



Mental Health Matters

Chatting mental health with our kids doesn't have to be overwhelming.

Whether you are a parent or coach, supporting athletes with their mental health is key to improving their performance, enjoyment of the sport, and longevity in golf. It's also important for their life and development on and off the course. A great place to start is by building the skills to recognize signs and symptoms of good or declining mental health using the Mental Health Continuum.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

The mental health continuum is designed with the full-colour spectrum – the full spectrum of experiences people might have. We've used the terms healthy, hurt, and injured to align with sport more broadly- these terms are easy to picture when it comes to physical health.

Below each heading is a list of signs and symptoms that you can use to check in with how you or your athlete is doing today. You may look at this list and feel like a few (or many) of the symptoms within one category fit. You may also feel like a couple categories fit. If you or your child is experiencing several symptoms in the injured or hurt category for a prolonged period, you might consider referring them to a trusted professional for additional support.

A few questions to consider:

- What are the athlete's common tendencies?
- What can you do when you notice an athlete is injured to help move them towards healthy?
- What are some of the first signs of my athlete being hurt or injured?

HEALTHY	INJURED	HURT
Normal fluctuations in mood	Depressive mood	Occasional to frequent anxiety, irritability, sadness or hopelessness
Calm, confident & competent	Excessive anger, easily enraged	Increased worry, procrastination
Normal sleep patterns	Unable to fall or stay asleep	Trouble sleeping
Concentration & focus is good	Absent	Distracted & lose focus
Physically well, full of energy/eating well	Exhausted/physical illness/ No appetite/over-eating	Low energy/fatigue/ Eating more or less than normal
Consistent performance	Unable to perform	Decreased performance presentation
Normal social activity	Isolating from others, avoiding	Decreased or withdrawn from social activity
Limited to no substance/alcohol use	Substance/alcohol use	Addictions and avoidance in full swing

“I spoke to a psychiatrist back home in South Africa because I was feeling like absolute balls... It was bleeding into my personal life. I was measuring myself as a human being based on my world ranking. That went through my mind. I spoke to a lot of people about how to separate Erik the Human Being from Erik the Golfer. Obviously, that's a lot easier when things are going well, but even if I'm winning, I don't want to be known just as a guy who wins golf tournaments. It was important for me to learn how to separate the two regardless of result. It was a bit of a journey.”

- Erik van Rooyen, PGA TOUR Golfer



THE MENTAL HEALTH TOOLBOX

When it comes to mental health tools, everyone should have their own toolbox of strategies and practices that they can use to keep themselves well and manage tough situations. Everyone is unique, so some tools may work better for some people or some situations. Just like an athlete's approach to improving on a skill, you need to practice these tools in order to remember to use them when you need them most. Here are some options to get you started!

Mental Health Tool #1: Be KIND to yourself

When pursuing high-performance sport, sometimes – most times, if we are being honest – it hurts. Badly. By encouraging a culture of positive self-talk, athletes can begin to be more deliberate about the language they use towards themselves. Athletes can build awareness of their self-talk by asking the following:

- In which situations am I hardest on myself?
- What is one kind thing I could say to myself during a difficult moment?
- What would I say to a friend that is experiencing this?

Mental Health Tool #2: Breathing to recharge, refocus and regain control

Take two minutes for a mindful breathing break. Athletes can do this once daily or incorporate it into their golf routine. Use nose breathing unless noted.

1. **Slow Breathing:** Inhale every 10 seconds while focusing on calming thoughts.
2. **Breathing Low:** Put your hands right above your hip bones. Try moving your breath low so that your hands move.
3. **Longer Exhalations:** Exhale for twice as long as you inhale.
4. **Relax Shoulders:** Let your shoulders drop as you exhale.
5. **Physiological Sigh:** Inhale. Hold. Inhale again. Sigh out the breath (using mouth).

Mental Health Tool #3: Emotional Agility

It takes a mindful, open approach to recognize the feelings and experiences that we have going on within us. Rather than suppressing, ignoring, or beating ourselves up for having an inner experience, we can:

1. Foster your courage and compassion so you can face your emotions — especially difficult ones.
2. Take a step back and look at the bigger picture – put things in perspective.
3. Set aside the desire to “be right” – instead, be open and curious.

4. Identify your why and know your values.
5. Be deliberate about aligning day-to-day choices with your why and what matters most.
6. Take on challenges to push yourself to the edge of your ability – even when uncomfortable.
7. Be open to change – plans, intentions, and life direction.
8. Be extra kind to yourself after you've been managing or taking on hard things.

FOLLOW THROUGH

It can be helpful to know some options of where athletes, parents, and coaches can access mental health support, whether it is to keep them well while striving or to support in more severe situations.

Canadian Mental Health Association

General mental health support ideas and local resource options.

cmha.ca

Canadian Sport Psychology Association

Practitioners with training and background in sport and performance. If mental health is also a concern make sure your provider is trained in psychology or counselling.

cspa-acps.com

Talksuicide.ca

Call 1.833.456.4566 anytime or text 45645 between 4pm and midnight ET.

Kids Help Phone

24/7 support for youth. Call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT 686868

**If you are concerned about your safety or the safety of someone you care about, please call 911 or attend your local hospital or crisis centre immediately.*