

U.S. Ski & Snowboard
Mental Health Leave Return to Sport Protocol

U.S. Ski & Snowboard is committed to protecting the privacy of our athletes and the confidentiality and security of all personal health information with which it is entrusted. All transactions involving the use of personally identifiable information must be confidential and secure, and only occur between authorized persons for care, administration, education, athletic planning or other authorized purposes.

Introduction

This document serves to outline the process by which U.S. Ski & Snowboard athletes may return to sport and/or team activities and competition following a leave of absence for mental health.

- When a leave of absence for mental health & wellness is necessitated, the primary point of contact throughout the process should be the athlete's primary sports medicine provider.
 - The primary sports medicine provider should refer the athlete to [USOPC Mental Health Services](#) to facilitate support.
 - The athlete has three options: a full leave of absence, a partial leave of absence, or a brief leave of absence.
 - The options will be based upon evaluation and recommendations from their mental health provider(s) and/or sport psychologist.
 - If an athlete necessitates a higher level of care (e.g., intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization, residential, or inpatient) for mental health they should immediately inform their primary sports medicine provider and, if already established, their mental health provider and/or sport psychologist.
 - In collaboration with the athlete, and when deemed in the best interest of the athlete, the primary sports medicine provider will inform involved parties such as the Sports Medicine Director, Team Physician, High Performance Director/Sport Director, and/or members of the athlete's coaching staff.
 - If an athlete necessitates a higher level of care for mental health, the athlete is encouraged to sign Releases of Information for their primary sports medicine provider, Sports Medicine Director, mental health providers (including, but not limited to, USOPC Mental Health Services), sport psychologist, and, if appropriate, High Performance Director/Sport Director.

- Regardless of the length of the leave of absence, the primary sports medicine provider should inform the athlete about return to sport protocol including the need to meet individually with a member of the USOPC Mental Health Services team and/or sport

psychologist, Sports Medicine Director, Team Physician, and, in some cases, the Registered Dietitian to discuss their return to sport and/or return to team activities.

- When an athlete necessitates mental health support, the primary sports medicine provider will convene an Integrated Support Team (IST) to establish an integrated support system and to aid continuity of care and communication through an Integrated Support Plan (ISP). This team may consist of a combination of any of the following; primary sports medicine provider, Sports Medicine Director, High Performance Director/Sport Director, Team Physician, USOPC Mental Health Team Member and/or USOPC Sport Psychologist, Registered Dietician, and/or members of the athlete’s coaching team, parent/guardian(s)
 - The USOPC Mental Health Services provider and/or Sport Psychologist is responsible for collecting releases of information for the following:
 - Between USOPC Mental Health Services and U.S. Ski & Snowboard Medical Department, including Registered Dietitian, as appropriate.
 - Between USOPC Mental Health Services and coaching staff, as appropriate.
 - Between USOPC Mental Health Services and High Performance / Sports Directors as appropriate.
 - Between USOPC Mental Health Services and contracted sport psychology providers (if applicable).
 - Between USOPC Mental Health Services and any other providers/practitioners involved in the care of the athlete’s mental health (e.g., treatment programs, outpatient therapists)

Types of Leave

- Full Leave of Absence:
 - If an athlete necessitates a full leave of absence for mental health, they will retain full team status and support for the duration of the involved season.
 - Prior to beginning a full leave of absence, the athlete will need to obtain a completed Health Evaluation Form (see Appendix C) from their mental health provider and/or sport psychologist. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), symptoms, impact of symptoms on sport participation and functioning, recommended treatment/mental health support, and contact information of mental health provider.
 - The athlete’s primary sports medicine provider and/or Sports Medicine Director can aid the athlete in notifying the athlete’s Team Physician, High Performance

Director/Sport Director, and/or coaches of the full leave of absence. Details of the leave of absence should be shared only if in the best interest of the athlete.

