

## Supporting Psychologically Distressed Athletes: Suggested Best Practices for Coaches



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**Table 1.** Coaching practices to address barriers to athlete disclosures of distress.

Specific Barriers to Disclosure	Specific Coaching Practices
Emphasis on Athlete Toughness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt and demonstrate a holistic coaching philosophy that places increased emphasis on athlete development and well-being (i.e. sleep, nutrition, academics, etc.)</li> </ul>
Power of Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbally communicate that help-seeking may require athletes to step away from sport temporarily, but that athletes will have an opportunity to return following recovery</li> <li>• Develop coach-athlete relationships founded on trust, openness, and reciprocal communication with athletes</li> </ul>
Athlete's Position on a Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide transparent selection criteria</li> <li>• Provide equitable training opportunities to all athletes</li> <li>• Assign all athletes a valued role on the team</li> </ul>
Poor Visibility & Understanding of Psychological Distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach athletes awareness surrounding their mental and psychological well-being</li> <li>• Enforce accountability such that athletes understand they are responsible for managing their own holistic well-being</li> <li>• Share personal experiences with psychological distress and/or mental health challenges</li> </ul>
Previous Bad Experience with Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbally communicate coaching expectations to athletes</li> <li>• Engage with all athletes in an empathetic and compassionate manner when distressing situations arise</li> </ul>
<b>Global Coaching Practices</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and demonstrate an open-door policy</li> <li>• Role model behaviours that support positive psychological well-being</li> <li>• Use appropriate and non-discriminatory language when discussing athletes' psychological health and well-being</li> <li>• Build a diverse coaching and support staff</li> </ul>	

**Table 2.** Effective support practices for coaches in assisting distressed student-athletes.

Timeline	Suggested Support Practices
Initial Response to Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to athlete describe their concern(s)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Paraphrase what the athlete is saying</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provide reassurance to athlete</li> <li>• Ask follow-up or probing questions (if needed)</li> <li>• Triage the severity of the distress</li> <li>• Connect athlete with appropriate professional resources (if needed)</li> </ul>
Short-Term Support Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist athlete in creating plan to manage distress                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Engage athlete in this process to show support for their autonomy and support accountability</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Connect athlete with professional resources                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Offer to schedule appointment/make connection on the athlete's behalf</li> <li>○ Offer to take athlete to initial meeting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Long-Term Support Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep athlete engaged with the team</li> <li>• Check in with athlete on consistent basis</li> <li>• Make yourself readily available for as-needed communication</li> <li>• Modify sport-related demands</li> <li>• Maintain athlete confidentiality</li> <li>• Demonstrate patience and understanding in regards to the slow process of recovery</li> </ul>

### References

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