Nepean Artistic Swim Club Mental Health Return-to-Sport Protocol

Nepean Artistic Swim Club recognizes mental health benefits and risks inherent to competitive sport. We strive to create a sport environment that is positive, task-oriented, and develops the mental strength and skills of our athletes. Similar to physical injury, mental health symptoms can impede training and cause unsafe training environments in a sport where athletes are at risk of injury when those around them cannot perform to the demands of training. NASC aims to support any athlete experiencing mental health challenges by supporting them to stay in sport as much as possible while working with appropriate health professionals towards recovery and management of symptoms.

While this protocol provides guidance for coaches and athletes, it does not constitute medical advice and athletes should follow the instructions of their doctor or another medical professional.

Definitions

Mental Health: a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO).
Mental Illness: persistent and substantial deviation from normal functioning that impairs the ability to execute social roles and generates emotional suffering.

When to enact the MHRTS Protocol

- The athlete has to sit out of portions of/ miss practice for mental health reasons for one week or more of practices
- The athlete discloses suicidal ideation
- The coach notices unexplained behaviour change in the athlete for 2+ weeks (ex. mood, energy, significant weight gain or loss, significant drop in performance and/or athleticism), or observes evidence of self-harm behaviours in the athlete

MHRTS Protocol Steps

1. Coach discussion with parent

In cases where mental health challenges are suspected or reported, the coach is required to disclose these to a parent. The coach and head coach will also make a recommendation for an appropriate level of services.

Services may include a Mental Performance Consultant (MPC), Registered Counsellor or Psychotherapist, or Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Recommendations should be made according to the severity of the symptoms of the athlete. See figure 1 below for help selecting an appropriate service for the athlete.

a. If the athlete is experiencing a mental health emergency and is an acute danger to themself or others, a parent/guardian should call 911 and/or take the athlete to the emergency room

