



Supporting Young Athletes Through Deselection: A Parent's & Guardians Guide to Emotional Support & Mental Wellbeing

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Purpose

- The purpose of this presentation is to raise awareness among parents and guardians about the vital role you play in supporting your child through the challenges of deselection from elite youth academies (Grey-Thompson, 2017; McGlinchey et al., 2022).
- It is designed to inform parents and guardians understand how this transition affects young athletes' mental wellbeing and to offer suitable strategies for support.

What is Deselection?



Deselection in sports refers to the process by which an athlete is removed from a team or pathway, often due to coaches' decisions and Injury (Slade et al., 2024).



Deselection is an example of 'Non-Normative Transition' which refers to an unplanned and often emotionally distressing event in an athletes' journey e.g. released from academy set up.



For many children, football is an essential part of who they are, losing this can lead to anxiety issues, low self esteem and even depression (McGlinchey et al., 2022).

Academy Pathway in Scotland: Stark Reality.

- Youth football academies is a structured programme often run by professional clubs that identify and develop young players, helping them improve their skills and progress towards every child's dream of becoming a professional footballer.
- However, in Scotland the academy environment is very competitive. Children as young as eight (Under 9s) are exposed to intense physical and psychological demands from coaches and sometimes parents (Lundqvist et al., 2024; Mills et al., 2014).
- Of the 10,000-12,000 children enrolled at any time, fewer than 0.5% will go onto a professional contract (Kelner, 2021; Gorman and Blackwood, 2024).
- In result, most children will face deselection at some point during their academy pathway, often without robust and structured emotional preparation and support.



The Emotional Impact of Deselection.

Deselection can trigger a range of emotional responses in youth athletes;

- Loss of confidence or self worth.
- Identity loss.
- Anxiety.
- Withdrawal from sport and other social activities.
- In the worst cases, suicide. (Wilkinson, 2021)

These outcomes are not certainties but are increasingly likely if support systems are not robust and structured (Grey-Thompson, 2017). Your role as a parent/guardian is crucial not only helping prevent these challenges from manifesting but also supporting your child every step of the way.



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Transition

- The transitional period following deselection is a critical welfare moment. Without structured support, young athletes may experience mental health issues (McGlinchey et al., 2022).
- The Duty of Care in Sport Review (Grey-Thompson, 2017) highlighted the need for sport organisations to prioritise athlete welfare and wellbeing through transitions through key recommendations.



Key Recommendations from the Duty of Care Review (Grey-Thompson, 2017)

- Implementation of transparent deselection criteria for both athletes and parents.
- Independent oversight during selection/deselection process.
- Proactive welfare support to ensure that young athletes and their families are signposted to available services and treated with humility and honesty.

These recommendations aim to reduce emotional harm and promote ethical practice in youth sport (Gennings et al., 2025).



The Role of Parents & Guardians.

- Parents and guardians are emotional buffers for your children. Your response to deselection can shape how your child processes rejection and builds resilience.
- Samuels (2023) and Wilkinson (2021) found that emotionally supportive parents positively help children regulate distress and maintain self esteem and confidence.
- Strategies such as ‘Console first, talk later’ (Neely et al., 2017) allow children to feel heard and valued before solutions are offered.



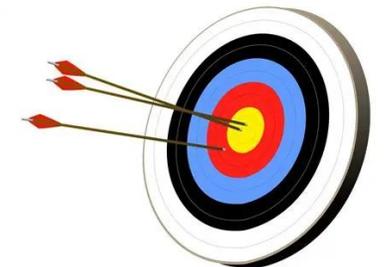
Emotional Support Toolkit.

You can support your child through deselection using the following evidence-based approaches:-

- **‘Console First, Talk Later’**- Prioritise emotional support/listening before providing solutions (Neely et al., 2017).
- **Reframe the experience**- Help your child see deselection as a learning experience rather than failure (Harwood and Knight, 2016).
- **Set New Goals**- Encourage your child to explore a range of interests beyond football such as golf, athletics, or hillwalking, to foster personal growth and broaden social experiences (Fadare et al., 2024). Re-engaging with football in a different setting, such as joining a local team with school friends, can help mitigate feelings of isolation and restore enjoyment through familiar peer connections (Samuels, 2023).



