

Niagara Disability Committee Meeting- Anxiety

2/20/2022

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Dani Richards, Will Chidsey, Jean Lalomia, and Courtney Christ

Agenda:

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of last minutes
3. Research sharing
4. Next meeting topic
5. Adjournment

Call to order: 7:05pm

Meeting minutes approval pushed to next meeting.

Lots of overlap with all the other topics we have gone over.

Dani-connection coaches have with the breath and how to use it and rest and digest. You get there through cold water, humming, and deep exhales

Learn how to work with your body

Have coaches teach their athletes how to use the breath and how to use the breath throughout their swimming.

Jean- there will always be another race. Take the breath. Be their calm, get the Coach where they need to be. They athletes are already under pressure for themselves be their calm.

How you approach the situation will directly change how the swimmer responds to it.

Team culture is a huge part of it. You know your child the best and what will fit best for them.

Each team has a culture that they give off you are either about numbers or about the kids.

Instructing the parents on what is the parent role that they have and you as the coach take on the coaching rule.

Important that the child learns how to deal with what they are feeling in their way. Also taking the step to learn how to get to the bottom of it what is causing them to feel what they are feeling.

Officials stay in your own lane. Teach officials going forward how to use this information and finding the right words many officials are in the suck it up and deal with it changing it

Will- their emotions may get them into a point where they cannot talk about it so tell them to nod yes or no. Do not always jump to getting their parents, that may make the situation worse. Ask if they want their parents they may not.

Coaches' toolbox if you don't have anxiety, you may not know anything about it

Remember to always think about what is in the best interest of the child

Parents do not get much time to talk with their kids during the day, coaches most times have the most FaceTime with the kids. It is important that they know how to react and assist in what is going on.

Going forward with the idea of what the team wants, creating the positive experience for the athletes when there is so much pressure around them.

Redefining what creates success for each of the swimmers. For some that is the Olympics for others it is time to spend with their friends doing something that they enjoy. At the end of the day the parents and the coaches want what is best for their kids.

Excited for the future

Next topic: LSC guidelines for anxiety and assistants on deck

8:15pm adjourn

Attachment 1, Jean Interview

As with so much of what we, as the Disability Committee, have researched, this project on anxiety produced a tremendous amount of information that was both unexpected and deeply concerning. As I am clearly a mid-20th century person, I come from the generation that said, "Stop whining or I will give you something to whine about." This morphed into the "Just do it" coupled with the "Suck it up, buttercup" years. Times change, but methods of dealing with an issue such as anxiety are impacted by the ways each of us was raised and the ways in which we were coached. Although our knowledge has increased dramatically, real change is always far slower. This is the disconnect between what we have become aware of and what we actually do.

Pre-pandemic estimates of teens suffering from anxiety disorders were as high as 20 to 30% (Stout). Then Covid hit and in the ensuing 2+ years, some suggest those numbers may have increased. Others hold that the prevalence of anxiety disorders in the general population are only at 11 to 12% (Somers, Goldner, Waraich, et al. 2006) with elite athletes being approximately 9% (Stollman, Glick, McDuff et al, 2019). Regardless, whether it is one of 10 or three of 10, we must become informed. As one advertisement says, "Anxiety cannot make sense to those who don't have it" (Health Prep, 2016). We have much learning and understanding to do.

I had the privilege of speaking with two gifted coaches from the Niagara District. Both are informed and impressive. The first is our own Coach Dani Richards of the Granada Racing Aquatic Team in Walworth, New York and the second is Coach Becky Sapio of the Town Wreckers Swim Team in Orchard Park, New York. They were generous with their time and perceptions on the topic of anxiety disorders, although not trained as mental health professionals, they each combine a rich background of experiences and extensive personal research in their desire to meet the diverse needs of their swimmers. The three plus one questions will serve as guides and boundaries for their responses.

A) How to best help at meets?

Coach Dani:

"...The competitive experience can sometimes agitate feelings of anxiety. The best thing we can do is have compassion for athletes." She reminds that although there is a time frame for a meet and that we typically expect swimmers to be at the blocks, ready to swim, the way it is done matters. Being "kind and caring" when there are difficulties ("messaging up" or missed events) will go a long way. Finding ways to solve a problem should be our goal.

Coach Becky:

Provided valuable guidance in the approaches to consider in dealing with an athlete in distress.

