

# Firearms and Mental Health.

## Introduction

**EVERYONE'S** mental health is important and at some point, in all our lives the majority of us will be affected by circumstances or feelings that can impact negatively on us. It is important that members of the shooting community, as well as their family, friends and colleagues, understand that **it's ok to tell us you're not ok**.

For some, a gun may be a vital part of their work and livelihood. For others, it may be the method by which they engage in sporting activities and interact with people at their local clubs or events. In Scotland, we recognise that there are many good reasons for legally possessing a gun; whatever your reason, possessing and using guns will be meaningful to you.

This leaflet is to help explain the support available and will provide details of who you can contact, what steps may be taken and some of the possible outcomes. This cannot be an exhaustive list as every case is different and will be treated as such, but it will help demonstrate that there are different ways concerns may be handled and managed and in a supportive, understanding and proportionate way.

So, if you have concerns about your own mental health, or the mental health of a family member, friend or a shooting companion, don't be afraid to talk with us because we're here to help. Remember, **it's ok to tell us you're not ok** - it is the right thing to do.

## It's more common than you think

Experiencing low mood or suffering poor mental health or distress is common and affects around 1 in 4 of the population at any given time and quite likely many of us at some point in our lives.

Research tells us that asking for help is the most important step in dealing with mental ill health. Talking openly about mental health is vital in challenging the confusion that still surrounds this common health condition.

## Promoting Positive Mental Health

Shooting, be it involved in work or as a pastime, can also play an important role in supporting and promoting positive mental health.

Whether it be from the focus and achievement gained from the sporting side, sense of satisfaction gained from working or benefiting the environment, or the social element from being around people with a shared interest, all these play a vital role in promoting and maintaining positive mental health.

## The role of Police Scotland

The priority of Police Scotland is to ensure public safety and protect the communities across the country. Shooting organisations are key partners of the police who manage the licensing of nearly 75,000 firearm certificate holders currently.

The police have a duty to manage risk on a daily basis but also work alongside us in seeking not to disadvantage certificate holders and deal with each situation presented in a

sympathetic and proportionate manner. This applies to those experiencing mental or other health matters too.

## **The role of shooting bodies in Scotland**

A collective of Scottish bodies involved in shooting, whether from a sporting, conservation, or vocational interest, work together with Police Scotland and the Scottish Government on the Scottish Firearms Practitioners Group (please see back page for a full list of bodies involved in developing this leaflet). With 1 in 4 people in the UK admitting to experiencing poor mental health at some point, it is inevitable that those in the shooting community will have experienced concerns, either about themselves or those around them.

We all recognise the challenges faced by Police Scotland but also the reservations of certificate holders speaking out about poor mental health. All of the partners have come together to deliver the joint message that **it's ok to tell us you're not ok**. This joint work aims to help to dispel concerns about how such matters will be handled, whilst always ensuring public safety, including the safety of the certificate holder, is prioritised.

## **What role can I play?**

Whether you are a certificate holder or a family member, friend or work colleague of a certificate holder, it is important that you know what you can do, and who you can speak to, if you have concerns about your own mental health or the mental health of someone close to you. Thankfully in the UK instances of certificate holders taking their own lives or the lives of others with legally held guns are extremely rare, and we want to keep it that way. The best way of doing this is looking to provide people close to us with the best support possible and we can all play a role in doing this.

## **What can the Police do?**

Guns can be an essential part of a working life, especially in the gamekeeping or deer stalking world. That is widely recognised by everyone involved in firearms licensing, be that certificate holders, shooting organisations and the police. If the police have any concerns regarding a certificate holder, they will treat each case on its own merits.

There may be times when an initial move to secure an individual's guns for safety is the most appropriate option. This allows the police to establish whether there is any genuine risk to the certificate holder, the people around them and the wider public. This does not mean that the certificates themselves will necessarily always be revoked, it just allows the police to have temporary control of the guns until such time as the situation can be fully reviewed and the police can ensure the certificate holder can safely possess guns at that time.

The police will gather all relevant information to help assess the risk and this may include, speaking with family and/or friends and if necessary, employers to establish their views in respect of the persons suitability to possess guns. The police may write or speak to the person's GP to confirm any medical diagnosis, how any illness impacts on their life and how they are coping so that the police can make an informed decision on their suitability at that time.

For this, and many other reasons, it is essential that members of the shooting community have a positive, open and frank relationship with their GP.

Once the police have established the facts and concluded their assessment, they may decide to:

- Return the guns to the certificate holder if appropriate to do so;
- Come to arrangement where the guns are stored remotely;
- Suggest that the certificate holder surrenders their certificates and then reapply when their health has improved;
- Revoke the certificates, only if appropriate to do so, considering what they have learned.

It is important to remember that the police will always prioritise public safety, which includes the wellbeing of the certificate holder.

### **Where can I turn to for help?**

Remember, **it's ok to tell us you're not ok** and there are a number of organisations who you can turn to for help and advice and support in relation to mental health, be it about yourself, a family member, friend or colleague.

Below are the contact details for organisations able to help or signpost you in the right direction. Other organisations, the details of which can easily be obtained online, can help.

	Contact tel no.
Breathing Space	0800 838 587
Samaritans	116 123, text 07725 90 90 90
Support in Mind Scotland	0131 662 4359
Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)	0141 530 1000
NHS 24	111
Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust	0300 123 3088
Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution	0300 111 4166

### **Police Scotland**

Firearms Licensing North	01463 720484
Firearms Licensing East	01592 418424
Firearms Licensing West	01786 895580

### **Other sources of information in Scotland**

BASC Scotland	01350 723226
Scottish Association for Country Sports (SACS)	01350 724 228
Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA)	0131 344 4640
Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA)	01738 587515
Scottish Target Shooting	0131 467 2489
National Rural Mental Health Forum	
Scottish Land and Estates	0131 653 5400

Mental ill health can and does affect anyone. It is important to talk this through and importantly, together we can help people get the help they need. It really is OK to tell us you're not OK.