

SMHRT-1

The International Olympic Committee Sport Mental Health Recognition Tool 1

DEVELOPED BY THE IOC MENTAL HEALTH WORKING GROUP



Sadness, anger, stress, irritability and anxiety are all normal parts of the human experience; however, if these problems persist for long periods of time or have a big impact on someone's sport career or daily life, it may indicate that the athlete is experiencing a mental health problem. As mental health problems are common in elite athletes, it remains essential to identify them as early as possible in order to refer the athlete for management and/or treatment for potential mental health problems in a timely manner.

The International Olympic Committee Sport Mental Health Recognition Tool 1 (SMHRT-1) can be used by athletes, coaches, family members and all other health professionals and members of the athlete's entourage to recognise mental health problems but not to diagnose them. The SMHRT-1 presents a list of athlete experiences (thoughts, feelings, behaviours, physical changes) that could be indicative of mental health problems. If an athlete reports and/or displays these experiences and they are significant and/or persistent, you have an important role in encouraging the athlete to get the support needed as early as possible.

The SMHRT-1 in its current form can be freely copied for distribution to individuals, teams, groups and organizations. Any revision or translation requires specific approval by the IOC Mental Health Working Group, and it should not be re-branded or sold for commercial gain.

Common experiences of mental health problems

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Thoughts:

Excessive self-criticism, low self-esteem, pessimism, hopelessness, problems with focus, concentration and memory.

Feelings:

Irritability, anger, mood swings, sadness, extreme disappointment that you just can't shake, depression, loneliness, emptiness, lack of passion and sense of purpose, lack of motivation.

Actions:

Aggression, withdrawal from others / not going outside as much, being much more quiet than usual, unexpected drop in performance (e.g., in sport, school, work).

Physical changes:

Low energy, poor sleep, changes in appetite, changes in weight and appearance, physical signs of harm by self or others including cuts and bruises, evidence of alcohol or other substance misuse (e.g., tremors, blood-shot eyes, change in pupil size, characteristic smell of marijuana or alcohol, slowed or poor coordination, injuries or arrests after using).

Red flags

If an athlete (or you) experience or observe any of the following, seek immediate help.

Comments related to harming self or others.

Talking about feeling hopeless or so overwhelmed that you cannot function.

Dramatic weight changes.

Other highly uncharacteristic behaviours, emotions and appearances.

An episode of overwhelming sudden onset of fear with marked physical symptoms such as sweating or shortness of breath that has never before been experienced or is different from prior episodes (could be a panic attack or another medical problem).

What to do when mental health problems occur?

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If you are observing mental health problems in an athlete, consider the following (depending on your role):

- Allow the athlete to tell their story.
- Be non-judgemental and understanding (e.g., with simple statements such as "I'm so sorry you are feeling this way; I'm glad you told me about it.").
- Know which resources are available and encourage help-seeking.
- Remember to look after yourself when assisting an athlete with mental health challenges.
- Consider what adjustments in your coaching approach might be needed to help an athlete's mental health while maintaining or creating a positive environment (e.g., recognising the need for positive feedback, encouragement and the right balance of challenge versus support).
- Consult with the medical team and discuss the possible adjustment of an athlete's training, in consultation with your technical staff.

If you personally are experiencing mental health problems:

Remember that seeking help is a sign of strength. Pay attention to what you are experiencing. Prioritise your mental health and life balance. Talk to someone you trust such as your coach, your parents, a friend and/or a teammate. Be open to advice and support. Consider seeking professional help.