- 1) Be aware, observe, and touch base with a swimmer.

- 2) Check body language.
- 3) Locate and utilize a quiet spot where the swimmer can decompress and/or regain control of emotions.
- 4) Suggest deep breathing with eyes closed.
- 5) Use your voice to calm. Speak a little more slowly, more gently.
- 6) If you are not a coach, have one located and brought to the swimmer.
- 7) Always be calm and compassionate, whatever your role on deck.

Further discussion yielded valuable insights for coaches:

- 1) Build trusting relationships with athletes that are based upon positive interactions.
- 2) Ask questions and listen to the responses: "Can you breathe?" and "What made you feel this way?" are two examples.
- 3) Self assess. Ask yourself: "Am I pushing too hard? "Is there something I have done which may have caused a problem?"
- 4) Be respectful. Focus on a positive attitude/approach. Use affirmatives.
- 5) Have a conversation away from other swimmers in the calming phase.
- 6) In dealing with parents who may be part of their child's anxiety, sit with them to discuss potential approaches. Less pressure, fewer demands, less videotaping, and analysis of that. Call out undue pressure as it is not in an anxious swimmer's best interest. Be careful not to "sound wrong."
- 7) Keep perspective. Be clear on what is important. Sometimes stepping back from a race or taking a day off will help regain equilibrium and/or control.
- 8) Actions speak louder than words. Be the calm and the support in the center of the situation.

B) How to find a team?

Coach Dani:

"Families will have to be willing to explore on their own because team cultures vary so much from club to club." She suggests messaging the club contact and asking questions. Find out if a club has a culture would "lend itself to providing support for an athlete diagnosed with anxiety." She cautions parents to examine the difference between a club which can provide specific examples (training of coaches, methods used, etc.) and a club that gives a response that is generic, "OH sure. We work with all kinds of kids." She lists the following as valuable:

- 1) Specific trainings for coaches.
- 2) A mission statement that supports swimming as a "developmental tool" (being focused on personal growth) as well as being focused on competition. The answers, she says, will guide the choice of a team ("assuming there are choices in the area").

Coach Becky:

"Know your swimmer. Watch and assess when you view different teams. Speak honestly to the coaching staff about the needs/issues with your swimmer." Goal setting is essential, but these should be small and achievable. Success breeds success and confidence in an athlete. Select

coaches who choose to know your swimmer and work well with him/her.

Speak with other parents. They can provide insight and perspective. Be aware of the "fit." Some may be a good fit, while others are not.

C) How to meet with a coach?

Coach Dani:

"Success comes from honest and open communication. The more that is shared with a coach, the more the coach can work with the athlete and family to build a relationship of trust."

Training (education) and personal experiences on the coaches' parts will guide how best to support the athlete based on the information the parent has provided. The coach therefore can be observant, watching for signs, then suggesting taking a break, and possibly doing deep breathing exercises. The athlete will decide when she/he is ready to return. "Conversation without judgement or frustration" is held and a safe place for decompression provided with the goal being to allow the swimmer to manage his/her feelings. Coach recognition of the equal value of both mental and physical health is essential.

Coach Becky:

- 1) Be honest when you speak with the coach. Give the staff the information necessary to succeed with your swimmer.
- 2) Discover what is required of you, the parent, and how you can best support your swimmer.
- 3) Expect that every child matters, regardless of circumstances, to the coaching staff,
- 4) Know the goals being set and that they are realistic and achievable.
- 5) Pay attention, be cooperative, and care. Support the coaches in their efforts.

D) How can officials best support a swimmer with anxiety?

Coach Dani:

With "Kindness and compassion. We won't know by looking at someone if they are living with anxiety, so I think it's best not to assume." Choose to "speak kindly and with empathy." Our athletes deal with great pressure, sometimes resulting in "fight or flight" and the variety of ways that might look, "Racing heart, shaky voice, uneven breathing, nausea, sweaty palms, a sense of fear" are among the indicators. "Simply asking a shaken-looking swimmer, 'Is there anything I can do to help you?' can go a long way."

Coach Becky:

"You may not 'know', but if you sense there is a distress issue with a swimmer, get to one of us."

Find a coach, even after the fact. It is not the role of an official to engage or interact. Providing a calm, kind response while offering a seat or a safe place until a coach arrives is perhaps the best an official can do. Be aware.