

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

# Student-Athlete Mental Health and Building Resiliency

Student-athletes face intense pressure to perform well and struggle to manage academic and athletic responsibilities, leading to potential mental health challenges. Supporting their mental well-being is crucial for helping them reach their full potential.

## Student-Athlete Mental Health

Student-athletes can face intense pressure to perform well and struggle to manage academic and athletic responsibilities, leading to potential mental health challenges. There are many different factors that can play into the pressures faced by young student-athletes, including:

- **Early Specialization:** Pressure to focus on one sport at a young age, leading to burnout and increased risk of injury.<sup>1</sup>
- **Social Media Scrutiny:** Constant social media presence can lead to cyberbullying, comparisons, and performance anxiety.<sup>2</sup>
- **Parental Expectations:** Pressure from parents to perform well, win, or secure college scholarships can be overwhelming.<sup>3</sup>
- **Body Image Concerns:** Young athletes may experience body dissatisfaction or disordered eating behaviors.<sup>4</sup>
- **Balancing Academics and Athletics:** Managing schoolwork, practice schedules, and competition can be stressful and impact mental health.<sup>5</sup>



Due to these pressures, student-athletes are at a higher risk for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.<sup>5</sup> Establishing a supportive environment that encourages student-athletes to prioritize their mental health is crucial.

### Additional resources for families, coaches, and health professionals

- American Academy of Pediatrics. Healthy Children.org. [www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sports/](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sports/).
- NCAA. Mental Health Best Practices: Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Health. [https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ssi/mental/SSI\\_MentalHealthBestPractices.pdf](https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ssi/mental/SSI_MentalHealthBestPractices.pdf).

## Building Resiliency

Here are ways to help young athletes overcome the pressures they face and help build resiliency:

1. **Diversify Sports and Interests:** Encourage young athletes to participate in multiple sports and activities to prevent burnout and increase enjoyment.<sup>6</sup>
2. **Social Media Management:** Establish boundaries, monitor online presence, and promote positive interactions online.<sup>7</sup>
3. **Parent Education:** Provide workshops or resources to help parents understand the impact of their expectations and behaviors on young athletes.<sup>3</sup>
4. **Body Positivity and Self-Care:** Offer body positivity programs, self-care workshops, and mental skills training to promote overall well-being.<sup>4</sup>
5. **Academic Support:** Provide academic support services, such as tutors or study halls, to help young athletes manage schoolwork and athletic responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>
6. **Mental Health Resources:** Provide access to mental health professionals, counseling services, or support groups to address emerging concerns.<sup>8</sup>
7. **Coach and Teammate Support:** Foster a positive team culture, and encourage open communication, empathy, and support among coaches, teammates, and athletes.<sup>9</sup>

## Empowering Student-Athletes

By harnessing the power of education, support systems, and coping strategies, we can forge unbreakable resilience in student-athletes. The Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation supports coaches, athletic departments, and institutions being empowered to become mental health champions, providing the guidance, resources, and care that student-athletes need to thrive.

By joining forces, we can create a culture of strength that empowers student-athletes to overcome adversity, achieve their full potential, and win in the game of life.

### References

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### ABOUT

#### OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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