

**Mental Health for Youth  
Swimmers – Recognition and  
Strategies: A Guide for Coaches**



**Erin Allan**

## What is mental health?

Mental health is a state of wellness where an individual can self-recognise their abilities and manage everyday stressors whilst being a productive contributor to society.

Self-recognition can be difficult for children and adults with a mental health disorder, leaving many disorders undiagnosed and un-treated.

## **Mental Health issues for children and adolescents.**

Research shows within these groups 'mental health issues are prevalent. Some of the most commonly diagnosed mental health issues in this age group are:

- **Anxiety**
- **Stress**
- **Depression**
- **Eating Disorders**

## What are the issues?

**Anxiety** – Anxiety is a temporary or lasting feeling of unease, worry or fear. There are mild and severe forms.

**Depression** – A lasting feeling of unhappiness, hopelessness or a lack of motivation

**Stress** – A physical or mental struggle to cope with tasks or situations.

**Eating Disorders** – An unhealthy over or under indulgent attitude to food that causes illness. Obsessing over weight and body shape.

## Facts and Figures

- 15-19 year olds have the highest level of diagnosed anxiety disorders
- 10-20% of children worldwide are thought to have a mental health problem with as little as 1.8% being properly diagnosed
- Diagnosed mental health problems in adults often start earlier in life
- Over 50% of females ages 12-45 with a form of eating disorder were unable to recognise their problem and had not seemed any help.

## Facts and Figures

- 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of adults with a mental health issue had not recognised or reported anything. This shows the importance of knowing signs and symptoms and catching these things at a younger age.
- Girls as young as 6 years old reported being unhappy with their bodyweight and body image, the statistics grew from 47% at this age to 78% of females aged 17.
- A study of Olympic level swimmers showed 25% had been mentally or physically abused, even from a young age, which caused mental health issues throughout their lives.



## The relationship between sport and mental health

- Regular sports participation from ages 12-16 shows a lower prevalence of depression in adulthood
- Sports participation is positively correlated with mental and physical wellbeing and a reduction in stress.

## Why should you as coaches be informed?

- Your relationship with your athletes can affect the athletes self esteem and performance
- Swimming requires a high level of investment and you could be spending from 12-40 hours per week with your athletes.
- Parents and coaches have both identified sport and an appropriate setting for mental health promotion.
- Not all children will feel comfortable confiding in a parent, and could see you as an adult they trust and confide in.



## Behaviours to look out for in your athletes

- Looking sad or withdrawn
- Panic Attacks – sudden overwhelming fear, racing heart or fast breathing
- Use or abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Any serious attempt, or plan of harm or suicide
- Aggressive or violent behaviour
- Not eating or constantly throwing up
- Struggle with concentration
- Severe mood swings

## **Should you always take action when spotting these behaviours?**

These behaviours are not always a cause for concern, for example, mood swings and aggressive behaviour can also be related to other factors such as puberty and menstruation.

Behaviours can often be temporary, but there are strategies you can use to help you identify when further action may be required.

## What can you do?

Start the conversation

- Ask your athletes about their days, show interest in their lives outside of training.
- You will likely get to know your athletes well, use your knowledge of them to help you identify any signs of a higher issue.

## Beyond the Conversation

One strategy you can use with athletes is yoga. Yoga comes in many forms including the physical practice as well as meditation and breathing practice.

These techniques will not only help the capabilities of your athletes in terms of lung capacity and strength, but the relaxation and meditation is a proven method of mental health awareness and treatment. Yoga focusses greatly on positivity, which can be a fantastic preventative measure.

