We are on the Same Team

Building Bridges between Athletics and Mental Health

Clarion University of Pennsylvania
Clarion University

• Rural university
• One of 14 schools in Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
• 5000 students
• Residential campus – about 1350 students in Halls
• 1 – NCAA Division I Team (Wrestling)
• 14 – NCAA Division II Teams
What brought us here today

“Okay, what do you want from Me?”

I'm not good at that, isn't that your job?

What if I say the wrong thing?

I don't really know what to do or say.

I don't know why you're here, counseling doesn't help us anyway.
The Environment and the Coaches

• Coaches put a significant emotional investment into recruiting the athletes and strong bonds form with students and families

• Loyalty to students’ success is something the coaches take very seriously

• Coaches spend a great deal of time finding students who are the right fit for their programs – athletically, academically and socially

• Coaches consider the students their “kids” and teams are “family”

• This leads to the desire for coaches to try to “fix” students’ problems all by themselves
The Plan

• Best Practices included:
  • Clinical Licensure Of Those Providing Care
  • A Mental Health Emergency Action Plan
  • A Pre Participation Mental Health Screen
    • Utilized a low cost option of PHQ-9
  • Health-Promoting Environments that Support Mental Well-Being and Resilience
    • Continual training of athletes, coaches, and administrators of mental health signs symptoms, and referrals

• PSAC’s Role
  • Statewide implementation of a mental health emergency plan, pre participation screen, and discussion on each institutions environments
MH Plan Team

And then you’ll follow up that they came to counseling, right

What do we make them do to come back to play?

So, what do we make them do if they score high? Make them see a counselor?

Should we stop them from travelling with the team?

What do we make them do if they went to the hospital?

What if we don’t know what to say?
The Plan

The purpose of this document is

- to provide a baseline understanding of common mental health issues, and how these types of mental health issues may present themselves,
- to outline the University’s expectations of employee and/or volunteers who work with student athletes, and
- to explain the Mental Health Screening Process that has been adopted by Clarion University for student athletes.

Mental Health Emergencies

It is important to familiarize yourself with situations, symptoms or behaviors that are considered mental health emergencies. A mental health emergency is defined as any of the following (See Appendix for definitions):

1. Suicidal and/or Homicidal Ideation
2. Sexual Assault
3. Highly agitated or threatening behavior, such as an individual stating that he/she is hearing or seeing things that aren’t there, confusion to the level that the student isn’t making sense (psychosis) or is concerning, or stating that people are out to get them (paranoia)
4. Acute Delirium/Confused State
5. Acute Intoxication or Drug Overdose
Mental Health Emergency Response: While every crisis situation will present itself in a different manner, the following provides a general guideline of steps that should be taken to manage these common mental health emergencies:

Suicidal and/or homicidal ideation

- If a student has an immediate medical emergency, call 814-393-2111
- If a student is not in your physical presence and expresses a harm to themselves or others
  - Call 911 or University Police at 814-393-2111 for a medical emergency
  - Provide 911 with the reason for your call
  - Ask 911 to complete a “welfare check”
- If a student is in your physical presence and expresses a desire to harm themselves or others
  - During Business Hours: walk with the student to the Center for Wellness in 256 Becht
  - After Business Hours: contact Clarion County Crisis at 814-226-7223
  - Provide the Center for Wellness or Crisis with information the student discussed with you
Also includes

• Follow up after a mental health emergency (Debrief and BIT referral)
• Guidelines for mental health screening
• Rules for return to play
Successes – People, places, and things

• Getting the RIGHT people in the room
• Listen. Listen. Listen.
• Respect of the others point of view
• Pressure and Change in Leadership
• Catastrophic events, crisis situations, and supports all did their job to position mental health individuals in a place of support to athletics
Challenges

• Institutions need to provide proper services to alleviate the burden of coaches trying to handle everything on their own

• Recognize this isn’t as easy as “you coach and we counsel” so we need to honor that special relationship and bring the coaches on board as partners

• Mental Health Practitioners need to work on building relationships of trust and respect with the coaching staff so a strong collaboration is inherent

• Athletic trainers often find out more about athletes’ concerns because the students share information with them rather than their coaches since they don’t want to disappoint their coaches
Get out in front of issues – Prevention is Key

• Training for coaches on identifying mental health issues, suicidality, resources, financial readiness and when to involve others

• Training for athletic trainers on mental health, suicidality, resources and when to involve others

• Training for student athlete leaders on recognizing symptoms in their teammates and themselves

• Offer opportunities for counseling center staff to interact with coaches and athletes before problems arise

• Make plans to support coaches during “off” times when campus services may not be open. Facilitate connections between coaches and community resources
Discussion

• What are some common reactions that your athletics teams have when “mental health” shows up

• How have you successfully addressed these occurrences as a university?

• How have you built strong relationships between your wellness team and athletics?

• How far have you come in implementing clear policies and procedures to help coaches support their athletes discovery of mental health resources
Thank you!

If you have absolutely any questions, please email me at:
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References
