

# Mental Health Challenges With Student-Athletes

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Mental Health and Wellness Symposium  
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# Your Presenter



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# Objectives for Today

Raise awareness and understanding of mental health challenges with student-athletes.

Raise understanding of the importance of mental health in sports.

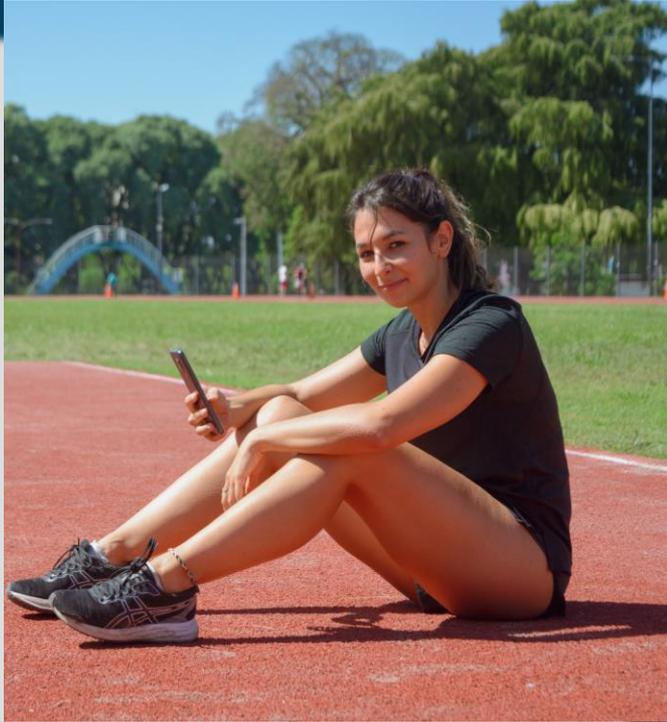
Discuss prevention efforts to help normalize and destigmatize help-seeking for mental health concerns.

Discuss prevention efforts to help equip and empower high school athletes to improve their mental well-being and adopt resilient skills and strategies.

# Importance of Mental Health in Sport



Are you familiar with these athletes?  
What do they have in common?



# Why Does Mental Health Matter for Student Athletes

# Mental Health Statistics: Athletes

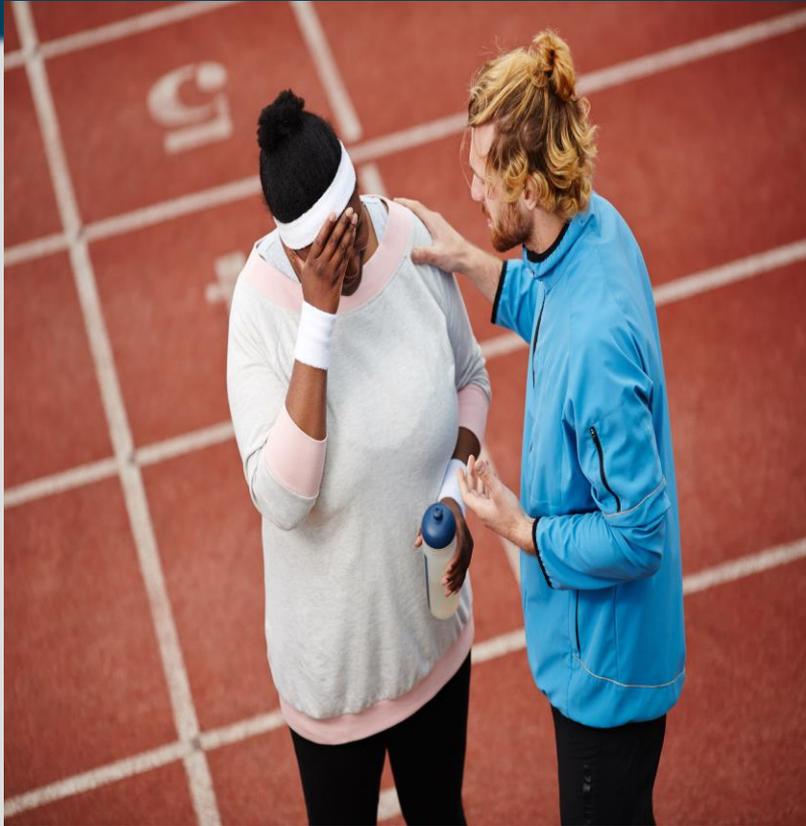
Mental health issues are on the rise.

