



Mental Health Concerns for Student Athletes- FRC 2023

Student-athletes are not immune to mental health disorders. Student-athletes may experience disorders such as depression or eating disorders, on top of having to cope with just as much, or more, stress than the average student. In 2017, over 30% of college students reportedly sought help for mental health concerns within the previous year. Seeking help from a coach or professional for any mental or physical health concern does not make student-athletes weak or inept and can result in beneficial treatment or management techniques.

Why are student athletes susceptible to mental health issues?

A study conducted between Drexel and Kean University found that female student athletes are nearly twice as likely to be depressed as male athletes at the same level, but that overall the levels of depression in athletes are similar to the rates of depression of the college population as a whole. Both male and female track and field student athletes have the highest prevalence of depression (37% of females and 25% of males), followed by female soccer players (30%) and baseball players (18%).

Researchers in the study found that athletes practice 39 hours a week on average while keeping up with a full academic course load. During the off-season, athletes reported they spend just as much time practicing. High stress levels in a competitive environment are likely the cause behind student athletes' depression and anxiety. Fortunately, there are ways to catch the signs a student athlete is struggling with mental health issues before their depression reaches a dangerous point.

Common signs you or an athlete is struggling with mental health

The most common sign you or a student athlete is having mental health challenges is a change in behavior. These behavioral changes may include:

- Moodiness/irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in eating habits/isolation while eating
- Lack of interest/joy in their sport
- Conflict with teammates
- Obsession or rigidity around exercise and food
- Preference to exercise rather than spending time with friends/family
- Obsession with losing/gaining weight

Other signs you or a student athlete may be suffering from mental health issues are physical changes. These physical changes may include:

- Overuse/chronic injuries
- Training when hurt, tired, or sick
- Rapid/extreme weight loss/gain
- Interruptions in the menstrual cycle due to exercise/low weight

These changes in behavior and physical appearance can be distressing. If you notice a student-athlete experiencing these signs, they may benefit from seeking psychological help.

How to help prevent sports-related mental health issues

As a student athlete or FRC coach it is important to support peers, athletes and YOU from developing sports-related mental health & wellness issues by encouraging a healthy attitude toward sports, fitness and mental wellness.

Consider the following tips for YOU, peers, trainers, and coaches to encourage the student athlete in your life and promote mental wellness.

1. Create a list of behavioral health professional referrals to use/provide when you believe you, a peer or athlete may be struggling. Don't wait to search for resources on your own and for your athletes.
2. If an athlete has been found to have a mental health disorder, don't stop their athletic participation automatically. The athlete may see this as a punishment, which can cause them to hide their problems from you in order to continue the sport. Only stop their athletic participation if it's been advised by a medical professional. To better assess the athlete's condition, consult with a medical professional or behavioral health professional.
3. Encourage self-confidence in athletes by promoting a positive self-image and good self-esteem.
4. Pay close attention to the warning signs surrounding potential mental health issues, especially eating disorders. If you do notice warning signs, take them seriously. Individuals suffering from

eating disorders have a suicide rate of 15% and a mortality rate between 10 to 15%. On top of the suicide rate of student athletes, these numbers are extremely dangerous.

Student athletes are often reluctant to seek help because of social stigmas and the fear of being taken off the team or benched. However, it's important to seek help if you or someone you know is experiencing mental health issues.

Left untreated, mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders can cause self-injurious behaviors and even suicide.

Fortunately, these mental health issues can be treated using talk therapies such as mental and behavioral health counseling, dialectical behavioral therapy and cognitive behavior therapy alongside medication if needed. But before you or a student athlete can receive the treatment they need, they first need to seek help.

The following are available intervention and referral services:

- **Mental Health & Wellness Center:** 1-530-283-0202, ext. 205 or 234.
- **Plumas District Hospital Emergency Room:** 530-283-7111
- **Plumas County Behavioral Health:** 1-800-757-7898 or 530-283-6307
- **Plumas Crisis Intervention and Resource Center (PCIRC):**
 - 24 Hr. Crisis Line: 530-283-4333 or 1-877-757-0029
 - Text: Here2Help to 72727
- **TimelyCare:** Free 24/7 Virtual Mental Health and Health Services for FRC students
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255

“My attitude is that if you push me towards something that you think is a weakness, then I will turn that perceived weakness into a strength.” – **Michael Jordan**
