

Real Talk: Strength in Seeking Support

“ If you’re having a hard time, I want to remind you that you’re not alone. Sharing what you’re going through could be the most important thing you do. It was for me.
– Kevin Love



CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Music Playlist

Lesson Intention:

For many athletes, the stigma that still surrounds mental health challenges prevents them from reaching out for support and leaves them to navigate their emotions alone. Yet, when athletes do reach out to share their story, they often find that their teammates feel similarly, and that this newfound community brings comfort and helps them feel less alone.

Athletes face unique pressures as they seek to balance demanding training and game schedules with academic responsibilities, and they have minimal time for social life and rest. This can lead to stress and burnout. Additionally, many athletes find a sense of identity and worth in their athletic success which can lead to additional pressure and a sense of unworthiness if they have an injury or a less successful season.

By providing athletes with warning signs that they can look for in themselves and their teammates, this lesson helps normalize seeking support. Athletes have an opportunity to reflect on their own emotions and experiences, while developing an understanding of how they can contribute to shifting the narrative around sports and mental health. They will learn empowering strategies to reach out to teammates, coaches, and trusted adults.

Learning Goals:

- Understand the warning signs that indicate if an athlete or their teammate may need mental health support and how to get that support.
- Develop strategies for initiating conversations to support a teammate who might need help.
- Recognize the value in reducing stigma around mental health conversations within athletics.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video - Dr. R. Kweku Amoasi, Psy.D.](#)
- [Additional Videos](#)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)
- [Activity Handout](#)
- [Creative Activity Examples](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

1. *Have writing utensils, index cards and the activity handout (or blank paper) for each student. *If you would rather use Spotify or Canva, make sure that your athletes have access to it on their personal electronic devices.*
2. *Write your own index card – on the front, write one sentence about how other people see you, and on the back, one sentence about an aspect of yourself that you don't always share with the world.*
3. *Create your own music playlist that you will share with your athletes.*
4. *Choose the additional video(s) that you feel will resonate the most with your athletes.*
5. *Have a list of campus/local mental health resources that you can share with students afterward.*

Featured Video:

1. Dr. R. Kweku Amoasi, Psy.D describes the signs that indicate when an athlete may be struggling with their mental health.

Additional Videos:

1. Despite his success as a student-athlete, Ryan (former high school golf) struggled privately with body dysmorphia, anxiety, and depression which eventually led him to walk away from the sport he loved.
2. Overwhelmed by perfectionism and burnout, Abby (high school field hockey) nearly lost her love for her sport.
3. Emily (high school volleyball & flag football) struggled with the pressure to be perfect until she realized she didn't need to hit a breaking point to ask for help.
4. To manage pre-race anxiety and self-doubt, Lola (high school swim) turned to her teammates, coaches, and mindfulness tools for support.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

As discussed in the facilitator training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

* Slide 2

- The facilitator introduces today's lesson with the importance of learning the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges and shifting the culture of athletics to normalize discussing mental health and being open and vulnerable about our own experiences.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Today, we are going to talk about taking care of our mental health, and the value of being open about what we are going through in our own lives and reaching out for support when we need it. As you probably have noticed, the norm in athletics has started to shift, making conversations around mental health more accepted. Professional athletes have begun to share their own experiences and set the tone for the student-athletes who follow in their footsteps. Kevin Love, DeMar Derozan, Simone Biles, Naomi Girma, Michael Phelps, Victoria Garrick Browne are a few examples, but I bet you can think of examples of athletes who have shared vulnerable stories on social media or in interviews.

Often, athletes talk about the way they hid how they were feeling because they were nervous about how their teammates or coaches might react. Can you relate to this? Have you ever felt like the way you were feeling didn't match the way other teammates or coaches saw you? We're going to start today with a short activity called 'the game face.' We always talk about how you have to have a 'game face' and lock in when competing. Many times, that's also the face we show to the world. Each of you has an index card. On one side of the card I want you to write a sentence or two about the way everyone else sees you- your coaches, teammates, family and friends. I will share my example first. *(Facilitators, share a sentence about the way you think other people see you.)* Now, take a minute to write a sentence or two on your index card about the way you think other people see you. This is your 'game face' for the world.

(Give students three minutes to write.)