GOAL SETTING



Lived Experiences- Voices That Matter

To address the lack of lived experiences in current literature, the resource includes video clips/media sources from former academy players and parents. These stories offer emotional relateness and explores themes including:-

- Navigating the transition
- Finding new purpose after deselection
- Mental Health Issues
- The importance of a strong family support system (Bailey, 2021)



Examples of Lived Experiences

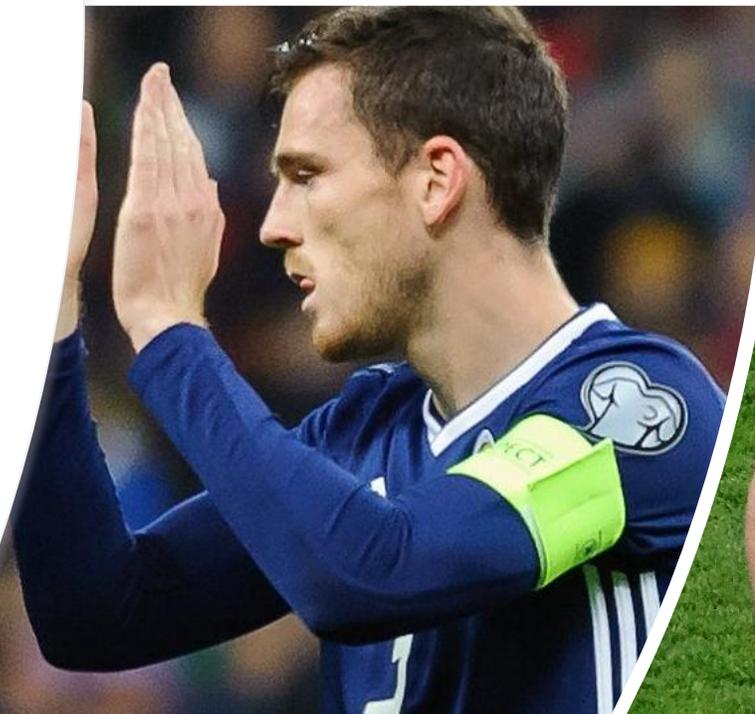
- Alfie's story- [Football academies: A failed dream 'sends you to a dark place' - BBC News](#)
- Lily's story- <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c134ezlyyl5o>
- Deese Kasinga's story- [Deese Kasinga: What happens when the Premier League academy dream ends? - BBC Sport](#)
- Jeremy Winsten's story- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-59214647>



Comeback Success Stories.

Even some current household names in the footballing world faced deselection and setbacks during their youth careers. It is important that your child knows that deselection from an academy is not the end of the road (Williams and MacNamara, 2020).

- Harry Kane- Released by Arsenal at age 9 and went on to become one of the worlds best strikers and currently the England captain.
- Jamie Vardy- Released by Sheffield Wednesday at age 16, later rising through the English footballing pyramid and reaching the summit with a fairytale winning of the top division with Leicester city.
- Andy Robertson- Released by Celtic at youth level went onto become a premier league and champions league winner with Liverpool FC and captain of the Scotland national team.
- Lauren James- after being released from Chelsea and Arsenal at youth level, she later went on to become a two-time women's euros winner with England and returning to Chelsea becoming one of their prized stars.



Support Services & Useful Links

You should be aware of other mental health and wellbeing services available to you and your child:-

- Mind- [We're Mind, the mental health charity | Mind](#)
- Sporting Chance- [Sporting Chance](#)
- SAMH- [SAMH](#)
- Go Again- [Go Again – Mental Health Sport Charity](#)

Takeaway Messages & Recommendations for Future Practice.

- Deselection is not the end of your child's sporting journey — it is a transition (Williams and MacNamara, 2020).
- With the right support systems in place, young athletes can recover, grow, and thrive and be reselected (Dugdale et al., 2021).
- You play a vital role in this process. Academies must embed welfare practices and uphold the recommendations of the Duty of Care in Sport Review (Grey-Thompson, 2017).
- By working together, we can safeguard future talent and foster a healthier, more nurturing sporting environment.



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