watch the warm ups to keep your mind busy until the game.



Spotting the signs & helping others

Panic attack symptoms:

Sweating

Numbness

Feeling faint

Shortness of Breath

Trembling & shaking

Chills or hot flushes

Fears of losing control

Increase heart Rate

A person having a panic attack could be experiencing anywhere from one to all of these symptoms. Other things may also trigger some of these symptoms, such as excitement or adrenaline.

Initiate conversation

"How are you feeling?"



Personal space

Be mindful of their personal space, people experiencing panic attacks will often be sensitive of their own space. If they ask to be left alone, do so if you are confident they are not in immediate danger of harm.

Offer water

Offering a bottle of water can be a simple way of helping, having the water to sip can be effective in grounding the person, as well as preventing the dehydration that can lead on from anxiety symptoms.

Listen and don't judge

Listen, be patient, allow for silences and don't interrupt the person when they are talking. Use minimal prompts such as 'I see' and ask clarifying questions where helpful to communicate that you have heard what the person is saying.

Point towards support

Once you feel the incident has calmed down, recommend seeking further support or toolkits like this. Some people may already be receiving support, respect their privacy if they don't want to continue the conversation.

Grounding techniques & breathing exercises

54321 Game

Name 5 things
you can see

Name 4 things
you can hear

Name 3 things
you can feel or
touch

Name 2 things
you can smell

Name 1 thing
you can taste

Muscle Relaxation

Scrunch
your face
up, then
relax it.

Tense your
arms in
front of you,
then relax.

Tense your
shoulders
and chest,
then relax.

Tense your
legs out in
front of you,
then relax.

Take one
deep
breathe.



Panic Attack

Focus on your
breathing and
take long, deep
breaths from your
belly button.

Stamp your
feet to bring
your attention
from your mind
into your body.

Use your senses:
stroke
something soft
or smell perfume
or minty gum.

Find somewhere
quiet and safe to
recover and have
something to eat
and drink.

Finding support!

If you would like support with anxiety, feel low or overwhelmed, we're here for you.

Wellbeing Centres

Winchester

019 6285 9012

Winchesterwellbeing@solentmind.org.uk

Eastleigh

023 8061 1458

Eastleighwellbeing@solentmind.org.uk

Fareham & Gosport

013 2928 1445

adminfg@solentmind.org.uk

New Forest

023 8084 1341

nfwreferrals@solentmind.org.uk

Positive Minds (Portsmouth)

023 9282 4795

PSRwellbeingcentre@solentmind.org.uk

Talking Therapy

iTalk

(Hampshire)

www.italk.org.uk

023 8038 3920

info@italk.org.uk

Steps to Wellbeing

(Southampton)

www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk

0800 612 7000

dhc.sstw@nhs.net

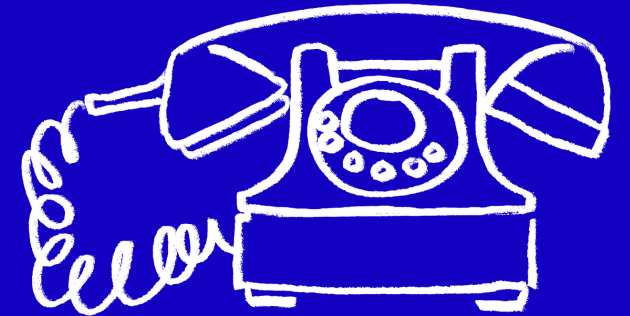
Talking Change

(Portsmouth)

www.talkingchange.nhs.uk

030 0123 3934

snhs.talkingchangesolent@nhs.net



Solent Mind Support Line
023 8017 9049

For opening hours visit
solentmind.org.uk

