



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

WELL-BEING TRAINING PROGRAM FOR COACHES

MINDPLAY

KA210-YOU-SMALL-SCALE PARTNERSHIP IN YOUTH





Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

The project

This publication is one of the final products of the "MINDPLAY" project. By developing this Well-Being Training Program and an open-source Online Training Platform for coaches, the project aims to equip mentors and coaches with practical tools and resources that empower them to use sports as a means to foster overall youth health.

Partners

Federación Aragonesa De Voleibol	https://www.favb.es/
Kogui HUB	https://www.koguihub.org/
Association Mundus Bulgaria	https://mundusbulgaria.com/en/home/
ASOCIACIJA AKTYVISTAI	https://aktyvistai.lt/about.html

Authors

This publication was realized with the contribution and collaboration of all partners.

License

The project resources contained herein are publicly available under the Creative Commons license

Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.





Contents

Introduction	5
What is ETS?	6
References	7
Recognizing Signs of Mental Health Issues	8
Why Mental Health Matters in Sports	8
Common Mental Health Issues in Teens	9
Learning Disabilities and ADHD	11
Substance Abuse Disorders	11
Eating Disorders	11
Suicide and Self-Harm	12
A Day in the Life of a Mentally Healthy Teenager: Recognizing Strengths and Early Warning Signs	12
National Research on Youth Mental Health	15
Practical Exercises for Supporting Youth Mental Health	17
Exercise 1: Pass the Thought Ball	17
Exercise 2: Fast Feet, Fast Mind	18
References	19
How to Build a Supportive Environment	20
What is a Supportive Environment?	20
Key Components of a Supportive Environment	20
How to Build a Supportive Environment	22
Conflict Management Strategies	24
Practical Exercises to Build Supportive Environments	25
Exercise 1: Paper feelings	25
Exercise 2: Active listening	26
References	27
Best Practices to Support Young People's Well-Being Through Sports	28
Best Practices in Cultivating a Supportive Environment for Youth Well-Being Across the Globe	28
The Mind-Body Connection in Young Athletes	30
Sports as Emotional Training	31



Exercise 1: The Confidence Circuit	32
Exercise 2: Emotion Relay Race	34
Exercise 3: Mindful Cooldown	35
Exercise 4: Stress Dribble Challenge	36
Exercise 5: Positive Talk Huddle	37
Exercise 6: Self-Compassion Stretch	38
References	38
Strategies to Raise Mental Health Awareness and Develop Effective Communication	39
Communication Strategies for Raising Mental Health Awareness	40
Breaking the Stigma on Mental Health	40
Strategies for Effective Communication	41
Mental Health Advocacy	42
How to Organize an Interactive Session using ETS	43
What is Experiential Learning?	44
What are Teachable Moments?	45
What is Debriefing?	46
How to Prepare for an ETS Session	47
Creating an ETS Session	48
Practical Exercises for Promoting Communication	49
Exercise 1: Ultimate frisbee	49
Exercise 2: Sports Values	51
References	52
Coach's role limits	53
The Coach as a mental health promoter	53
Collaboration not substitution	54
References	55
Conclusion	56
Glossary	57



Introduction

The MINDPLAY project aims to equip sport coaches with practical tools to identify young people experiencing mental health challenges and to use team sports like volleyball as a way to support healing and reduce the impact of these issues – especially among youth from marginalized backgrounds. Through this initiative, the project is developing a Mental Well-being through Sport Toolkit, organizing international events and conferences to raise awareness, and designing this training program for coaches.

Team sports have been proven to be highly beneficial in supporting mental health. They foster a sense of connection and solidarity, encouraging young people to open up about their feelings and experiences without fear of judgment. But this supportive environment doesn't happen by itself – it depends heavily on the role and behavior of the coach.

As mentors and trusted adults, coaches need proper preparation to recognize signs of distress in young athletes, to build an inclusive and positive team culture, and to create strong coach-athlete relationships grounded in trust and open communication. This is where the Well-being Training Program for Coaches comes in. Its main objective is to enhance coaches' knowledge and skills in preventing and responding to mental health issues among youth. It aims to help them develop critical competencies for supporting the mental and physical well-being of their players through sport.

The consortium of MINDPLAY spans three countries: Spain, Lithuania, and Bulgaria, offering the handbook in four languages. An online platform will host all training materials as free, multilingual resources, making them accessible to grassroots sport clubs and mentors across all participating countries.

The training program is grounded in the Education Through Sport methodology, a practical approach that connects sport activities with learning outcomes to support personal growth and well-being.



What is ETS?

Education Through Sport (ETS) is a powerful educational approach that uses sport and physical activity as tools to support learning, personal development, and positive social impact. Instead of focusing only on technical sport performance, ETS places emphasis on what happens through sport – how young people can learn new skills, values, and attitudes by participating in meaningful, structured sport-based activities.

ETS is grounded in the idea that sport has the potential to teach important life skills – such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and self-discipline – while also promoting core values like inclusion, fairness, and respect. It's not just about becoming a better athlete, but about becoming a more resilient, socially aware, and emotionally healthy person.

This approach also acknowledges the significant cognitive, physical, and psychological benefits of sport. Research shows that regular physical activity can boost concentration and memory, improve mood, reduce anxiety and stress, and increase self-esteem – all of which are especially important during adolescence, a period marked by rapid emotional and social changes.

Education in, through, and by Sport – What's the Difference?

These three terms are often used in similar ways but have distinct meanings and objectives:

Education in sport focuses on sport as the subject of learning — improving physical fitness, mastering techniques, and understanding rules. It's often structured and linked to performance or curriculum-based learning (e.g., physical education classes).

Education through sport is about using sport as a *method* of non-formal learning. The focus is on personal and social development — fostering emotional intelligence, teamwork, leadership, and well-being. This is the core principle behind ETS.

Education by sport uses sport as a tool for addressing larger societal issues. This approach aims to contribute to social justice, peacebuilding, and inclusion, often involving advocacy and awareness efforts.



Benefits of Education Through Sport (ETS)

ETS can be tailored to different groups and goals – from personal empowerment to community building. What makes ETS especially powerful is that it engages young people emotionally and physically, making learning experiences more impactful and long-lasting.

By using ETS methods, coaches can actively contribute to the mental health of their teams in the following ways:

1. **Fostering a supportive team culture:** Create an environment where every player feels valued by focusing on teamwork, inclusion, and celebrating effort over performance.
2. **Embedding reflection into practice:** Use short debriefs after training to help players reflect on their emotions and build emotional awareness.
3. **Normalizing mental health conversations:** Introduce topics like stress, emotions, and peer support through regular, casual discussions connected to the sport context.
4. **Building life skills through activities:** Choose or adapt sport-based exercises to strengthen communication, empathy, leadership, and conflict resolution.
5. **Supporting youth beyond the game:** Learn to recognize signs of distress and provide a safe space or guidance when young players face personal challenges.

In a sports club or school setting, ETS can be used to tackle issues like bullying, discrimination, or lack of confidence, by turning everyday training into opportunities for growth and emotional learning. With this approach, you're not just training better athletes – you're shaping more confident, connected, and emotionally healthy young people.

References

- [Sport&NFE Handbook on the Empowering Use of Sport in Non-formal Education](#)
- [Virtual Education through Sports Lab Toolbox](#).



Co-funded by
the European Union



Recognizing Signs of Mental Health Issues

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being, especially for adolescents who undergo significant physical, emotional, and social changes. The teenage years present unique challenges such as academic pressures, evolving social dynamics, and identity formation. These factors, combined with the influence of social media and external expectations, can contribute to increased vulnerability to mental health issues. Recognizing and addressing mental health concerns early is crucial for preventing long-term consequences. Coaches and mentors, who play an integral role in young people's lives, are well-positioned to detect early warning signs and provide a supportive environment. This module aims to equip professionals with the knowledge and tools to recognize symptoms of distress, understand common mental health disorders, and implement effective support strategies.

As a coach or mentor, you play a pivotal role in shaping the well-being of young athletes. Remember, mental health is as important as physical health in sports, influencing performance, motivation, teamwork, and personal development. Adolescence is a time of significant emotional and psychological changes, making young people particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. Studies show that 10-20% of teenagers experience significant mental health issues.

This module will equip you with essential knowledge about common mental health disorders in teenagers, their symptoms, risk factors, and strategies for supporting young athletes in maintaining their well-being. By learning to recognize signs of mental distress and fostering a supportive sports environment, you can help prevent serious issues and build resilience within your team.

Why Mental Health Matters in Sports

Young athletes face unique pressures - competition, performance expectations, social comparison, and balancing sports with school. Mental health challenges can affect motivation, focus, and even physical performance. Research indicates that mental health disorders account for 15-30% of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost in young people. Despite these statistics, mental health in youth sports is often overlooked.

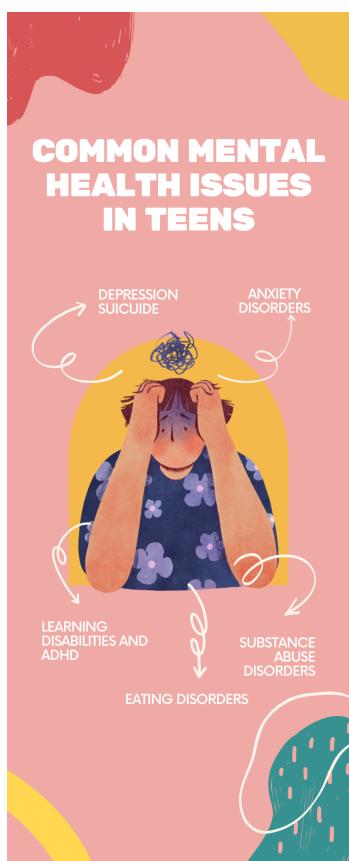


As a coach, you are in a powerful position to:

- Recognize when a young athlete may be struggling.
- Foster an environment where players feel comfortable discussing their emotions.
- Encourage healthy coping mechanisms.
- Work alongside parents and mental health professionals when needed.

Creating a culture that prioritizes mental health is vital in sports and education. It not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to overall team cohesion and performance. A young athlete's mental state can significantly impact motivation, focus, and resilience, ultimately affecting their success in both sports and academics. Some strategies, like fostering open conversations about mental health, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, and providing access to resources, coaches and mentors can play a significant role in ensuring young people thrive.

Common Mental Health Issues in Teens



Mental health challenges among teenagers manifest in various ways, often impacting their daily lives, academic performance, and relationships. Adolescents may struggle with emotional distress, behavioral changes, and cognitive difficulties, which may indicate an underlying mental health disorder. Research suggests that one in five teenagers experience symptoms of emotional distress, with conditions such as anxiety and depression being the most prevalent¹

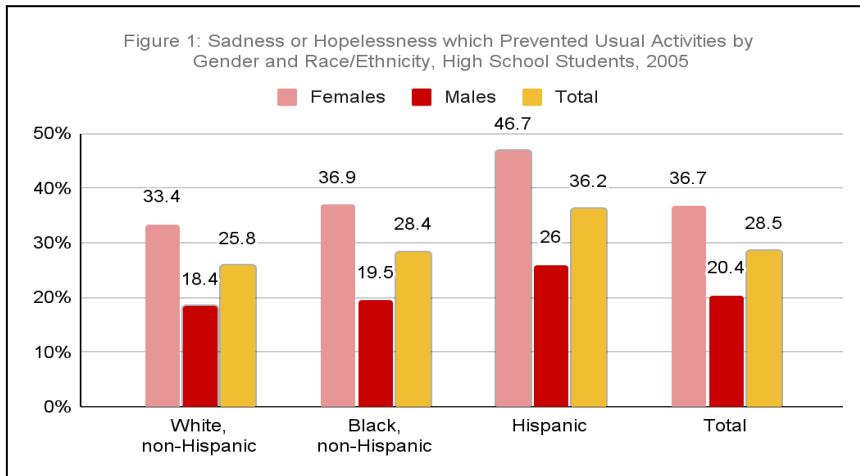
Mood Disorders

Mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, significantly affect teenagers' emotional well-being. Symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, fatigue, loss of interest in activities, difficulty concentrating, and changes in appetite and sleep patterns. Bipolar disorder, though less common, involves extreme mood swings ranging from depressive episodes to periods of intense energy and impulsivity. Studies show that approximately 10-20% of teenagers worldwide experience symptoms of depression, making it one of the most common mental health issues among youth.