Now, flip your index card over and on the opposite side, I want you to write the emotions or experiences that you don't always share with others. Maybe you feel anxiety before a big game, maybe you feel worried about an injury or about the way you have been playing lately or something else that is going on in your life. Write one sentence about the emotions you hide from the world. Before you write, I want to share what I wrote for mine. *(Read the sentence you wrote about the aspect of yourself that you don't share with the world- these might be emotions, worries, or other mental health challenges that you are not often open about with your athletes. Make sure to choose an age-appropriate example to share with the team.)*

Now, we will take a few minutes to write a sentence or two about the emotions that you don't often share with others.

(Give students three minutes to write down the emotions or thoughts that they don't often share with others.)

I hope this activity gave you a chance to reflect on the way we often put on a 'game face' for others, and the value in noticing how we actually feel. Is there anyone who wants to share your index card with the group?

(Encourage students to share their card if they would like.)

One of the added benefits of starting to be more open about the way we feel inside is that it can encourage others to share how they are feeling. And this can help to change the stigma that still surrounds these types of conversations. As you can see from this activity, many athletes feel pressure to hide how they are feeling and just 'push through' struggles which can make mental health challenges difficult to notice in ourselves or in our friends and teammates. But, there are some signs we can notice in ourselves or our teammates that might point to the fact that someone is struggling and may need support."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introduce & Play Expert Video:

* Slide 3

- Introduce the video from Dr. R. Kweku Amoasi, Psy.D., who will describe how to recognize the signs that someone is struggling with their mental health and next steps for seeking help. This can also help us recognize these signs in ourselves too.

Examples of What You Could Say:

"We are going to watch a video from a sports psychologist who will share more information about the signs that we can look for in ourselves and in our teammates that are early indicators that we might need support. He will also explain how and where to reach out for support. Finally, he will give advice on how to talk with a teammate who you think might be having a difficult time."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Reflect on Expert Video/Introduce Additional Video(s):

- Reiterate the main idea of the expert video. As Kevin always says ‘everyone is going through something.’ The important thing is to notice some of those signs mentioned in the video and reach out for help.
- Connect the expert video to the additional video(s). Note that these videos show how other athletes navigated their own challenges with mental health.

Examples of What You Could Say:

“Now that you know what to look for in yourself or a teammate, how to reach out for support, and how to talk to a teammate you might be worried about, I want to play another video from an athlete who will share their personal story. One of the ways that we can begin to reduce the stigma that still surrounds mental health in sports is to talk about our own experiences with each other. This can also be a big part of helping a teammate who we think might be struggling. The more we can normalize these discussions, by modeling them ourselves, and being open about our own experiences, the more we will begin to change the culture in sports- and show younger players that mental health is just as important as physical health. In this video, the athlete shares their personal mental health story, how they noticed they needed help and reached out for support.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Additional Video(s):

- Before you play the additional video, remember to give students a description of its content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video.

Introducing the Creative Activity:

* Slide 4

- Students will have the opportunity to make a music playlist that represents a challenging time from their life, and the emotions they experienced during that time. Athletes will select a few songs that represent their emotions and design cover art that represents those emotions.

Example of What You Could Say:

"I like that the video was another example of being open about mental health and helping to set a new standard where it is okay to talk about how we are doing, especially if we are struggling. I want you to pause for a minute and have you think about a time in your own life when you were experiencing a challenge. Was it during a season when you didn't feel you were playing well? Maybe it was a situation outside of your sport that you were struggling with- like a relationship challenge or difficulty in school. What was the situation where you were experiencing difficult emotions?"

I remember a time when I... *(The facilitator shares a time in their life when they experienced a mental health challenge or difficulty in their life.)*

Now that we have an experience in mind, I want you to reflect on whether or not you reached out for support. Did you know where you could go to get the help you needed?"

Sometimes, it can feel hard to put into words the way we are feeling, or we feel like there is a real stigma that still surrounds talking about our mental health. I want to share one idea that can be a good place to start. Have you ever heard a song that you thought represented a feeling that was hard to put into words? Maybe the lyrics or the melody made you feel understood, like you weren't the only one struggling.

I want you to make a playlist- and choose several songs that reflect the way you were feeling during a difficult time. Or pick a few songs that helped you get through a challenging time. Next, write down why you picked these songs for your playlist. If you have extra time, you can also draw/design cover art for your playlist.

We will now take 10 minutes to do this."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity: Music Playlist

- Students spend approximately 10-15 minutes creating their own music playlist and cover art representing emotions they felt during a challenging time in their life.
- Students can use their electronic device to create their playlist and cover art or markers and colored pencils on the handout that you provide for them.

