Equity Isn’t a Game: Girls in Sports

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What is Mental Health

• Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It determines how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices.

• Stigma

• Unaddressed mental health issues can affect one’s performance and functioning

• Playing sports should be fun and mentally healthy for youths
Common mental disorders in youth

13% Mood disorders/depression:
lethargic mood that impacts thoughts, interests, sleep and eating habits

32% Anxiety disorders:
most common (ages 12–18); intense feelings of excessive worry and fear

9% Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder:
inability to concentrate; hyperactivity that interferes with daily life

3% Eating/feeding disorders:
 extreme or abnormal eating habits leading to extreme weight loss or weight gain; feelings of low self-esteem and low confidence with self or body

(U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019)
Stress

Body
- headaches
- frequent infections
- taut muscles
- muscular twitches
- fatigue
- skin irritations
- breathlessness

Mind
- worrying
- muddled thinking
- impaired judgement
- nightmares
- indecisions
- negativity
- hasty decisions

Emotions
- loss of confidence
- more fussy
- irritability
- depression
- apathy
- alienation
- apprehension

Behavior
- accident prone
- loss of appetite
- loss of sex drive
- drinking more
- insomnia
- restlessness
- smoking more
Signs & Symptoms Depression in Children

• Feeling sad, hopeless, irritable a lot of the time
• Not wanting to do or enjoy doing fun things
• Show changes in eating patterns: too much or less than usual
• Changes in sleep patterns- too much or less than usual
• Showing changes in energy- tired and sluggish or tense and restless a lot of the time
• Having a hard time paying attention
• Feelings of worthlessness, uselessness or guilty
• Showing self-injury and self-destructive behavior
SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

• Being very afraid when away from parents—separation anxiety
• Having extreme fear about a specific thing or situations—almost phobic like behavior
• Being very afraid of school or other places where there are people
• Being very worried about the future and about bad things happening
• Having repeated episodes of sudden unexpected, intense fear that come with symptoms like having difficulty breathing, heart pounding, shaky, feeling dizzy and or sweaty
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH GIRLS IN SPORTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased mental health issues and burn out due to constant competition, year round training and injuries (<em>research has indicated that injury is strongest risk factor for mental health issues in athletes)</em></td>
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<td>• Fears related not living up to one’s potential or others expectations leading to decreased self-confidence and lowered self esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Body Image- myths around diet and body</td>
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<td>• Eating Disorders</td>
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<td>• Risk of Sexual Victimization</td>
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MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF GIRLS IN SPORTS

• Improves Self Esteem

• Social and Interpersonal Skills

• Sense of Community

• Supportive Adults

• Self-Discipline

• Students who play teams sports in grades 8-12 have less stress and better mental health as young adults

• Exercise decreases depressive symptoms due to natural chemicals in the brain being released

• Opportunities for learning adaptive coping strategies (i.e., frustration tolerance, dealing with losing, managing stress/anxiety)
MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Physical Self-Care
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Water intake
- Medication
- Supplements
- Breathing

Spiritual Self-Care
- Prayer
- Meditation
- Spiritual community
- Forgiveness
- Finding purpose and meaning

The Goal
To feel vital and balanced, free from depression and anxiety

Lifestyle
- Structure/routine
- Relaxation
- Setting goals
- Fulfilling work
- Time in nature
- Pleasure

Mental/Emotional Self-Care
- Positive self-talk
- Positive beliefs
- Feeling one's feelings
- Mood journal
- A library of positive memories
- Psychotherapy
- Family of origin healing
- Working through grief
- Working with a good therapist

People Support
- Family
- Friends
- Psychiatrist/therapist
- Minster/rabbi
- Support group
- Day treatment
- Community service
STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A SELF-CARE PLAN FOR YOUTHS

• Balance between academics, social obligations and sports

• Teach them to focus on play and skill development instead of who finished first (Parents and coaches can help with this)

• Paying attention to whether the sport is still fun for the youth

• Parents and coaches creating an atmosphere for the youth to feel comfortable expressing themselves

• Do fun things and spend time with friends outside of their respective sports
STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A SELF-CARE PLAN FOR YOUTH (CONT’D)

• Exercise

• Get adequate sleep and rest

• Utilize relaxation techniques to decrease body tension and to manage stress

• Setting realistic goals related to the athletic abilities and pursuit of a professional career
TECHNIQUES FOR YOUTHS

• Breathing deeply and visualizing a safe calm space
• Drawing
• Reading
• Yoga
• Positive Affirmations
• Journaling
• Making a Collage of Favorite things or how you are feeling
• Counting backwards slowly from 10
• Going on a walk
GROUNDING EXERCISE - exercise for when you feel your anxiety increasing or your emotions becoming overwhelming using the 5 senses (5 – 4- 3 – 2 – 1 Method)

• TOUCH-  Notice the feel of your clothing. Notice your body sitting in the chair.
• SIGHT – What do you see around you...describe the colors, identify things you see.
• HEARING- What sounds do you hear. Listen to your breathe as you breathe in and out deeply.
• TASTE- Drink something refreshing and try and identify the flavor.
• SMELL- Try to figure out the different smells you come across.