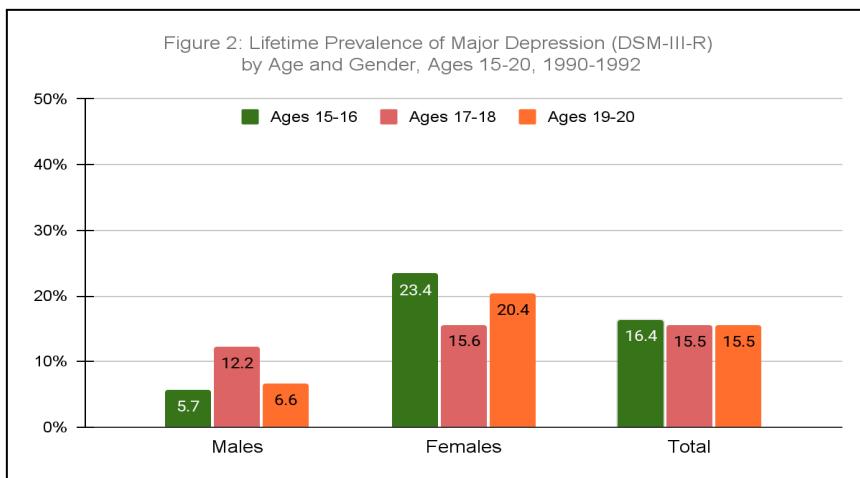
¹[link to Canva](#)



One of the broadest indicators of depressive symptoms comes from the YRBSS (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System). This study asks: *Have you ever felt so sad or hopeless almost every day, for two weeks in a row, that you couldn't do some of your usual activities?* Results from the 2005 YRBSS indicate that 36.7% of female and 20.4% of male high school students reported this level of sadness; Hispanic students reported higher rates (46.7% of females & 26.0% of males) than their non-Hispanic Black & White peers (**Figure 1**).



Depression is more than twice as prevalent among females ages 15-20, compared to same-age males, according to an analysis of data from the 1990-1992 National Comorbidity Study (**Figure 2**).



Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are another prevalent issue among teens, with approximately 32% of adolescents experiencing excessive worry, social withdrawal, panic attacks, or phobias. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder, and panic disorder can significantly impact confidence, social interactions, and academic performance. Left



untreated, anxiety disorders can hinder a teenager's ability to participate fully in everyday activities.²

Learning Disabilities and ADHD

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities can create significant academic and social challenges for teenagers. ADHD is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which can interfere with schoolwork and relationships. Studies indicate that nearly 9% of children and adolescents are diagnosed with ADHD. Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or processing disorders, can cause frustration and low self-esteem, contributing to anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Substance Abuse Disorders

Substance abuse disorders often emerge during adolescence, with some teenagers using drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism for stress, peer pressure, or underlying mental health conditions. Research indicates that early substance use increases the risk of long-term dependency, academic failure, and legal issues. Approximately 12% of adolescents report using illicit drugs, while alcohol remains one of the most commonly abused substances among youth.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa and bulimia, are particularly prevalent among adolescents due to societal pressures related to body image and self-esteem. These disorders involve unhealthy eating habits, extreme dieting,

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STATISTICS

ANXIETY

About **32%** of teens experience anxiety disorders, including excessive worry, social withdrawal, panic attacks, or phobias.



ADHD

Studies indicate that nearly **9%** of children and adolescents are diagnosed with ADHD.

SUBSTANCE USE

Approximately **12%** of adolescents report using illicit drugs.



EATING DISORDERS

Studies show that nearly **3%** of teenagers suffer from an eating disorder, with females being more commonly affected than males.



SUICIDE

Studies reveal that nearly **15%** of teenagers have seriously considered suicide, while **8%** have attempted it.



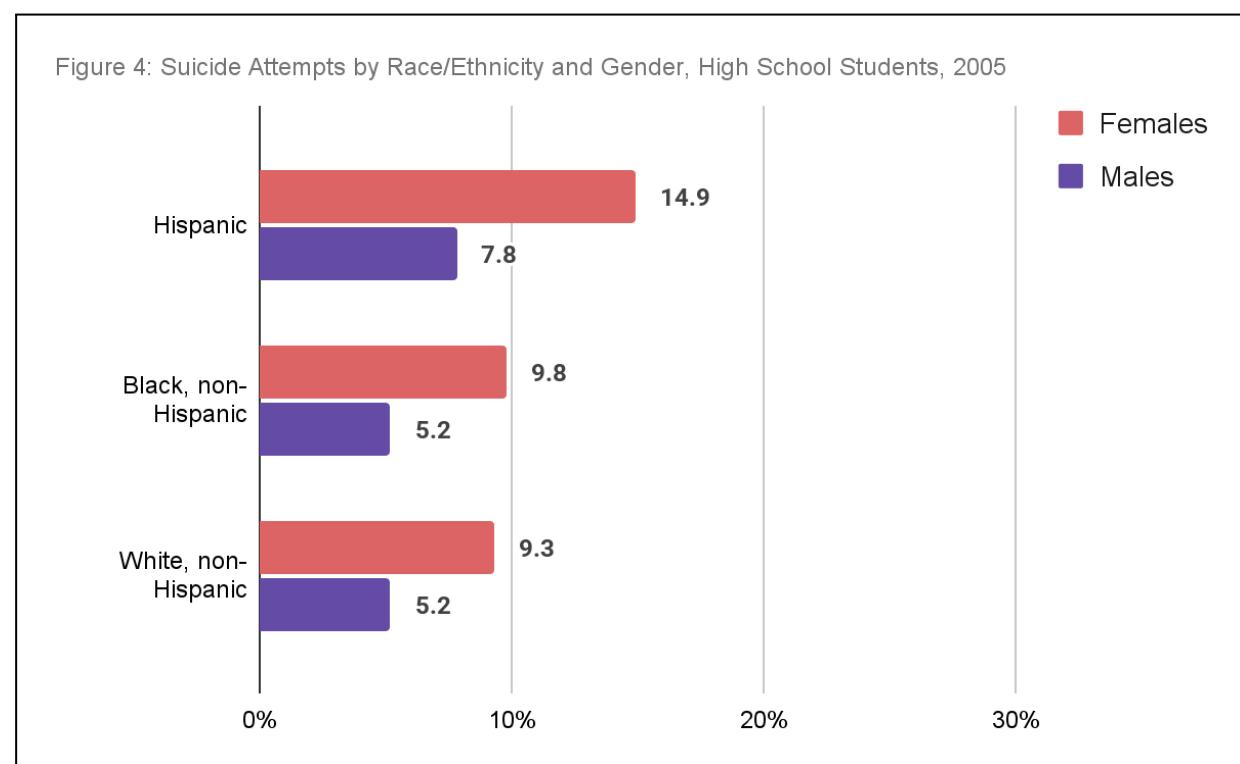
²[link to Canva](#)



binge eating, and purging behaviors. Studies show that nearly 3% of teenagers suffer from an eating disorder, with females being more commonly affected than males. If left untreated, eating disorders can lead to severe physical health complications and mental distress.

Suicide and Self-Harm

Suicide remains a leading cause of death among teenagers, highlighting the urgent need for early intervention. Studies reveal that nearly 15% of teenagers have seriously considered suicide, while 8% have attempted it. The 2005 YRBSS found that, in contrast to completed suicide, female high school students are much more likely to attempt suicide than male peers (**Figure 4**). Warning signs include expressions of hopelessness, withdrawal from loved ones, giving away possessions, drastic changes in personality, and increased risk-taking behavior. Recognizing these signs and providing immediate support can be lifesaving.



A Day in the Life of a Mentally Healthy Teenager: Recognizing Strengths and Early Warning Signs

As coaches and mentors, you play an important role in the lives of young athletes. You're not just shaping their athletic abilities; you're influencing their overall well-being. Recognizing and addressing mental health concerns is crucial for fostering a positive and supportive team environment.



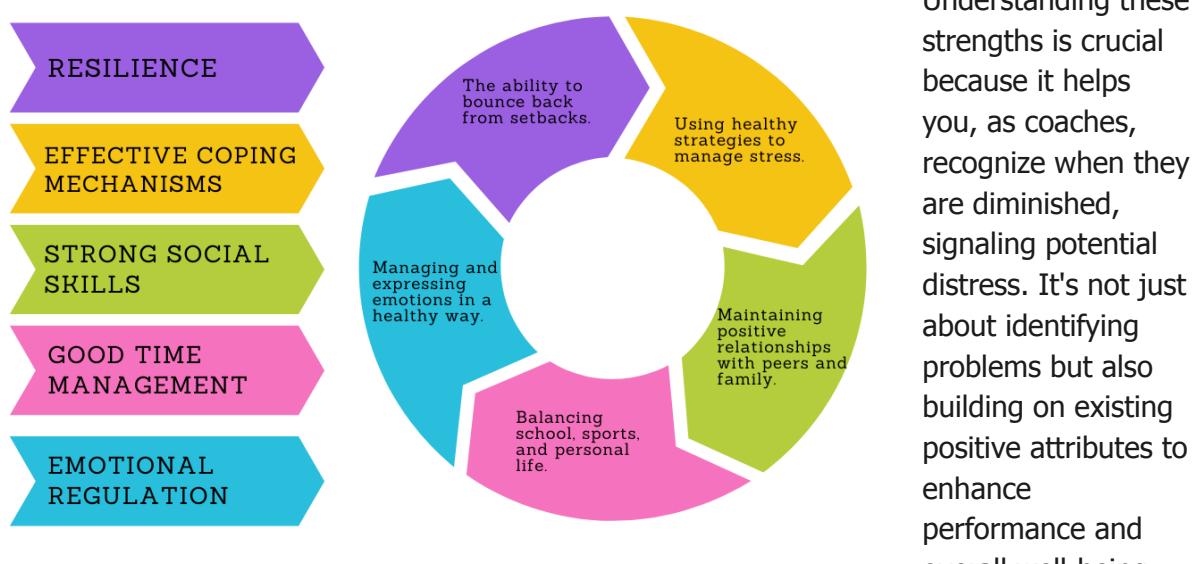
A Day in the Life of a Mentally Healthy Teenager: Recognizing Strengths

Picture Alex, a teenager and super active student-athlete. Alex wakes up feeling great after a solid night's sleep, pumped for the day. They have a balanced breakfast, get ready for school, and head out, saying hi to friends on the way. In class, Alex's hand is always up, they ask questions, and jump into discussions with classmates. At lunch, they're laughing with their teammates, talking about the next game.

Then, in the afternoon, Alex hits a small bump: a lower-than-expected test grade. Instead of panicking, Alex takes a deep breath, reminds themselves it's just one test, and decides to study harder next time. After practice, Alex goes home, finishes their homework, hangs out with family, and relaxes before bed by reading a book instead of scrolling on their phone.

Recognizing Alex's Strengths - Building a Foundation:

Alex demonstrates key strengths that contribute to their well-being, including:³



Early Warning Signs: What to Look For

It's important to remember that these signs often appear gradually, making them easy to miss. Pay attention to patterns, not just isolated incidents.

³[link to Canva](#)



Withdrawal



- Athletes start withdrawing from activities they once loved. They skip practice, avoid social gatherings, and isolate themselves.
- This withdrawal isn't just physical; it can be emotional.

