

# How to act

The following tips are made to guide you when you are approaching an athlete who is facing a mental health problem.

<p><b>GENERAL APPROACH</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be non-judgmental and understanding (e.g., with simple statements such as “I’m so sorry you are feeling this way; I’m glad you told me about it.”)</li> <li>• Focus and relate to them as a person and not as an athlete</li> <li>• Consider their culture, gender, age and social norms</li> <li>• Do not isolate or punish athletes for talking about their mental health concerns</li> <li>• Provide a safe space and environment to share their concerns should they wish to</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACTIVE LISTENING COMMUNICATION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice active and empathetic listening</li> <li>• Stop what you are doing and look at the person, and listen</li> <li>• If you listen well, you will know when to speak and what to say</li> <li>• Indicate that you are glad they came to you and that you want to help</li> <li>• When it appears that the person has finished talking, ask if there is anything else they need to say</li> <li>• Allow the athlete to tell their story</li> <li>• Ask if there is someone they would like you to contact</li> </ul>

## ATHLETIC DOMAIN

- Find a time slot to provide feedback and listen to the needs of the athletes, before or after sessions
- Ensure that you know, at the beginning of a session, the mood and state of the athlete (fatigue, mood, anxiety, motivation)
- If an athlete is out of the group for some time (e.g., because of an injury), you can ask the athlete to come and give him or her some simple tasks to accomplish (timekeeper, water provider, referee, ...)
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to ensure the athlete feels confident
- Outline rules for autonomy: allow them to choose between several exercises
- Identify the mental health professionals in or outside the training facility, and the processes to find them
- Suggest breaks from training sessions (suggest some time off)
- Set goals (adapted and reachable)
- Consider what adjustments in your coaching approach might be needed to help an athlete's mental health while maintaining or creating a positive environment
- Consult with the medical team and discuss the possible adjustment of an athlete's training, in consultation with your technical staff.

## PERSONAL DOMAIN

- Keep your role as a person outside of the performance or medical staff
- Show that you can be available to listen in any case
- Be aware of the mental health support system, and be able to guide the athlete to a mental health professional if they need one
- Talk about anything else than their sport practice and performances, except if the athlete expresses a need to talk about it
- Remember that there is a person behind the athlete
- Suggest other activities (watching movies, walking around, concerts, playing video games, ....), and spend quality time with them
- Find some time to go and see their competitions from time to time
- Check in on them, by asking them what they need, how they feel, if there is something they wish to talk about

<p><b>FOR ANYONE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect their right to make their own decisions related to seeking further help (unless they present an immediate risk of harm to themselves or others)</li> <li>• Remember to look after yourself when assisting an athlete with mental health challenges</li> <li>• Be aware of what you can expect from yourself, you cannot change the person and you have limited control over that person. Your responsibility is to recognize and refer, whatever your role in the entourage.</li> <li>• Do not promise things you cannot deliver or provide inaccurate/false information</li> <li>• Respect their need for privacy and don't pressure them to share their story</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always inform the athletes of what you share with other members of the entourage regarding them</li> <li>• Always ask for consent before disclosing something about them</li> <li>• Ensure that when you discuss mental health with the athlete you are alone, and that no one else is listening, unless the athlete requests someone else to be present.</li> </ul>

# ASK

If you notice something, ask if there is something wrong, or if there is something they wish to talk about

# LISTEN

If they want to open up about it, make time for them, and make sure to be available

# ENCOURAGE

Tell them they can seek help if they wish, and provide some information on how to find professional help

# CHECK-IN

This may help you detect possible sign. If you know someone is facing mental health problems, check with them how the situation is evolving.