Athletes experience mental health issues at about the same rate as non-athlete peers, but reach out for help at much lower rates.

Athletes are often missing the care that would be beneficial.



Everyone you  
meet is fighting a  
battle you know  
nothing about.



# Definition of Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices.

— CDC



# Importance of Mental Health in Sport

## Mental Health

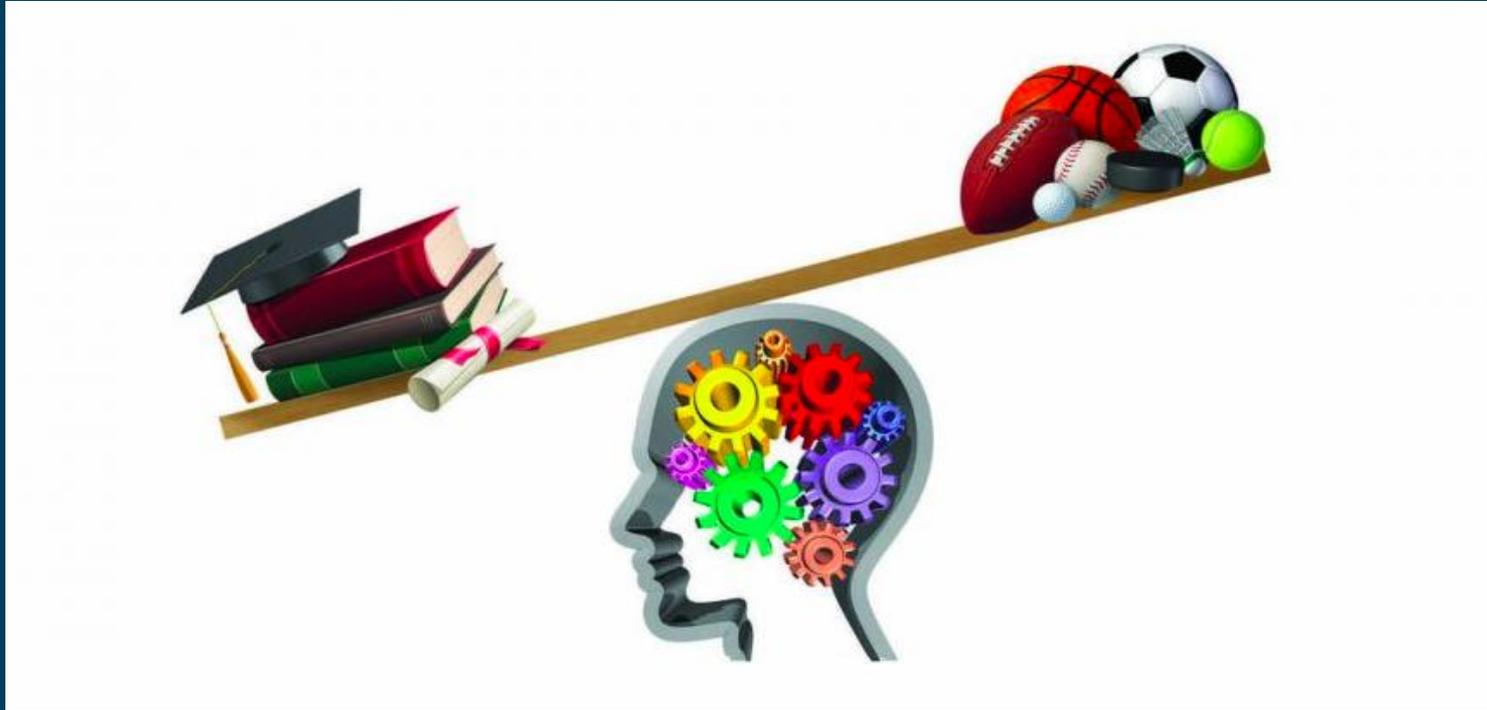
General state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and is able to make contributions to the community.

VS

## Mental Illness

A behavior or mental pattern that causes significant distress or impairment of personal functioning; and interrupts how you feel, think, communicate and behave.

