Anxiety & Mental Health

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

WHAT IS IT?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, fear or worry. Most people feel anxious sometimes, and it can help us prepare for a challenge.

It becomes a concern when it feels overwhelming, is hard to control or affects daily life, relationships or sport. A coach should never diagnose.

5 WAYS ANXIETY CAN AFFECT SOMEONE

01 Worry & fear

Someone may feel tense, nervous, unable to relax or afraid that something bad will happen.

02 Thinking & focus

Worry, racing thoughts and overthinking can make concentration, decisions and instructions harder.

03 Body & breathing

A faster heartbeat, sweating, shaking, dizziness, nausea or breathlessness can feel frightening.

04 Avoidance & confidence

Someone may avoid places, people, training or competition, repeatedly seek reassurance or need to escape.

05 Sleep & recovery

Poor sleep, tiredness, headaches, tension and stomach problems can affect energy, mood and recovery.

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.

- Repeated worry, fear, tension or feeling constantly on edge.
- Avoiding sessions, competition, people or leaving unexpectedly.
- Freezing, overthinking mistakes or repeatedly seeking reassurance.
- A racing heart, sweating, shaking, nausea, dizziness or breathlessness.
- Poor concentration, irritability, poor sleep or unusual tiredness.
- Sudden intense fear, panic or feeling an urgent need to escape.

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

Never assume chest pain, collapse or severe breathing difficulty is 'just anxiety'. Call 999 or go to A&E for immediate danger, serious self-harm, suicide risk, chest pain, collapse or severe breathing difficulty. Stay with them and follow instructions. If urgent but not an emergency, contact a GP or GP out-of-hours service.

WHERE TO GET HELP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

GP / LOCAL SERVICE

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

HELP!

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5 WAYS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE

01 Listen and take their feelings seriously

Ask: “What is worrying you?” or “What would help right now?” Listen without judging, interrupting or immediately trying to fix everything.

Reassure them that they are not facing it alone.

02 Help them feel calmer and safer

Move somewhere quieter, speak slowly and use one short question at a time. Encourage gentle, steady breathing or grounding—such as noticing what they can see, hear and feel.

Do not simply say “calm down.”

03 Offer choices and practical support

Offer a pause, water, a trusted person or a lower-pressure role. Explain changes and expectations clearly.

Choice can help the person regain a sense of control; forcing them to talk or continue may increase distress.

04 Support small, gradual steps

Avoidance can maintain anxiety, but forcing someone into a feared situation can also make things worse. Help them agree manageable steps towards taking part, recognising each success.

NHS guidance recommends gradually building up time in anxiety-provoking situations

05 Connect them with appropriate help and follow up

Encourage them to speak with a parent, carer, GP, school wellbeing lead or mental-health professional when anxiety is persistent, worsening or disrupting everyday life.

CBT and applied relaxation are evidence-based treatments recommended by research. Continue checking in after making the connection.

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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