



For athletic staff: What to notice & what to do?

Some IMPORTANT things to remember:

- No one is above anxiety, depression, or suicide. Athletes often attempt to mask their mental health struggles due to stigma, but they still exist.
- Each person may experience symptoms differently. This means that symptoms look different from person to person.
- You don't have to solve your students' problems. Being a compassionate listener is more important than giving advice.
- Your job is not to provide treatment. Know when and how to refer a student.
- Be direct when communicating with your students. Asking about suicide will not push someone into doing something self-destructive.

How do you know when there is a PROBLEM? (*also see PDF document on Mental Health Risk*)

- Decline in grades, school performance, athletic performance and practice
- School avoidance/avoiding training/withdrawn
- Negative comments about performance ability/confidence in self
- Mood and/or behavior changes
- Increased peer difficulties/conflict with teammates/coaches
- Increased need for accommodations
- Changes with eating/sleeping (watch for disordered eating...)
- Changes in motivation to perform
- Self-harming/very high-risk behaviors (not characteristic)
- Drug or alcohol use
- Reports of suicide
- Lethal triad: Intoxication, access to firearms, suicidal ideation

Examples of easy CONVERSATION STARTERS when you notice a concern:

- ✚ “How are things going for you?”
- ✚ “Tell me what is going on.”

- ✚ “Your behavior [insert incident(s)] has me concerned for you. Can you tell me what is going on, or is there something I need to know to understand why this incident/behavior(s) happened?”
- ✚ “Tell me more [about the incident/behavior].”
- ✚ “How do you feel about this [incident or facts presented]?”
- ✚ “Tell me how those cuts [or other wounds] got there.”
- ✚ “Perhaps you would like to talk to someone about this issue?”
- ✚ “I want to help you, but this type of issue is beyond my scope as [coach, athletic trainer, administrator, nurse, sports medicine doctor, etc.] I know how to refer you to someone who can help.”

Examples of DIRECT QUESTIONS include:

- ✚ “When you say everyone would be better off without you, are you thinking about suicide?”
- ✚ “Do you ever think about hurting yourself?”
- ✚ “Do you have a plan for how you would kill yourself?”

Examples of REFLECTION & PARAPHRASING include:

- ✚ “So, you already felt isolated, and it sounds like today’s incident added to what you have already been feeling?”
- ✚ “It sounds like things have been really tough for you lately, no wonder you have felt so stressed.”
- ✚ “Can you tell me more about the frustrating thoughts you have been having?”
- ✚ “I’m proud of you for reaching out for help. You don’t have to go through this alone.”

When you TALK to the student-athlete about making a REFERRAL for professional help remember:

- It may be uncomfortable and that is ok!
- Consider the setting, who is around you, and your body language
- Focus on the person NOT the athlete
- Listen empathetically
- Encourage the student-athlete to talk about what is happening
- Focus on what you are seeing...(actions/behaviors)
- Remind the student-athlete that psychological health = physical health
- Possible negative impact of what is happening on their performance
- Reminder: confidentiality with the conversation and it’s limits
- Express confidence in mental health profession and how counseling can help
- Emphasize informed consent and confidentiality in counseling

NEXT STEP:

REFERRING to PROFESSIONALS:

Notify the appropriate school personnel of your concern (follow the school’s emergency mental health action plan). Be sure the parent/guardian is notified as a part of this plan.

- “I know it may seem uncomfortable, but a mental health professional can get you the help you need.”
- “Why don’t we go visit with (School Counselor or other Mental Health Professional)? I can go with you if you want.”
- “I know you are strong, but you don’t have to go through this alone. Letting someone else help will take a lot of pressure off you.”

Organizational RESOURCES

For Emergencies, Call 911

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org>

Text or Call 988

Crisis Text Line

<https://www.crisistextline.org/>

Text START to 741741

NFHSLearn.com

<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/student-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention>

Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention online course

Work2BeWell

<https://work2bewell.org/>

Improving well-being and mental health of teens

The JED Foundation

<https://jedfoundation.org/>

NCAA Mental Health Resources

<http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mental-health>

Contact your local physician, they can help find mental health resources near you.

Call your insurance provider for assistance on locating a mental health professional.

PEOPLE RESOURCES

Remind students about the people in their lives that care about them and are also a resource for help:

- Friends/Teammates
- Parents
- School Counselors

- Coaches/Sponsors
- Teachers
- School Administrators
- School Nurse
- Athletic Trainer
- Local Pastors

APPS/INTERNET RESOURCES

- Headspace
- Virtual Hope Box
- Calm.com
- Breathe2Relax
- iBreathe
- Mood Balance
- Relax Melodies (to help with sleep)
- <http://athletesconnected.umich.edu>
 - Testimonials and strategies for athletes and their mental health
- <https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations/>
 - Free mindfulness meditations
- <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>
 - Guided Meditations