# Balancing School and Sport



# Life of a Student Athlete

Academic

Social

Friends & Family

Training

Competition

# Positive Benefits of Sports Related to Mental Health



- Exercise
- Social connections
- Promote positive mood
- Increase self-esteem
- Distractions
- Better sleep patterns
- Setting and striving for goals
- Relieve stress
- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Fun!

# Mental Health Issues Impacting Student- Athletes



- Athletic identity
- Pressure to succeed
- Lack of confidence
- Fear of failure
- Performance anxiety
- Perfectionism
- Social approval
- Competitive stress
- Risk of injuries
- Harsh self-judgement
- Lack of emotional control (after making mistakes)

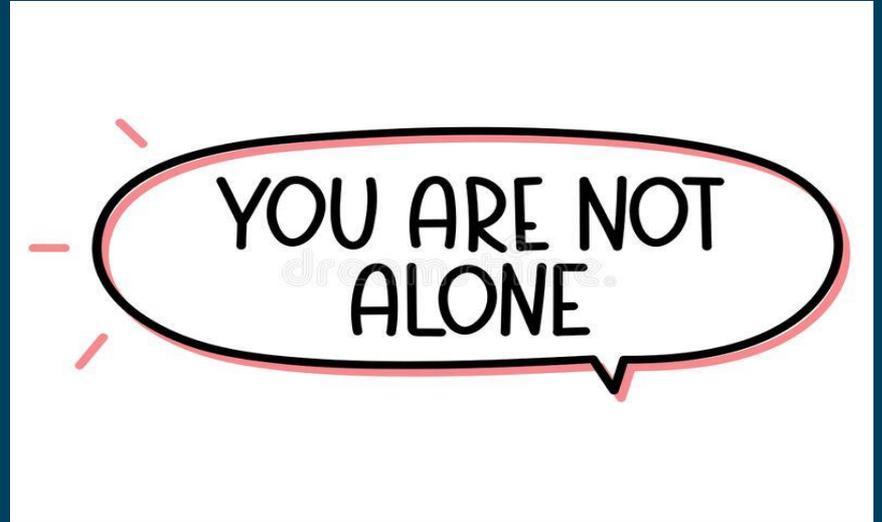
# Mental Health Issues Impacting Student-Athletes

