



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

SUPPORTING STUDENT ATHELETES

CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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STUDENT ATHLETES





TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

FAMILY PROBLEMS

INJURY AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH

CAREER-ENDING INJURY

COLLEGE BREAKS (HOME CAN BE GREAT OR NOT)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TRAVEL HOME DURING
WINTER/SPRING BREAKS)

TRIGGERS FOR STRESS, DEPRESSION, AND ANXIETY FOR
STUDENT ATHLETES



SIGNS OF DISTRESSED STUDENT ATHLETE

- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping and concentrating
- Somatic complaints
- Loss of interest in athletics
- Hyper-vigilance or nervousness
- Signs of substance abuse/use
- Decline in academic performance

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN CRISIS

- Watch for signs of intense emotions, flushed face, disjointed sentences, or irritational actions
- Be careful not to “mirror” the student’s behaviors
- Ask for another colleague to assist you
- Stay calm, move slowly, and be aware of safety, the more you stay calm and connected, the more likely students will mirror you
- Practice empathy and compassion and give the student space, listen, acknowledge their feeling-but do not talk at them, touch them, make fast movements, crowd them, or give any complicated directions
- Invite student to take a nonpunitive “cool down time.” This works best if given as an option and not a command.
- Suggest simple tasks to engage the cortex of the brain. Encourage them to breathe
- When the student has begun to de-escalate, change the subject by asking them what will help them feel more comfortable and how you can best work with them.”
- Contact the Counseling Center at 773.995.2383 so that we may immediately assist and assess.

COACHES, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ATHLETES

- Effective Communication – Open and honest dialogue and validation of the athletes' well-being is priority
- Decrease the potential for stress for athletes
- Trust – keep issues confidential, lack of trust deters help-seeking behavior
- Stigma – Athletes fear losing celebrity status, playing time, and/or being devalued by others and fear they will be stigmatized by coaches, teammates, and campus community; athletes perceive their coaches' attitudes toward mental health to be example
- Toughness & Self reliance – athletes have a deep desire to be self-reliant and tough; denial of pain influences risks and the non-acceptance for obstacles, this includes emotional pain

CODEBOOK

Code	Definition
Coach-Athlete Communication	When a coach has a conversation with the athlete, exchanging dialogue including “talking,” “listening,” “checking in,” “having a meeting,” and “encouragement”
Athlete Referral	Coach speaks to athletes about professional help such as “psychologist” or “professional” or “counselor
Education & Awareness of Resources	Provide physical resources including information about mental health, making athletes more aware of what resources are offered or outlets are available to them
Healthy Open Environment	A welcoming team culture or making athletes feel comfortable
Genuine Concern	When a coach shows authentic actions or signs of care of non-specific recommendations for the athlete including help and advices

HOW CAN COACHES HELP?

- Maintain that extraordinary relationship you have with your athlete.
- Help reduce the stigma of mental health by talking about it and normalizing the need to take care of our minds. Be an ambassador for mental health.
- Use mental health resources on your campus to identify athletes who could use help, and refer them to appropriate resources.
- Make mental health information available when students arrive on campus.
- Add yearly education/prevention activities to your team's season. This may consist of speakers for general as well as specific mental health topics (such as stress, study skills, depression, anxiety, eating concerns, or substance use).

POWER DYNAMIC

- Coaches have control over playing time, grants-in-aid/scholarships and this creates a power dynamic and athletes feel pressure to adhere to the coach's spoken and unspoken expectations
- The athlete perception of their coaches' attitudes and values strongly influence their own attitudes and behaviors, including help-seeking behavior
- Athletes do not want to be perceived as vulnerable, weak, resistant, or lacking commitment
- Therefore how the head coach manages a team directly includes the outcome of whether or not an athlete will seek help for mental health issues

COUNSELING CENTER CAN OFFER SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

- BREATHING STRATEGIES
- MINDFUL SELF COMPASSION
- VISUALIZATION
- MUSCLE RELAXATION
- MEDITATION
- MOBILE APPS (HAPPIFY, ISLEEP EASY, SUPERBETTER, YOUNGER)

IT IS WELL KNOWN AND RESEARCHED THAT THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION CAN HAVE IMPACTS ON PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND HEALTH.

FOR ATHLETES, WE KNOW THAT MINDFULNESS CAN HELP SLOW DOWN THE SYSTEM, DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN HELPFUL VS. UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES, AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE.

A SPECIFIC PRACTICE THAT COMBINES MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION, AND INTENTIONAL RELAXATION IS RESTORATIVE YOGA. RESTORATIVE YOGA HELPS TO REDUCE TENSION, SLOW THE MIND, AND BRING AN INTENTIONAL CALM TO THE BODY, SOMETHING THAT IS HARD TO COME BY FOR ATHLETES, ESPECIALLY STUDENT-ATHLETES WHO ARE BALANCING ACADEMIC WORKLOAD AND THE RIGORS OF PERFORMANCE.

RESTORATIVE YOGA