

Coaches Guide for Supporting Athletes Who Are Struggling with Eating Disorders

Coaches play a vital role in the lives of athletes. As a coach, your words and actions can have lasting meaning. These guidelines can help you feel better equipped to communicate with your athletes, especially those who may be prone to disordered eating and unbalanced exercise habits.

What Coaches Should Avoid:

- Giving athletes weight or body composition parameters
- Holding public weigh-ins or sharing athletes' weights or body compositions
- Discussing calories or promoting specific diets to your athletes
- Restricting what your athletes should or should not eat

Harmful Messages from Coaches:

*Communicated by athletes who have eating disorders

- "Commenting on my weight, shape, appearance."
- "The 'before' & 'after' weight loss competitions between teammates were triggering."
- "You look thin" or "you would be so much faster if you lost a few pounds."

What Coaches Should Do:

- Recognize the signs & symptoms of disordered eating & relative energy deficiency
- Collaborate with referrals to set appropriate limits around when to reduce or limit training
- Defer to a sports dietitian or physician to establish a goal weight & weight or body composition recommendations
- Have a list of resources available for your athletes & refer to an eating disorder professional if needed

Helpful Messages from Coaches:

*Communicated by athletes who have eating disorders

- "It's helpful when my coaches said, 'We are concerned about you. How are you doing mentally? Can we help at all?'"
- "The coaches that talked about the importance of rest & recovery days made it more normalized & not something that made me feel lazy."
- "I am not attached to an outcome with your sport performance or appearance; I just want you to be OK as a whole person."