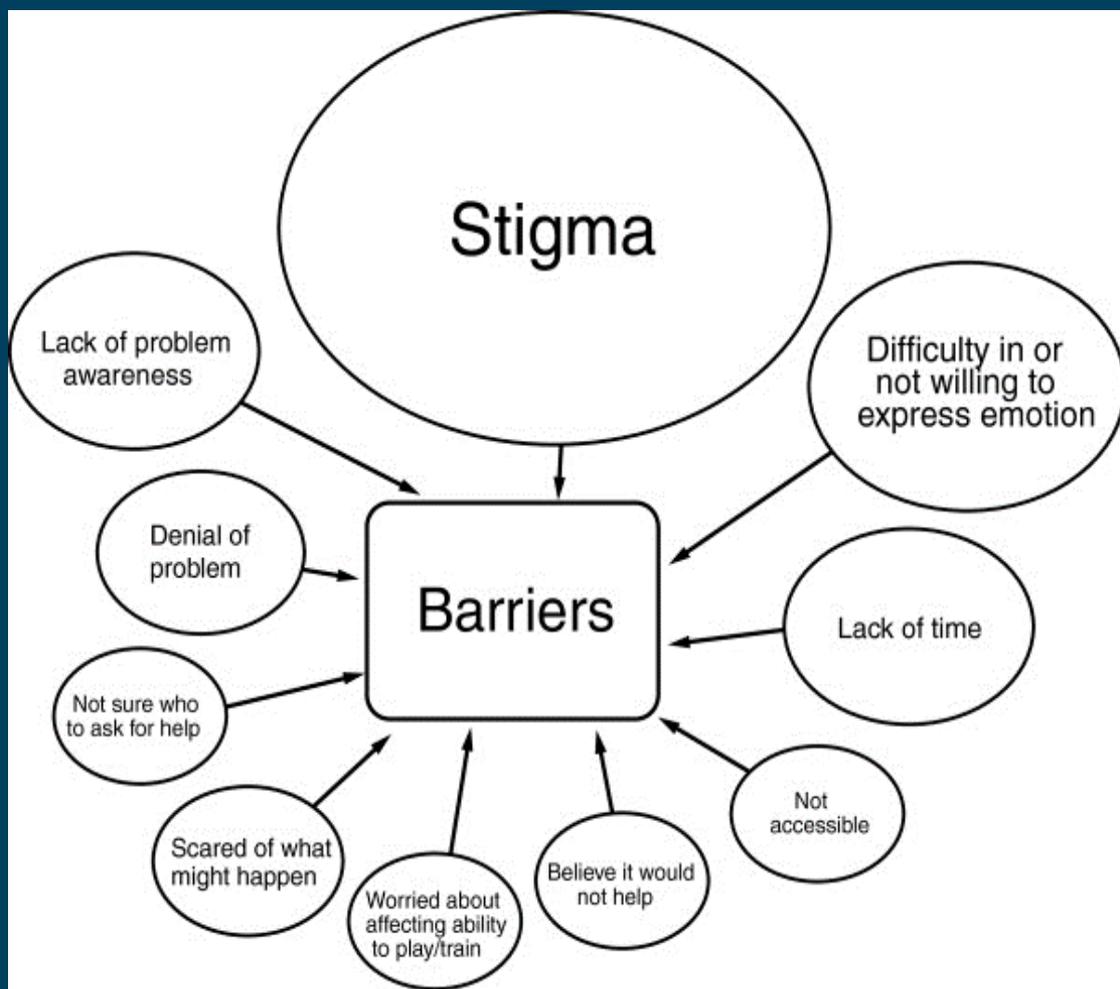


- Overwhelmed from their schedules
- Pressure-to-win coaches
- Struggles with team relationships
- Unrealistic expectations from parents
- Mild depression after an injury if they cannot play the sport they love

# The Good News

To a certain extent, these symptoms are a normal consequence many student-athletes go through that impacts their mental health.





## Barriers for Seeking Help for Mental Health Concerns

# Mental Health Stigma and Sport

In the culture of sports, there has been a lot of stigma around mental health

Athletes are taught to tough it out, act strong, persist through pain—‘No pain, no gain.’

This may work for a little distress, but not for more serious issues.  
There is a difference between pushing through discomfort and playing with a broken leg.

Athletes are more comfortable reaching out for help around physical health complaints and injuries than around mental and emotional challenges

# When Mental Health Declines

Sleep disturbance  
(too much or  
too little)

Feeling  
overwhelmed

Getting behind in  
school

Procrastination

Over-  
compensation

Cranky and  
irritable

Stress and  
pressure

Lack of  
concentration

Can't shut mind off

Out of balance

Drop the ball

# And then there's...

In season/off season

Erratic schedules

Dealing with wins and losses



Injury

Can lead to risky behaviors

Overtraining syndrome

Lack of playing time

# Which results in...



- Distraction
- Lack of concentration
- Less alert
- Slower response time
- Poor decisions
- Poor eating habits
- Sleep disturbance
- Decreased motivation
- Negative thinking
- Fatigue