## Where can I find more information?

Ithrive/Edspace - [www.edspace.org.uk](http://www.edspace.org.uk)

Health in Mind – [www.health-in-mind.org.uk](http://www.health-in-mind.org.uk)

Beat – [www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)

**Please use the following link to the NHS website for information on many different mental health issues**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

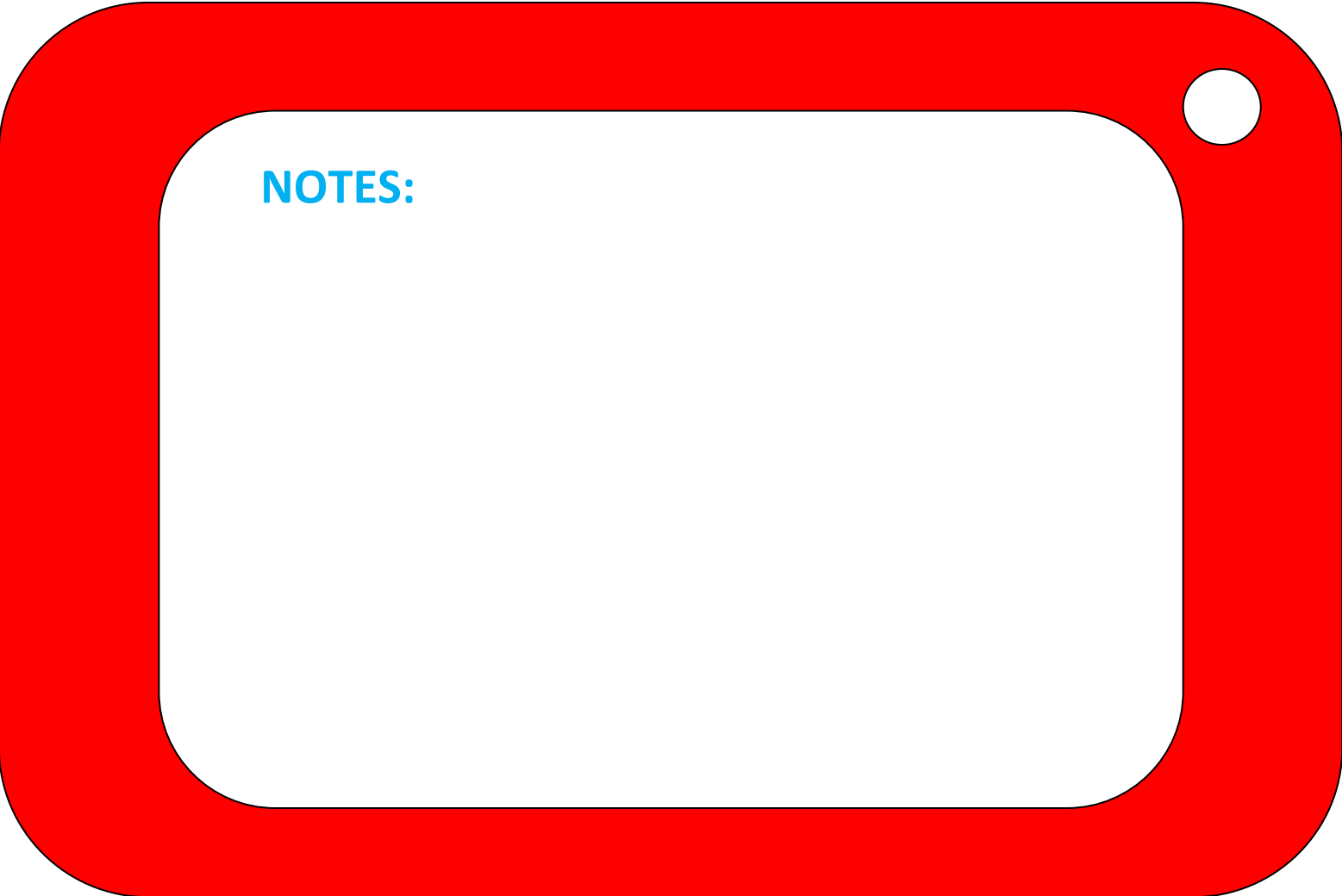
**In an EMERGENCY situation  
contact:**

NHS24 – Call 111

BREATHING SPACE – Call 0800 835 387

SAMARITANS – Call 08457 90 90 90

EDINBURGH CRISIS CENTRE – Call 0808 801 0414



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