Coastal Carolina University
Athletic Training Department
Policy and Procedure Manual
Mental Health
Revised/Reviewed 7/2011

INTRODUCTION:

When you think of a student-athlete's health, we tend to think primarily of the physical/medical condition and what effect the injury will have on athletic performance. A student-athlete's "mental health" might be viewed as secondary to physical health; however, it is every bit as important. Medical problems often have psychological or emotional consequences. Psychological problems (e.g. eating disorders, substance-related problems) have medical consequences. Given the inter-relationship between the physical and mental, it is helpful to think of student-athletes with mental health problems as "injured" – just as you would of a student-athlete who has a physical or medical problem. As with physical injuries, mental health problems may, by their severity, affect athletic performance and limit or even preclude training and competition until successfully managed and treated.

PROCEDURE:

Signs and Symptoms of a Depression

- Low or sad moods
- Irritability or anger
- Feeling worthless, helpless and hopeless
- Eating and sleeping disturbance (increase or decrease)
- Decrease in energy and activity levels with feelings of fatigue or tiredness
- Decreases in concentration, interest, and motivation
- Social withdrawal or avoidance
- Negative thinking
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Signs and Symptoms of an Anxiety Disorder

- Excessive worry, fear or dread
- Sleep disturbances, especially difficulty falling asleep
- Changes in appetite, including either an increased need to eat when anxious or difficulty eating due to anxiety
- Feelings ranging from a general uneasiness to complete immobilization
- Pounding heart, sweating, shaking or trembling
- Impaired concentration
- A feeling of being out of control
- Fear that one is dying or going crazy
- A disruption of everyday life

How to respond when the student-athlete approaches you

When an individual approaches you, he or she is indicating a need to talk with you. The best way to respond is to listen. Listening is the most important part of communicating. Generally, wait to speak until the student-athlete stops talking or appears to be waiting for you to respond. It is all right to ask questions for clarification, but be careful not to judge or be critical.

How to respond when the student-athlete is in need and has not approached you.

The person approaching the student-athlete should be a person of some authority. More important, however is that this initial step should be taken by someone who has a good relationship with the student-athlete or who is comfortable in discussing important and sensitive issues. Even if you cannot understand the seriousness or difficulty of the student-athlete's problem, you must accept that it is a serious problem for the individual. Depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and substance-related disorders are mental health problems in need of treatment. They are illnesses- not choices; that is why they are called disorders.

It is best to approach the individual privately to decrease the likelihood of embarrassment and to avoid any other activity that might distract you or the student-athlete. Sensitivity is a key in facilitating the discussion. Begin by saying you are concerned about the individual's welfare and would like to help. Hopefully, this approach will allow the student-athlete the opening to talk with you about his or her difficulties.

Knowing Your Limits

To avoid the student-athlete's difficulties weighing too heavily on you, you need to know your limits. Be aware of what is reasonable to expect from yourself. You cannot change the person because you have limited control. Your responsibility is to recognize and refer. When you begin to feel undue stress or worry, it is time to take care of yourself and turn the problem over to someone else.

Confidentiality

One of the most important aspects of psychological management and treatment involves the issue of confidentiality. Healthcare practitioners are legally and ethically required to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their patients. They cannot divulge any information about their patients to anyone without the patient's written consent. Even then, the information is still restricted to what the patient agrees can be released, what is appropriate to be released, the conditions under which the information can be released and to whom.

Making a referral

Many referrals are not accepted or used by the student-athlete. There are aspects of making a referral that increase the likelihood of it being successful. Know or at least have some knowledge regarding the referral person or agency. Share that knowledge with the student-athlete. Also, referrals are more often accepted when the referral is made to a specific person.

Referrals should be made to Counseling Services 843-349-2305 (8am-5pm) or after hours an on-call counselor can be reached at 843-349-2177.

Helping the student-athlete who resists treatment

The student-athlete may resist evaluation and treatment. In such a case, the student-athlete should be told that he or she is considered to be "injured" and that it's your responsibility to take care of your injured student-athletes. If the student-athlete asks about being able to train and compete as a result of the difficulty and treatment, reply that the decision will have to be made by the healthcare professionals who manage the treatment.

Recommendations regarding individuals at risk for suicide

When dealing with a student-athlete who has expressed, indicated an intent or plan, or attempted suicide, do not try to determine the "lethality" of the though, gesture or attempt. Do not assume the person is engaging in suicidal thoughts or actions for "attention". Make an immediate referral.

If an attempt is already in progress, call EMS and have them transported to an emergency room. If an attempt has not already begun, call Public Safety (349-2177) and ask to speak to the counselor on call. The counselor will then call the student-athlete or athletic trainer to set up a place to meet whether it is at Public Safety, ER, office or do an assessment over the phone depending on the circumstances.

If a suicide occurs please refer to the catastrophic injury procedure.