



# Mental Illness Detection and Response

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November 19, 2019



## Prelude

- It is important to recognize the athlete first as a person- not just a performance machine
- Engaging the athlete on a personal level and learning how to best motivate them to achieve their peak performance (which will vary between athletes) will lead to better performance, sport satisfaction, and overall wellbeing
- Athletes are very resilient individuals who can manage a remarkable amount of stress.



# When Struggles Happen

- Mental illness can occur in athletes at the same rates as the general population
- Athlete performance and behavior can change throughout the season, and may present as:
  - Tardiness
  - Missed training
  - Declining performance
  - Increased errors
  - Underperformance
  - Irritability, anger, fatigue, impaired concentration, social isolation, impaired stress management
  - Anxiety attacks, tearfulness
  - Significant weight loss or gain



# Contributing Factors

- The factors underlying these changes are multifactorial, and may include:
  - Lengthy travelling
  - Over training
  - Challenges created by housing situation
  - Conflict with teammate(s) or coach(es)
  - Academic stress
  - Financial difficulty
  - Physical illness or injury
  - Family stress
  - Lifestyle management issues (sleep, nutrition, balancing schedule)
  - Loss (grief)
  - Trauma (physical/sexual/psychological)- potentially from a sport context
  - Transitions (planning for life after major games, not being selected for teams, awaiting “promotion” to the elite squads, retirement)
  - Mental illness





# Identify the Signs, Understand What They Mean

- If you see signs of psychological and emotional struggles or hear athletes talking about their difficulties, you are not expected to be their counselors or therapists
- You need to be aware of resources that are available to them and danger signs to watch for
- Signs of emotional and psychological struggle can include:
  - Evidence of self-harm (obvious scars or recent cuts, inappropriate use of long sleeves and evasive behaviour)
  - Increased drinking or drug use
  - Change in behaviour around training- late for training, missed training or competitions; avoidance of, or frequent requests for, anthropometric measures (particularly in leanness or endurance sports)
  - Excessive distraction or emotional reactivity that is out of character (sadness, irritability, anger)
  - Rapid changes in sleep and eating routines, which impact energy, attendance, and performance
  - Sudden changes in socialization with the team; increased isolation
  - Tearfulness
  - Panic attacks
  - Changes in personal hygiene and appearance
  - Talking a lot about problems and feelings
  - Others express concern about the athlete



## Identify the Signs, Understand What They Mean

- Some athletes may be just dealing with mild challenges that can be managed with a review of needs directly with them and some enhanced supports
- Some athletes may require more intensive intervention and support. It is important to identify them early, and then get help in determining where they go from there.



## Specific Challenges

- Performance-based
- Mood disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Sleep disorders
- ADHD
- Eating Disorders
- Substance Use Disorders
- PTSD
- Self-harm
- Post-concussion mental illness



## Your role(s)

- Coaches can play a pivotal role in recognition, support, and management of treatment. This can be facilitated through open dialogue with the athletes, checking in with the athletes at appropriate times, and incorporating management of their needs into the team approach (ie travel times and arrangements, and an open, accepting culture for mental wellness).
- It is important to be aware of the support network that is available for athletes- including sport psychiatrists, mental performance consultants, psychologists, sport medicine physicians, family doctors, and crisis services.





## Your role(s)

- While it is important to recognize the signs of struggle, it is equally important to recognize your roles as supporter, advocate, and linkage to supports. Your roles do NOT include therapist, counselor, or doctor

# Know the risks!

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- **Low:** No risk of harm to self or others; distress is limited to one area of athlete's life
- **IST role:** Express concern and provide personal support by listening carefully; suggest that athlete reaches out to support (or you can reach out to supports)- this can include Carla  
([cedwards@synergysportmentalhealth.ca](mailto:cedwards@synergysportmentalhealth.ca); 905-570-5629) and Fiona ([Fiona.meikle@cyclingcanada.ca](mailto:Fiona.meikle@cyclingcanada.ca); 289-228-7616) (response will be 12-24 h later)



# Know the risks!

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- **Medium:** Unclear if there is a risk of harm to self or others; no immediate risk but athlete is currently in distress and it may escalate
- **IST role:** Express concern and provide personal support by listening carefully. Reach out to Carla and Fiona, also connect with local resource (Dr. Rod Corban- 642-194-1765; [rod.corban@gmail.com](mailto:rod.corban@gmail.com))



# Know the risks!

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- **High:** Threat of violence or harm to self or others (safety risk for the athlete or for others). Direct or indirect reference to suicide; acute distress affecting the athlete's ability to function.
- **IST role:** express your concern for the athlete. Contact local resources; call 111 (emergency services in NZ) for acute risk