- When the athlete is ready to return to sport, they will need to notify their primary sports medicine provider. As part of their petition to return, the athlete will need to have a Petition to Return Health Evaluation Form (see Appendix D) completed by their mental health provider. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), summary of mental health treatment, whether recommended mental health treatment has been completed, and recommendations for continued mental health treatment/support.
- During the season in which the athlete returns to the team, they are required to complete at least one follow up meeting with the Sports Medicine Director.
- Should the leave of absence extend beyond the end of the season, the athlete will be required to complete the Team Nomination process.
- Injury Protection for FIS points is available to athletes who miss competition due to injury or illness (e.g., physical and/or mental health). Please see the information on our [website](#).

■ Partial Leave of Absence:

- Athletes have the option to request a partial leave of absence from the team which would modify their participation but would allow continued participation in selected team activities.
- The athlete's primary sports medicine provider and/or Sports Medicine Director can aid the athlete in notifying the athlete's Team Physician, High Performance Director/Sport Director, and/or coaches of the partial leave of absence. Details of the leave of absence should be shared only if in the best interest of the athlete.
- Athletes requesting a partial leave of absence will need to provide a completed Health Evaluation Form (see Appendix C) from their mental health provider and/or sport psychologist. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), symptoms, impact of symptoms on sport participation and functioning, recommended treatment/mental health support to actively manage mental health while partially training, and contact information of mental health provider.
- When the athlete is ready to fully return to sport, they will need to notify their primary sports medicine provider. As part of their petition to fully return, the athlete will need to have a Petition to Return Health Evaluation Form (see Appendix D) completed by their mental health provider. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), summary of mental health treatment, whether recommended mental health treatment has been completed, and recommendations for continued mental health treatment/support.

■ Brief Leave of Absence:

- If an athlete necessitates a brief leave of absence from training and/or competition for mental health reasons, the athlete can contact their primary sports medicine provider.
- The athlete's primary sports medicine provider and/or Sports Medicine Director can aid the athlete in notifying the athlete's Team Physician, High Performance Director/Sport Director, and/or coaches of the leave of absence. Details of the leave of absence should be shared only if in the best interest of the athlete.
- The athlete will need to obtain a completed Health Response Form (see Appendix C) from their mental health provider and/or sport psychologist. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), symptoms, impact of symptoms on sport participation and functioning, recommended treatment/mental health support, and contact information of mental health provider.
- When the athlete is ready to fully return to sport, they will need to notify their primary sports medicine provider. As part of their petition to fully return, the athlete will need to have a Petition to Return Health Evaluation Form (see Appendix D) completed by their mental health provider. This form will be submitted to their Sports Medicine Director and will document diagnosis (if applicable), summary of mental health treatment, whether recommended mental health treatment has been completed, and recommendations for continued mental health treatment/support.

Return to Sport Process

Note: Coaches should not engage in a conversation about return to sport and/or return to team activities with the athlete until the return to sport process has been initiated.

- Upon clearance to return to sport, the athlete is required to have at least one individual session with either the primary point of contact from USOPC Mental Health Services (Dr. Jessica Bartley or the assigned USOPC Senior Sport Psychologist (Dr. Alex Cohen), or with a licensed mental health clinician as assigned by the USOPC Mental Health Director or USOPC Senior Sport Psychologist. In some cases, more than one individual session may be necessary - particularly in cases where the athlete has never had contact with USOPC Mental Health Services and/or Sport Psychology in the past.
- If the athlete has an established licensed mental health provider outside of the USOPC, they will be required to consult with a USOPC Mental Health Services or Sport Psychology provider regarding return to sport. The USOPC Mental Health Services or Sport Psychology provider should obtain a Release of Information and consult with the

established licensed mental health provider regarding the athlete's treatment and recommended treatment moving forward.

