**Checklist of ideas to keep participants engaged in sessions**

| Before sessions | Completed |
| --- | --- |
| Provide a welcome pack for new starters to reduce anxiety. Include information about your session, a map showing the location of the venue and a picture of the person leading the session. |  |
| Provide opportunities for people to ask questions or raise any concerns they may have with the coach/instructor on a one to one basis. Some people may not be comfortable raising these in a group setting. |  |
| Set the tone of the session – be welcoming and non-judgemental. Let participants know it’s OK not to attend every time. |  |
| Manage expectations – be clear about the scope of the programme and the level of support you can provide. This may also include agreeing standards such as giving notice if a session has to be cancelled or if participants can’t make the session. |  |
| Highlight the different routes/skills participants can gain from the programme, such as training to be a volunteer or gain coaching qualifications. |  |
| Identify and welcome people who closely support participants (like a friend, family member, a support worker or carer). |  |
| If someone is concerned about travelling to the session on their own, look at whether a volunteer can accompany them, or whether they’d be willing to buddy up with another participant. |  |
| A fun ‘warm up’ activity to get participants talking to each other at the start of the session. This helps to put participants at ease and provides a welcoming introduction to the activity. |  |
| In the first session, set aside time for people to ask questions and get to know the coach/instructor before the activity starts. If you have time, it may be worth making this the focus of the first session, rather than the activity itself, to build people’s confidence and comfort in taking part. |  |

| Before sessions | Completed |
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| Loud music can be daunting or distracting for some people, so it’s worth finding out what people would be comfortable listening to during the session. |  |
| Activities should be fun, achievable and social. |  |
| Try to build in mental health elements (such as mindfulness[[1]](#footnote-1) or information sessions) before or after the activity, rather than integrating the two. This can help people leave their mental health diagnoses ‘in their kitbag’ and focus on enjoying the activity. |  |

| After sessions | Completed |
| --- | --- |
| Organise get-togethers and celebration events to encourage people to have fun and reflect on what they’ve achieved. |  |
| Develop simple systems for gathering regular feedback to improve the participants’ experience, such as short feedback surveys, a comments box or building in time after the activity to gather some verbal feedback. |  |
| Provide information sheets that recap on the activities delivered, introduce new activities or signpost to further resources such as videos or training plans. |  |
| Check in with participants and volunteers who have not attended sessions for a while through texts or emails, and let them know they’re still welcome. |  |
| Signpost to online support, such as our [Side by Side](https://sidebyside.mind.org.uk/) online peer support community, wider support through [local Minds](https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds/) and other providers. |  |

| General | Completed |
| --- | --- |
| Be welcoming and encourage people to keep coming back to the activity. |  |
| Keep providing positive feedback. When providing feedback, ensure it’s meaningful. If you’re praising someone it’s important to tell them why you’re doing so. |  |
| Wherever possible ensure that sessions occur at the same time and place each week with the same session leader. |  |
| Always have a contingency plan in case you can’t deliver the session indoors or at the original venue. If needed, could the session be delivered outside or online? |  |



1. Mindful elements can be integrated into activities like walking, yoga and tai chi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)