

Mental Health and Wellness for Athletic Administrators

NADC 2024 Austin

Why are we here?

Operational
Structures
Proactive approaches

NORTH
Get things done – Let's do it!
Likes to act, try things, plunge in

WEST
Paying attention to detail-
Likes to know the who,
what, when, where, why
and how before acting



EAST
Speculating – Likes to look
at the big picture, the
possibilities, before acting

SOUTH
Caring –
Likes to know that
everyone's feelings have
been taken into
consideration; that their
voices have been heard,
before acting

Physical
Emotional
Personal

Grounding

- Purpose:
 - To bring you to the present moment
 - To signal safety to the body
 - To activate the thinking brain



Holistic Approach: AC/CD



Mental Wellness

- Mental “wellness” is more than the ***absence*** of mental illness
- “A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” [World Health Organization]

**Athletic departments must strive to create a
culture of mental wellness**

Culture of Mental Wellness

- Your department's culture around mental health is what reduces stigma and empowers athletes to access mental health resources

Athletic Directors and Coaches create the culture

- Must create an inclusive environment
- All personnel need proper training/education and support
- Remove obstacles for obtaining care

Decreasing Stigma

Athletic Directors and Coaches MUST:

- Support mental wellness education
- Avoid negative words around mental health
 - Crazy, nuts, psycho, etc.
 - Use “people first” communication
- Emphasize appropriate sleep/rest
- Provide safe space to talk about mental health
- Acknowledge that stigma may exist
- Stress the importance of seeking help



Decreasing Stigma

Coaches MUST:

- *Be intentional* to empower student-athletes to take control of their mental wellness by practicing good self care
- Self care requires a partnership between the coach and student-athlete with open dialogue



Psychologically Safe Team Environment

- A psychologically safe team environment stems from a sense of *trust and respect* across the team environment
- Psychologically safe teams facilitate both high-performance and wellbeing among team members
- Abusive coaches create a toxic environment

Psychologically Safe Team Environment

- Interpersonal relationships
 - high-quality interpersonal relationships, particularly the coach-athlete relationship
- Consistency and accountability
 - Athletes felt unsafe when there was inconsistency between words and action
- Fostering vulnerability
 - Observe vulnerability from someone in a position of power and see this vulnerability met with acceptance and support
- No athlete voice suppression
 - Communication must flow in both directions

Managing Stressors

- Stressors vs. Stress
 - Stressors: unmeetable demands and expectations
 - Stress: physical response of your body to perceived threat
- Stress Response System
 - Beginning, middle, end
 - We must complete this cycle

Important to deal with the stress, not just the stressor

Regulation *Proactive and responsive approach*

**Physical movement	Signals your body that you have survived the threat.
Social Connection	An external sign that the world is a generally safe place.
Intentional breathing	Connection to heart rate
Real laughing	Humor as a social connector, solidarity in profession.
Affection from others	20 second hug releases Oxytocin (Gottman) flooding your brain with feelings of love, connection, safety, and trust. Therapy animals lower blood pressure, provide an example of trust and safety. Higher power community, faith & trust.
A big cry	Flushing stress & toxins releasing Oxytocin and Endorphins-natural pain management.
Making something	Can be a safer way to express what your brain might be shielding you from.

Regulation is Contagious

Your regulation is powerful in influencing the outcome of a challenging conversation

1. **Regulate** (counter threat response)
 - Breathe: in nose, out mouth
 - Add sensory input: tension, movement, tune in.
2. **Co-regulate** (communicate safety to others)
 - “Welcome”: Consider body language, tone, attention.
3. **Communicate** (balance hearing and responding & ‘fixing’)
 - “I language”
 - Clarify what they need (venting vs. problem solving)
 - Set boundary; what you can offer
 - Lead with compassion

Re-regulate after conversation
(signal brain you survived threat)

- Prioritize movement, mindful breathing, social connection

The stressors don't
need to stop for us
to feel better



Our regulation directly impacts:

- The quality and longevity of work we do
 - Our relationships with the people we care about
 - Our physical and mental health
 - <https://howwefeel.org/>
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Mental Health Best Practices

Key Components

- Procedures for identification and referral of athletes with mental health concerns
- Pre-participation mental health screening
- Health promoting environments that support mental well-being and resilience
- *The UIAAA Model*

Mental Health Awareness Action Plan

- Leadership within school
- Student, coach, and parent education
- Emergent and non-emergent intervention options
- Collaborate with healthcare team
 - Connect immediately with the needed resources
- Mobilize the student support system
- Follow-up with referrals

Struggling Stressing Striving

**An Introduction to Mental Health Strategies for
Athletic Administrators**

National Trends—Grass Root Concerns

- *“Am I doing enough to support the mental health of my coaches?”*
- *“How do I provide coaches and students with the support and resources they need?”*
- *“How can I reduce their stress, their anxiety, their hurt, their depression?”*
- *“We’ve had two athlete suicides in the past six months—where do we start?”*

Struggling/Stressing/Striving & Surviving

- The Stress Model Barometer: Are the demands greater than my ability to cope?
- **Stress Model Equation: Demands > Coping = Stress**
- Identify the demands currently experienced
- Identify coping strategies to reduce the demands and reduce the stress
- When the stress barometer drops, when the demands are no longer greater than our ability to cope, we are now prepared to properly help and serve others

Setting the Stage: Barometer Questions

- My Life as an Administrator is...?
 - How would you describe your life as an administrator?
- The Life of a Coach is...?
 - How would you describe the life of a coach?
- The Life as a Student is...?
 - How would you describe the life of a student athlete?

Please complete the following form

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