

Promoting Mental Wellness

What Staff and Student-Athletes Should Know

Having environments that promote mental well-being are an important part of supporting student-athlete mental health.

Understanding mental health protective factors, as well as using respectful and destigmatizing language, help create an environment where talking about mental health and asking for help are normalized.

WHAT DOES MENTAL WELLNESS LOOK LIKE?

- Experiencing positive emotions, such as having moments of joy, feeling satisfied with life and feeling able to handle everyday challenges.
- Understanding and recognizing signs and symptoms of mental health challenges and feeling comfortable reaching out for support when needed.
- Having a supportive and trusted social network. This may include teammates and friends, family, coaches, faculty or other trusted individuals.
- Practicing emotional self-care, such as mindfulness, journaling or breathing techniques.
- Practicing physical self-care, such as getting restorative sleep, and having a balanced diet that fuels your body for academic and athletic performance.

WHAT ARE MENTAL HEALTH PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Protective factors at many levels – individual, interpersonal and departmental – can help you maintain mental wellness.

They can include, but aren't limited to:



- **Individual:** Practice physical and emotional self-care.



- **Interpersonal:** Have a support network or seek support from a licensed mental health provider. Use respectful and destigmatizing language.



- **Departmental:** Have a written Mental Health Action Plan and rehearse it. Have a plan to continuously improve mental health services and resources.



Research shows that participation in NCAA athletics may be a protective factor for mental health.

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

How people speak about mental health has real impacts; it can reduce stigma or reinforce it.

Words shape how people think about themselves and others; respectful, person-first language reduces shame and encourages help-seeking. Using neutral, accurate language helps keep the focus on support, hope and human dignity. When people hear mental health talked about like physical health, it becomes easier to get help without fear or judgment.

USING RESPECTFUL, DESTIGMATIZING LANGUAGE

Do Say

- ✓ “She has depression.”
- ✓ “He’s living with bipolar disorder.”
- ✓ “They died by suicide.”
- ✓ “They survived a suicide attempt.”
- ✓ “She’s experiencing mental health challenges.”

Avoid Saying

- ✗ Using slang, labels or insults.
- ✗ Defining a person by their condition (“a person with schizophrenia,” not “a schizophrenic”).
- ✗ Using outdated language about suicide (don’t say “committed suicide”).

How to Talk to Someone Who Needs Support

If someone is experiencing mental health symptoms, or you suspect they are, your words can help them feel seen, heard and safe.



Use calm, respectful language.

“I’m sorry things are tough right now. You’re not alone.”



Encourage help-seeking.

“Talking with a licensed mental health provider or a trusted adult can help. I can help you find support.”



Acknowledge their feelings without judgment.

“It makes sense you’re feeling overwhelmed.”



Normalize seeking mental health care.

“Many people who feel this way have found counseling to be helpful. Getting help is a sign of strength. Treatment works.”

Your words make a difference. For more resources on destigmatizing language, see [Resources to Foster Belonging and Well-Being](#).

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call, text or chat 988.

See the [NCAA Mental Health Best Practices](#) for more information on supporting student-athlete mental health.

