

Ethics, Values and the Professional Self: Ethical Challenges in Sports Psychology

Confidentiality in Team Settings

Athletes may disclose sensitive information (e.g. mental health struggles, substance use).. Psychologists must protect confidentiality even when coaches request access to this data. Coaches or management may request access to this information for performance reasons. Psychologists must balance confidentiality with team dynamics and legal obligations.

Dual Relationships

Working closely with athletes, coaches, or staff can lead to blurred boundaries. A psychologist might be asked to provide both therapy and performance coaching to the same individual. Maintaining professional boundaries is essential to avoid conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent and Autonomy

Athletes should voluntarily participate in psychological services. Consent must be informed and free from coercion. Athletes may feel pressured to participate in psychological assessments or interventions. Ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent is key, especially with minors or elite athletes under contract.

Safeguarding and Duty of Care

Psychologists must act on concerns about abuse or unsafe practices, even if it affects team relationships. Psychologists may become aware of abuse, bullying, or unsafe practices within a team or organisation. They must act in accordance with safeguarding laws and ethical codes, even if it risks team relationships.

Performance Enhancement vs. Wellbeing

Ethical practice involves prioritising athlete wellbeing over performance goals when necessary. There may be pressure to focus solely on mental strategies that improve performance. Psychologists must advocate for holistic wellbeing, even when it conflicts with competitive goals.

Cultural and Identity Sensitivity

Psychologists must respect diverse backgrounds and avoid bias in their practice. Working with diverse athletes requires awareness of cultural, gender, and identity-related factors. Ethical practice includes respecting individual values and avoiding bias or stereotyping.

Social Media and Public Exposure

Psychologists must manage their online presence and protect athlete privacy in public forums. Athletes may share or be discussed publicly, raising issues around privacy and professional conduct. Psychologists must navigate their own online presence and avoid breaching confidentiality.