Mood Swings and Increased Physical Complaints



- Noticeable mood swings, exaggerated reactions, or unusual emotional volatility.
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches, or other unexplained symptoms.

Irregular Sleep Patterns



- Changes in sleep, including excessive sleeping.
- Insomnia, or restless sleep.

Changes in Eating Habits



- Significant changes in appetite or eating patterns.

Decline in Performance



- Sudden drop in grades, difficulty concentrating, or decreased motivation.

Cognitive Changes



- Increased self-criticism, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, or excessive worry.

Your Role as a Coach: Providing Support

⁴[link to Canva](#)



As coaches, you are in a unique position to provide support. Remember, you are not therapists, but you can be a vital source of support and a bridge to professional help.



5

Your well-being is essential. Prioritize self-care to avoid burnout and maintain your effectiveness.

National Research on Youth Mental Health

Spain

Spain has implemented the Mental Health Strategy of the National Health System (2022–2026), with a strong focus on childhood and adolescent mental health. Key initiatives include early detection, integrating mental health professionals into schools, and strengthening primary healthcare support for mental health issues. A notable measure under this strategy is the Suicidal Behavior Hotline (024), which provides immediate crisis support and referrals.

Additionally, the Youth Strategy 2030 (EJ2030) highlights the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people. It emphasizes suicide prevention, reducing mental health stigma, and adapting public services to better meet adolescent needs. Spain's Mental Health Care Plan (2022–2024), backed by a €100 million budget, aims to enhance mental

⁵[link to Canva](#)



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

healthcare across all levels and further integrate child and adolescent psychiatry into specialized training programs.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria does not have a dedicated youth mental health strategy. Instead, mental health concerns are addressed under the National Strategy for Mental Health of the Citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria (2021–2030). This strategy focuses on modernizing psychiatric services, developing child and adolescent psychiatry, reducing aggression and self-harm, and tackling substance abuse. A special focus is placed on improving data collection on children's mental health and attracting more specialists to the field.

The National Youth Strategy (2021–2030) addresses youth mental health by emphasizing prevention, access to psychological support, and raising awareness. It also highlights the negative effects of substance abuse, with worrying trends in smoking, alcohol, and marijuana use among Bulgarian youth. The National Youth Program (2021–2025) promotes healthy lifestyles through sports and recreational activities as preventive measures against aggression and addiction.

Lithuania

Lithuania's National Mental Health Strategy (2007) promotes mental well-being, prevents disorders, and supports community-based services. Key priorities include suicide prevention, substance abuse reduction, and mental resilience-building through education and social policies.

Youth-focused initiatives include the Mental Health Ambassador Program (2022), empowering young people to advocate for mental health awareness, and the Life Skills General Program (2023), which integrates mental health education into schools. The Pagalba Sau platform provides free mental health resources and support.

A 2020 study highlighted barriers like a shortage of specialists, high costs, and stigma, discouraging youth from seeking help. In response, Lithuania expanded mental health centers, social psychiatric networks, and crisis intervention programs. Initiatives like Childline, Stop Bullying, and Teenagers in Action promote awareness and peer support. Suicide prevention remains a focus, with the Suicide Prevention Bureau (2015) and Tu Esi ("You Are") platform (2018) offering targeted interventions.



Practical Exercises for Supporting Youth Mental Health

Exercise 1: Pass the Thought Ball

Introduction:

Negative self-talk is a common barrier in sports. This game helps athletes reframe negative thoughts into positive, constructive statements in a fun and interactive way.

Learning Outcome:

- Improve mental resilience by challenging negative self-talk.
- Strengthen team support and communication.
- Foster a growth mindset in sports and life.

Timeframe:

10 minutes

Materials:

- A ball (soccer, basketball, volleyball, etc.)

Preparation and Description:

1. Gather the team in a circle.
2. The first player states a negative thought they might experience in sports (e.g., "I always mess up").
3. They pass the ball to a teammate, who must reframe it into a positive statement (e.g., "I learn from my mistakes and keep improving").
4. Continue passing the ball until everyone has participated.
5. Optional: Make it more dynamic by adding a time challenge (players must respond within 3 seconds) or introducing a physical movement (e.g., do a squat before passing the ball).

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- Ask: "How did it feel to change a negative thought into a positive one?"
- Discuss: "How does self-talk affect performance in sports?"
- Encourage athletes to practice positive self-talk before games and during challenges.



Exercise 2: Fast Feet, Fast Mind

Introduction:

This activity helps young athletes recognize stress and quickly apply mental strategies to manage emotions under pressure. By combining movement with cognitive reflection, it strengthens the connection between physical activity and emotional regulation.

Learning Outcome:

- Develop the ability to recognize and manage emotions in real time.
- Improve focus and quick thinking under pressure.
- Learn simple stress-reduction techniques applicable in sports and daily life.

Timeframe:

10–15 minutes

Materials:

- Open space
- A whistle (optional)

Preparation and Description:

1. Warm-up: Have players jog in place or do small, quick movements (jumping jacks, bouncing on toes).
2. Emotion Call-Out: Randomly call out different emotions (e.g., "frustration," "nervousness," "excitement").
3. Response Challenge: Players must shout out a healthy way to handle that emotion while continuing their movement (e.g., "Take deep breaths!" for stress, "Focus on my strengths!" for self-doubt).
4. Keep It Engaging: Increase the speed and challenge by adding a new rule (e.g., if they don't respond fast enough, they do a quick sprint or a jumping motion).
5. Cool-down: End with deep breaths and a group reflection on what they learned.

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- Ask: "Which emotions were easiest/hardest to respond to?"
- Discuss: "How can quick thinking help during a stressful game or competition?"
- Encourage players to try using these mental strategies in their sport and daily life.



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

References

- Knopf, D., Park, M. J., & Mulye, T. P. (2008). *The Mental Health of Adolescents: A National Profile*.
- Kieling, C., et al. (2011). *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Worldwide: Evidence for Action*. *The Lancet*, 378(9801), 1515-1525.
- YRBSS (2005, 2007). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- World Health Organization ([WHO](#)). (2004). Mental Health in Adolescents.
- [Mental Health America](#) (2020). Know the Signs.
- National policies on youth mental health in [Spain](#), [Bulgaria](#), and [Lithuania](#).
- [Turnbridge](#): What are the Signs of Mental Illness in Teens and Young Adults?



How to Build a Supportive Environment

Creating a supportive environment is crucial for fostering the mental well-being of young athletes. This module delves into the key components of a supportive environment, providing coaches with practical strategies to implement within their teams. We will explore different concepts like safe spaces, the importance of team support, motivation techniques, inclusion strategies, enhancing emotional intelligence and open communication, amongst other things.

What is a Supportive Environment?

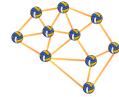
A supportive environment is one in which individuals feel safe – athletes feel free from physical and emotional harm, they feel respected, athletes' opinions, backgrounds, and contributions are valued and encouraged, athletes are motivated to take risks, try new things, and persevere through challenges.

Why does it make the difference?

Sports in youth can be a sanctuary from pressures of school, social media and personal life, which can have long-lasting effects if unaddressed. Coaches play a crucial role in promoting well-being, as mental health affects athletes' motivation, focus, and overall performance. When kids and teenagers feel supported, they are more engaged and confident (Winberg & Gould, 2019).

Key Components of a Supportive Environment

1. Concept of safe(r) space: a safe space is a setting where individuals can communicate openly without fear of judgment or negative consequences. Coaches play a vital role in establishing and maintaining safe spaces by setting clear expectations for behavior, promoting empathy and actively addressing any instances of disrespect or bullying.
2. Role of team support: team support is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and friendship. Coaches can help team support by encouraging positive interactions and team-building activities to create a tight-knit group where everyone shines.



3. Motivation: effective motivation techniques can enhance athletes' performance, self-esteem and enjoyment of sports. This involves setting realistic and reachable goals, providing positive feedback and celebrating both: individual and team achievements.
4. Inclusion: means ensuring that all athletes, regardless of their background, abilities or identities, feel valued and have equal opportunities to participate and work with and for the team.
5. Fair Play: involves inherent rules of sport, respecting opponents, officials and teammates; demonstrating good sportsmanship. In this way, coaches should be models of fair play and emphasize its importance to their players during practices and competitions.

Each component is part of supportive environment mainstays that promote the development of good mental health in sports, especially among young athletes.

Supportive Environment Mainstays





How to Build a Supportive Environment

Now we know what the fundamental pillars of a supportive environment are, let's put it into practice with some tips for coaches to get their players and teams mentally healthier:

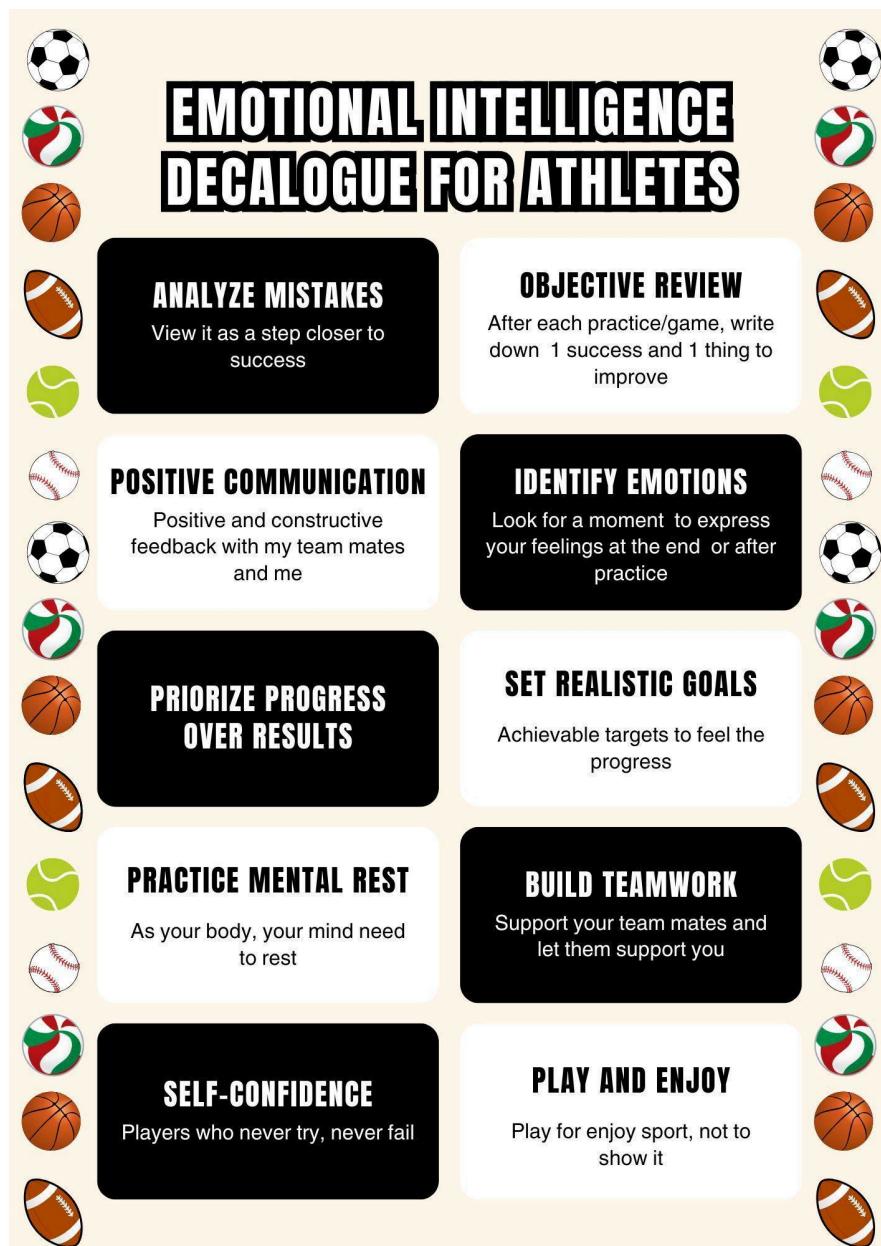
- **Establish clear expectations:** in pre competition period it is important to set individual and team (realistic) targets that players are going to reach during the season. It becomes relevant to define values and rules of playing and training collaboratively between coaches and athletes, to establish the path to follow.
- **Promote open communication:** to encourage athletes to express their thoughts and feelings without being judged by no one. The whole team must be comfortable talking about emotions, helping each other as if it were a family. This should be accompanied by active listening, especially coaches and staff members, paying attention to what athletes are saying, both: verbally and nonverbally. It would help to identify mental health problems in different situations as soon as possible.
- **Provide constructive feedback:** offering specific and actionable feedback that focuses on improvement more than on the mistake. It becomes more relevant to prioritize progress over results.
- **Foster teamwork:** to design activities that require cooperation and mutual support, sometimes, besides technical and tactical work training. For example, including warming up games encouraging teamwork.
- **Celebrating successes:** appreciating individual and team accomplishments is crucial to promote mental health of players and the team. Who doesn't like recognition for their excellent work? For example, in volleyball, celebrating points when the opponent is significantly superior—due to the effort it takes to earn them—is just as important as winning a match in which you're the favourite. One more time, this must be understood from the perspective that the process is valued more than the result.
- **Address conflict effectively:** implement strategies for resolving disputes in a fair and respectful manner. Coaches have to be able to detect problems in the locker room and working to resolve them efficiently. That will improve positive and considerably the team's performance.
- **Model positive behaviour:** coaches should exemplify values and behaviours they wish to inspire in their athletes. It is a double-edged sword: bad way - if a coach complains to the referees, players will do so – and good way – if a coach shows respect to the opponent, players will do the same.