Lesson Closure:

- Invite students to share their playlist and/or cover art.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Thanks for doing this activity. I know it takes courage to tell the truth about how we are feeling or share a time in our lives when we were struggling. I hope today, you saw that this stigma is starting to shift in sports and that we can be a part of making this change.

Questions to prompt the conversation:

- Would anyone like to share a song from their playlist or show their cover art?
- Did finding a song that represents an emotion make it feel a little easier to talk about that emotion?
- How did it feel to make the playlist/cover art? Was it helpful?
- Did you learn anything new today about what you can look for in yourself or your teammate that might be a sign that it is time to reach out for support?

Thank you for sharing with us. We talked about what we can look for in ourselves and our teammates that will help us see when we would benefit from additional support with our mental health. We also talked about where you can go for support. I want to remind you about these steps you can take or that you can share with a teammate or a friend.”

Share Resources:

* Slide 5

- Display the Resource Page on PowerPoint.
- Share local/campus resources.
- Encourage students to reach out for help if needed.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Remember that it is okay to ask for help if you need it. If you or someone you know is in crisis or in need of immediate support, you can call 988 or text HOME to 741741.

Here are the Kevin Love Fund resources, which you can access directly on their website at kevinlovefund.org. You can also visit nami.org for a ton of resources.

And here are some additional resources from our campus/community that you can utilize as well. (*Share relevant information to campus counselors/sports psychologists.*)”

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third-party links are included below.

1. [Use this resource](#) to reference the warning signs and understand the next steps athletes could take to help a friend. Sometimes it’s hard to tell if their teammates are feeling down or if there’s a larger challenge. This resource can help put words to what they are seeing in their teammates and friends.

2. [In this video](#), Priscilla and Brooke talk about the emotions surrounding asking for help. Sometimes, athletes can put on a “game face” or “mask” around their teammates. Asking for help can be tough, but hearing from these stories and tips shows it’s okay to ask for help.
3. A [commitment planner](#) can be a great resource when managing the different obligations of these student-athletes. The athletes can sit down and make time to balance their studies, practice, other responsibilities, and pencil in dedicated time to recharge and practice self-care.
4. [NAMI On Campus \(NOC\)](#) is a mental health awareness club available for high schools and colleges. Student-athletes can either participate in activities of their existing NOC club or help start a club to promote mental health awareness further and create a safe space for students on campus.
5. The [NAMI Teen and Young Adult Resource Directory](#) is a great place to go when looking for additional resources specifically for young people. This directory was put together by NAMI Helpline volunteers to support young people in finding resources that best meet their needs.
6. Trusted adults can use [this resource](#) from NAMI to spark easy, meaningful conversations on the ride home from practice or a game. These question prompts help athletes and trusted adults check in, reflect, and open the door to talking about feelings beyond the game, turning everyday moments into opportunities for connection and support.
7. For coaches and trusted adults, use [this resource](#) from NAMI to learn how to show up with curiosity, concrete support, and connection. The 3 C’s can help coaches and parents build supportive, understanding relationships with teen athletes so they know they’re seen, heard, and supported both on and off the field.
8. Use [this resource](#) from NAMI to recognize common warning signs of suicide and understand what to do next. This resource can help athletes and trusted adults put words to changes they might be seeing, so they can notice when someone may be struggling and take supportive, informed steps toward help.
9. Bringing calm and focus into everyday moments can have positive effects on wellbeing. These simple [mindfulness activities](#) can help teen athletes and trusted adults slow down, tune into the present, and build skills for managing stress both on and off the field.
10. [In this podcast interview with Dr. Laurie Santos](#), Kevin Love describes the way he struggled with his mental health when he was younger. Sharing Kevin’s story is a way to normalize discussing mental health. This interview can help an athlete feel less alone if they are having a difficult time.
11. [“The Human Behind the Athlete” in Psychology Today](#), Kevin Love describes the free athlete mental health program provided for coaches, schools and nonprofits by the Kevin Love Fund. To attend a free training and access the program, reach out at kevinlovetfund.org.
12. [Kevin Love Fund scientific advisor Dr. Brook Choulet interviewed Kevin Love](#) about the pressure that many athletes face today. This short video can be a useful supplement to this lesson, another example of the way being open and vulnerable about mental health can contribute to shifting the stigma in sport.

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