# Resources

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- Mental Performance Consultant: Fiona Meikle- [Fiona.meikle@cyclingcanada.ca](mailto:Fiona.meikle@cyclingcanada.ca); 289-228-7616
- Sport Psychiatrist: Dr. Carla Edwards- [cedwards@synergysportmentalhealth.ca](mailto:cedwards@synergysportmentalhealth.ca); 905-570-5629
- Local Sport Psychologist (NZ): Dr. Rod Corban- [rod.corban@gmail.com](mailto:rod.corban@gmail.com); 642-194-1765
- Emergency services (NZ)- 111

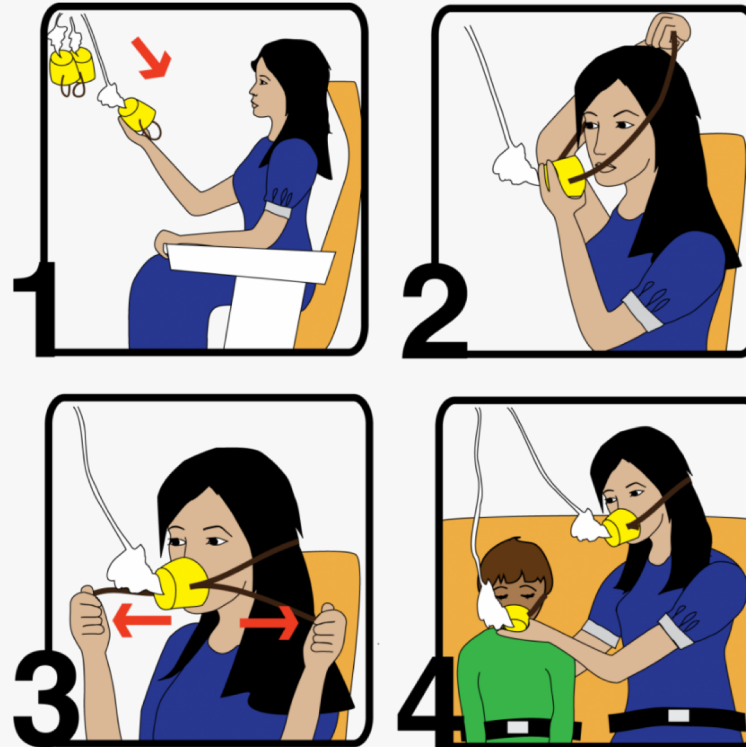




# Building Resilience

Fiona Meikle

# Put Your Own Oxygen Mask on First



# Under pressure, leadership strengths can become weaknesses

- Drive for results → *unrealistic perfectionism and criticism*
- Good relationships → *unwillingness to confront problem behaviour*
- Self confidence → *burnout through never asking for help*
- Dilligent worker → *drive self and others into the ground*
- Fast pace → *Mistakes through sloppy thinking*

The question is not “Do I change under stress?”...but “HOW do I change under stress?”



# What influences YOUR ability to cope?

## Response to Pressure is Influenced by:

### Thoughts/Thinking

- Expectations (Realistic? Helpful?) “be the best we can be on the day”
- Perceptions (How bad is it? Do you think you/your team can cope?)

### Emotions/Feelings

- Your confidence in coping
- How well you manage your emotions

### Body/Physical Feeling

- Your health
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Blood pressure
- Tension

### Behaviour/Doing

- Your ability to Control the Controllables
- Your determination to thrive

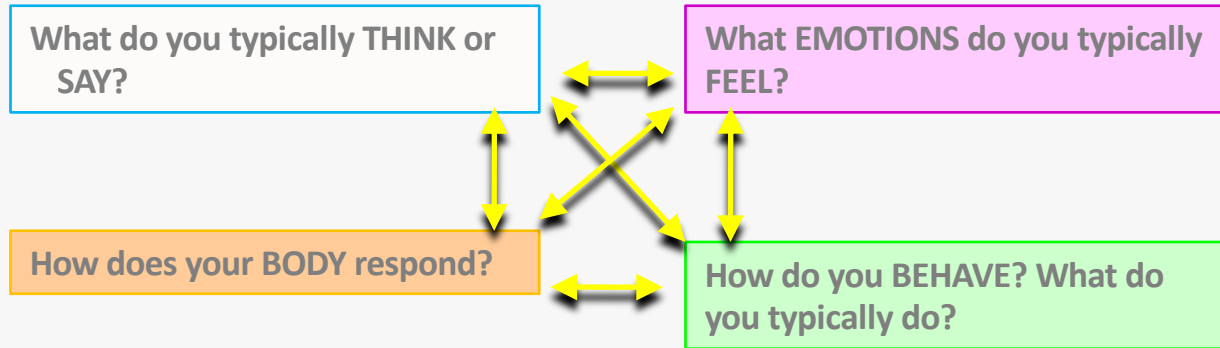
What can you do?