Coaches play an important role in the development of players, but athletes must do their part to have good mental and physical health, enjoying the sport, which turns out to be the essence of it.

Professional players are increasingly setting a better example, as they publicly demonstrate that working on mental health leads to better performance on the court. Currently, there are organizations that base their progress and success on emphasizing this work, such as the famous Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team. Players report feeling more focused, resilient and confident in high-pressure situations. They have shown that even the toughest and most successful athletes can struggle with mental health issues.

Since not all sports organizations have a mental health expert on their rosters, we have created a decalogue that players are recommended to follow to enhance their emotional intelligence and self-awareness:





Conflict Management Strategies

Clubs and sportive franchises must provide their staff members and coaches with different strategies to manage these kind of conflicts, not only to enhance the performance, but to have athletes which enjoy playing sports and never give up on them – transferring all benefits to daily and healthy life.

These are some strategies to follow by coaches who want to evaluate the mental well-being of their team and solve mental health conflicts:

1. **Regular check-ins:** establishing periodically team/individual meetings (per week, per month, competition period, etc.) to talk about feelings with the competition, practices and teammates. According to Holt & Dunn (2004), coaches who take notice about how their athletes are doing mentally and emotionally, improves the performance in sports significantly, especially in team sports.
2. **Assistant/captain role:** seasons last so long that coaches can't cover more than sporting aspects. To prevent it, choosing an assistant to help with the emotional aspects of the team is always a promising idea. The figure of the captain usually plays this role because they are part of the locker room and know what's going on inside. In these cases, communication between captain and coaches must be open and efficient during the whole season.
3. **Relax activities and practices:** set relaxing sessions with activities where athletes can feel heard and show their emotions make team building strong and cohesive.



Practical Exercises to Build Supportive Environments

Exercise 1: Paper feelings

Introduction:

Sometimes players don't know each other more than sport. This game promotes emotional intelligence and communication skills by writing down emotions and feelings.

Learning Outcome:

- Raise awareness of team values
- Enhance open communication and understanding within the team

Timeframe:

10 minutes

Materials:

- Markers and flip chart paper.

Preparation and Description:

1. Gather the team in a circle around the paper with one marker per player.
2. Ask a question and give time to the player to write down their thoughts about the following question: "What does it mean to you to be part of the team?"
3. Next papers and next questions: "What do you like the most/least about practice?", "What things will you change to enhance the performance of the team?"
4. Read together what has been answered in each question and think over it.
5. Optional: Make it more dynamic by adding a time trial or introducing color markers and changing them with each question to finally identify the author.

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- Discuss the importance of these values in sports and life.
- Set a path to follow from then with the team about emotions and feelings.
- Make it clear that these emotions and thoughts can be shown in training and matches, always in a constructive way.



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

Exercise 2: Active listening

Introduction:

This exercise develops active listening skills in a team setting.

Learning Outcome:

- Improve active listening and empathy.
- Set self and team confidence.

Timeframe:

15 minutes

Materials: cook timer (to make it funnier)

Preparation and Description:

1. Pair players. One speaks about a recent challenge while the other practices active listening (eye contact, nonverbal cues).
2. Switch roles.
3. Group discussion on the experience.
4. Can repeat as many combinations as possible.

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- Ask: "What advice will you give to your teammate?".
- Discuss: "How supportive did you feel when you listened actively?".
- Identify how active listening can improve team dynamics (offering open communication spaces).



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

References

- Weinberg, R. S., & Gould, D. (2019). Foundations of sport and exercise psychology (7th ed.). Human Kinetics.
- Zourbanos, N., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Tsakaras, N., Chroni, S., & Theodorakis, Y. (2010). A multimethod examination of the relationship between coaching behavior and athletes' inherent self-talk. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 32(6), 764-785.
- Jowett, S., & Felton, L. (2014). Coach-athlete relationships: The key to athletes' well-being and performance. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 10(2), 94-107.
- Holt, N. L., & Dunn, J. G. H. (2004). Toward a sociology of sport parenting. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21(1), 4-26.
- [NeuroLaunch](#). Dodgers mental health player: Strategies for success.
- [NeuroLaunch](#). Mental Benefits of Volleyball: Boosting Cognitive and Emotional Well-being Through Play
- Federación Aragonesa de Voleibol web (FAVB). [Fair play document](#).



Best Practices to Support Young People's Well-Being Through Sports

Young people today face unprecedented challenges: academic pressure, social media exposure, mental health concerns, and post-pandemic anxiety.

Sports offer a uniquely powerful tool to enhance well-being, promoting not only physical fitness but also emotional resilience, social skills, and mental strength.

By participating in sports, adolescents develop:

- Emotional regulation skills
- Self-confidence and motivation
- Teamwork and leadership abilities
- Stress management strategies

This module provides practical, research-based best practices for using sports to support youth well-being — including exercises, reflection activities, and ready-to-use templates.

Best Practices in Cultivating a Supportive Environment for Youth Well-Being Across the Globe

A supportive environment plays a pivotal role in nurturing the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of young people. This report explores globally recognized best practices aimed at cultivating such environments, with an emphasis on education, sports, mental health, and community inclusion. The practices highlighted have been drawn from successful initiatives, policies, and frameworks implemented across different countries.

Best Practices by Region:

1. Scandinavia: Holistic Education Models (Finland, Sweden, Norway)

- *Core Idea:* Schools integrate mental health education, social-emotional learning (SEL), and physical activity.
- *Practice:* Finland's curriculum includes "life skills" education with an emphasis on stress management, empathy, and communication.
- *Impact:* High youth well-being scores and low dropout rates.



2. Canada: Inclusive Sport and Youth Engagement Policies

- *Core Idea:* Promote equal access to sports for marginalized communities.
- *Practice:* Canada's "Long-Term Athlete Development" (LTAD) model ensures youth-centered sport programming.
- *Impact:* Improved youth engagement, especially among Indigenous populations.

3. Japan: School-Based Mental Health Support

- *Core Idea:* On-site counselors and peer support programs.
- *Practice:* Mandatory mental health check-ups and trained teachers.
- *Impact:* Early detection of anxiety and social withdrawal in students.

4. Rwanda: Trauma-Informed Education and Sport

- *Core Idea:* Post-conflict healing through community-based activities.
- *Practice:* "Youth Clubs for Peace" use sports and art to build emotional resilience.
- *Impact:* Reduced stigma around mental health and enhanced social cohesion.

5. Australia: Youth Mental Health Campaigns

- *Core Idea:* Nationwide mental health awareness and digital support.
- *Practice:* Headspace centers provide walk-in psychological care and digital counseling.
- *Impact:* Increased early access to mental health services.

3. Cross-Cutting Global Practices

- **Youth Participation:** Involving young people in program design and leadership roles.
- **Community Involvement:** Building local partnerships (schools, NGOs, sports clubs) to sustain supportive networks.
- **Safe Spaces:** Providing physical and emotional safe zones where youth can express themselves freely.
- **Integrated Support Services:** One-stop centers offering health, education, and social services under one roof.

4. Recommendations for Implementation



1. **Adopt Whole-Person Approaches:** Combine mental, emotional, and physical well-being programs.
2. **Train Frontline Workers:** Educators, coaches, and mentors should receive training in trauma-informed care and emotional intelligence.
3. **Invest in Access:** Ensure all youth have access to supportive environments, regardless of socio-economic background.
4. **Utilize Sport as a Tool:** Integrate movement and team-based activities into mental health promotion.
5. **Monitor & Evaluate:** Continuously assess impact using youth feedback and evidence-based indicators.

5. Conclusion

Creating a supportive environment for young people is a shared global priority. By learning from successful practices across diverse contexts, stakeholders can implement effective strategies that foster resilience, inclusion, and holistic growth. Collaboration between governments, educators, coaches, families, and youth themselves is key to long-lasting impact.

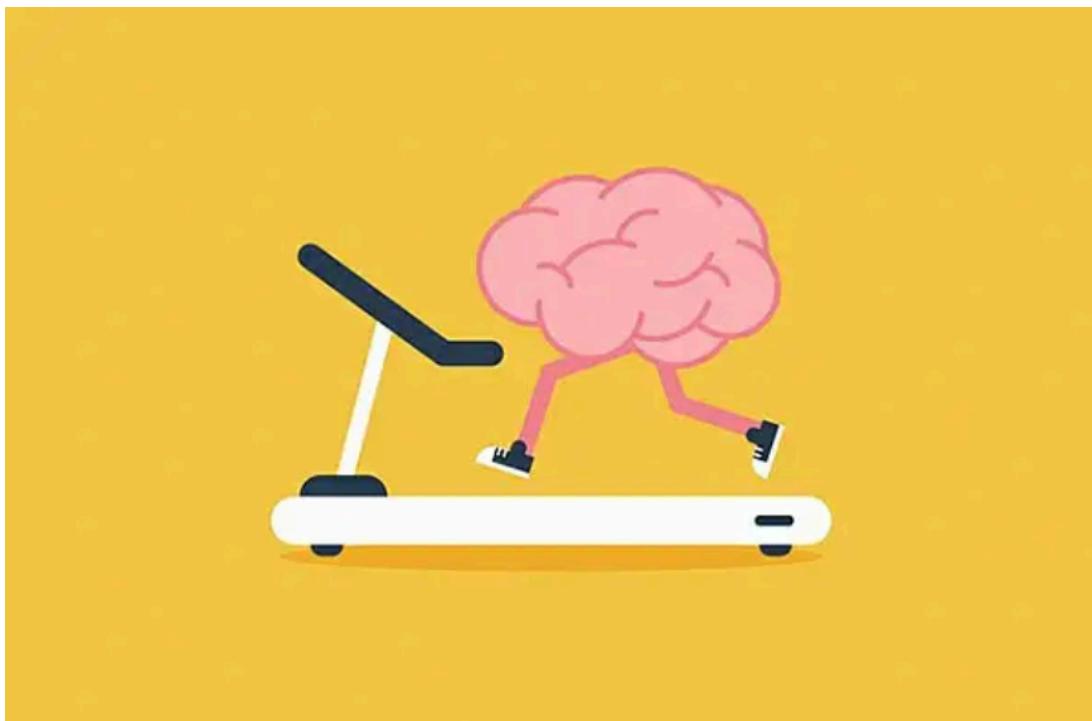
The Mind-Body Connection in Young Athletes

Physical movement stimulates the release of **dopamine**, **serotonin**, and **endorphins** — brain chemicals that regulate mood, reduce anxiety, and improve emotional well-being.

