

ATHLETE MENTAL HEALTH

8 WAYS TO PROMOTE A CULTURE OF SPORTS SAFETY

Parents, coaches, school administrators and medical professionals all play an important role in supporting the mental health of student athletes. Here are ways you can help.

1. **MAKE IT FUN.** One of the primary reasons kids quit sports is because it isn't fun anymore. Keep the game in perspective, show good sportsmanship and focus on opportunities instead of failures.
2. **PLAY AT THE APPROPRIATE AGE AND SKILL LEVEL.** Forcing student athletes to play above their abilities may lead to stress and anxiety.
3. **PROVIDE ADEQUATE TIME FOR REST** during the week and between seasons. Student athletes are susceptible to mental health conditions when their bodies are worn down. Ensure your student athlete is getting the appropriate amount of sleep. Make sure they are getting breaks between sport seasons as well.
4. **MIX IT UP.** Athletes are more prone to burnout if they specialize in one sport early. Encourage your student athlete to participate in a variety of activities and multiple sports.
5. **GET SCREENED.** Ensure the athlete receives a psychosocial screening as part of his or her pre-participation examination. Ideally, this would be done by the athlete's primary care provider.
6. **KNOW THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS** of mental health concerns. Knowing these will help support early recognition and necessary referrals for student athletes.
7. **REMOVE THE STIGMA** around seeking care. Promote a culture where student athletes feel comfortable talking with authority figures about their mental health status. Initiate conversation about how an athlete is feeling and make this a regular dynamic.
8. **REFER TO AN EXPERT.** Ensure there is a policy established for the appropriate referral of student athletes with mental health concerns.