

Providing best practice well-being support to athletes during Classification:

Classification is a Transition

This fact sheet is intended for staff who provide support to athletes around Para-sport classification. Classification is a transition in the athlete journey - while it involves procedural steps, it also has practical, emotional, and identity-related impacts that can require support. Viewing classification as a transition helps staff provide holistic, proactive guidance to athletes.

Classification experiences

Classification is more than an administrative process; it is a pivotal period in an athlete's career that can influence confidence, self-perception (identity), retention and future opportunities. When treated solely as a procedural step, athletes may not receive the support needed to navigate the emotional and practical challenges of this stage.

Athletes may experience a range of emotions during classification, which are normal parts of this transition:

- **Before classification:** anxious, nervous, or worried.
- **During classification:** overwhelmed, embarrassed, anxious, or disempowered due to the deficit-focused approach (focusing on what athletes cannot do rather than their strengths).
- **After classification:** upset, shocked, confused, or disappointed if outcomes do not progress as hoped and re-thinking their ongoing involvement in sport.

Acknowledging these feelings as part of the transition helps athletes process their experiences and maintain balance.

Strategies to assist positive well-being outcomes

For all athletes:

- Know and provide information to athletes about what to expect during classification;
- Encourage athletes to always take a support person to classification with them, irrespective of how certain the classification outcome may seem or the number of times an athlete has previously been classified;
- Encourage the athlete to ask questions during classification, give their best effort and



comply with the requests of classifiers. It is ok to ask for a break or clarification during classification if needed;

- Educate athletes and the support person on their rights to Protest and Appeal decisions;
- Provide an opportunity to debrief after the classification. Be empathic, open and listen to experiences;
- Ensure athletes are aware of their Medical Review opportunities should their condition change over time;
- Consider exploring other ways for athletes to stay engaged in your sport or other sport options if classification outcomes are non-favourable or if the athlete is found Not Eligible.
- Encourage athletes to reach out if they need help to work through their experiences. Talking to someone makes a difference; and
- Offer access to professional supports.

For athletes undergoing international classification:

- Explore and discuss the possible outcomes that might result from classification with all parties before the classification takes place;

Ensure athletes have accessed provisional or national classification prior to progressing to international level to understand any risks. Seek support from PA for further Classification Risk Screening support;

For staff supporting athletes:

- Mental health training – including Mental Health in Sport and Trauma Informed Care
- Provide feedback loops for the athlete and staff on their experience and allow participants to know how their feedback was used
- Be clear on the next steps for the athletes (additional support requirements identified)
- Documented operational and empathetic protocols underpin the handling of athlete classification
- Have wellbeing professionals and support embedded into the classification process

Remember: Classification is a Transition

- Classification affects more than eligibility - it can impact confidence, identity, and career pathways.
- Approach it as a developmental stage, not just a procedural step.
- Provide proactive support before, during, and after classification.
- Consider emotional, social, and practical implications to help athletes navigate this transition successfully.



Professional supports

The following professional supports may assist:

- Personal psychologist/counsellor/GP or other mental health professional
- Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement Manager and/or Member Protection Officers within the NSO/NSOD or SSSAS Para-Unit

- **AIS Mental Health Referral Network** (for AIS categorised athletes only).

<https://www.ais.gov.au/mhrn>

Phone +61 2 6214 1130 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm AET)

Email: mentalhealth@sportaus.gov.au

- **Beyond Blue**

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours a day)

Online chat, forums, and email available

- **Lifeline**

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hours a day)

Online chat, text, and email also available