Research by WHO (2022) shows that **60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) daily** significantly reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents.

Key Takeaways:

- Exercise directly impacts emotional balance.
- Physical health and mental health are deeply interconnected.



Sports as Emotional Training

Sports mimic emotional challenges in real life: competition, mistakes, wins, and losses.

Guided correctly, sports teach young people emotional regulation, persistence, and coping strategies.

Exercise	Focus area	Objective	Time needed
Confidence Circuit	Self-esteem	Build confidence through positive affirmations	20 min
Emotion Relay Race	Emotional regulation	Recognize and manage emotions under pressure	15 min



Mindful Cooldown	Stress management	Introduce mindfulness in sports	10 min
Stress Dribble Challenge	Focus and stress control	Quick thinking under pressure	15 min
Positive Talk Huddle	Team spirit	Strengthen communication and positivity	15 min
Self-Compassion Stretch	Self-care	Foster kindness toward oneself	10 min

Exercise 1: The Confidence Circuit

Introduction:

Young people often focus on mistakes ("I'm not good enough"). This circuit teaches them to recognize their strengths and build positive self-talk through physical movement. It boosts self-esteem and trust through team support and visualization.

Learning Outcome:

Youth will recognize personal strengths and practice positive affirmations.

Timeframe:

20 minutes

Materials:

Cones, markers.

Preparation and Description:

Set up a "circuit" with different stations.

Each station represents a strength (e.g., "I am resilient", "I am a good teammate").



Set up cones or markers in a circle or zig-zag path.

At each station, write a strength on a card (e.g., "I am brave", "I am a leader", "I never give up").

Participants move from station to station (jogging, skipping, or hopping) — when they reach a station, they:

- Read the positive affirmation **out loud**
- Do a small exercise (e.g., 5 jumping jacks)

Why it works:

- Saying affirmations **out loud** reinforces belief.
- Physical movement **anchors** positive emotions to the body.
- Builds **self-confidence** and **team support**.

Coaching Tips:

- Model enthusiasm! Read the first card yourself.
- Celebrate when players finish: clapping, cheering.

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- How did you feel saying your strengths out loud?
- What strengths did you notice in yourself or your teammates?
- How can these lessons apply beyond sports?
- How can these affirmations help you in a real match/game?



Exercise 2: Emotion Relay Race

In fast-paced sports, emotions arise quickly — excitement, frustration, nerves.

This relay race teaches athletes to **recognize emotions** and **choose healthy coping responses**.

Step-by-Step:

1. Create two teams.
2. Place emotion cards (happy, angry, nervous, proud, frustrated) at a "challenge station".
3. Players run to the station, pick a card, and:
 - Act out the emotion briefly
 - OR name a coping strategy (e.g., deep breaths for "nervous")
4. After acting/naming, they race back and tag the next player.

Why it works:

- Makes **emotional awareness fun and fast**.
- Trains the brain to **recognize feelings under pressure**.
- Builds emotional **resilience** during real games.

Coaching Tips:

- Keep pace lively — celebrate creative acting!
- Debrief: Talk about why knowing emotions helps in competition.

Debriefing and Evaluation:

- How did the exercise make you feel?
- What strengths did you notice in yourself or your teammates?
- How can these lessons apply beyond sports?



Co-funded by
the European Union



Exercise 3: Mindful Cooldown

After intense sports, young people need to learn recovery: Calming the body also calms the mind.

Step-by-Step:

1. After practice, gather the team lying down or seated.
2. Play soft background music (optional).
3. Guide them through:
 - Deep breathing (inhale 4s, hold 4s, exhale 6s)
 - Body scan (relax head, shoulders, arms, legs, feet)
 - Thanking their body for today's effort

Why it works:

- Combines **mindfulness + physical recovery**.
- Reduces cortisol (stress hormone) after sports.
- Teaches emotional regulation after adrenaline spikes.

Coaching Tips:

- Speak slowly and calmly.
- Use visualization: "Imagine a wave of calm moving down your body."



Co-funded by
the European Union



Exercise 4: Stress Dribble Challenge

Simulates stress and decision-making under pressure (common in sports matches).

Step-by-Step:

1. Each player has a ball and starts dribbling in a defined area.
2. The coach randomly shouts new challenges, such as:
 - "Switch hands!"
 - "Sit down!"
 - "Run backward!"
 - "Touch the ground!"
3. Players must adjust quickly without losing ball control.

Why it works:

- Trains **quick adaptation** under chaotic conditions.
- Builds **mental flexibility** and **focus**.
- Reduces panic in real competitive situations.

Coaching Tips:

- Start slower, then speed up the commands.
- Praise quick reactions, not just ball control!



Co-funded by
the European Union



Exercise 5: Positive Talk Huddle

A quick, emotional booster to improve **team morale** and **individual confidence**.

Step-by-Step:

1. Form a circle (huddle).
2. Each person says **one positive thing** about the teammate to their right.
 - Example: "You always work hard even when tired."
3. Continue around the circle until everyone has both given and received praise.

Why it works:

- Boosts **social belonging** and **self-worth**.
- Teaches young people to **recognize and verbalize** positive qualities in others.

Coaching Tips:

- If someone struggles, help with prompts ("What makes them a good teammate?").
- Model sincerity — show it's cool to be kind!



Exercise 6: Self-Compassion Stretch

Helps athletes recover mentally after failures or tough days — shifting from **self-criticism** to **self-support**.

Step-by-Step:

1. Light stretching routine (arms, legs, back).
2. During each stretch, players silently repeat kindness phrases like:
 - "Mistakes help me grow."
 - "I am trying my best, and that's enough."
3. Encourage players to invent **personalized positive mantras**.

Why it works:

- Reduces harmful perfectionism.
- Builds **resilience** and **self-motivation** after setbacks.

Coaching Tips:

- Normalize mistakes — share a personal story if possible.
- Emphasize: **Self-kindness is strength**, not weakness.

References

- Sports Psychology Today. [The Psychology of Youth Sports](#).
- Mental Health America (2022). [Self-Esteem and Mental Health in Adolescents](#).
- Harvard Medical School (2021). [Exercise and Mental Health](#).
- American Psychological Association (APA). [Resilience guide for parents and teachers](#).
- OECD (2021). [Education at a Glance: Youth Well-Being Indicators](#).
- World Health Organization (2022). [Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents \(AA-HA!\)](#)
- UNICEF (2022). [Learning to Listen: Engaging Youth in Mental Health](#).
- Canadian Sport for Life. [Long-Term Athlete Development Framework](#).



Strategies to Raise Mental Health Awareness and Develop Effective Communication

In sport, we often focus on physical fitness, discipline, and performance - but mental health is just as important for young athletes to grow, thrive, and stay motivated. Mental health affects how we think, feel, interact, and perform - on and off the field. When young people struggle with their mental health, it can impact their confidence, relationships, and ability to cope with challenges.

As coaches and mentors, you play a key role - not only in shaping athletes' technical skills, but also in creating a safe and supportive environment where they feel seen, heard, and valued. Today, the mental health of young people is under pressure from many sides: stress at school, social media pressure, personal struggles at home, and even experiences of bullying or discrimination. These can leave long-lasting effects if not addressed early.

There is growing recognition at the global level of the need to prioritize mental health. Institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations have identified mental well-being as a public health priority and a foundation for sustainable development. Countries across Europe are working on national strategies, but much of the real impact begins from a grassroots level - and that includes sport clubs, youth organizations, and mentoring groups. Even with growing attention, major challenges remain:

- Stigma and discrimination around mental health are still widespread;
- Many young people don't feel safe asking for help in mental health crisis;
- There is low mental health literacy (people don't know how to recognize signs or what to do);
- Mental health services are often difficult to access or underfunded.

This is where sport coaches can make a difference. By learning how to talk about mental health, respond with empathy, and advocate for positive change, you can contribute to a more inclusive, healthy, and empowering environment for young people.



Communication Strategies for Raising Mental Health Awareness

As a coach, your influence goes far beyond the playing field. The time you spend with young people places you not only as a guide in sport, but also as a mentor, role model, and sometimes even a trusted friend. These roles carry real responsibility – especially when it comes to supporting youth who may be facing mental health challenges.

Raising awareness about mental health in your team isn't a one-time effort – it's an ongoing process. It begins with opening up the conversation and showing that mental health shouldn't be a taboo topic. Staying silent doesn't mean the issue doesn't exist.

Fighting stigma is a key part of this journey. Many adolescents still feel shame or fear when it comes to speaking up, and your approach can help break that silence. But breaking the silence is only the first step. The cornerstone of reducing the impact of mental health issues in young people is continuous, inclusive, and empathetic communication on a personal level – along with creating a safe and supportive team environment. Effective communication also means knowing how to use your voice publicly, advocating for mental health awareness both in sports and beyond.

This chapter explores practical communication strategies to help you take action – both personally and publicly – to support your team's well-being.

Breaking the Stigma on Mental Health

Stigma around mental health can be really damaging, especially when it comes to teenagers. It often shows up as negative labels, judgment, or exclusion towards young people who are struggling with mental health challenges. Sometimes, even their families or the adults who support them – like teachers or coaches – get affected by this stigma. Sadly, many young people say that the way others treat them because of their mental health is worse than the condition itself. Normalizing mental health and giving young athletes the words to discuss mental health issues is essential for them to be able to identify their struggles and learn effective strategies to cope, or reach out for help from a trusted adult.

As a coach, you are in a powerful position to challenge this stigma and shift the culture within your team. Fighting stigma starts with education – but it needs to be more than just



information. It's about creating a team environment where talking about mental health feels normal and safe (see Chapter 3).

For example, you can run a simple but impactful activity during practice: gather your players in a circle and toss a volleyball around. Whoever catches it shares one "invisible weight" they carry – like pressure from school or anxiety before matches – and one way they deal with it in a healthy way. This kind of playful yet meaningful sharing helps young athletes realize they're not alone, and encourages open, stigma-free conversations.

Strategies for Effective Communication

Effective communication is fundamental in integrating mental health awareness within coaching practices. As coaches, you must develop skills that go beyond the realm of sports instruction, delving into emotional intelligence and empathetic communication. The ability to listen actively, speak thoughtfully, and understand non-verbal cues plays a significant role in identifying and addressing mental health concerns among young athletes.

Be an Active Listener

Active listening means more than simply hearing words – it's about truly understanding the message behind them. It requires patience, full attention, and the ability to notice what's not being said. Since mental well-being is not traditionally addressed in sport settings, coaches often need to take the first step in opening up such conversations.

They should create safe spaces for honest dialogue, where athletes can express themselves without fear of judgment or consequences. This can be done through simple practices – for example, starting each training session with a mood barometer to check how everyone is feeling, or having casual one-on-one check-ins during a coffee break or after practice.

The key is to be assertive and genuinely interested in getting to know your athletes – not to offer quick advice or fix their problems, but to show them that they're seen, heard, and supported.

Be Emotionally Intelligent



Handling difficult conversations is an inevitable part of addressing mental health issues. Coaches should approach these moments with sensitivity, always maintaining confidentiality and respect for the athlete's privacy.

