



POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Student-Athlete Mental Health

BOOKLET

# Letter from the Superintendent



## The Positive Impact of Coaches on Students

Sports promote a host of healthy habits, including resiliency, community, positive relationships, teamwork and life skills. That doesn't mean that student-athletes don't struggle. Coaches play a key role in students' lives and may be some of the first people to notice when they need help - whether that's noticing signs of dehydration or signs of depression.



Dear Coaches,

We recognize - and value - the work you put into supporting and guiding our student-athletes in Poudre School District. We know it can come with challenges, but it also comes with great reward in knowing you've helped shape the lives of young people.

One of PSD's Strategic Plan pillars is mental health and belonging. Since you play such a critical mentorship role in the lives of our student-athletes, PSD created this booklet to help you recognize potential signs of distress in students and share ways you can support them.

If you or anyone you know needs support please contact:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

988lifeline.org

Call or Text 988 for support 24/7

Colorado Crisis Services

coloradocrisisservices.org

Call 1-844-493-8255 or Text "TALK" to 38255

Thank you for all that you do for Poudre School District student-athletes.



Brian Kingsley

Superintendent, Poudre School District



## Athletes & Stigmas

Athletes may not want to appear like they need help; they may fear that acknowledging their mental health struggles will hurt their ability to be a starter or impact their ability to get into college and qualify for funding for college. As a result, a student-athlete may hesitate to reach out for help or tell someone directly that they are struggling. Watch for signs like those listed on the next page; encourage teammates to ask, listen, and connect with each other; and don't hesitate to suggest resources if something's off.



**B**eing a student-athlete comes with great rewards (teamwork, achievement, opportunities), but it can also be challenging for many students.

Most student-athletes are effectively able to manage the stress they experience being both a student and an athlete without any long-term consequence to their mental well-being. Everyone has “bad days,” but some students may experience more prolonged distress.

#### **Ask, listen, and connect with student-athletes**

Ask how they're doing

Listen to their answer

Connect them with resources

Below are some behaviors and symptoms that may indicate a student-athlete might have a mental health concern. If one of your athletes or coaches (or you!) exhibit any of these behaviors, encourage them to reach out to you or another trusted adult such as a coach, teacher or parent, a friend or teammate, a mental health professional at school, or call 988.

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of interest or participation in things they're usually interested in
- Loss of motivation
- Withdrawing/isolating from social contact
- Irritable, edgy, impatient, argumentative
- Deterioration in appearance and/or hygiene
- Negative self-talk

- Excessive worry or fear
- Loss of enjoyment in activities previously found to be enjoyable
- Irresponsibility, lying
- Mood swings or lack of emotion
- Feeling out of control
- Physical complaints not related to sports injury
- Unexplained wounds or deliberate self-harm
- Unhealthy weight control practices such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, over-exercising, self-induced vomiting, or abuse of laxative, weight loss supplements and diuretics
- Overuse injuries, unresolved injuries, or continually being injured
- Talking about death, dying or “going away”

If you are approaching a student-athlete because of their concerning behavior, be prepared to share concrete, specific examples that sparked your concern. State them factually, without judgment and commentary. For example, “I am worried about you. You don't seem like yourself lately. You haven't been eating, you've been sleeping a lot, and you don't seem as focused at practice. Have you thought about going to talk with someone about what's on your mind?”

Poudre School District cares about the health and well-being of all of our students. To access more mental health resources for students, staff, parents and guardians, scan this QR code.



# Tips for Coaches

Coaches are important advocates for promoting positive attitudes about mental health. Coaches can be mindful of signs a student is struggling and refer student-athletes to additional support or help.

Here are a few other things coaches can do to support the mental health of student-athletes:

- Talk about the importance of taking care of their mental health - how it is just as important as their physical health.
- Bring a counselor in to meet the student-athletes and let them know where they can go within the school, district and community to get support.
- Communicate the importance of mental health to parents and guardians.
- Help student-athletes learn how to respond to stressors and/or disappointments in healthy ways.
- Foster a process-oriented mindset that emphasizes effort and improvement versus achievements and outcomes.
- Have an alumni athlete who struggled with their own mental health and sought help speak to the student-athletes.
- Keep an eye on students' behavior patterns. Everyone has bad days, but if you're noticing something is off talk to them, one-on-one, asking them if everything is okay because you noticed "XYZ" was off/happening/going on.
- Coaches are not alone - the onus is not on you alone to help - schools have lots of resources to help students with their mental health
- Support comes from counselors as well as school psychologists, school nurses, school social workers, and school mental health specialists
- Helping their mental health will help their whole lives, including their athletic performance.

To foster a culture of well-being and acceptance, coaches should consider the following tactics:

- Bring in a yoga and/or meditation instructor to teach your students relaxation techniques.
- Post positive team mantras or encouragement on Post-It notes in the training or locker rooms, Ted Lasso-style.
- Lead by example, sharing your own experiences with mental health issues as an athlete.
- Communicate clear protocols and contact information for seeking help confidentially if needed. Consider posting laminated posters or flyers in the locker room or handing out small business cards to all team members periodically.
- If you recognize a student-athlete might be struggling, you can offer to go with them to the counselor for the first time. Some will be open to that and take you up on your offer. Do not offer this if you can't follow through.
- Recognize that the student-athlete may not be ready for help right away and may refuse your suggestion. Don't take it personally. Follow up in a few days, specifically asking about the concern, and whether they have considered the idea of talking to a counselor.
- If you are truly concerned, reach out to the student-athlete's parent or guardian with an example of behavior that triggered your outreach.
- For a student in crisis, stay with them until they are connected with help, such as going to the counselor's office, getting picked up by their parents, or calling 911.



## Did You Know?

According to the National Collegiate Athletics Association, creating a culture in athletics where mental health issues are talked about as easily and readily as a physical injury will help to reduce the stigma. When student-athletes know that coaches, peers, friends, parents, counselors and others will not judge them negatively for addressing their mental health, it will help them feel comfortable in seeking help when needed.

