



POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Student-Athlete Mental Health

BOOKLET

Letter from the Superintendent

Portrait Here

Dear Coaches,

We recognize - and value - the work you put into supporting and guiding our student-athletes in Poudre School District. We know it can come with challenges, but it also comes with great reward in knowing you've helped shape the lives of young people.

To that extent, one of PSD's Strategic Plan pillars is student mental health. Since you play such a critical mentorship role for our student-athletes, our District Student Services team created this booklet to help you recognize potential signs of distress in students with ways you can support them.

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Thank you for all that you do for Poudre School District student-athletes.

Best regards,

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Brian Kingsley
Superintendent, Poudre School District



Being a student-athlete comes with great rewards (teamwork, achievement, opportunities), but it can also be challenging for many students.

Most student-athletes are effectively able to manage the stressors they experience being both a student and an athlete, without any long-term consequence to their mental well-being. Everyone has "bad days," but some students make experience more prolonged distress.

"Athletes should understand that mental health and well-being are one and the same," says Robin Scholefield, Ph.D., Director of Culture, Well-Being and Clinical and Sport Psychological Services at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. "Taking care of your mental health is a part of taking care of yourself and no different than going to the gym."

Below are some behaviors and symptoms that may indicate a student-athlete might have a mental health concern. If you or someone you know exhibits any of these behaviors, reach out to a trusted adult such as a coach, teacher or parent; a friend or teammate; your school's counselor; or call 988.

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of interest or participation in things he/she is usually interested in
- Loss of motivation
- Withdrawing/isolating from social contact
- Irritable, edgy, impatient, argumentative
- Deterioration in appearance and/or hygiene

- Negative self-talk
- Excessive worry or fear
- Loss of enjoyment in activities previously found to be enjoyable
- Irresponsibility, lying
- Mood swings or lack of emotion
- Feeling out of control
- Physical complaints not related to sport injury
- Unexplained wounds or deliberate self-harm
- Unhealthy weight control practices such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, over-exercising, self-induced vomiting, or abuse of laxative, weight loss supplements and diuretics
- Overuse injuries, unresolved injuries, or continually being injured
- Talking about death, dying or "going away"

If you are approaching a student-athlete because of their concerning behavior, be prepared to share concrete, specific examples that sparked your concern. State them factually, without judgment and commentary. For example, "I am worried about you. You don't seem like yourself lately. You haven't been eating, you've been sleeping a lot, and you don't seem as focused at practice. Have you thought about going to talk with someone about what's on your mind?"

Poudre School District cares about the health and well-being of all of our students. To access more resources specifically for student-athlete mental health support, scan this QR code.

QR Code
Here

Tips for Coaches

Coaches are important advocates of promoting positive attitudes about mental health by being mindful of early identification and referral of student-athletes who may need additional support or help.

Here are a few things coaches can do to support the mental health of student-athletes:

- Talk about the importance of taking care of their mental health - how it is just as important as their physical health.
- Bring a counselor in to meet the student-athletes and let them know where they can go within the school, district and community to get support.
- Communicate the importance of mental health to parents.
- Help student-athletes learn how to respond to stressors and/or disappointments in health ways.
- Foster a process-oriented mindset that emphasizes effort and improvement versus achievements and outcomes.
- Have an alumni athlete who struggled with their own mental health and sought help, speak to the student-athletes.
- Keep an eye on students' behavior patterns. Everyone has bad days, but if you're noticing something is off talk to them, one-on-one, asking them if everything is okay because you noticed "XYZ" was off/happening/going on.

To foster a culture of well-being and acceptance, coaches should consider the following tactics:

- Allow students one mental health day per month off from practice.
- Bring in a yoga and/or meditation instructor to teach your students relaxation techniques.
- Post positive team mantras or encouragement Post-It notes in the training or locker rooms, Ted Lasso-style.
- Lead by example, sharing your own experiences with mental health issues as an athlete.
- Communicate clear protocols and contact information for seeking help confidentially if needed. Consider posting laminated posters or flyers in the locker room or handing out small business cards to all team members periodically.
- If you recognize a student-athlete might be struggling, you can offer to go with them to the counselor for the first time. Some will be open to that and take you up on your offer but do not offer this if you can't follow through.
- Recognize that the student-athlete may not be ready for help right away and may refuse your suggestion. Don't take it personally. Follow up in a few days, specifically asking about the concern, and whether he/she has considered the idea of talking to a counselor.
- If you are truly concerned, reach out to the student-athlete's parent or guardian with an example of behavior that triggered your outreach.



Did You Know?

According to the NCAA, creating a culture in athletics where mental health issues are talked about as easily and readily as a physical injury will help to reduce the stigma. When student-athletes know that coaches, peers, friends, parents, counselors and others will not judge them negatively for addressing their mental health, it will help them feel comfortable in seeking help when needed.