To do this effectively, coaches must also be aware of their own emotional responses and personal biases, as these can influence the way they interact with athletes. A coach's emotions – whether it's anger, stress, calmness, or happiness – can directly affect how athletes feel. In strong coach-athlete relationships, this emotional connection becomes even more significant. That's why it's important for coaches to understand the emotional impact they have and to develop the skills to regulate their own emotions as well as support the emotional well-being of their athletes.

Various coaching strategies can help in this process – from setting goals and giving feedback, to showing enthusiasm, managing your own emotions, encouraging athletes with positive words, having open and respectful conversations, and most importantly, being a good listener.

Be Empathetic

Empathy means being able to understand and share someone else's feelings by imagining what it's like to be in their situation. It involves seeing things from their point of view, accepting their emotions without judgment or criticism, and showing that you recognize what they're going through. Empathy helps create real human connection – something that's especially important when working with young people facing mental health challenges.

You can only truly empathize with your young athletes after you've listened to them actively and openly, and after you've acknowledged both their emotions and your own. This kind of emotional awareness builds trust and makes it easier for young people to open up about what they're experiencing.

Qualities like closeness, commitment, empathy, and self-control are key to building strong coach-athlete relationships. When a coach responds with empathy, it can ease feelings of anxiety, reduce fear of failure, and help young athletes feel less alone. In this way, empathic coaching becomes a powerful tool in reducing the emotional weight of mental health issues. It supports young people not just in sport, but in their overall well-being.



Mental Health Advocacy

The advocacy movement in mental health started with families and individuals who demanded respect, dignity, and services for people with mental health conditions. Today, it includes professionals, organizations, and governments working together to improve awareness and access to care. Advocating for mental health can include sharing personal stories and experiences, supporting mental health organizations and initiatives, and advocating for policy changes that improve access to mental health services.

As a coach or mentor, your advocacy can begin in small but powerful ways:

- Promoting mental well-being as part of your regular work with youth
- Encouraging policies in your sport club that protect mental health (e.g. having a code of conduct that includes psychological safety)
- Sharing information and tools with other coaches, parents, and staff
- Supporting young people in accessing help when needed

Advocacy also means challenging wider inequalities. Many mental health issues are connected to poverty, violence, or exclusion. Raising awareness about these social and environmental factors helps build a culture of care and fairness.

The more coaches speak out and integrate mental health awareness in interactive youth-centered activities, the more we can change the story around mental health in adolescents – from shame and silence to resilience, support, and hope.

How to Organize an Interactive Session using ETS

How can we make sure that our students stay engaged and remember what they have learned? Interactive sessions are a great way to make sure that students are not only engaged physically, but mentally, in our sports exercises. ETS allows us to give added value to a regular PE class or extracurricular sports. Using this methodology in an interactive session can be especially beneficial when targeting skills outside sports - in this context,



mental health. Think of exercises that build mental resilience, foster team spirit, encourage internal reflection, and empower your students.

In order to organize an interactive session using Education through Sport, you need to know:

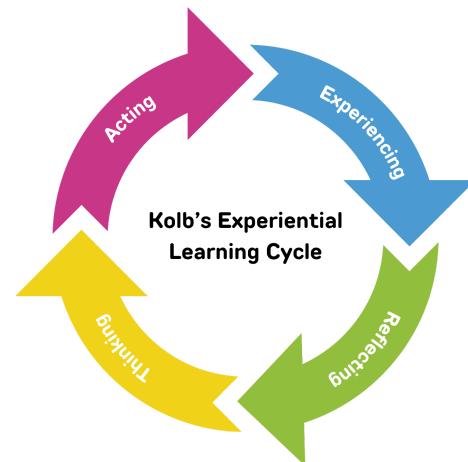
- What is experiential learning?
- What are teachable moments?
- What is debriefing?
- How to prepare for an ETS session.

What is Experiential Learning?

ETS relies a lot on the theory of experiential learning. The term *experiential learning* was coined by David A. Kolb, and it is a framework that describes how people learn through experience. Learning is a primary element of living, meaning learning occurs in any setting and continues throughout life.

David Kolb described the ideal process of learning in a four-step Experiential Learning Cycle:

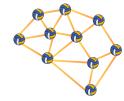
1. Experiencing (Concrete Experience)
2. Reflecting (Reflecting Observation)
3. Thinking (Abstract Conceptualization)
4. Acting (Active Experimentation)



Learning begins when a learner uses senses and perceptions to engage in what is happening now. After the experience, a learner reflects on what happened and connects feelings with ideas about the experience. The learner engages in thinking to reach conclusions and form theories, concepts, or general principles that can be tested. Finally, the learner tests the theory and applies what was learned to get feedback and create the next experience.

This is a naturally occurring process that we can use to our advantage when teaching. We can consciously use the experiential learning cycle, for example through ETS exercises.

Education through sport can be described as a targeted process. Learning takes place in a planned, targeted, and controlled way. The systematic debriefing and reflection of experiences or specific events in the context of sporting activities (teachable moments) is a



core element of the method. Education through Sport is particularly suitable for equipping young people with a wide range of life skills.

What are Teachable Moments?

A “teachable moment” is a particular moment or situation from which an opportunity arises to teach an individual or a group something specific. Teachable moments are anchor points for the subsequent learning process led by a trainer.

The teachable moment can be very different. It can be an experience, a behavior, the result of a successful or unsuccessful trial, something we experience or just observe, an individual mistake, poor teamwork, or an unexpected success...

Teachable moments are a valuable tool in ETS. For those participating, it has personal significance tied to emotions (e.g. personal failure or success), and it relates the learning outcome to an action taken by the participant (e.g. I trained well, I tried really hard, etc.).

Teachable moments in sports can occur spontaneously from context or situation, or through a planned activity. It is important to remember that these moments must be followed up with a guided reflection process called **debriefing**.

The trainer can create teachable moments by:

- Getting learners out of their comfort zone without overwhelming them.
- Giving learners new and appropriate responsibilities that they are eager to do, but will challenge them (e.g. becoming a team captain, or leading a part of the activity).
- Creating activities that rely on group interaction (e.g. effective communication, creative problem-solving, teamwork).

Examples of teachable moments can include:

- A participant shows kindness and consideration in a team game.
- A participant tries to cheat to win a game.
- A participant doesn't respect the referee or the rules of the game.
- The team has won their first game.
- The team argues instead of cooperating on the pitch.
- The team lost, but the participants still showed kindness and understanding towards each other.



And many others. Be a careful observer or you might miss them!

What is Debriefing?

After an experience with a group of participants, the debriefing is a key element following the experiential learning cycle. A debriefing is a guided reflection with the participants undertaken by the trainer to support reflection and integration of any experience as a learning outcome. Teachable moments - whether positive or negative - should be followed by a debriefing session to ensure positive learning outcomes for the participants. The trainer can pause the activity that triggered a teachable moment, or wait until the activity is over. It is important to remember that debriefing is meant to be a discussion, where participants can express their thoughts and feelings.

How to debrief:

1. Describe. *What just happened? What have you noticed?*

Your first question in a debriefing session should always be to ask the participants to describe what happened. The idea is to make them look back on the teachable moment and direct their attention to a certain skill, situation, or learning opportunity without judging the situation.

2. Explain. *Why did that happen? What were the consequences?*

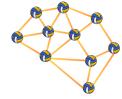
The second step is to ask participants to explain why did that happen. They will explain why something has happened and describe the impact of their behavior. They may also think of an alternative behavior in that specific situation.

3. Generalize. *Does that also happen in other areas of life? Does that happen in school, or at home?*

The third round of questions invites participants to generalize the experience, asking them to look at it in broader terms and see if there is a connection between the experience in the sport environment and other areas of life such as school or the workplace.

4. Learn and Apply. *What did you learn from this experience? What will you do differently in the future?*

The final questions are at the heart of the reflection process. They ask participants about their personal learning. What would they do differently in the future? First of all, within the narrow scope of the activity, but also as a transfer of that learning experience in other areas of life.



Notice how the debriefing structure follows Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. The participants first experience the activity and teachable moment, and then they reflect on what happened and why, they then think about ideas on how to implement that learning in everyday life, and then they get to act on it.

How to Prepare for an ETS Session

The very first thing that needs to be done before an Education through Sport session is making sure that the learning environment is safe. We need to make sure that the learning environment is supportive, engaging, physically and emotionally safe, inclusive, and challenging.

Sport is widely known as an activity that is fun, brings people together and offers a wide range of educational and health-promoting opportunities. However, sport also involves physical exertion, demands skill and ability, and is often practiced with a competitive character. Therefore, despite its great educational potential, sport is also an area of activity where learners can be harassed, abused, neglected, or exploited.

This is especially the case when sport is used as a tool for education or social work in settings where social problems already exist which can make participants more vulnerable in general.

What to look out for:

- **Physical hazards.** For example, holes in a football pitch, any loose ropes on the floor, a hard surface that participants could fall on, any obstacles that can cause an injury, etc.
- **Emotional risks.** For example, participants always being picked last by their teammates, any signs of bullying, minors being inappropriately watched by strangers, etc.

As the trainer, you should not be anxious or afraid, just alert of the possible hazards or risks around you. Always make sure that your activities take place in a safe environment for all.

For in-depth tips on how to create a supportive environment, go to page 21. In short, four things should be considered when creating a safe environment:



1. Safeguarding.
2. Routine checks of equipment and environment.
3. Code of conduct created by you and your learners, where you define the expected behavior during learning time.
4. Emergency plans. Know who to call in case of an emergency, where the first aid kit is, and how to escape in case of a fire.

Creating an ETS Session

There are a lot of helpful resources when it comes to creating ETS sessions, such as the [Sport&NFE Handbook on the Empowering Use of Sport in Non-formal Education](#), or the [Virtual Education through Sports Lab Toolbox](#). If you'd like to create your own session, consider the following structure:

1. **Learning outcomes.** *What is the end goal of this exercise? What am I going to teach my learners?*
Learning outcomes can be anything from "to improve teamwork skills among players" to "bringing the team together to discover something new". Remember that the debriefing session will verify if your learning outcomes have been reached.
2. **Timeframe.** *How much time do I need for this exercise? Is the exercise going to be split into phases?*
3. **Materials.** *What materials am I going to need for this exercise?*
4. **Preparation and description.** *What do I need to prepare for this exercise? How do I imagine this exercise playing out? Are there any potential loopholes in my exercise? What is going to happen step by step?*
5. **Debriefing and evaluation.** *How can I evaluate that the learning objectives have been reached? What kind of questions can I ask my participants?*

In this last step, let the debriefing structure presented in this chapter guide you. When debriefing, it is important to collect information about the experience of your learners instead of telling them directly what they were supposed to learn - stay curious, and don't be afraid to ask clarifying questions!

Below, you can find examples of ETS sessions that you can use with your learners.



Practical Exercises for Promoting Communication

Exercise 1: Ultimate frisbee

Introduction:

This exercise is a simple three-step introduction to non-formal education and shows the difference between using education by, for and through sport. The session is an eye-opener about how sport can be used as a tool to develop social competencies. The issues addressed include conflict resolution, inclusion and participation.

Number of people involved:

- 2 teams of not more than 10 people in each

Learning Outcome:

- To understand and reflect upon our own behavior and behavior of others
- To understand teamwork

Timeframe:

- Around 60 min

Materials:

- Frisbee
- A safe space to be able to move around freely for the group;

Preparation and Description:

Usually, an ETS session starts with a short warm up – In this case you can start with usual frisbee play for some minutes. Then the facilitator introduces that there will be a play of Ultimate Frisbee game in which there will be 3 parts of playing the game all of them for 10 minutes.

1. Education for sport

The idea is that participants learn what is the game of ultimate Frisbee and to play in 2 teams against each other. The time of playing is 10 minutes.

