

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several ice hockey sticks lying on a white ice rink. The sticks are arranged diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. Some sticks are black with white and red accents, while others are white with black accents. The blades of the sticks are visible, showing some wear and tear. The lighting is bright, creating soft shadows on the ice.

Mental Health

Recent research has discovered that mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are prevalent in elite athletes

Being able to prevent, identify and manage mental health is essential in sports nowadays, ice hockey included.

This leaflet will help inform coaches how they can prevent, identify and manage mental health in their athletes.

Mental Health Awareness for Coaches in Ice Hockey

Understanding Mental Health

Christopher Anderson

What is Mental Health

Mental health is 'a state of wellbeing where individuals can realise their own potential, cope with life's normal stresses and work productively whilst having a positive impact in people's lives'.

Mental health disorders can manifest in a variety of different forms, including:

- Anxiety
- bipolar disorders
- depression
- eating disorders
- PTSD

Mental Health Statistics

Globally, mental disorders are said to contribute to 14% of the burden of disease

Depression and anxiety are two of the most common mental disorders, or CMD's, with depression affecting 4.4% and anxiety affecting 3.6% of the population.

CMD's are much more common in young people and adolescents, with 25% of 16-34 year olds diagnosed with some form of CMD. This is also the age range that elite athletes tend to fall under.



Duty of Care

In the recent Duty of Care Sport Review, mental health/wellness in elite athletes was identified as a major issue.

The review made a number of recommendations to bring around widespread change in mental health, increasing awareness and reducing the stigma associated.

As coaches have a duty of care for their athletes, this leaflet will help coaches increase their awareness which will help them with the identification, prevention and management of mental health issues.

Duty of Care in Sport
Independent Report to Government

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE, DL

Signs and Symptoms

Identifying mental health issues early is said to be very important, as it can minimize the effect that mental health issues can have on a person's life.

Signs and symptoms that coaches should look out for can include:

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Suicidal thinking

Prevention

Whilst mental health issues cannot fully be prevented, reducing the risk factors associated with the onset of disorders can help reduce the incidence, prevalence and reoccurrence of mental health disorders.

Mental health professionals, which can include coaches, are key in helping with the prevention of issues. Professionals will be able to increase awareness, promote positive mental health, as well as recognize signs and symptoms to aid with early identification and provide access to high quality health services.



Management

To help with the management of mental health issues, the correct support mechanisms need to be in place.

Support mechanisms can include:

- Talking to the athlete; this will require the coach to have the knowledge and confidence to assist athletes
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; this is a short-term treatment offered by the NHS
- Medication; anti-depressants, mood stabilizers and sleeping pills
- Referral to a professional; appropriate professionals may be available within the sport system

Prevalence in Elite Athlete

Recent studies have found that mental health issues in elite athletes are much more common than previously thought. This is said to be due to the intense physical and mental demands of elite sports such as ice hockey, which exposes athletes to unique stressors that can make them susceptible to mental health disorders.

These stressors can include:

- Overtraining
- Injury
- Burnout
- Retirement
- Career dissatisfaction

Barriers to Seeking Help

Whilst elite athletes have been shown to be susceptible to mental health issues, further research has shown that they are less likely to reach out for help. This may be because of a number of perceived barriers to getting help that athletes can face.

Examples of some barriers that athletes face can include:



Why is mental health important for athletes?

Ice hockey players are people too and are vulnerable to mental illness. If athletes are struggling with mental health issues it can affect their performance levels in their sport, as well as their personal lives.

Athletes whose mental health and wellbeing is supported and managed better, are said to perform at a higher level due to their increased coping abilities and improved emotional wellbeing.

An example of this is Jordin Tootoo (pictured), who battled mental health during his career but sought help for the NHL and went on to have a successful career. Now retired, Tootoo is an advocate for mental health promotion.

Raising Awareness for Coaches

Awareness needs to be raised regarding how coaches can aid athlete's mental health.

Coaches are in a position that allows them to support athlete's mental health in a major way.

This is because they are able to spend a lot of time with the athletes, allowing them to establish important relationships.

However, the majority of coaches are unsure how to handle and respond to mental health problems.

By developing and improving their knowledge and understanding of mental health, coaches will be able to take better care of their athletes.

Training

Coaches in elite sport are currently not required to undertake mental health training.

However this has to change, as research has shown that leaders who take part in mental health training were able to increase their knowledge and confidence when dealing with mental health, which made them more likely to promote good mental health and assist colleagues.

To help better inform coaches, coaches can take part in the mental health charity MIND's workshop, which aims to increase mental health awareness. Areas covered in the workshop include the stigma of mental health, the barriers, signs and symptoms, how to talk about mental health and where to signpost those affected.

Training will allow coaches to increase their mental health knowledge, which can aid their ability to prevent, identify and manage the mental health of their athletes.

Ice Hockey

Mental health can affect anyone, in all sports, even ice hockey. However little to no research has looked at mental health in elite ice hockey players.

Coaches who have a better understanding of mental health issues will be in a better position to help athletes.

For example, if athletes suffered a concussion, coaches will be more likely to identify the signs and symptoms of any mental health issues stemming from the injury, allowing for early identification which can minimize the effects of future mental health issues, and therefore allow for treatment and further management of the issues.



Useful Links

Featured are number of websites which coaches can use to increase their awareness surrounding mental health.

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>

<https://www.sportengland.org>

<https://www.samh.org.uk/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

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