

Part II – First Response

3. Critical situations



Co-funded by
the European Union

MENTiS

Critical situations – severe depression

Case example: For a little over two weeks now, Jane has had trouble getting up in the morning. She feels very tired and finds it hard to do the activities she used to do every day. She distances herself from her friends and prefers to be alone. She often looks tired and sad. When training, she can't concentrate or do the exercises. Whereas she used to be interested and motivated to train, she now feels less and less like coming and is less committed.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MENTiS

Critical situations – severe depression

An athlete can feel depressed, sad, with no motivation to do anything, and even show a very low esteem of himself/herself: these can be signs of severe depression

Additional focus of attention: being aware of suicidal thoughts. For example:

- “I already thought I would like not to wake up the next day”
- “I thought I will end everything”
- “I ask myself why am I alive”
- “If I disappear, everything would be easier”
- “I already thought about a plan to end my days if...”
- “The next time I see the opportunity, I kill myself”



Critical situations – severe depression

Steps you can take:

- If available, contact a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist.
- If these professionals are not available, contact the medical team.
- Ask the athlete if there is someone they would like to contact
- Do you have other suggestions on steps to take in this situation?



Critical situations – panic attack

Case example: During a swimming session, Ben says "it's too hard"; "I'm out of breath"; "I'm not going to make it". The feeling of the water on his face burns and hurts. He suddenly starts to feel hot and has trouble breathing. His chest hurts and his heart beats faster and faster. His breathing quickens, his throat tightens, and he feels as if he's suffocating. He's afraid of dying and interrupts his training session because he can't keep swimming.



Critical situations – panic attack

Some symptoms of panic attacks

- Palpitations, accelerated heart rate
- Sweating
- Feeling suffocated
- Nausea or abdominal discomfort
- Feeling dizzy or about to faint
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of dying

Typical verbal signs

- I feel I'll die
- I can't breathe anymore
- I won't be able to do it
- I feel a weight on my chest
- I'm too hot
- My heart is beating too fast
- I can't control anything
- I need to get out of here



Critical situations – panic attack

Steps you can take:

- Leave the situation that triggered the panic attack
- Stay with the person
- Help them breathe regularly, for example count to 6 each time they breathe in and each time they breathe out
- Try to make them focus on the present moment
- Contact the psychologist or the psychiatrist

- Other steps you could take?



Critical situations – eating disorder

Case example: After a competition, Nora talks more and more about her weight and how she sees herself. She compares the size of her thighs to those of her teammates. She's careful about what she eats and sometimes says she doesn't eat because she's not hungry. When she shares a meal with those around her, she feels guilty and denigrates herself, isolates herself or becomes irritable. In her cupboards or garbage can, one can regularly find lots of food wrappers (packets of cakes or potato chips), but her weight and figure seem to remain the same. She adds training sessions, or you notice she spends time in the bathroom/toilet.



Critical situations – eating disorder

Different signs can be observed: excessive focus and concerns about the weight, shape or composition of the body.

Some strategies used to refrain from gaining weight (or to lose weight):

- Taking medications for diuretic or laxative effects
- Vomiting
- Excessive exercise
- Skipping meals
- In other sports than endurance sports, for female athletes, amenorrhea (absence of period)



Co-funded by
the European Union

MENTiS

Critical situations – eating disorder

Steps you can take:

- Contact the nutritionist
- Contact the psychologist or psychiatrist
- Observe signs (skipping meals regularly, taking medications that are not usual, ...)
- Other steps you could take?

Abuse, neglect and violence

- **Neglect**: failure to provide for the basic needs of a person.
- **Abuse**: interactions in which one person behaves in a cruel, violent, demeaning, or invasive manner toward another person or an animal.
- **Violence**: the expression of hostility and rage with the intent to injure or damage people or property through physical force and verbal behaviours.



Abuse, neglect and violence

Steps you can take:

- Do not be a bystander
- Contact the psychologist and the person who is in charge of safeguarding the athletes, if present.
- Offer support to the athlete, listen to them and check in on them.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MENTiS