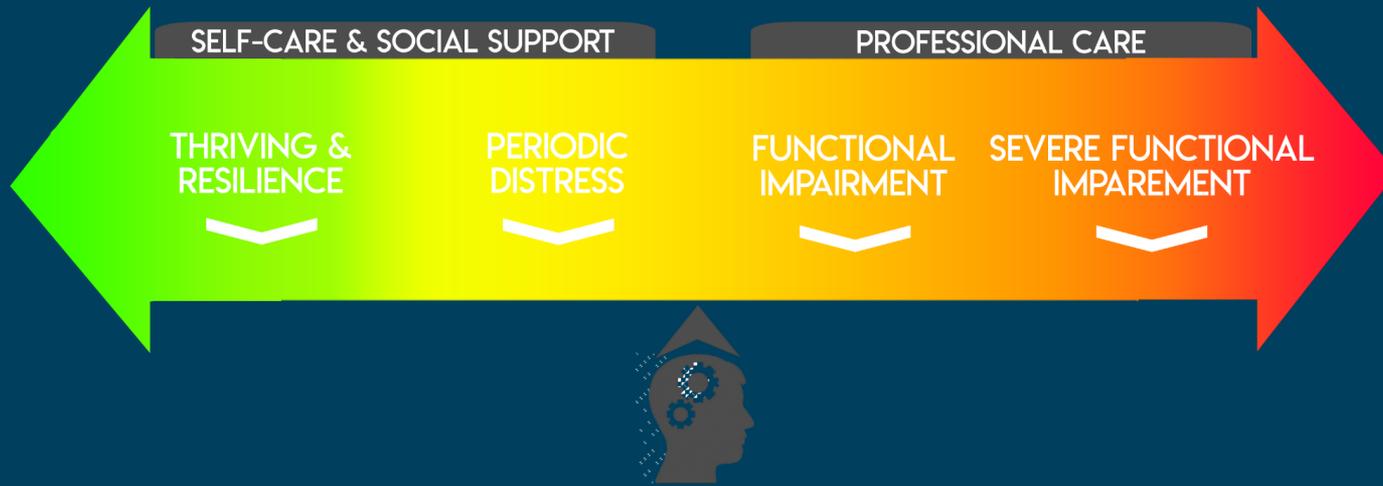
# Mental Health Problems

A student athlete who is experiencing mental problems is “injured”— just as if they had a physical or medical problem.



Mental health problems, if not treated, can affect athletic performance and limit or even preclude training and competition until managed or treated.

# Mental Health Occurs on a Continuum



# Signs of Distress

## Physical Signs (may be the most obvious)

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Poor sleep or sleeping too much
- Physical complaints not related to sports — headaches, GI complaints
- Overuse injuries, unresolved injuries, or continually being injured

## Mental Signs

- Difficult with focus/concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Pessimism or negative self-talk
- Excessive self-criticism

## Psychological Signs

- Agitation
- Excessive worry
- Anger
- Mood swings
- Lack of interest or pleasure, lack of purpose
- Helplessness or hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts

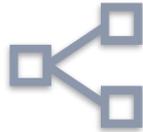
## Behavioral Signs

- Withdrawing from teammates or daily activities
- Substance use
- Out of control behaviors, getting in trouble, acting irresponsible, lying
- Significant decreases in academic performance

# Red Flags and Warning Signs



Cognitive



Emotional/Psychological



Behavioral



Physical/Medical

# Red Flags and Warning Signs

Cognitive

Trouble  
Concentrating

Confusion

Obsessive  
All-or-Nothing Thinking

Negative  
Self-Talk

Suicidal  
Thoughts

# Red Flags and Warning Signs

Emotional  
Psychological

Anxiety  
Fears  
Worries

Depressive Mood  
Sadness  
Low Self-Esteem

Agitation  
Aggression  
Anger Issues

Indecisiveness

Feeling Out of  
Control

# Red Flags and Warning Signs

Behavioral

Decrease in Athletic  
Performance

Decrease in  
Academic  
Performance

Withdrawal and  
Isolation From Peers  
and/or Family

Substance Abuse

Legal Issues

# Red Flags and Warning Signs

Physical/Medical

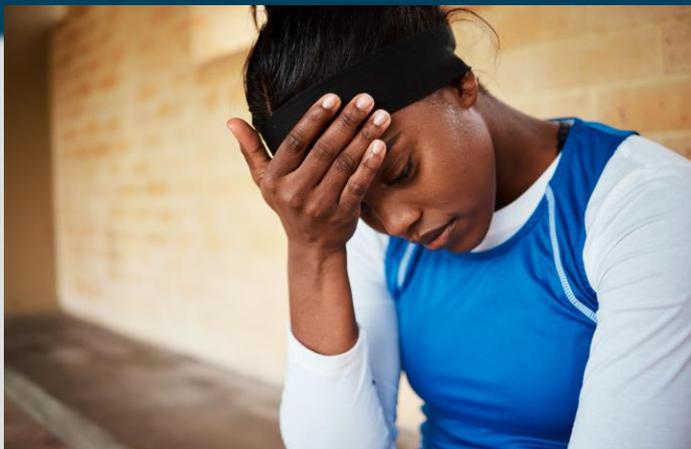
Insomnia or  
Hypersomnia

Tiredness and  
Weakness

Headaches or  
Gastrointestinal  
Complaints

Shakes and  
Trembling

Changes in Appetite  
or Weight



# You Can Manage Your Mental Health





## How to Improve Your Mental Health

Surround yourself with a good support network

Set effective (but achievable) goals

Talk to someone if needed

Reduce overall stress (talk to someone if the stress gets too much)

# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Self Care

Don't skip breakfast

Eat a well-balanced diet – variety of foods

Eat smaller, frequent meals

Maintain hydration

Avoid alcohol, caffeine, drugs, tobacco





# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Sleep Regimen

Make your bed

Establish and maintain regular bedtime  
and waking time

Rooms should be clean, cool, and quiet

Don't eat or drink caffeine before bed after 4pm



# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Sleep Regimen

Overall mental health cannot be achieved without quality sleep

Mood stabilization, appetite control, and immune system health

Mind and body repair during sleep

### **American Academy of Pediatrics:**

Age 6 to 12 years  
should sleep 9 to 12  
hours per day on  
regular basis

Age 13 to 18 years  
should sleep 8 to 10  
hours per day on  
regular basis

A consistent  
schedule  
  
Turn off screen an  
hour before bed.



# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Emotional Balance and Wellness

Practice good time management

Develop routines and habits that can offer personal balance and satisfaction

Embrace support from others

Improve your physical wellness – Good physical health habits, nutrition, and exercise

Establish and maintain regular time for self-reflection or meditation

Identify low priorities that you can reschedule



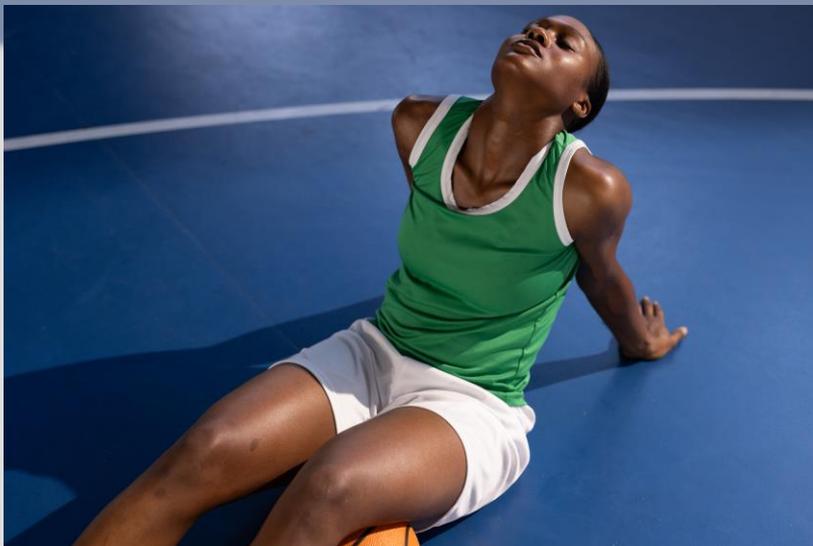
# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Self Awareness

Define and differentiate roles in your life

Take charge of self regulating your thoughts, emotions, behaviors

Embrace your personal beliefs, morals and values



# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Stress Management

Keep in mind stress isn't a bad thing

Establish and maintain regular exercise-workout regiment

Prioritize your responsibilities

Keep things in perspective

Set aside time for yourself



# How to Improve Your Mental Health

## Psychological Wellness

How you are feeling about yourself

Regulation of your thoughts and feelings

How you deal with challenges, difficulties,  
obstacles

# Key Takeaways

## Prioritizing Your Mental Health

Athletes are human, too. Athletes are at risk for burnout.

Self care will boost your confidence both on and off the field.

Self care will strengthen your skills for stress management.

Your mental health is connected to better physical health.

Self care will strengthen your relationships with teammates and coaches.

Self care will allow for better life balance.

Self care will improve your concentration and focus.

Self care will enhance your emotional regulation skills.

Self care will give other athletes permission to also prioritize their mental health.

# Ask for help

- Identify a trusted go to person who you can talk to
- Don't try to be your own clinician if you know something is wrong
- Find a trusted licensed counselor, psychologist or social worker
- Reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness
- Commit to the therapy/counseling process to see results

# In Closing

Let us help you optimize your athletic performance and mental health.

Identify healthy ways to cope with stress.

We can help you keep your balance and NOT drop the ball.

Return to your optimal level in sports and life.

Here are a few resources if someone you or someone you know is struggling with mental health crisis:

- <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/NAMI-HelpLine/Top-HelpLine-Resources>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>
- <https://www.crisistextline.org>
- Suicide Prevention Hotline (24/7) – 800-273- TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text Line (24/7) Text HELLO to 741741

# Resources



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# Thank You

