Children & Mental Health

Understand the impact. Notice the pattern. Know what to do.

WHAT IS IT?

Children can experience worry, sadness, anger and other difficult feelings as they grow. Mental health can affect how they feel, think, behave and cope.

Concern grows when changes last, get worse or affect daily life, relationships, school or sport. A coach should notice and support—not diagnose.

5 WAYS MENTAL HEALTH CAN AFFECT A CHILD

01 Feelings & behaviour

A child may seem more worried, sad, irritable, angry, fearful or overwhelmed than usual.

02 Thinking & focus

Concentration, decisions, memory and following instructions may become harder.

03 Body & routine

Sleep, appetite, energy or physical complaints such as headaches and stomach aches may change.

04 Connection & enjoyment

They may withdraw, lose interest, avoid people or stop enjoying activities they usually like.

05 Confidence & safety

Low confidence, worthlessness, self-harm or thoughts of suicide need prompt support.

A coach notices and supports—a coach does not diagnose.

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Notice. Respond. Connect.

SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN SPORT

What a volunteer coach may notice—and what to do next.

- More worried, sad, tearful, irritable or angry than usual.
- Withdrawing from teammates or losing interest and enjoyment in sport.
- Missing sessions, avoiding activities or becoming hard to contact.
- Poor concentration, unusual mistakes or difficulty following instructions.
- Sleep, appetite, energy, headaches or stomach aches changing.
- Talking about worthlessness, self-harm, suicide or not wanting to be here.

Look for change, patterns and context. These signs can have many explanations.

01 NOTICE

Spot Changes in behaviour, mood , attendance or performance.

No obvious sign? Check in anyway.

02 TALK

Say what you have noticed, or simply remind them you care. "Ive noticed.." "I'm checking in.."

Follow safeguarding procedures.

03 LISTEN

Give them time. Ask open questions. Do not interrupt, judge or rush to try and fix everything.

Take notice and care to listen.

04 CARE

Stay calm, kind and non-judgmental. Repeat back what they tell you. Respect privacy within the safeguarding limits e.g. Coach, Parent and Safeguarding Officer.

Ask what would help.

05 CONNECT

If anything worries you follow the safeguarding procedures and connect them with the right lead, trusted person, GP or support service.

Immediate danger call 999.

URGENT / MEDICAL

Take any mention of self-harm or suicide seriously. If a child has seriously harmed themselves, is in immediate danger or at immediate risk of suicide, call 999 or go to A&E. Stay with them and follow instructions. If urgent but not an emergency, contact a GP or GP out-of-hours service. Follow safeguarding procedures.

WHERE TO GET HELP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

GP / LOCAL SERVICE

TEXT "TEAMMATE" TO 85258
LIFELINE 0808 808 8000
CHILDLINE 0800 1111

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5 WAYS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE

01 Be a trusted adult who listens

Check in regularly, give the child time to speak and take their feelings seriously. Ask open questions such as: “How have things been for you?” Do not judge, interrogate or immediately try to fix everything. The PHA identifies coaches and youth leaders as important trusted adults

02 Create safety, belonging and inclusion

Make the club a place where children feel accepted, respected and safe to speak up or make mistakes. Use encouragement, predictable expectations and supportive relationships. Evidence identifies psychological safety, inclusion and trusted-adult support as central to children’s wellbeing.

03 Teach practical emotional skills

Help children name emotions, notice what affects them and practise healthy coping strategies such as problem-solving, calming breathing, asking for help and positive self-talk. Teach these skills through games and normal club activities—not only when something goes wrong.

04 Protect healthy routines and positive activity

Encourage enjoyable physical activity, sleep, balanced meals, friendships and time away from pressure. Keep children involved where possible, adjusting activities without unnecessarily excluding or singling them out. PHA recommends connection, activity and healthy daily routines to support wellbeing.

05 Notice changes and connect help early

Act when changes in mood, behaviour, sleep, attendance, friendships or enjoyment continue or interfere with daily life. Involve the child in decisions and connect them with a parent/carer, school, GP or appropriate service. Follow safeguarding procedures—never promise to keep information secret if someone may be unsafe.

TAKE 5 FOR WELLBEING

Five evidence based everyday actions to help maintain and improve wellbeing.

CONNECT
Spend time with people who help you feel supported.

BE ACTIVE
Walk, run, cycle, play sports and games.

TAKE NOTICE
Pause & take notice of the world around you. Chill & relax.

KEEP LEARNING
Try something new or build a skill your value.

GIVE
Offer time, kindness or encouragement to help others.

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