Know Your Warning Signs...when  
pressure gets to you, how do you respond?



## What can you do?

Know Your Warning Signs...when pressure gets to you, how do you respond?



Which do you tend to notice first?

If you can recognise the warning signs, you can change your response!

What can you do?

## Keep your armour strong

- Quality sleep (bring earplugs, sleep mask, headphones)
- Nutrition (bring cool bags and zip lock bags of snacks)
- Know your needs for personal space
- Take 5 minutes to relax (so you can bounce back quickly) - Headspace
- Exercise
- Manage your expectations





What can you do?

## Use Your Support Network

- Communicate your needs
- Ask for help
- Talk to the support staff
  - Your Team
- Talk to friends/family
- Buddy system



## What can you do?

Know how your response to stress impacts  
other staff & athletes

- Respect the needs of others
- Have a pressure release valve
- Let others' frustrations slide off you
- Ask for feedback about your behaviour
- Communicate



What can you do?

Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

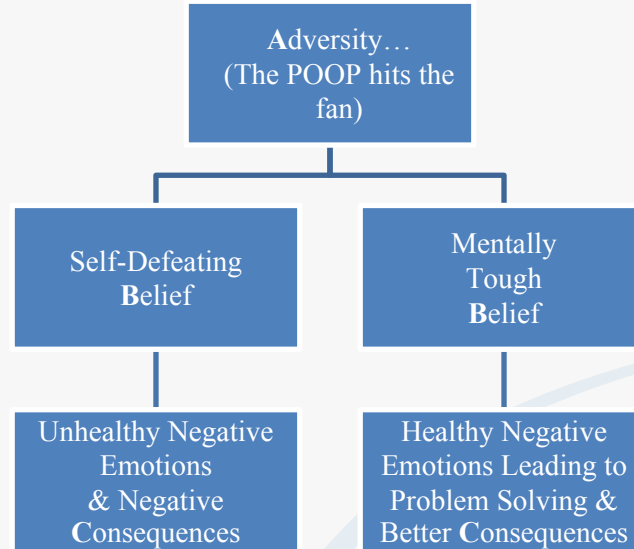
*"Peak performance is truly about  
learning to be comfortable being  
uncomfortable."*

– Dr. Ken Ravizza

# What can you do?

## (The ABC's) Beliefs → Responses

- People are disturbed not by things, but by their rigid and extreme views of things (Reformulation of Epictetus AD 55-135)
- Facts stay the same
- Meaning we give to facts can differ



What can you do?

## Check Your Responses

- Ask yourself....**Is my response helpful?**

If it's not, choose to change your response!!



## Be Resilient!

Using these strategies increases the probability that you will have a Peak Performance mindset.

- Believe in what you have achieved, trust the work that you have done, and know that you are prepared for this race! Continue to be aware of and believe in what is possible for you to achieve.
- Stay focused on the task at hand; be in the moment and reframe the ineffective to effective.
- Avoid self-criticism, being overly analytical, and give yourself time to switch your mind off when appropriate to do so.
- Connect with, give, and receive support to teammates, including coaches and staff.
- Seek to control what is under your control; let go of all things that not under your control.
- Let adversity make you stronger; view adversity as a challenge and not a threat.
- Seek the challenge and opportunity to race; thrive on the pressure.
- *Embrace the process*, execute your plan and welcome the pain (it ain't going away).
- Feel how you want to feel. Seek to find enjoyment in every moment.
- Maintain a positive perspective; remember what you are there to do – Race FAST, take each race at a time, take each lap at a time – The 'process' will take you to the 'outcome'.

Remember to BREATHE; nervous energy can lead to muscle tension and shallow breathing; taking full deep breaths can help to release tension and bring a sense of calm and control back to the moment.



# to CHOOSE to Thrive

- ☐ Know your warning signs
- ☐ Choose a refocus trigger
- ☐ Keep your armour strong
- ☐ Focus on the positives
- ☐ Focus on what you can control
- ☐ Prioritise
- ☐ Use your support network
- ☐ Help your team mates
- ☐ Expect the Unexpected – Be Flexible
- ☐ Check your responses (mentally tough or destructive)
- ☐ Start practicing your thriving attitude NOW!

Any questions?