

WHEN TO OFFER A PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH REFERRAL

The same qualities that allow athletes to thrive—drive, focus, determination—can propel mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Warning signs may be difficult to see, yet mental health challenges exist in a wide swath of today’s youth population.

Being educated about the possible warning signs of a mental health concern is paramount for dance educators. While you may not be a trained mental health expert, you can be aware of the signs and offer referrals when needed.

Note: this is not medical advice. It is meant for guidance and information only.

Signs of a mental health concern may include:

- Tardiness or frequent absences.
- Declining performance.
- Physical complaints (“injuries” that never heal or recur; stomachaches or headaches).
- Worry or anxiety that interferes with daily activities.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Spending more time alone than usual.
- Sadness or guilt for not fulfilling high expectations.
- Drastic changes in behavior or personality.

If you or your staff notice these concerns in a student, first document what is observed. Approach the student’s parents to share your observations and be prepared to suggest they speak with a doctor, therapist, or counselor. Thank them for listening. Useful phrases you might use include:

- “Do you have time to talk? I’d like to share with you something we’ve recently observed about your dancer.”
- “I care deeply about your dancer’s health and well-being.”
- “Would you like me to provide any resources for mental health support?”

Resources for mental health support can be found here:

- [NAMI resources for supporting children and teens](#)
- [SAMHSA’s National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention and Crisis Lifeline: Text 988](#)
- [Goodtherapy.org](#) (search for licensed mental health professionals)

Sources:

[National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)

[Stein Counseling and Consulting Services](#)

Katie Gatlin, licensed professional counselor, [LifeStance Health](#)