Facilitator explains the technique of throwing and catching the Frisbee:

The rules of Ultimate Frisbee say that the teams play against each other and the team that scores is the one that has passed the Frisbee 10 times inside the team without letting it go on the ground.



2. Education by sport

The objective is the same but participants need to make sure that each team member has touched the Frisbee at least once in view of having the 10 passes. Time of play is 10 min.

3. Education through Sport

The aim of the game is still the same but before the play each participant from both teams takes a card given by the facilitator and shall act according to the assignment written on the card. Also, participants shall not say to others what is written on their card.

The assignments are the following:

- *Pass to the other team*
- *Try to include everyone*
- *Pass only to one person*
- *Lead your team*
- *Play normal*

Debriefing and Evaluation:

Facilitator starts by reviewing what was happening during the activity.

Following questions can be used:

- What was happening during the first part?
- Were the instructions clear and did you learn how to play ultimate Frisbee?
- How was the 2nd part?
- How did you cope with the limitations?
- How did you feel? Did you feel more included in the game than the 1st part?
- Did the team work well?
- Were you under pressure because everyone shall touch the Frisbee?
- What happened in the last part?
- How did you feel in your roles?
- How did you perceive the behavior of others?
- Do you think it happens to behave like this in some everyday life situations?



Exercise 2: Sports Values

Introduction:

This is a game for improving emotional intelligence, presenting one's ideas and communication skills. The participants will have a chance to discuss different points of view and reach an agreement.

Learning Outcome:

- Raise awareness of different values within sport
- Develop dialogue and discussion

Timeframe:

- Around 60 mins (depending on the group size)

Materials:

- A safe space to be able to move around freely for the group;
- 1 piece of A4 paper for each participant;
- Colored pens or pencils;
- A flip-chart to record the final group values at the end.

Preparation and Description:

Give each participant a piece of A4 paper along with colored pens. Ask each participant to fold their piece of paper into 6 squares. Firstly, each participant starts off this activity individually and is asked to use the 6 squares and creatively (As best they can within their abilities) depict the top 6 values within sporting activities and then give them a rating between 1-6 (with 1 being the most important).

After the participants have finished this (10-15 mins should be adequate) ask them to find a partner (maybe someone they haven't spent too much time with) and then give them the task to discuss their values that they have put down, see if they have similar ones, do their values rank the same? Do they have anything in common or totally different?

After around 10 mins then get the pairs to join another pair to make a 4 to discuss, and so on until the group is back together as a whole.

The first round starts as the basis for the final discussion which involves all participants, where everyone will explain their view (note not all have to speak if they don't really want to but it's good to try to encourage participation). The participants should try to reach a common list of values, putting them in order of importance and giving a definition for each one of them and explain why they are important in sports and the wider world.



Debriefing and Evaluation:

Disagreements may occur about the importance given to the various values and participants might find it difficult to find a common point of view to decide what the order of importance of the values is, even if generally they agreed on which ones are the most relevant.

This activity starts to explore the values that not only we need in sport activities but in life generally, it starts to provoke discussion and learn that there is more to sport than just the active part.

- Ask: "Can sport exist without these values? Would it be the same without them?"
- Discuss: "How can these values be useful in the real world?"

References

- Thornicroft, Graham et al. [*The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health*](#), The Lancet, Volume 400, Issue 10361, 1438 - 1480; 2022
- [*European framework for action on mental health 2021–2025*](#). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022.
- [*Advocacy for mental health*](#). Geneva, World Health Organization, 2003 (Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package).
- Schomöller, Anne et al. [*SPORT COACHING FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW*](#), International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), [*SPIRIT project*](#); 2022.
- Schomöller, Anne and Detlef Dumon, [*Sport Coaching for Mental Well-being: Recommendations for Coach Education and Club Management*](#), International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), [*SPIRIT project*](#); 2022.
- [*Sport&NFE Handbook on the Empowering Use of Sport in Non-formal Education*](#)
- [*Virtual Education through Sports Lab Toolbox*](#).
- [*EmployMe Employability Toolkit Handbook \(Communication Module\)*](#)
- [*Building healthy communities, changing opportunities*](#), Main ETS Exercises, [*Ultimate Frisbee*](#)
- [*What is experiential learning?*](#), Institute for Experiential Learning.
- [*Experiential learning and debriefing*](#), Appraiser - Competence Development Platform for Trainers.



Coach's role limits

In youth sports, coaches hold a privileged position in young people's lives — not only as technical instructors but also as trusted adult figures. However, this closeness brings a particular responsibility: understanding the **limits of their role** in emotional support and knowing when to refer to trained mental health professionals.

This module aims to provide a clear and realistic understanding of the coach's scope as a prevention and support agent, distinguishing their position from that of clinical professionals such as psychologists or therapists. It offers guidance on identifying warning signs, outlines ethical considerations, and presents best practices for collaborating with mental health services when necessary.

The Coach as a mental health promoter

As youth coaches take on a growing role in supporting players' emotional well-being, it is essential to define **clear professional and ethical boundaries**. Coaches are not mental health clinicians. While they are often trusted adults and early witnesses to signs of distress, their primary role is not therapeutic, but preventive and supportive.

According to recent evidence in the fields of sport psychology and adolescent development (Jowett & Felton, 2014; Weinberg & Gould, 2019), coaches can be powerful influencers of youth well-being by creating psychologically safe team environments, fostering trust and open communication, observing behavioural changes that may signal emotional difficulty and referring players to professional help when necessary.

Coaches are in an ideal position to build resilience, reinforce positive coping strategies, and normalize conversations around mental health. However, stepping beyond their role can lead to ethical risks, especially if they attempt to interpret or treat psychological disorders without formal clinical training.

Mental health professionals – such as psychologists, therapists, or counselors – are trained to assess, diagnose, and treat emotional and cognitive disorders. Their work includes conducting clinical interviews and psychological evaluations, providing individual or group therapy, developing treatment plans and ensuring confidentiality and clinical supervision.



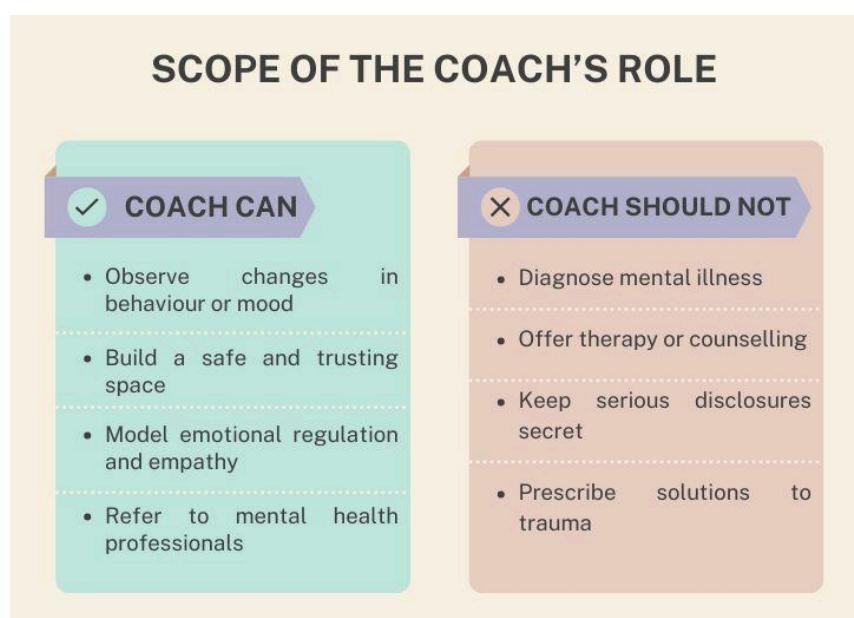
Unlike coaches, these professionals are bound by specific ethical codes and legal responsibilities. Coaches should avoid offering advice or interventions that resemble therapy, especially in complex or acute situations such as suicidal ideation, trauma, or psychiatric symptoms.

Collaboration not substitution

Rather than assuming therapeutic responsibilities, coaches should focus on collaborating with mental health services. When signs of serious emotional distress are observed, it is both appropriate and responsible to: express concern empathetically to the athlete, encourage them to speak with a trusted adult or professional, inform family (if appropriate and not harmful to the young person) and follow a referral protocol if available within the club or institution.

Research from the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (Schomöller & Dumon, 2022) recommends the following guidelines for coaches:

- **Do no harm:** avoid interventions you are not trained for.
- **Know your limits:** refer when an issue exceeds your scope.
- **Maintain boundaries:** remain a supportive coach, not a therapist.
- **Create a referral network:** know who to contact when needed.





Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

References

- [American Psychological Association](#). (2023). *Recognizing the signs of mental health problems in youth*.
- Jowett, S., & Felton, L. (2014). Coach–athlete relationships: The key to athletes' well-being and performance. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 10(2), 94–107.
- Schomöller, A., & Dumon, D. (2022). *Sport Coaching for Mental Well-being: Recommendations for Coach Education and Club Management*. International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), SPIRIT Project.
- Weinberg, R. S., & Gould, D. (2019). *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (7th ed.). Human Kinetics.
- [World Health Organization](#). (2022). *Mental health of adolescents*.



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

Conclusion

As coaches, trainers, and physical education teachers, you do more than teach skills or lead practices—you shape environments where young people grow not just as athletes, but as human beings. Through the *MINDPLAY* training program, you've been introduced to tools and approaches that place mental well-being at the heart of sport and movement.

By applying what you've learned—from recognizing early signs of mental distress to creating supportive team cultures—you're becoming a first line of support for your students. You're helping to normalize conversations around emotions, to foster resilience through teamwork, and to guide youth toward healthier ways of coping, connecting, and thriving.

This manual is just the beginning. Let it inspire you to continue learning, adapting, and leading with empathy. Remember: a single coach can change the course of a young person's life. And when mental well-being is part of your training routine, you're not only building stronger athletes—you're building stronger, more confident people.

Thank you for being part of the movement toward a more mindful, inclusive, and emotionally aware sport.



Glossary

Adolescents: Young people typically between the ages of 10 and 19 who are in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. This period involves physical, emotional, and psychological changes as individuals mature.

Adrenaline spikes: Sudden increases in adrenaline levels in the body, usually triggered by stress, excitement, fear, or physical activity. These spikes prepare the body for a “fight or flight” response by increasing heart rate, energy, and alertness.

Affirmations: Positive statements or phrases repeated to oneself to promote self-belief, confidence, and emotional well-being. Often used as a tool for self-empowerment and mental focus.

Aggression: Hostile or violent behavior aimed at harming others physically or psychologically.

Anorexia nervosa: eating disorder with fear of becoming obese, disturbance of body image, significant weight loss as essential features. minimal normal weight for age and height is not maintained.

Anxiety: A feeling of uneasiness, worry, or fear that may be mild or intense. It can be related to a known or unknown source and often includes symptoms such as muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, and heightened alertness. Anxiety may be situational or linked to mental health conditions such as phobias, panic attacks, or generalized anxiety disorder.

Anxiety: An ongoing feeling of fear, nervousness, or unease. In the DSM-IV, anxiety is a key part of many conditions and can include physical symptoms like a racing heart or restlessness.

Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): signs of developmentally inappropriate inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity for the child’s age. The characteristic behavioural problems should be of early onset (before age 6 years) and long duration (> 6 months), and not limited to only one setting.

Behavioral Changes: Changes in how someone acts such as becoming more withdrawn, aggressive, or impulsive , can be signs of mental health problems. These are considered during diagnosis.

Bias: A tendency to favor or judge something or someone unfairly. In mental health, bias can appear in language, diagnosis, treatment, and societal attitudes—often resulting in stigma, discrimination, or unequal access to care. Bias may also arise from cultural, systemic, or personal perspectives and can influence decisions in subtle or overt ways.

Binge eating: recurrent episodes of binge eating occur in bulimia disorder.

