Practical Tips for Mental Concerns

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Disclaimer

• While today’s talk will discuss some practical ways to manage mental disorders, if we fully understood how to deal with the minds of young adults we would have already written a book and retired. This presentation is meant as a starting point for athletic directors, coaches, parents, and athletes.
Overview

• Overview of Mental Health in Secondary School Students

• Athletics & Mental Health

• Common Red Flags and Conditions

• Practical Tips to Implement
Mental Health Facts

• 1 in 3 adolescents meet criteria for anxiety disorder
  – If you have a roster of 100 athletes, 33 of them will meet the criteria for anxiety disorder.

• 1 in 5 were affected by behavioral disorders

• 1 in 6 consider suicide

• 1 in 7 experiences mood disorders

• 1 in 8 had substance abuse disorders

• Only 1 in 5 will seek help
  – Of the 33/100 meeting the criteria, only 7 will seek help. The other 26 will not.

Muscottell, 2018; Neal, 2015
Why Is This A Problem?

• **Underdiagnoses & Under appreciation**
  – Mental health concerns ignite negative emotions in parents, teachers, coaches, teammates
  – It’s socially acceptable for Johnny to miss Friday’s game for an ankle sprain but it’s not socially acceptable for Johnny to miss Friday’s game due to a mental health concern.

• **Looking for Different Symptoms**
  – Children display different symptoms for mental concerns than adults. Adults look for same symptoms they have

• **Lack of Services**

• **Stigmas/Discrimination**
  – Mental Health Disorders are viewed as weaknesses. A mental health concern is an injury to the brain. Just like an ankle sprain is an injury to the ankle.
What Are Some Common Diseases and Symptoms?
Eating Disorders

• **Anorexia**
  – Extreme Thinness
  – Compulsive Exercise
  – Dry & Yellowish Skin
  – Lethargic

• **Bulimia**
  – Chronic Sore Throat
  – Swollen Neck & Jaw
  – Dehydrated
  – “Normal” Appearance
Anxiety & Depression

• Depression
  – Lack of Energy & Interest
  – Change in Eating and/or Sleeping
  – Decreased Performance
  – Difficulty with Academics and Concentration
  – Sensitivity to Rejection/Failure

• Anxiety
  – Feeling Apprehensive or Powerless
  – Changes in Body Processes
    • Heart Rate, Breathing Rate, Sweating
What Triggers Should I Look For?
Mental Health Factor For High School Athletes

• Triggering Events (Can all occur in a teenager’s life, can be kept hidden)
  – Poor Performance
  – Conflicts with Coaches/Teammates
  – Class Concerns
  – Family Issues
  – Violence
  – Burnout
  – End of Playing Career
  – Change in Importance of Sport or Expectations

Neal et al., 2015; Pellant, 2016
Mental Health Factors for High School Athletes

• Athletic Identity
  – When removed (due to injury, end of career, cut from team) can leave individual not knowing who they are, how to act, how to socialize.

• Specialization & Training
  – Intense demands on time and energy can serve as triggering events.

• Weight Management

• Balance Demands
  – School, home, athletics, friends, multiple extracurricular activities, college decisions, social media...
Injuries & Mental Health

• Normal Cognitive Response to Injury
  – Injury is viewed as a stressor
  – Response determines behavior and emotions
  – Can lead to mental concerns

• Social Support
  – Necessary for athlete to respond positively to an injury
  – Necessary from coaches, healthcare providers, family, and friends
  – Includes information on what will happened, how to cope, doctor’s appointments, accommodations

• Loss of Connection to Team & Friends
  – No longer have same interactions and experiences

Wiese-Bjornstal, 1995
Concussions & Mental Health

• Concussed Athlete = 3x more likely to be diagnosed with depression

• 10% of Concussed Athletes had depressive disorder within 6 months of diagnosis

• Importance of Return to Learn and Return to Play Policies
What Can Be Done Within The High School?
Practical Tips

• Include Screening Questions in Pre-Participation Exam
  • Trouble Sleeping?
  • Wish They Had More Energy?
  • Think About Things Over and Over
  • Feel Anxious/Nervous
  • Sad/Depressed

• Red Flag Those Forms with Answers Representing Possible Condition

• Adding these questions to your pre-participation exam will prompt physician to ask the student-athlete further questions, and begin the treatment process

Neal, et al., 2015, Neal, 2016
Practical Tips

• Questions to Ask Any Athlete You Feel May Have a Mental Health Concern
  – How are things going?
  
  – Tell me what is going on?
  
  – Tell me more about (incident)?
  
  – This (event/behavior) concerns me. Is there something I can do to help or need to know about?

• These are not easy conversations to have. But they are crucial conversations to have.

Neal, et al., 2015
Practical Tips

• Beaviors to Monitor
  – Changes in Eating/Sleeping/Weight

  – Social Withdrawal
    • Smartphones have made social withdrawal easier for adolescents.
    • Pay special attention when observing this behavior

  – Decreased Interest

  – Loss of Emotion

  – Irritable/Agitation/Mood Swings

  – Overuse or Frequent Injuries
    • The normally injury-free athlete is now sustaining consist
Future Mental Health Services

• HF 690
  – Child Mental Health Bill
  – Increases Availability of Mental Health Services

• Telemedicine
  – Recently Expanded Within State
  – Some Practicality and Benefits for Telepsychiatry
  – Being Explored by Providers in Des Moines Metro
Practical Tips

• Treat it like an injury.

• Involve, Educate, Plan
  – Done with parents, coaches, teachers, counselors, athletic trainers

• Return to Learn and Play Plans
  – Required starting July 1, 2019. Will be a good time to plan for all mental health concerns.

• In the End, You Don’t have to Diagnose, Just Recognize
References

• Neal, TL, et al. (2015). Interassociation recommendations for developing a plan to recognize and refer student-athletes with psychological concerns... *Journal of Athletic Training*. 50(3), 231-249.