



Parents – How do you relate to your child's injury?

What is injury?

An injury is any physical or mental disruption that gets in the way of doing something you were once able to do. Sometimes a mental block can disrupt the ability to perform, just like a physical injury would. Not all injuries are the same. If you as a parent had an injury in the past, and then your child has an injury, the experience will be different. Perhaps your tolerance for pain is different. The healing process may be different, or advances in medical technology may make treatment go more quickly.

Subjective and objective injuries

Not all injuries are created equal. Your child's injury may be different from another child who has had the same injury.

One reason for this is the differing aspects of injury.

- **Objective aspects** of an injury include what you see on the body or in an MRI/ x-ray, or the diagnosis given by a medical professional.
- **Subjective aspects** of an injury include the pain or discomfort the athlete feels, as well as their perception of how "serious" the injury is.

Objectively you may have a shoulder injury but subjectively you may feel fine, and vice versa.



The 5 Stages of injury

1. **Pre-injury:** Conditions before the injury occurs, i.e. poor hydration, high stress, lack of sleep.
2. **Immediate:** Seconds to hours after the injury.
3. **Post Immediate:** After injury, before recovery. Athletes may experience grief, anger, sadness or depression.
4. **Recovery:** Taking care of the athlete. Treat recovery with the same level of care and attention as performance. Be sure to communicate with coach regarding your expectations and needs during this stage.
5. **Returning to Play:** Objectively ready may differ from subjectively ready. Check on your child's emotions about returning to play frequently and allow your child to express any doubts or concerns if they arise.

How does an injury affect mental health?

Parents help prevent injury



Stress is the biggest contributor to injuries in athletes. Parents can help their child manage the stress they are under. Here are examples of how stress affects the body:

- Stress causes an increase in muscle tension
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep (sleep deprived), poor diet and poor hydration
- How many demands are placing on the student-athlete (activities in addition to sports and/or a loaded academic schedule)

How can you help reduce the stress and pressure?

Parent support after an injury

Immediacy of injury – The moment, when an injury occurs, is not the time to tell your athlete "I told you so", or ask "What happened?" It is a time to support your athlete, be steadfast and make your child feel safe. If medical attention is needed, be available to be escorted onto the playing surface. Prepare yourself; don't freak out; and listen attentively to what is being said.

Post Immediate – Be a supportive anchor. Gather information; see what steps need to be taken; take notes; and manage your emotions. You may be interacting with medical personnel, coaches and athletic trainers. As a parent, it is important to advocate for the best interests of your child.

Recovery – Be supportive and do not push for a speedy recovery. Discuss care and recovery with medical professionals. Your child's injury will likely create extra work for you – doctor appointments and assisting with other tasks in the recovery process. It is important to have conversations with your child and see how they want to handle their recovery. As a parent or caregiver, be supportive and meet your child's need in this situation. Inability to participate, even temporarily, can be a difficult adjustment, especially if participation is a big part of their identity and/or a source of enjoyment for them.



Return to play – Objectively, your child is healed. but subjectively, you child may not be mentally ready to return to play or perform the task. As a parent, it is important to understand this. Added stress slows this process. There may be a variety of emotional responses to an injury (sadness, anger, guilt, embarrassment) as well as returning to that sport/activity after physically recovering (nervousness, fear or anxiety). If your child is having trouble, professional help may be needed.