

The Wellbeing Corner



Welcome to a new feature for the 2026/27 season and beyond: the Wellbeing Corner.

Sub-Edited each edition by Cardiff City's Medical Director Professor Len Nokes and Club Psychologist Dr Mikel Mellick – with contributions from Club medical personnel, health partners, researchers and charities – these pages aim to provide you with information around current wellbeing and health-related issues and campaigns.

And crucially, where you can find out more information and get support.

To kick-off the new season, Dr Mikel and Cardiff Met Researcher **Erin Howard-Cook** look at the important role sport plays in developing social and emotional learning (SEL) and children's wellbeing...

Win, Lose or Draw, Football Teaches our Kids to 'Feel' Safe!

As we ready ourselves for the emotional roller-coaster ride of a new football season, we can take a moment to reflect on the positive role sport and football plays in our children's social and emotional learning (SEL). That is our children's ability to feel: to possess the skills to control their emotions with awareness of support resources available to them.

How we use team sport to help disengaged and at-risk children

Cardiff City FC Community Foundation and charities such as **School of Hard Knocks** work in schools to support children who are not attending regularly or have particular behavioural or emotional challenges associated with the traditional classroom. Football and other organised sport-based activities offer these children a powerful setting to help them learn to identify, understand, describe and control 'feelings' in a way that is safe, promotes connection and better ensures their wellbeing and mental health.

Organised team sports provide an important 'doing' opportunity to develop key SEL skills in kids focussed on **respecting rules, recognising fairness through competition and dealing with feelings** associated with success and failure within the context of their school learning and development.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), framework suggests there are **five core areas of SEL competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making**. Intentional, meaningfully designed, sport-based programmes can be used to empower vulnerable young people by building their resilience and nurturing social support through safe, caring adult relationships that exist outside of the classroom.

The importance of SEL

So why does this matter?

We are seeing sharp increases in young people not in education or training (NEET). A report by the Youth Futures Foundation suggested NEET status is most associated among young people that are disabled, economically inactive, in receipt of benefits or who have few qualifications. To combat this rising problem, better ensuring school engagement and attainment can help to reduce risks of achieving long-term NEET status. This highlights the importance of identifying those in need of early intervention and engaging young people before they leave school.

Evidence suggests that young people disengaged with school often experience a social-emotional skills gap contributing to underachievement and poorer long-term life outcomes with greater experiences of unemployment, imprisonment, substance misuse and mental health conditions. SEL can help young people acquire and develop social and emotional skills, attitudes and knowledge to develop healthy identities, manage their emotions, achieve goals, build supportive relationships and make responsible, caring decisions.

Find out more Get support

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Your Wellbeing Editors



How can sport be used as the medium to deliver SEL?

A **Cardiff Met** review examined what actionable resources and conditions help to facilitate SEL. These included focusing on developing emotional language and understanding; employing staff that believe in the empowerment of young people; and resolving conflict between young people, their peers and staff. It is also proven paramount that examples used in fun and relaxed environments are relevant to young people's everyday lives.

As concerns grow around school disengagement, mental health and educational inequality, the findings of the review have clearly suggested that sport can offer much more than recreational activity. When programmes are intentionally designed and relationship driven, sport can provide a meaningful environment for developing SEL skills for school children to move through their challenges and adversity.

In association with

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