



MENTAL HEALTH TOOLBOX

The physical and emotional benefits of activity participation are numerous. We also know students who participate in your school’s activity programs can encounter mental health challenges just like any other student, and at times may be even more susceptible due to the stresses associated with activity participation. Coaches, teachers and administrators are in unique positions to observe and interact with students daily and may often be one of the first people to recognize when a student may be struggling with a mental health crisis. School leaders are not expected to serve in the role of mental health professionals but understanding some simple strategies to recognize and communicate with students facing a mental health challenge are beneficial. The following information has been compiled by the KSHSAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee to support member schools in supporting their students who may be facing a mental health challenge.

Things to remember

- No one is above anxiety, depression, or suicide. Each person may experience symptoms differently.
- You don’t have to solve your students’ problems. Being a compassionate listener is more important than giving advice.
- Know when to refer a student. Your job is not to provide treatment.
- Be direct. Asking about suicide will not push someone into doing something self-destructive.

Starting the Conversation

- “Recently, I have noticed some differences in you and wondered how you are doing.”
- “I have been feeling concerned about you lately...”
- Think about the setting of the conversation, who else is around, your body language, any other distractions, etc.

When You Don’t Know What to Say

Reflection & Paraphrasing	“So you already felt isolated and it sounds like today’s incident added to what you have already been feeling?”
Validation	“It sounds like things have been really tough for you lately, no wonder you have felt so stressed.”
Open Ended Questions	“Can you tell me more about the frustrating thoughts you have been having?”
Strength ID	“I’m proud of you for reaching out for help. You don’t have to go through this alone.”



Direct Questions

- “When you say everyone would be better off without you, are you thinking about suicide?”
- “Do you ever think about hurting yourself?”
- “Do you have a plan for how you would kill yourself?”

Referring to Professionals

- “I know it may seem uncomfortable, but a mental health professional can get you the help you need.”
- “Why don’t we go visit with (School Counselor or other Mental Health Professional)? I can go with you if you want.”
- “I know you are strong, but you don’t have to go through this alone. Letting someone else help will take a lot of pressure off you.”



EXAMPLES OF RISK

Below are examples of different mental health risk levels and considerations for activity participation.

Emergency

- In these situations, the student is in imminent risk of harming themselves or someone else.
- Examples: Student has ingested medication or other substance in an attempt at self-harm or suicide. Student is making threats of harming someone else. Student is experiencing hallucinations/delusions that are putting them at risk of harm. Student is actively engaging in self-harm behavior that could potentially be life-threatening (cutting wrists deeply).
- It is most important to get the student to safety (emergency room or hospital) immediately. Then, you can inform necessary others (parents).
- Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department or crisis stabilization center.
- It is likely not safe for the student to engage in activities before receiving further evaluation and treatment.

Urgent

- In these situations, the student is clearly in distress but not in immediate danger.
- Examples: The student is crying over a recent break-up, feeling panicked over a failed test, family troubles, etc., student has made vague comments about their worth, the student is in the midst of a panic attack.
- It is important to make sure the student is safe.
 - If you are unsure of the student's level of safety, the student needs to be assessed by a mental health or medical professional. The student can go to the school counselor or take additional measures to make sure the student is safe.
- Once the student has reduced physiological arousal, it is likely safe for the student to return to activities with close monitoring.

Low Risk

- The student is in need of counseling to address issues in their life but the need is not immediate.
- If the student is being seen already, encourage them to make contact with their therapist with any new important information.
- If the student is not seeking care from a counselor, encourage them to do so.
- Express concerns to the school counselor and parents if appropriate.
- Example: You learn of ongoing depression or anxiety the student is facing. The student is struggling with overwhelming stress. The student is having a difficult time with family or significant other relationships.
- It is likely that the student is safe to continue to participate in athletic activities.



RESOURCES

For Emergencies, Call 911

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Crisis Text Line

<https://www.crisistextline.org/>

Text START to 741741

NFHSLearn.com

Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention online course

Work2BeWell

<https://work2bewell.org/>

Improving well-being and mental health of teens

NCAA Mental Health Resources

<http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mental-health>

Contact your local physician, he/she can help find mental health resources near you.

Call your insurance provider for assistance on locating a mental health professional.



PEOPLE RESOURCES

Remind students about the people in their lives that care about them and are also a resource for help:

- Friends/Teammates
- Parents
- School Counselors
- Coaches/Sponsors
- Teachers
- School Administrators
- School Nurse
- School Athletic Trainer
- Pastors

APPS/INTERNET RESOURCES

- Headspace
- Calm.com
- Breathe2Relax
- iBreathe
- Mood Balance
- Relax Melodies (to help with sleep)
- MyLife
- <https://www.k-state.edu/counseling/student/biofeedback/bfsample.html> - Relaxation exercises
- <http://athletesconnected.umich.edu> – Testimonials and strategies for athletes and their mental health
- <https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations/> - Free mindfulness meditations
- <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/> - Guided Meditations