



SIGNS AN ATHLETE MAY BE STRUGGLING

Watch, listen and observe

What are some indications an athlete may be struggling with their mental health? Observing the thoughts, feelings and behaviors your athletes may be experiencing may indicate that something has changed in the athlete's mind and thought process.

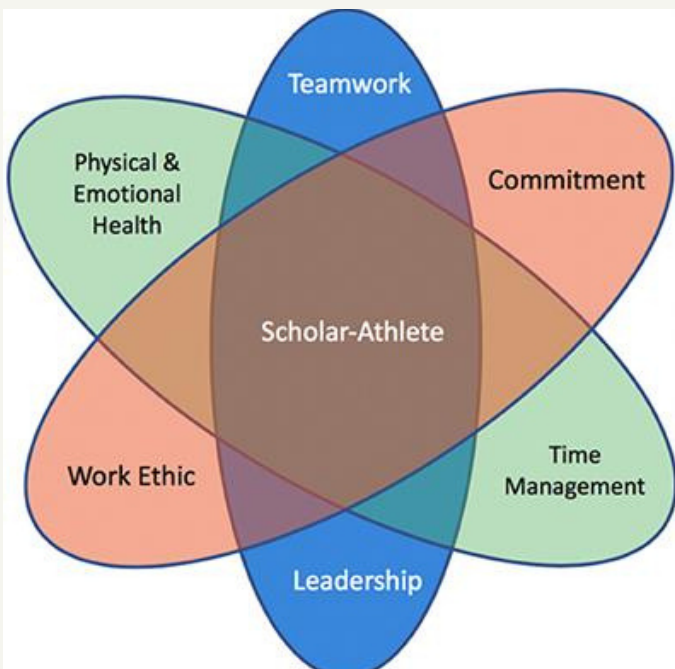
One way for head and assistant coaches to monitor their athlete's well-being is to take a little time each week and do a brief check-in with each athlete. Coaches can ask the athlete how they are doing as an individual and a teammate? By watching and listening to what athletes are doing and saying, coaches can identify any changes that raise concerns.

"Negative Thinking"

Athletes who are struggling have more negative pattern of thinking.

Concerning statements coaches might hear :

- I am never going to be able to do this.
- I would be better off if I wasn't here.
- I can't ever get anything right.
- I am not good enough.
- I am always a failure.



Thoughts

Changes in athletic functioning

- Diminished athletic decision making.
- Delayed reactions.
- Inability to focus on coaching.
- Loss of athletic efficiency.
- Lack of concentration.

All consuming thought patterns:

- The athlete cannot let go of things.
- Anxious thinking or behavior.
- Negative self-thoughts.

These thought patterns might be expressed openly to/in front of others, or they might be part of internal dialogue with themselves.



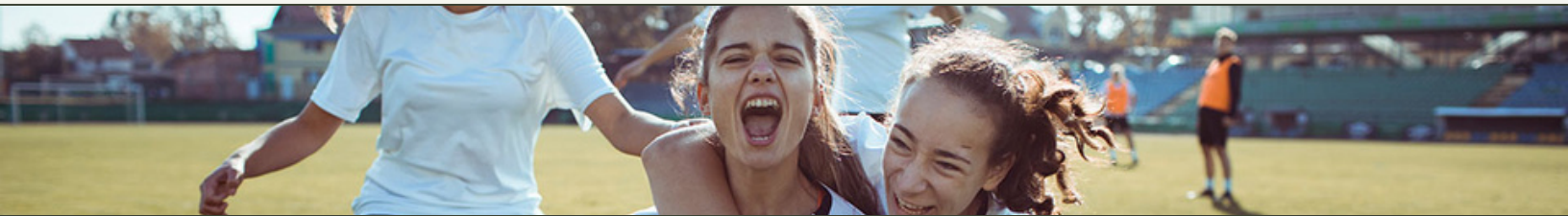
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Feelings

Moodiness and irritability can be common for teenagers. Sudden or dramatic changes from their typical functioning may be a sign of a deeper emotional struggle.

- Mood swings – happy one minute, angry or annoyed the next.
- Persistent irritability, sadness, worry or anxiety.
- Be aware if the athlete is always worried, has fear or anxiety.
- Diminished confidence – if the athlete was confident, the first one to do a new drill and now they are nervous, less sure of themselves, that can be indication they are or could be struggling.
- Low motivation, not as motivated to work out, do drills or participant in team events.
- Diminished enthusiasm and excitement.

It is important to have a good relationship with your athletes. This relationship allows you to have insight into how your athletes usually are and where they are now. The closer the relationship, the easier it is to identify these differences.



Behavioral

Things you might see an athlete doing or saying that may reflect a mental health struggle:

- Disruptive or disrespectful behavior.
- Isolating from team or teammates.
- Decrease in performance.
- Substance use or suspected substance use.
- Emotional outbursts/anger – throwing equipment or getting upset after constructive criticism.
- Speaking more threatening or aggressive.
- Not getting enough sleep; – tired all the time; fatigued.
- Rapid weight gain or loss. or change in appetite.
- The athlete is restless, fidgety or jumpiness.
- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches, chest pains, blood pressure raising or difficulty breathing not tied to a medical condition or physical injury.

Reflect and awareness

Reflect and try to identify.

- When was an athlete struggling?
- What were the red flags?
- What did I do in that situation?
- Would I do the same thing again or would I do something different?

Take that insight and apply in current moment.

- What athletes might be struggling?
- What are the red flags I am noticing?
- What can I do?

It is really about observing and being aware. Ask yourself, are my athletes ready? How is their well-being? What are some red flags I can address?