



SPEED PROJECT

Sport & Prevention of Emerging Eating Disorders

How to Communicate with Parents

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If the athlete is a minor, it is necessary to communicate first with the family, preferably with both parents:

- schedule an appointment with the parents;
- it would be preferable for the conversation to take place in person, but if it is not possible to find a suitable time it may also be done by phone;
- the specific reason for requesting a meeting should not be disclosed, but kept generic (e.g., “I have noticed some behaviors that concerned me and I think it is important to discuss them”);
- if the parents are separated, give the same communication to both, preferably in writing via email.



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How to approach the conversation:

- it is important to emphasize first and foremost that a meeting was requested because of genuine concern for the athlete's wellbeing;
- it is important to acknowledge one's own role as a significant person in the athlete's life, but not as a mental health professional;
- behaviors and indicators that have been observed should be reported objectively, without interpretation, simply describing what occurred;
- avoid expressing judgments;



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How parents may react:

- they may show awareness of the problem;
- they may minimize what the coach reports;
- the coach's observations may confirm a concern that already existed but had not yet been addressed;
- they may react aggressively



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If parents are aware of the problem:

- share and compare notes on what has been observed;
- if the athlete is already seeing a professional, ask whether there are specific guidelines on how to act;
- express willingness to communicate with the professional(s) caring for the athlete if needed;
- ask how they intend to manage the continuation of sporting activity in the event of significant weight loss;
- agree on any forms of direct communication with the athlete.



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If parents minimize what the coach reports:

- repeat that certain behaviors and changes have been observed and specify precisely when they occurred;
- also mention any concern expressed by other staff members;
- highlight the indicators related to athletic performance;
- remind them that the decision to reach out was made out of genuine concern for the athlete's wellbeing;
- remind them that the decision to address the issue is ultimately theirs as parents, and that the goal of the conversation was simply to make them aware of the situation.



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If parents confirm the concern but have not yet directly addressed the problem:

- emphasize the importance of consulting a mental health professional as soon as possible;
- express willingness to speak with the athlete if the parents agree and find it helpful;
- reiterate one's own concern about what has been observed;
- if a team psychologist is available, provide this information to the parents.



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If parents react aggressively:

- repeat that the goal of the conversation is the athlete's wellbeing;
- show understanding of the fact that this is a sensitive and difficult topic to address;
- reaffirm that one is not a mental health professional, but has a privileged observation point because of the time spent with the athlete;
- confirm one's availability should the parents wish to discuss the matter in the future.



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