



SPEED PROJECT

Sport & Prevention of Emerging Eating Disorders

How to Communicate with the Athlete

Dr. Giulia Guardavilla



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The coach may communicate with the athlete by expressing their concern regarding the behaviors observed.

If the athlete is a minor, the coach may speak with them about weight and eating only after having spoken with the parents and obtained their consent.

If the athlete is an adult but still quite young, the coach should assess whether it may be better to involve the family or not.



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Before approaching the athlete, it is important to:

- be informed about how the sports club handles this type of issue;
- choose the best setting and moment;
- think about what the goal of the conversation is;
- ask oneself whether one is ready to address the topic;
- consider whether it would be helpful for another staff member to join the coach in the conversation.



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How to communicate with the athlete:

- convey the message that you are concerned and that you care about the athlete's wellbeing ("I care about you, I am worried about you");
- describe the behaviors that have been observed without expressing judgment;
- make them feel safe and that they can talk;
- ask how they are feeling and give space to express thoughts and emotions;
- encourage them to seek help if they recognize there is a problem.



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It is important to keep in mind that:

- the topic of weight is very sensitive;
- the athlete may feel embarrassed or anxious;
- the athlete may not be aware of having a problem;
- the athlete may also react aggressively and refuse to talk;
- it is essential to convey empathy and understanding;
- it is essential to listen and not judge.



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What to avoid:

- do not take on the role of a therapist - describe observed behaviors without providing a diagnosis or label;
- do not claim to have the answers to the problems that emerge, but encourage seeking professional help;
- do not focus on food or weight, but on how the athlete feels;
- not provoke guilt by avoiding phrases like "You make me worry".



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If a minor athlete spontaneously speaks about an eating problem with the coach:

- be available to listen and do not shut them down;
- give space to the athlete's emotions and thoughts;
- emphasize the importance of seeking professional help;
- make clear that if they have not yet done so, it is necessary to inform the parents about the problem, and that you can support them in doing this;
- should they refuse to communicate with the parents: emphasize that the coach is responsible for the wellbeing of their athletes and that it is necessary to inform the parents of the situation.



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