



Why is this important for student-athletes?

Student-athletes encounter mental health challenges just like any other student, and at times may be even more susceptible due to stressors or triggering events associated with sport's activity participation.

Some IMPORTANT statistics to remember:

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages of 10 – 24.
- Almost 40% of children and teenagers experience an anxiety disorder.
- 35% of elite athletes deal with a mental health crisis.
- 20% of adults experience some form of mental illness.
- The teenage brain is not fully matured. It takes until around age 22 for females and 26 for males for this to occur.

– The last part of the brain to mature is the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for planning, impulse control, decision making, managing social interactions, working memory and attention. This means that the teenager is incapable of interpreting their reality with a broader perspective. They live in a more moment-to-moment perspective and often don't or can't realize the long-term effects.

The IMPACT of ATHLETIC participation on students can be because of the physical and/or psychological demands of the sport; which can result in an increase in stressors or triggering events for those students; possibly leading to mental health concerns.

- *Physical* demands could include injuries (such as a concussion) or over-training
- *Psychological* demands could include expectations/performance pressure (being #1, not being able to play due to injury, or being cut from the team); end of career (sometimes due to injury); athlete burn-out; attention from media and students; mistakes in play/dealing with success; less personal and family time/living away; academic stressors; conflict with coaches; physical/sexual abuse; dieting/weight loss; drug/alcohol abuse; and gambling

UNFORTUNATELY, research has shown a significant under-reporting of mental health concerns by student-athletes. These individuals are experts at masking pain and distress, making recognition of mental health challenges also difficult for the school/athletic staff. Student-athletes must attend practices/school and often appear to be well-functioning, even when struggling on the inside. There is also a culture of masculinity in which toughness is valued above seeking help. This leads to mental health concerns at times being unseen or invisible to the outside world. Some are also not aware of the impact mental health has on their own athletic performance; they don't like to or find it difficult to express emotion; they don't believe there is enough time to address this; or they have had past negative experiences. As a coach or supportive member in the student's life, you have a unique perspective into their world and well-being. If something seems off, it might be!