

# WHEN TRAUMA IMPACTS THE ATHLETE

## A Coach's Guide to Recognize & Respond

The information below is not exhaustive. For more information and a better understanding of this complex topic, please visit [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org).

### BE TRAUMA AWARE

Any event in which a gymnast has been physically or emotionally harmed, seriously injured, or dies can be traumatic to other gymnasts even if they don't know each other. Witnessing, reading about, or watching these critical incidents in the news or on social media may cause gymnasts to recognize their own susceptibility to injury or death while participating in the sport they love.

### RECOGNIZE BEHAVIOR CHANGES

- Heightened fear or anxiety
- Regression or loss of skill
- Patterns of avoidance
- Emotional changes
- Appears distracted or distant
- Frequent stomach aches/head aches

**VALIDATE** their experience, feelings, and **be supportive**.

Is this refusal/misbehavior OR are they overwhelmed/fearful?

It is not the coaches' role to counsel their athletes, but rather recognize the behavior and encourage the caregivers to find the appropriate resources.

### RESPOND WITH EMPATHY

It is paramount to provide support and empathy towards the athlete and always respond to each situation with patience, sincerity and composure when dealing with emotional health.

Explore behavior changes in a safe, **NON-JUDGMENTAL** way.

### ACCEPT. UNDERSTAND. VALIDATE.

"I noticed that you are hesitant to \_\_\_\_\_. Can you help me understand what you are thinking or feeling about \_\_\_\_\_?"

"I understand why you would feel \_\_\_\_\_."

"It can be scary to think about \_\_\_\_\_."

"What do you need from me to feel safe and supported?"

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USA GYMNASTICS.

“ When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos. ”

L. R. Knost