



SPEED PROJECT

Sport & Prevention of Emerging Eating Disorders

Eating Disorders and Team Dynamics

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It may happen that an athlete who is a member of a team has eating problems.

In this case, if the coach notices warning signs, it is important to act as soon as possible by communicating with the athlete or with the parents depending on the situation.

It may also happen that other team members report their concerns about a teammate's problem to the coach; in this case, do not discuss the problem but reassure them that the coach will take care of it.



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The fact that an athlete has eating problems can have an impact on the entire team, especially if it is composed of adolescents.

There may be a contagion effect within the team because:

- teams often eat together;
- teams change together, which means athletes observe and comment on each other's weight and body shape;
- team members talk about their eating habits, comparing them and linking them to weight, body shape, and performance.



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What can happen if no action is taken:

- disordered eating behaviors may spread throughout the team;
- the coach's silence may be interpreted as approval, sending the message that such behavior is acceptable and healthy;
- misconceptions about weight, eating, body shape, and their relationship to athletic performance may spread.
- rumors may spread that distract athletes and create tension within the team.



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It would be important to create an action plan to be implemented if eating-related issues are noticed within the team:

- acknowledge and give space to athletes' concerns about the presence of issues;
- consult the sports club psychologist to decide how to proceed;
- approach the involved athlete and/or their family privately;
- do not openly comment on at-risk behaviors in front of the team, whether the involved athlete is present or not.



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When eating-related issues are noticed within a team, one option is to address the topic of nutrition in general with the whole team.

In this case, a meeting can be planned with a nutritionist or nutrition expert, where the following topics can emerge:

- healthy eating habits;
- the importance of adequate caloric intake relative to the sport practiced;
- information and accurate guidance regarding foods, weight, and nutrition.



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