



HEAD
GUARD

CHESTER RUFC

HEAD GUARD PROGRAMME

Supporting mental wellness
throughout our rugby family

Dear **Parents**

There has been a lot of discussion in the media recently regarding mental health in children and young adults. The pandemic has really had a huge impact on families and young people. At Chester RUFC we understand that we have a role to play to help support our players, coaches and families within our rugby community.

We would like to share our new programme with you which is designed to be accessible for all. HeadGuard is the first initiative of its kind in the North West, and possibly UK-wide, that focuses on young players, coaches and families.

We are excited to share that we are now a partnered Club with Sale Sharks, working with the mental health team, and also an official partner with Looseheadz. You may have seen media coverage of the Looseheadz campaign to #Tacklethestigma and this is a message we are really behind. We want to help break down the barrier and allow conversations to take place that will be of a benefit to everyone.



Just as a **snap-shot** to understand how big an issue **mental health** is



*1 in 6 under 18's are managing a diagnosed mental health issue, 50% increase on 3 years ago.

*Self harm (including eating disorders), depression, anxiety and emotional difficulties have increased significantly over the last 2 years in children 6-18, with boys aged 11-17 being the highest brackets for increase.

*In a survey of 11-17 years old boys, 67% reported they have negative mental health feeling.

*Girls aged 16-18 were reported by the Department of health to be the most reclusive age groups at dealing with anxiety and depression, leading to an increase in self harm.

These are worrying statistics, and whilst we are not medical professionals, we are a rugby family and being able to support and help each other is key.

The M&J Exec Committee recognise that our players and coaches are at their happiest, and best, when they are fit and well physically and mentally. We have been developing a mental health support scheme that will signpost people to the resources and professional support they may need. Just like a player may need a physio to help with fitness, a player may need to know that their feelings are justified and in cases, shared, especially in these strange times.

Chester RUFC aim to create an environment that is **safe, supportive, motivating** and **inspirational** to all our players, coaches and families.

The relationship formed between team-mates, coaches, squads and support from the side line goes such a long way to helping the players to feel able to ask for help or raise concerns. As a committee, we want to make sure that families feel comfortable in asking for help and also know that there is access to 'productive guidance' where needed.

We are pleased to announce that our Mental Health programme 'HeadGuard' has taken a giant step forward with the appointment of two mental health leads to support the Mini and Junior section and the Women and Girls sections. They help us reach our ambition to support the physical and mental wellbeing of all our players, coaches and families.



We have **two** mental health leads:



Mark Bunnell, our head coach of the U8's, is a NHS Mental Health professional with over 15 years experience in adult and childrens mental health.

Andy Wheeler is a coach in the Women's and Girl's section, and a trained mental health first aider.



Both are at the club on Sundays, should you wish to discuss anything that you may want some guidance on. We are going to get email addresses set up so if you wish to talk confidentially or get some guidance on an issue.

What are we **looking to do?**

Our combined Mental Health support is based upon 4 principles,

***Recognise**

***Understand**

***Reassure**

***Signpost**

Coaches are not mental health experts, but they are dedicated to helping your child. If there is an issue that is bothering your child, a brief chat with the coach could make the world of difference, Coaches can also point you in the direction of Mark and Andy who have a wealth of experience that could be of help. There is no such thing as a stupid question - so if there is something we can do to help, please ask.

Once the Covid regulations ease we will be looking to host Looseheadz at the club for some mental health awareness events. We are also in discussion with Young Minds Charity regarding getting information readily available at the club too. We are looking to host some in-house mental health awareness groups in an informal and helpful environment. These will be available for parents as well and will provide you with the tools to know where to access help and guidance.



Some handy **links** for you as **reference**

www.mymind.org.uk

If there is a Mental Health Crisis, and you feel immediate support is required the helpline is **08001456485** Cheshire and Wirral NHS Support line.

www.looseheadz.co.uk

Looseheadz have information on their website, if parents/players wish to purchase any of the items to show support and awareness, use the Code **CHESTER20** for a discount and we will get a % of sales to help fund our HeadGuard programmes and allow for its development.



Thank **you**.

Obviously, as with any initiative, this will only succeed if we are all behind it, so in advance, **THANK YOU** for being part of something that is already supporting several players across the ages, and will help so many more.

If anyone would like to join our team, and help us grow and develop the programme, please let us know.