- In the meeting with the USOPC Mental Health Service or Sport Psychology provider, the following should be discussed and/or obtained:
 - Information about the athlete's mental health treatment
 - Current risk assessment
 - Collaborative discussion with the athlete about their readiness to return to sport
 - Determine the athlete's needs for ongoing mental health services and discuss what was recommended by athlete's prior treatment providers
 - See Appendix B for further information regarding USOPC Mental Health Services.
 - Plan for continued treatment and begin development of an Integrated Support Plan (ISP) as described in Appendix C.
- Upon returning to sport, the athlete will also be required to meet with the Sports Medicine Director and/or Team Physician. The purpose of this meeting will be to determine whether there might be some physiological cause of the distress and whether it has resolved at the desired point of return. The Sports Medicine Director /Team Physician will also collect information regarding medications the athlete is prescribed and/or taking. If the Sports Medicine Director /Team Physician is out of the office and unavailable to meet in a timely manner, the athlete should meet with a designated alternative provider.
 - If the athlete has an established mental health provider, it is recommended that they complete a release of information allowing the Sports Medicine Director / Team Physician to discuss the case with the provider.
- If the athlete's presenting concerns include eating disorder/disordered eating behaviors, the athlete will also be required to meet individually with a Registered Dietitian.
- The USOPC Mental Health Services or Sport Psychology provider (and in some cases the Registered Dietitian) consults with and provides verbal recommendations for a decision to the Sports Medicine Director /Team Physician.
- Based on this consultation, the Sports Medicine Director /Team Physician approves or denies clearance to return to sport.
 - This decision is verbally given to the athlete, primary sports medicine provider, coaching staff, Sport Psychologist, and in some cases the Registered Dietitian.
 - The decision will be given directly to the athlete by the Sports Medicine Director/Team Physician (primary sports medicine provider might be present).
- Recommendations for continued mental health treatment will be verbally provided to the athlete by the primary point of contact from USOPC Mental Health Services (Dr. Jessica Bartley) or the assigned USOPC Senior Sport Psychologist (Dr. Alex Cohen). The Sports Medicine Director /Team Physician will be made aware of these recommendations.

- Return to sport clearance does not guarantee return to practices/team activities/game participation (see below for return to team activities/competition process).
- The athlete will be required to attend meetings as established by their IST during the season they return to their sport. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the athlete is adhering to expectations regarding continued mental health treatment and support as well as to check in with athlete regarding their perceived functioning. It is recommended that the athlete's primary sports medicine provider maintain communication with the athlete regarding their mental health and adherence to treatment. Should the athlete report difficulties or fail to adhere to treatment recommendations it will be important that the primary sports medicine provider contact the Sports Medicine Director and the primary point of contact from USOPC Mental Health Services (Dr. Jessica Bartley) or the assigned USOPC Senior Sport Psychologist (Dr. Alex Cohen).

Return to Team Activities/Competition Process

- Once the athlete is cleared to return to sport, they should have a meeting with their IST to determine a plan for return to team activities/competition.
- Prior to this meeting, the IST, in collaboration with the athlete, will share relevant background information, treatment plans, and recommendations to head coach and other members of the athlete's support team.
- Coaches may decide to titrate the athlete's return to the team activities/competition, allow them to return fully, or may suggest a longer break from team activities/competition.
- Coaches may also decide to convene a team meeting to help both the team and athlete navigate reintegration.
- As the athlete returns to team activities competition it is recommended that an Integrated Support Plan (ISP) is developed. This document should be created collaboratively and should be based in recommendations from the athlete's mental health provider/sport psychologist. The athlete should sign off on this ISP and it should be documented in the appropriate Electronic Medical Record (EMR).
 - The purpose of an ISP is to provide a comprehensive support system around an athlete returning to team activities/competition. The components of the plan will include:
 1. Specific information / education regarding diagnosis.
 2. Identification of Integrated Support Team members, and contact information.
 3. Identification of specific "green" "yellow" and "red" light targets to guide decision making around support levels and interventions.
 4. Recommendations for support from teammates, coaches, and other involved parties should the athlete begin to express concerning behaviors and/or thoughts.

**This document has been adapted from a Return to Play Protocol written by Dr. Taryn Brandt for the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Counseling and Psychological Services and Athletic Departments.*

Appendix A: Important Contact Information (Current as of 6/21)

Sports Medicine Director-

Jaron Santelli

Sports Medicine Director

U.S. Ski & Snowboard

jaron.santelli@usskiandsnowboard.org

(mobile) 206-658-7566

USOPC Mental Health Services-

Jessica Bartley, Psy.D., CMPC

Director, Mental Health Services United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee

jessica.bartley@usopc.org

(Office) +1 719-866-2125

USOPC Sports Performance

Alexander Cohen, Ph.D., CMPC

Sr. Sport Psychologist United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee

alexander.cohen@usopc.org

(Mobile) +1 719-216-6376

Appendix B: USOPC Mental Health Services

For a complete listing of all USOPC Mental Health resources please refer to their [website](#). Below is an outline of mental health services available to athletes.

