



COVID-19: Healthy Adjustment and Transition

Psycho-Social Considerations of Phased Return

INTENTION

The following information was compiled collaboratively between the EIS Psychology, Performance Lifestyle and Mental Health Teams to support sports in their planning following Covid-19 restrictions. This document is intended to help sports consider the psycho-social factors pertinent to staff and athletes, and provide context to their decision making.

1. CONTENT

The following model is a useful framework for considering psychological responses to crisis and is currently being used within the NHS. The step towards a phased return to sport represents a time where the priority is to provide athletes and staff with support that is restorative. Everyone will respond to a crisis differently, experiencing these phases for different periods, intensities and often in non-linear ways.

However, we have referenced this model as it provides a framework to help us to understand our own and others' responses to these significant transitions. Whilst it is helpful to understand these stages, what is most important is to understand how we have been individually affected and to match support accordingly.

PHASES	ISSUES	NEEDS	PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT ROLE
ANTICIPATION PHASE (PRE-IMPACT)	Anticipatory anxiety	ORGANISING ACKNOWLEDGING EXPRESSING	PROMOTIVE
INITIAL IMPACT PHASE (IMPACT)	Heroic stage	ADAPTING STRESS MANAGEMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID ACCOMMODATING LOSSES AND SETBACKS	PREVENTIVE
	"Honeymoon" stage		SUSTAINING
CORE PHASE (RESPONSE)	Disillusionment stage		
END PHASE (POST RESPONSE)	Restorative stage	ACCESSING AFFIRMING RECONNECTING	RESTORATIVE
LONG TERM (RETURN TO 'NORMAL')	Aftermath		

Leach (1994); Tehrani (2004, 2010); Math et al. (2006); BPS (2018); Highfield (2020)

COVID-19: Healthy Adjustment and Transition

Psycho-Social Considerations of Phased Return

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A commitment to work towards a purposeful, restorative reintegration that recognises a thriving self and ultimately a performing person.
- Demonstration of an empathic, kind and compassionate approach to return, with consideration of an individual's personal circumstances (we have all been in the same 'storm' but in different 'boats').
- Safety created in decision making so that athletes and staff will be able to choose to 'opt-in' to return to training without prejudice (clarity from sports on this position is essential)
- Utilisation of the significant skills and resources which already exist from a multitude of people across the system, who can provide emotional support and peer debriefing.
- Main areas of focus in this period will be **ACCESSING, AFFIRMING** and **RECONNECTING**.

3. ADDRESSING NEEDS - THE HOW

A. Addressing the need for **ACCESSING**

- Athletes and staff able to "opt in" to return to training without prejudice. Ensuring athletes and staff have an understanding of their needs (incl. physical, health and safety and psycho-social) will be critical to making informed choices.
- There is a need for flexibility and regular review of the decision to "opt in". Changing environmental or personal circumstances may mean altering the decision. Opting in is therefore an ongoing process.
- Explicit expectations – explore what individuals are expecting, be clear about what may be expected of them and what the new environment will look like (i.e. who will be there, how things will work etc.).

B. Addressing the need for **AFFIRMING**

- Continue to prioritise self-care for all.
- Accept alternative experiences to your own and be willing to hear a perspective that may not align to yours.
- Be clear on what behaviour will be expected in the environment.
- Individual responses and readiness to return will be fluid, changeable and nonlinear.

C. Addressing the need for **RECONNECTING**

- Establish clear feedback loops and continue conversations about the decision to 'opt in'.
- Debrief regularly in small groups to explore how people are adjusting (a specific debriefing document to support these conversations is being developed and will be found on the [Covid-19 Training, Monitoring and Return SharePoint page](#)).
- Encourage regular peer debriefs.
- Recognise the need to reconnect personal relationships outside of sport (e.g. family and friends), and that time and space to do this will be needed.

COVID-19: Healthy Adjustment and Transition

Psycho-Social Considerations of Phased Return

4. KEY CONSIDERATIONS: BASED ON INFORMATION EMERGING FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES ACROSS THE SYSTEM

KEY CONSIDERATION	WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE
Awareness of a perceived need to be up and running (relating to the Games and International Competitions).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With 14 months to go we have an opportunity to use the immediate period sensibly to allow time for healthy adjustment.
Individual differences (in circumstances, preferences and prior experiences) will exist and will impact an individual's approach to return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular check-ins on the decision to 'opt in' are important. • Audit of personal circumstances and/or screening should be considered. • Consider upskilling staff in Psychological First Aid (see Further Support section).
Integrating a psycho-social model is challenging for some individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role model a person-first approach. • Know which existing members of staff are available, skilled and emotionally aware to help have these conversations.
Different staff (and potentially athletes) will return at different stages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep messages clear and consistent especially from leadership. • Consider specific opportunities to surface and manage any potential tension.
Growth will likely have occurred during lockdown, with increased experience of choice and autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in with 'lessons from lockdown' (preferred ways of working, new perspectives, etc.). • How these can be translated positively back into 'new normal'? • Identify opportunities for continuation of personal development and #More2Me activity.
Psychological-specific considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for anxiety related to return (e.g. injury, physicality in comparison to team-mates, infection risk, financial, training environment, impact on family members); are sources of support known, endorsed and promoted? • Potential reduced motivation with possibility of a long period before competition. • Trust in others to adhere to guidance to minimise risk to themselves and others. • Alignment of values and morality – awareness and acceptance of being "out of step" with general society. • Potential for unhelpful/unhealthy behaviours to have developed during lockdown i.e. loss of structure/routine, poor choices, etc.
Psycho-social-specific considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk for household on return – shielding high risk individuals. • Managing differing opinions about what is safe/healthy/responsible. • Care responsibilities. • Childcare concerns. • Allowing time and space for reconnection with friends and family.