Recognizing and Responding to Distress in Student-Athletes
• Mental Health in College Students
• Identifying the Problem
• How does Seize the Awkward Help?
  • Learning how to tell when you or a friend might need help
  • Learning how easy it is to help a friend that is struggling
• Questions
Mental Health In College Students
Mental Health Problems are Common in Young Adults

30% of college students reported being diagnosed with or treated a mental health condition in 2017*

- **Anxiety** (22%) and **depression** (18%) are the most common diagnoses

In the past 12 months students have reported the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Attempts</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Thoughts of Suicide</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Injured</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelming Anxiety</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt Very Sad</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*National College Health Assessment (NCHA) – Spring 2018
What About Student Athletes?

Student-athletes (male and female) have reported the following:

• 30% lower rates of anxiety and depression than non-athletes.
  • But this is still considered a significant rate

• High levels of satisfaction with the care they received from team or college personnel
  • From about 40% who sought help for a mental health issue

• Higher substance abuse and alcohol binging rates in D3 athletes.

• Higher rates of eating disorders and problem gambling

30% have been overwhelmed during the past month.

1/3 struggle to find energy for other tasks because of the physical demands of their sport.

1/4 being exhausted from the mental demands of their sport.

73% believe that their coach cares about their mental well-being.

Statistics are from NCAA Goals Study: http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mental-health-data-and-research and NCHA data
STUDENT ATHLETES AND SEEKING HELP

Student-athletes are less likely to reach out for help when experiencing distress.

Impediments include:

• Not wanting to admit a problem (“macho” culture)
• Fear that admitting a problem might impact image or playing time if others become aware
• Time constraints (they don’t have time or counseling service may not be open when they are free)
• The situation is improving and can be improved when athletics has dedicated or embedded counseling staff
IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM
We all have problems and challenges – they’re inevitable. But these problems can actually help us learn how to deal with and even overcome adversity.

- Not all emotional distress situations require professional help. There are a lot of things we can do to help ourselves or our friends who may be going through a tough time.
- Making sure to get enough sleep, eating well and getting regular exercise and even spending time doing enjoyable activities or a hobby can help
- Spending time and just talking to a friend can help them feel better

Being a good friend and/or teammate simply means stepping in to say something and help when you notice something is wrong.
How to Know When There’s a Problem?

When trying to recognize if your friend may be going through a difficult time or not, look out for changes in the following areas:

- Appearance
- Self-Care
- Speech
- Mood
  - Increased irritability
- Behavior
- Increase in feelings of hopelessness and desperation
Why a Friend May Reject Help?

- They may not believe there is a problem
- They may be worried that facing the problem will make it worse or afraid to face the possibility that there might be a problem
- They may be worried about other consequences
How to Know When Help is Needed?

If you notice your teammate has been going through a tough time, it may be time to step in if the issue is:

- Intense
- Lasting a long time
- Getting worse
- Disrupting usual functions (can’t sleep, work, relax)
- Associated with other problems (anxious and can’t concentrate or sleep)
- Keeps happening repeatedly
- Dangerous: Thoughts or impulses to harm oneself or others

Emotional challenges or mental health problems can affect our:

- Thinking (concentration, perceptions, memory)
- Feelings (sadness, anxiety, too happy)
- Behavior (OCD, eating or substance problems, suicidal or self harming behaviors)

Don’t be afraid to reach out to a teammate in distress.

If your gut tells you something is wrong, take it seriously.

Think about a stomach ache – when would you see a doctor? Mental health problems are the same.
How Does Seize the Awkward Help?
STARTING THE CONVERSATION

It may feel a bit awkward but it’s not hard to do.

Here are some tips:

• **Express Concern**
  “I am worried about you because…”

• **Be Specific** about why you’re concerned:
  “…because you’ve been missing a lot of class/looking exhausted/not hanging out with your friends... recently.”

• **Offer Help**
  “Do you want to talk about it or maybe just go out for a bite to eat?”

If the problem seems very serious, offer to help them find resources or professional help.
A FEW SIMPLE GUIDELINES

• Keep it Casual
  Relax: think of it as a chill chat, not a therapy session.

• Have Patience
  Let them open up at their own speed.

• Take Time to Listen
  You don’t have to necessarily solve all your friend’s problems to be helpful.

• “Know Your Role”
  If it is requiring lots of time, effort and concern on your part, or feels beyond what you can do, you probably need to get others involved.
  • Avoid offering advice or trying to fix their problems (unless a solution is simple or obvious).
What if They Won’t Accept Help?

If someone is not obviously or immediately in harm’s way and won’t accept your help try to keep the lines of communication open.

• **DON’T GIVE UP:** Maybe the first attempt didn't go so well or they weren't ready to talk. Stay available and keep checking in.

• **KEEP INVITATIONS GOING:** Even if they don't accept, it's important to keep offering because it still helps.

• **GET SOME OUTSIDE HELP:** You don’t have to do this on your own. Don’t be afraid to reach out for help from a coach, teacher, counselor or someone you trust, and if you are worried or unsure get support.

• **HANDLE THEIR TRUST WITH CARE:** If and when they do open up, you may be the only person they talk to about this. Show you care and avoid turning your back on them.
BREAKOUT SESSION: What are some ways you can bring these learnings back to the locker room?
In an Emergency

It is an emergency and time to seek outside help if someone is:
- Saying they are having thoughts or impulses to self harm
- Seeking means to self harm
- Agitated or disorganized in thinking or behavior
- Behaving in a dangerous or threatening way to others

In an emergency, do not put yourself in a dangerous situation and be sure to gather the appropriate information needed to help. The following resources are available to you:
- Campus Support Resources such as campus security, counselors or emergency
  - If these services are not available then call 911
- Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting “SEIZE” to 741-741 or call the National Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255
You can make a world of difference when you help!

QUESTIONS?
Resources

https://www.jedcampus.org/

http://www.press-pause.org/