



Streetsboro High School Athletic Department

Emergency Action Plan for High School Student-Athletes' Mental Health

Purpose:

The purpose of this plan is to ensure that student-athletes receive prompt and appropriate mental health support when experiencing mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal thoughts, or other disclosures. It includes a clear process for communication between coaches, guidance counselors, parents, and other involved parties, as well as prevention measures to create a supportive and proactive environment for the well-being of student-athletes.

1. Recognizing Signs of Mental Health Struggles

Coaches and staff should be trained to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health struggles, including:

- **Depression:** Persistent sadness, irritability, changes in appetite or sleep, withdrawal from activities, and low energy.
 - **Anxiety:** Excessive worry, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, or physical symptoms such as racing heart.
 - **Stress:** Overwhelm with academic or athletic demands, lack of motivation, or physical signs like headaches.
 - **Suicidal Thoughts:** Talking about wanting to die, feeling like a burden, or expressing hopelessness.
 - **Other disclosures:** Feelings of worthlessness, self-harm behaviors, or troubling thoughts related to personal life or school.
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2. Immediate Response to Mental Health Disclosure or Concern

When a student-athlete discloses a mental health concern (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts), coaches should follow these steps:

A. Coach's Immediate Response to Disclosure

- **Listen without judgment:** Create a safe, non-judgmental environment for the student-athlete to talk.
- **Do not leave the student-athlete alone:** If a disclosure is made, especially if thoughts of self-harm or suicide are indicated, ensure the student is accompanied by another trusted adult (if available).
- **Remain calm:** Your response can model how to handle the situation constructively and with care.
- **Assure confidentiality (within the bounds of safety):** Explain that you will need to share this information with appropriate parties to ensure they receive the support they need, but their privacy will be respected.

B. Call the Parents

- **Notify the parents immediately** about the disclosure (unless the situation is urgent and requires a different course of action, such as calling emergency services).
 - *Example:* "I'm calling to let you know that [Student's Name] has shared with me that they are feeling overwhelmed and experiencing some concerning thoughts. We think it's important to get them support immediately."
- **Provide reassurance** that the school and coaching staff will work with them to address the situation appropriately.
- **Offer suggestions for next steps** (e.g., seeing a counselor or seeking emergency mental health help).

C. Involve the Guidance Counselor/ Mental Health Professional

- **Reach out to the high school guidance counselor immediately.** They are trained to help guide the next steps and can provide appropriate mental health resources.
 - *Example:* "We have a situation with [Student's Name], who has disclosed concerns about their mental health. Could we work together to support them?"
- **Referral for immediate counseling:** The guidance counselor will either conduct an assessment or direct the student-athlete to the appropriate mental health services.

3. Intervention in the Event of a Suicide Attempt or Suicidal Thoughts

If a student-athlete discloses or expresses suicidal thoughts or makes an attempt, immediate action is needed:

A. Suicide Statement or Attempt

- **Do not leave the student-athlete alone.** Stay with them and ensure they are in a safe environment.
- **Call Emergency Mental Health Services (988)** if the student-athlete is at imminent risk of harm. If the student is in distress or has made an attempt, urgent medical intervention (911) is necessary.

B. Notify Parents

- **Call the parents immediately**, informing them that their child is in immediate danger and emergency services are involved. Be clear and concise but provide as much information as possible.

C. Notify School Administrators and Guidance Counselor

- **Inform the principal, athletic director, and school counselor** so they can coordinate and provide additional support for the student-athlete's recovery.
- **Follow-up with the guidance counselor** about post-crisis mental health services and check-ins.

D. Documentation

- Ensure that all details of the disclosure, the intervention steps taken, and follow-up actions are documented in accordance with school policy.
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4. Follow-Up Support

After the immediate response and intervention, ongoing care and support are essential:

- **Scheduled check-ins with guidance counselor:** The student-athlete should meet with a counselor to address ongoing mental health needs.
 - **Parental involvement:** Coaches should maintain regular communication with parents to track the student's progress and provide updates on their recovery plan.
 - **Monitoring at practices/games:** Coaches should ensure the student-athlete is supported in their athletic environment, where additional stressors may arise.
 - **Referral to external mental health professionals:** In some cases, referral to therapists or psychologists may be necessary.
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5. Prevention Measures

Creating a supportive environment is key to preventing mental health crises.

A. Education and Awareness

- **Mental health education for coaches:** Train all coaching staff on recognizing signs of mental health struggles, as well as appropriate responses.
- **Student-athlete education:** Incorporate mental health awareness into team meetings or orientations, educating students on how to seek help and manage stress.

B. Create a Supportive Team Culture

- **Encourage open dialogue:** Foster an environment where student-athletes feel comfortable discussing mental health issues.
- **Normalize seeking help:** Stress that mental health is just as important as physical health, and accessing help is a strength, not a weakness.
- **Stress management:** Include techniques for managing stress in practice sessions, such as mindfulness exercises or relaxation techniques.

C. Regular Mental Health Check-Ins

- **Regular mental health check-ins** with athletes by coaches and guidance counselors to identify any issues early.
- **Peer support programs:** Create peer support systems within the athletic teams, so athletes can look out for each other. Discuss Mental Health Awareness in pre-season meetings.
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6. Post-Crisis Plan and Reintegration

After a crisis, the student-athlete may need to return to practice or games. Reintegration should be gradual and supportive:

- **Develop a return-to-play plan** in coordination with parents, mental health professionals, and school administrators.
- **Monitor for signs of stress or strain** as the athlete returns to school or sports and provide additional support if needed.
- **Ensure a smooth transition** back into the team environment, with clear expectations and emotional support available.

Conclusion

This Emergency Action Plan for high school student-athletes' mental health emphasizes a timely, coordinated response involving coaches, parents, guidance counselors, and other mental health professionals. By ensuring open communication, immediate action in case of crisis, and a culture of mental health awareness, we can better support the well-being of student-athletes and prevent mental health crises.

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