



Creating a Safe Environment for Student-Athletes with Mental Health Issues

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CIAAA Conference

Presenters

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My Story

- ❖ Been an Athletic Director for 14 years.
- ❖ First presented at the Virtual NIAAA conference (Dec 2020) and CIAAA conference (Apr 2021), Saskatchewan, and Ontario Athletic Associations
- ❖ Diagnosed with Depression 2017
- ❖ Developed anxiety 2020



My Story

- ❖ Mental health advocate for adults and students
- ❖ Created a rapport with my student to create a safe environment to be open and share
- ❖ Fortunate over the years to be someone students can truly count on be there for them
- As much as we are aware of Mental Health



What is mental health?

- ❖ Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being
 - Resilience to stress
- ❖ Mentally healthy individuals are able to cope with daily stresses
 - Participate fully in school, sports and leisure activities



Current Climate

- ❖ With as much progress that we have made recognizing and supporting Mental Health, we have a long way to go.
- ❖ Everyone is aware this is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- ❖ What are we seeing now.



Rise in numbers

- ❖ An NCAA survey of athletes found that 30% reported feeling depressed over the course of a year.
- ❖ Approximately 30% of women and 25% of men who are student-athletes report having anxiety, and only 10% of all college athletes with known mental health conditions seek care from a mental health professional
- ❖ An estimated 31.9% of today's young people experience some form of anxiety disorder, according to "Challenges of Mental-health Issues in High School Athletics" on the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)



Notable Athletes

- ❖ Simone Biles (Gymnastics)
- ❖ Naomi Osaka (Tennis)
- ❖ Michael Phelps (Swimming)
- ❖ Ricky Williams (Football)
- ❖ Rhonda Rousey (UFC)
- ❖ Serena Williams (Tennis)
- ❖ DeMar DeRozan (Basketball)
- ❖ Lindsey Vonn (Skiing)



Change is needed

- ❖ Simone Biles (Gymnastics)
 - Simone Biles excels as a human, fails as an Olympic Gymnast (LA Times 2021)
 - In a Divided US, it's no surprise some see Simone Biles as a Villain (The Guardian 2021)
 - Texas deputy AG calls Biles “selfish, childish, national embarrassment” (Twitter)
- ❖ Naomi Osaka (Tennis)
 - Fined \$15,000 for not meeting media expectations
 - Study shows Naomi Osaka was the most abused player on Twitter last year, received 32,415 abusive messages



Change is needed

- ❖ Many previously mentioned athletes:
 - Turned to substance abuse
 - Contemplated Suicide
 - Felt that they couldn't bring it up
 - Felt alone
 - Felt lost
 - Burn out



What to watch for

- ❖ Pulling away from people and activities
- ❖ Low energy
- ❖ Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- ❖ Feeling that nothing matters
- ❖ Use of substances
- ❖ Easily agitated
- ❖ Mood swing
- ❖ Thinking about harming self



What can we do?

- ❖ Create an environment where mental illness is ok
 - Athletes miss activities when sick
 - Do they know this is ok with mental health?
 - Make this clear at your preseason meeting.
 - When talking to student-athletes they know their coaches will be there but...



How to help

- ❖ Be authentic!!
 - If comfortable, be open and honest
- ❖ Create an environment that fosters safety
- ❖ Get to their level (standing / sitting)
- ❖ Sitting side by side with males
- ❖ Go for a walk with them
- ❖ Shoot around, touch base during warm-ups



How to help

❖ Check - In

- Make them sincere
- Listen and allow them to share without interruption
- Thank them for being so open
- Ask what they would like from you?



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Questions to Avoid & Ask

❖ Avoid:

- How are you?
- Are you good?
- What's Up?
- What's going on?

Anything that is
impersonal

This is hard as it's
automatic in our
vocabulary

❖ Ask:

- How are you coping?
- Is there anything you would like to share?
- I have noticed ...
 - This makes it personal and you are aware of them.



Conversation options

- ❖ I've noticed you _____. How are you feeling?
- ❖ How would you like things to be different?
- ❖ I know _____. (Acknowledge something that is happening in their life.) Anything you want to talk about?
- ❖ How can I help?
- ❖ I'm concerned about you, but I'm not sure what to do. Let's talk to someone about this.



“In situations of severe anxiety or a panic attack, I don’t need that (advice) - I want someone to listen and be there. They don’t have to do or say anything.”



Group Sharing/Discussion

There was a study in regards to general doctors in getting responses from patients to fully make their visits worthwhile and they controlled having a group of doctors ask nothing at the end of their session, vs asking is there 'anything' else you need me to look at vs asking is there is 'something' else I can help you with and the results were (I don't know exactly, I'd have to look it up), but more patients actually opened up to the something question, vs anything



THANK YOU!

- Contact me with any follow up:
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