



**ELITE YOUTH
PLAYER**
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



Keeping Your Head in The Game and Covid-19

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The purpose of this co-produced resource is to respond to the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic, to support UEFA Elite Youth Player Development Programme players.

Background

The aim of this session is to build on the previous 'Keeping Your Head in the Game' sport psychology sessions to support Youth Academy players during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Since the previous face-to-face sport psychology session, we have all had to deal with the lockdown from Covid-19, wherein our living arrangements, habits and routines have been forced to change. This change to everyone's routine may lead to a feeling of anxiety, frustration, annoyance, some confusion and anger. For many the uncertainty of how long the lockdown period will last, combined with missing out on regular activities with school friends and teammates can be daunting. Some of you may also feel a sense of loss from all the great progress you were making in football. We are here to assure you that these psychological attitudes and feelings, and how you are responding to these uncertain circumstances are normal. We are also here to help you deal with these uncertainties together as an academy. #weareinthistogether

Therefore, to best deal with the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, it is important that we work together to support ourselves, our family members, coaches, staff, and teammates to look after our physical and mental fitness, so that we emerge from the lockdown, healthy and ready to play the sport we love.

We best achieve this by first reflecting on our attitudes, thoughts and behaviours, setting positive health goals, being proactive in maintaining good healthy habits and daily routines, and importantly, not being hard on ourselves but being kind and patient to ourselves and others. We can also get a lot of benefit out of helping others.

We believe you can manage through Covid-19 by doing what you know best: using the skills you have learned to be an elite youth academy player to emerge from this crisis. As a player of the academy you have learned to be a good decision maker, a team player, developed confidence, and resilience. You have taken control over your nutrition, sleeping habits, built skills in building effective friendships with other players, shown independence, been supportive to others, learned about your own psychology and what it takes to be the best possible player and person. Most of all you have shown resolve (didn't give up), stuck with the academy and showed commitment to seeing your goals through to the end. In other words, you have shown the psychological skills of perseverance. With support from your coaches and staff we can build on these skills further.

The skills described are linked with pillar four of the IFA four-pillar model:

1. Technical • 2. Tactical • 3. Physical • 4. Psychological

During challenging times there is a real opportunity for you to continue to build on the psychological pillar where you can hone your skills in attitude, resilience, work ethic, enthusiasm, imagination and dedication. To do this, working with you we have co-produced 11 ways to help you build the psychological pillar further. We ask you to read through these and list how you can put them in place. We are also aware that at times it can be challenging to achieve all recommendations, so give them your best shot.

UEFA Elite Youth Player Development Programme

Daily checklist

Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (World Health Organisation).

In order to be mentally fit we need to look after our mental health.

A game of football requires fielding 11 physically and mentally fit team players.

Shown below are 11 player recommendations that can help support you during this time.



12-Week Calendar of Achievements

You can use the calendar below to help manage your achievements each week and to help keep you on track as we continue to deal with Covid-19.

Player achievements	Describe the activity you have done	Achieved (Tick)
1. Have a regular daily routine Consider getting up early and getting school work completed, to free you to do other things		
2. Identify a space to do school work		
3. Connect (with friends, family, team-mates, coaches, nature, zoom)		
4. Exercise for fun – complete your training schedules Set a daily challenge like keepy-ups or push-ups. Consider analysing your performance. Consider weight training as a routine.		
5. Take notice of your surroundings (include more walks)		
6. Use time effectively Try to avoid activities that zap your energy, overuse of following the news, or social media, reduce screen time and time on phone apps.		
7. Sleep It's important to keep as regular a routine as you had before Covid-19. Get to bed early.		

8.	Learn something new about football Read an autobiography, learn the science of football, watch live play of a player in your position. Develop a new skill (guitar, language, cook new foods etc.). Learn simple DIY - you may need these someday in your own digs!		
9.	Give Offer to help at home, volunteer your time, teach someone else.		
10.	Try relaxation exercises (like breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, meditation). Try yoga to increase flexibility and reduce injury.		
11.	Remind yourself to control the controllable		

We can also help support each other during challenging times. Below are some great quotes and advice shared by academy players.

“All the work I am doing is for a reason and it will pay off someday.”

“They don’t know how much I want it, but I will show them.”

“Be happy you’re alive.”

“Try to go to bed early and get up early.”

“Help around the house and learn new life skills so when you move into your own digs you will know how to run them properly.”

“Set a screen limit on certain apps that cause you to procrastinate and waste time.”

“Train in silence. Let the crowd make the noise.”

“Stay as motivated as possible.”

“Try new healthy meals so before training if you are hungry you can make that meal and it won’t be too heavy on your stomach.”

Resources

Further resources are available to support your mental health at this time. Below are examples available.

- If you are or someone you know is in distress or despair, call **LIFELINE** on **0808 8088000** or visit www.lifelinehelpline.info
- **Samaritans** is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for anyone struggling to cope. Call the free helpline on **116 123**.
- In crisis go to or contact the Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital if someone is in immediate danger. You can also contact the emergency services by calling **999** or **112**.
- Contact a local GP or GP out of hours service. A GP can give you advice and information on support available to you.
- www.mindingyourhead.info has information on mental health and the supports and services in Northern Ireland.
- www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improvemental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing provides information on support available in each of the five Health and Social Care Trust areas.
- Helplines Network NI listen • support • inform: www.helplinesnetworkni.com
- Lifeline: **0800 808 8000**
- Samaritans: **116 123**