

MENTAL HEALTH

In recent years, concern has grown about the mental health of young people. As a coach, there are things you can do that will promote positive mental health in the athletes on your team. By keeping the experience fun, you will help keep the athletes involved in sports. Here are eight strategies that will contribute to a safe and healthy environment for your team.

1 POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

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Praise and celebrate effort and improvement, not just wins. This develops self-confidence and a growth mindset in athletes, and it will encourage them to believe they can and will improve through consistent effort.

EXAMPLE

During third grade basketball practice, two athletes are struggling with free throws. Their frustration is building. Do not falsely praise them for making free throws, but instead, praise smaller skills. "Way to keep your eyes on the target!", "Great job keeping your elbow in!", or "Way to use your legs on that shot!"

2 TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES

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Help young athletes develop a sense of what it means to be part of a team. Intentionally plan activities that require communication, collaboration and problem solving.

OLDER KIDS EXAMPLE

Attending a high school game together or arrange for a team dinner the night before a competition.

YOUNGER KIDS EXAMPLE

Plan fun, interactive games during practice (e.g. human knot, tug of war, or a scavenger hunt).

3 AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS

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Affirmative statements will help you to obtain desired behaviors from your athletes and build the strength of your coaching relationship with them. Use "dos" instead of "don'ts".



"Listen carefully when the coach is talking"



"Don't talk when the coach is talking"

4 GROWTH MINDSET

GROWTH MINDSET

When talking about competitions, whether wins or losses, focus on what was learned and how you will use that knowledge to get better as a team (and as a coaching staff).

EXAMPLE

A successful youth soccer team was beaten badly in the recent game. The defenders were often out of position for long balls. Acknowledge that you had not worked on that skill, and now you know to incorporate it in to practice. Express how this will make the team better prepared in the future. Own your role in the improvement process.

5 FACILITATE COMMUNICATION

FACILITATE COMMUNICATION

Let players know that they can share their thoughts or feelings with you without fear of judgment. Use these active listening techniques to facilitate communication with athletes. Thank athletes for their honesty after they share.



EYE CONTACT



NOD



SUMMARIZE

6 BUILD COPING SKILLS

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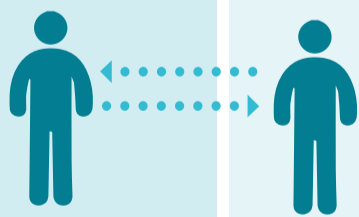
Suggest techniques your athletes can use to fight pre-game jitters or deal with mistakes or errors.

EXAMPLE : Explain that there are things the athlete can control (effort and attitude) and things they can't (bad calls and their opponents performance). Encourage them to not think or worry about the things outside of their control.

7 BUILD EMPATHY

BUILD EMPATHY

Talk with your team about how others feel and how they themselves may feel at times.



EXAMPLE

After time has passed following a loss, ask your athletes how they felt after the game ended. Point out that, after your next win, the other team will feel the same. Explain the Golden Rule: behave in a way after a win that doesn't make the other team feel worse.

8 RESPONDING VS. REACTING

RESPONDING

Taking time to think before acting, then taking appropriate action

REACTING

Sudden, impulsive, and poorly thought-out action in response to a stimulus

Teach athletes the difference between responding and reacting in the many circumstances that occur during practice and competition.

EXAMPLE

During basketball, a teammate makes a bad pass that turns into a turnover. **REACTING** is stomping and yelling at the teammate. Instead, **RESPONDING** is taking a deep breath then saying, "It's ok. We've all done that. Let's focus on the next play."

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