- Individual therapy with a USOPC Mental Health Services Provider
- Individual therapy with a USOPC Mental Health Registry Provider
- Individual therapy with an external mental health provider and/or treatment center
- eHome Counseling Group

While the USOPC has mental health services available to athletes, they may rely on outside resources to provide care in certain circumstances. Some of these circumstances may include:

1. A need for a higher level of care as indicated by:
 - a. Need or desire to be seen more than once a week for therapy
 - b. History of multiple hospitalizations
 - c. Chronic suicidality and/or self-injury behaviors; history of repeated suicide attempts.
 - d. Evidence or risk of progressive deterioration in mental or emotional functioning that requires intensive intervention.
 - e. Manifestations of psychotic symptoms without willingness or ability to remain on medication for stabilization of symptoms.
 - f. Inability or unwillingness to provide the necessary information to thoroughly assess symptoms.
2. Athlete needs specialized services not available through USOPC Mental Health Services. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Presence of significant drug and/or alcohol problems, for example, substance dependence, primary substance abuse, and/or past failed treatments.
 - b. Presence of significant or long-standing eating disorder with no period of remission, no previous treatment, or risk of significant medical complications.
 - c. Request for psychological evaluation
 - d. Services to fulfill an athlete's court-mandated assessment or treatment requirements.
 - e. Request for advocacy in a legal proceeding that may include assessment or testimony as part of the process (a letter for probation or parole, testimony in domestic violence, substance abuse, or child custody cases, etc.).
3. Limitations of licensure

- a. Athlete resides in a state where USOPC Mental Health Services providers are not licensed

At the discretion of the USOPC Mental Health Services team, some athletes who may benefit from higher level of care or specialized services may utilize USOPC Mental Health Services for a short period of time in order to be stabilized and return to basic functioning before referral for further treatment.

Appendix C: Health Evaluation Form

Health Evaluation Form
For athletes requesting a leave of absence

Athlete Name: _____

DOB: _____ Phone #: _____

Sport: _____

The remainder of this form to be completed by mental health provider

Provider/Clinician Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Credentials of provider (including License Number and Name of Practice):

Athlete's Diagnosis or Condition (include ICD Code for diagnosis):

Date of diagnosis: _____ Date of most recent appointment: _____

Total # of appointments: _____

Please provide information regarding the athlete's symptoms, including comments on duration, intensity, and frequency.

Is the athlete's condition significantly impacting the athlete's ability to function athletically?

Yes

No

If Yes, please describe:

Is the athlete's condition significantly impacting the athlete's ability to function safely or autonomously without supervision in the sport environment?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please describe:

In your opinion, does the athlete's condition justify a:

- Full Leave of Absence
- Partial Leave of Absence
- Brief Leave of Absence

What treatment have you recommended that the athlete receive to be ready to fully return to sport?

Signature of provider: _____

Printed Name and Credentials: _____

Name of Company/Practice: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Appendix D: Petition to Return Medical Evaluation Form

Health Evaluation Form

For athletes petitioning to return to sport after a leave of absence

Athlete Name: _____

DOB: _____ Phone #: _____

Sport: _____

The remainder of this form to be completed by mental health provider

Provider/Clinician Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Credentials of provider (including License Number and Name of Practice):

Athlete's Diagnosis or Condition (include ICD Code for diagnosis):

Date of diagnosis: _____ Date of most recent appointment: _____

Total # of appointments: _____

Please provide information regarding the athlete's symptoms, including comments on duration, intensity, and frequency.

Has the athlete followed all treatment recommendations? Please describe:

In your opinion, is the athlete in a place to return to sport:

- Yes, fully return to sport, team activities, and competition
- Yes, partially return to sport with a modified training schedule/plan
- No, athlete is not doing well enough to return to sport at this time

Please explain:

What treatment have you recommended that the athlete continue to ensure their continued well-being and stability?

Signature of provider: _____

Printed Name and Credentials: _____

Name of Company/Practice: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____