Bipolar Disorder: A condition where people experience shifts between periods of high energy or mood (mania or hypomania) and periods of depression. These mood changes can impact sleep, activity, and judgment

Body image: disturbance of body image is one of the main features in eating disorders.



Bulimia: eating disorder with binge eating accompanied by an awareness that the eating pattern is abnormal, fear of not being able to stop eating voluntarily and depressed mood and self-deprecating thoughts following the eating binges as essential features.

Burnout: Physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others. It results from performing at a high level until stress and tension, especially from extreme and prolonged physical or mental exertion or an overburdening workload, take their toll.

Canada's "Long-Term Athlete Development" (LTAD): A framework designed to guide athletes through optimal physical, mental, and emotional development across all stages of sport participation, from early childhood through adulthood.

Cognitive Difficulties: Problems with thinking, attention, memory, or decision-making that may appear as symptoms of various mental disorders. These are assessed as part of diagnosis.

Cognitive reflection: The individual ability or disposition to stop the first impulsive response that our mind offers and to activate the reflective mechanisms that allow us to find an answer, make a decision, or carry out a specific behavior in a more thoughtful way.

Community-based services: Support services offered within local communities (instead of institutions), such as mental health counseling, group therapy, or youth programs. They are more accessible and personalized.

Constructive feedback: Supportive and specific input aimed at helping someone improve or grow. It focuses on actions rather than personal traits and includes both strengths and areas for improvement.

Coping Mechanisms: Strategies people use to deal with stress, manage emotional challenges, and regain control over their lives.

Cortisol: A hormone released by the adrenal glands in response to stress. Often called the “stress hormone,” cortisol helps regulate metabolism, blood pressure, and the body’s response to stress.

Crisis intervention programs: Structured actions or services designed to help individuals in severe emotional or psychological distress. These programs provide immediate support to prevent harm and stabilize the situation.

Dependency: state of needing something or someone else. In this case refers to substance dependency (drugs).

Depression: A mental health condition marked by prolonged sadness, loss of interest, low energy, difficulty concentrating, and feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness. It can interfere with daily life.



Depressive Episodes: Times when someone feels persistently sad, hopeless, or uninterested in life for at least two weeks. These episodes often include other symptoms like tiredness, sleep problems, and difficulty thinking.

Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs): A measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability, or early death.

Distress (Mental Distress): Describes emotional experiences like intense worry, sadness, or fear, and also refers to situations that feel overwhelming or painful. It is a broad term that does not imply a medical condition.

Dopamine: A neurotransmitter involved in pleasure, motivation, reward, and learning. It plays a key role in mood regulation and is associated with feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Dyslexia: is a developmental reading disorder. Faulty oral reading occurs, often characterized by omissions, additions, and distortions of words.

Eating disorders: are characterized by grave disturbances in eating behavior Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia, Pica, Rumination Disorder of Infancy and Atypical Eating Disorder.

Eating habits: abnormal eating habits occurs in this kind of disorders.

Eating patterns: The habitual ways individuals consume food, encompassing not only what they eat but also when, where, and why they eat.

Emotion regulation: The ability to manage and respond to one's own emotions, including the ability to influence which emotions are experienced, when they occur, and how they are expressed.

Emotional Distress: A type of mental distress that includes intense feelings such as sadness, fear, anger, or anxiety. These experiences can affect how someone feels and functions in daily life.

Endorphins: Chemicals produced by the body that reduce pain and create feelings of pleasure or euphoria. Often released during exercise, laughter, or positive experiences.

Extreme dieting: refers to very restrictive weight-loss methods.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): A condition where someone feels excessive and uncontrollable worry about many things, most days, for at least six months. It often includes fatigue, restlessness, and sleep problems.

Grassroots level: Community-based efforts and initiatives that begin with everyday people at the local level. These activities are driven by the needs and voices of the community rather than by large institutions or governments.



Growth mindset: The belief that talents and intelligence can be developed through dedication, hard work and perseverance. People with a growth mindset embrace challenges, learn from criticism and believe that hard work is the path to success.

Holistic growth: A well-rounded approach to personal development that considers emotional, mental, physical, social, and spiritual aspects. It emphasizes the growth of the whole person, not just isolated skills or traits.

Hopelessness: lack of hope that in extremely way is cause of self-harm and suicide.

Hyperactivity: overactivity that implies excessive restlessness, especially in situations requiring relative calm.

Identity Formation: The development of a distinct personality or sense of self, especially during adolescence.

Inattention: inappropriate lack of attention that should be diagnosed as a disorder only if they are excessive for the child or adolescent's age and intelligence, and affect their normal functioning and learning.

Insomnia: A sleep disorder characterized by persistent difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or both, despite adequate opportunities for sleep.

Learning disabilities: group of disorders in which a specific delay in development is the main feature, such as dyscalculia, dyslexia, aphasia, dyslalia and others.

Life Skills General Program (2023) – Lithuania: A national education program teaching essential life skills like emotional management, stress coping, and communication. It includes mental health awareness as a key part.

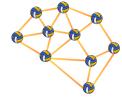
Mental distress: variety of experiences that negatively influence our well being

Mental Flexibility: The ability to adapt thoughts and behaviors in response to new information, changing situations, or unexpected challenges. It supports problem-solving, emotional regulation, and resilience.

Mental Health Ambassador Program (2022) – Lithuania: A national initiative where young people are trained to raise awareness and promote mental well-being among their peers, especially in schools and youth centers.

Mental Health Disorders: Noticeable disturbances in a person's thoughts, emotions, or behaviour that reflect problems in how their mind functions.

Mental Health Strategy of the National Health System (2022–2026) – Spain: A national framework focused on improving mental health care in Spain, increasing access to services, and reducing stigma around mental health.



Mental Health: A state where a person can manage daily stress, work or study effectively, build relationships, and contribute to their community. Mental health is not just about the absence of illness. Someone can have a mental health issue and still experience mental well-being.

Mindfulness: A mental practice focused on being fully present and aware of the current moment without judgment. It helps reduce stress and improves focus, emotional regulation, and well-being.

Moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA): Physical activity that raises the heart rate and makes breathing harder. Moderate activities include brisk walking or cycling, while vigorous activities involve running or playing sports.

Mood Disorders: A group of mental health conditions where mood (like sadness or extreme energy) is severely disturbed. This includes depression and bipolar disorder.

National Strategy for Mental Health of the Citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria (2021–2030); Bulgaria's official roadmap for improving mental health care. It aims to modernize services, focus on prevention, and make mental health support more community-based and inclusive.

National Youth Strategy (2021–2030) – Bulgaria: Bulgaria's strategic plan to support young people's personal and social development, including actions on mental health, education, employment, and participation.

On-site counselors: Mental health professionals who provide support and services directly within a school, workplace, or community setting, making it easier for individuals to access care where they are.

Panic Attacks: Sudden, intense periods of fear or discomfort, usually with physical symptoms like a racing heart, sweating, or feeling out of control.

Panic disorder: recurrent panic (anxiety) attacks that occur at times unpredictably. The individual is never certain which situations provoke those attacks. Panic attacks are manifested by sudden onset of intense apprehension, fear or terror, often associated with feelings of impending doom. It is important to differentiate it from the same clinical picture that occurs during marked physical exertion or a life-threatening situation, which are not called panic attacks.

Peer pressure: group influence, encouraging individuals to conform to the group's norms and behaviors.

Personalized Positive Mantras: Short, meaningful phrases created by an individual to inspire confidence, calm, or motivation. These mantras are tailored to reflect personal goals, values, or strengths.

Phobias: Strong and unreasonable fears of certain objects or situations, such as spiders or public places. These fears lead to avoidance and distress.



Positive attributes: Personal qualities or strengths that help individuals cope with challenges and thrive.

Post-conflict healing: The process of emotional, psychological, and social recovery after a conflict or traumatic event. It includes rebuilding trust, restoring relationships, and addressing individual or collective trauma.

Post-pandemic anxiety: Feelings of worry, uncertainty, or stress that emerge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. This may include fear of illness, social reintegration, or adapting to a changed world.

Processing disorders: synonym of developmental disorders and learning disabilities. Neurological conditions that affect how the brain receives, processes and responds to information from the senses.

Psychiatry: The branch of medicine focused on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders.

Purging: compensatory behaviors often associated with eating disorders.

Resilience: A person's ability to recover from difficult experiences and continue moving forward with meaning and strength.

Restless sleep: Difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings during the night, and feeling unrefreshed upon waking. Restless sleep can be a symptom of various sleep disorders and is often linked to issues like insomnia, sleep apnea, or restless legs syndrome.

Risk Factors: Characteristics or conditions like poverty, trauma, family difficulties, and exclusion, which can increase a person's likelihood of facing mental health issues.

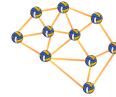
Risk-taking behavior: in this context refers to actions where individuals knowingly engage in activities with uncertain outcomes, potentially leading to harm or loss.

Self-harm: term referring to intentional self-inflicted poisoning or injury, which may or may not have a fatal intent or outcome.

Self-talk: The internal dialogue or commentary that a person has with themselves, either consciously or unconsciously. It's the inner voice that shapes thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Serotonin: A neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood, sleep, appetite, and overall emotional well-being. Low levels of serotonin are often linked to depression and anxiety.

Sleep pattern: A person's daily sleep habits, including what time they go to bed, how long they sleep, and how restful the sleep is.



Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia): A strong fear of being judged or embarrassed in social situations. This fear can lead to avoidance of speaking, eating, or performing in front of others.

Social Withdrawal: Pulling away from social interactions or relationships. It can be a sign of depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions.

Social-emotional learning (SEL): The process of developing skills to understand and manage emotions, set positive goals, show empathy, build relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Spain's Mental Health Care Plan (2022–2024): A targeted initiative to improve mental health services in Spain through more funding, training for professionals, and faster access to care.

Stigma: A negative connotation of a particular circumstance or quality. People with mental health problems can be stigmatised and viewed in a negative way because they experience or have experienced mental health issues.

Substance use disorders: those ones refer to the maladaptive behavior associated with more or less regular use of substances. Pathological use is divided into Substance Abuse and Substance Dependence.

Suicidal Behavior Hotline (024): An initiative funded by the national government in Spain. 024 is a free, anonymous and confidential telephone line nationwide that provides immediate support to people at risk of suicide or emotional crisis.

Sustainable development: Development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. In mental health, this can mean creating long-lasting, inclusive, and community-based systems of care.

Time management: The practice of using the time that you have available in a useful and effective way.

Volatility: Rapid and intense shifts in mood and emotional state.

Well-being: A general feeling of being well, having purpose in life, and being able to handle daily challenges. People can experience well-being even while facing mental health issues.

Youth Strategy 2030 (EJ2030); Spain's long-term plan to promote the development, participation, and inclusion of young people. It includes actions for mental health, well-being, and youth empowerment.

YRBSS (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System): The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) is the largest public health surveillance system in the United States, monitoring a broad range of health-related behaviors among high school students.



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINDPLAY

References

- American Psychiatric Association: <https://www.psychiatry.org/>
- American Psychological Association (APA): <https://www.apa.org/>
- Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/>
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders:
<https://aditpsiquiatriapsicologia.es/images/CLASIFICACION%20DE%20ENFERMEDADES/DSM-III.pdf>
- Mental Health - The power of Language
<https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MHE-Glossary-of-terms-and-Definitions.pdf>
- National policies on youth mental health in Spain, Bulgaria, and Lithuania.
- Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>
- ScienceDirect: Inmaculada Otero, Jesús F. Salgado, Silvia Moscoso, Cognitive reflection, cognitive intelligence, and cognitive abilities: A meta-analysis, Intelligence, Volume 90, 2022.
- World Health Organization
<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/mental-health/key-terms-and-definitions-in-mental-health#health>