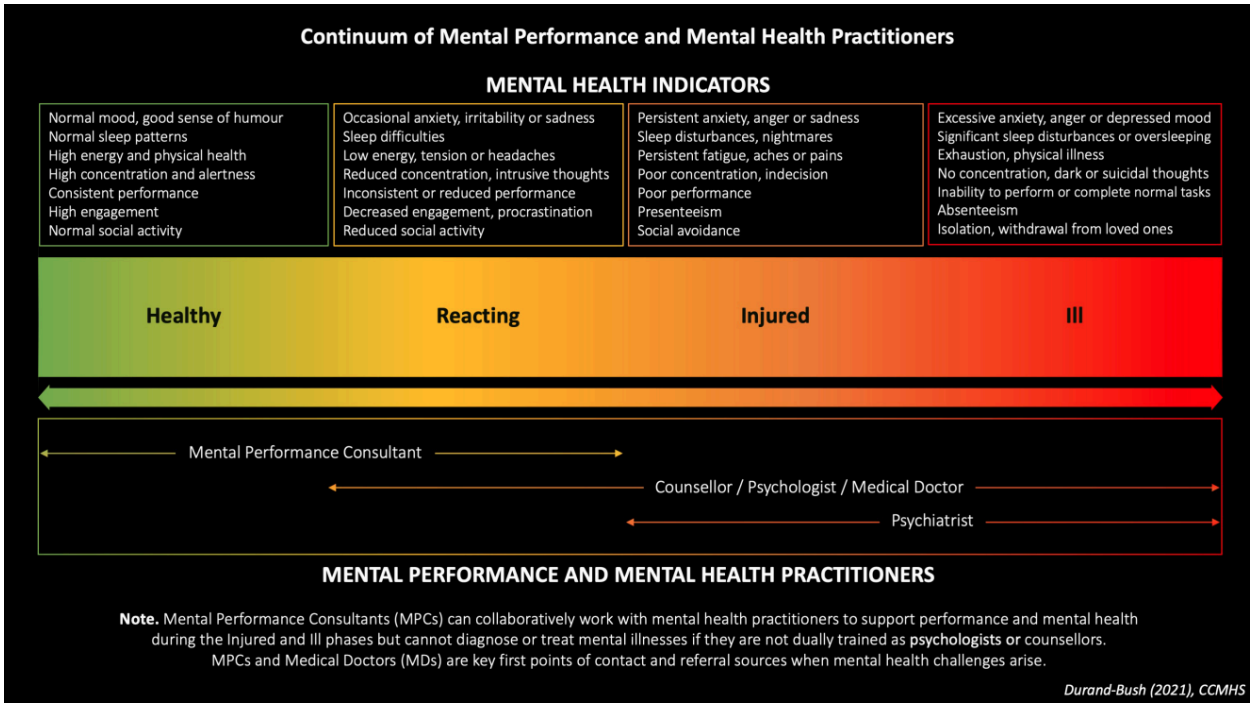


Figure 1

2. Determine functioning level of the athlete

Level	Green	Yellow	Red
Athlete participation in training	- Athlete can participate fully in practice and school and may or may not be working with a health professional - Symptoms may be present, but are stable and athlete can use coping strategies to manage them	- Athletes are able to partially participate in practice and school while working with a health professional - Symptoms are present and interfering with daily functioning	- Athlete is unable to participate in large portions of practice and school - Symptoms are causing significant interference with daily functioning and/or athlete is at risk
Role of the coach	- Coaches may need to provide occasional additional support in some areas	- Athletes may require modified training loads and schedules, similar to physical injury	- Athlete requires modified training and supervision from health professionals
Role of parents and/or guardians	- Parents/ guardians to provide updates to coaches as needed	- Parents/ guardians required to update coach weekly on athlete functioning and training needs	- Parents/ guardians required to update coach weekly on athlete functioning and training needs

Mental Health Challenges during Cutoff Period

If challenges occur or continue into the cutoff period, a meeting is required between parents, the athlete, team coach(es), a head coach and a board member to discuss the athlete's participation in the upcoming meet.

The final decision regarding competition participation will be made by the Head coaching team and will be dependent on case-by-case factors such as the ability to complete the full routine and figures safely, the athlete's participation in training, and the ability to follow the Code of Conduct while travelling and competing with the team. The decision may also include approval and recommendations from a medical professional. Possible decisions may involve partial participation in the competition (i.e. figures only), full participation, or a recommendation that the athlete does not participate or travel with the team.

Exceptional Circumstances

1. *The athlete is unable to participate successfully in the team environment without causing harm to other athletes and/or coaches*
    a. If the athlete is at the green level of the MTRHS protocol, the standard sanctions of the athlete code of conduct shall be applied
    b. If the athlete is in the yellow or red level of the MHRTS protocol and cannot participate without causing harm to others, their training load will be reduced or halted and additional referrals will be provided to the family to work towards stabilizing symptoms.

2. *Athlete who uses sport as a main coping mechanism*
    a. It is widely recognized that social support systems such as sport and teammates can play a role in athlete well-being when athletes suffer from mental health challenges. If the athlete identifies the sport environment as a facilitator to mental well-being, efforts to include the athlete in training will be made so long as training does not cause a worsening in symptoms or harm to others.
    b. An exception will be made if the affected athlete is not capable of participating in training and/or the team environment without causing harm to the other participants or breaking the Code of Conduct. In these cases, the athlete will not be permitted to participate in training or team activities until symptoms are stabilized and the athlete is able to participate without causing harm to others.

Mental Health Professionals and Resources

Please note that this list is non-exhaustive, but may give swimmers and families a starting point when seeking help.

Mental Performance Consultants

Canadian Sport Psychology Association: https://www.cspa-acps.com/find-a-consultant

Counsellors / Psychotherapists / Psychologists

Psychology Today: https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/on/ottawa

Westboro Psychology: https://www.westboropsychology.com

Drice Psychotherapy: https://www.dricepsychotherapy.com/team

Barrhaven Psychological Services: https://www.barrhavenpsychservices.ca

Red Oak Psychotherapy: https://www.redoakpsychotherapy.com

Juniper Counselling Centre: https://www.junipercounselling.ca

Ottawa Academy of Psychology https://ottawa-psychologists.org/online-directory/

Other Resources

1 Call 1 Click: https://1call1click.ca/en/index.aspx

Kids Help Phone: https://kidshelpphone.ca/

Resources for Parents

PLEO: https://pleo.on.ca/ (support for parents of children dealing with mental health challenges)

OAS Safe Sport Page: https://ontarioartisticswimming.ca/safe-sport/

CHEO Mental Health Resources:
https://www.cheo.on.ca/en/resources-and-support/a-z-resources-mental-health.aspx

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