

PARENT/CAREGIVER TIPS

PROTECTING ATHLETE WELL-BEING

During College Sports Recruiting





During the college sports recruiting process, your high school athlete is being evaluated intensely – by coaches, college admissions offices, teammates, social media, and most often by themselves. Your most powerful contribution as the parent or caregiver of your athlete is to provide a place where they are not being evaluated and do not have to perform.

RECRUITMENT IS HARD ON WELL-BEING

The college athletics recruitment process drains your athlete by stacking up the stressors. Timelines can be vague, communication and feedback from coaches can be inconsistent, and time demands – travel, training, calls, emails – are high on top of the already stacked up academic and athletic pressures for your athlete. Comparison culture – others committing on social media, for example – and identity pressures make the process feel even tougher. Normalizing these added stressors, talking about how tough recruitment can feel, and taking care to plan for and utilize antidotes to these stressors is critical.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY ATHLETE'S WELL-BEING?

Your message to your athlete should be, “My job is to help you think clearly, support your decisions, and value your voice - not to add stress or pressure.”

SOME SIMPLE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO MAKE THAT MANTRA A REALITY:

- **Support your athlete's autonomy.** Let them steer the process and support them with logistics when they need it/ask for it.
- **Develop a family agreement** outlining healthy recruiting boundaries. Limit check-ins about the recruiting process to 15 minutes, twice a week. Set communication boundaries with prospective coaches, for example: no calls, texts, or emails after a certain time unless urgent or unavoidable. Set one ‘recruiting free zone,’ such as mealtimes, right after school, or immediately after practice, during which the conversation focuses on more relaxing topics.
- **Keep a healthy routine going.** Strive to help your athlete get adequate sleep, nutrition, hydration, and recovery time. Help them balance wind-down time with friends and family with playing and recruitment time.
- **Be the calm presence.** Help them keep perspective, be predictable and soothing in your reactions, and offer reassurance about their value as a human when they need it.
- **Respond early to signs of stress.** Help them step back, take a rest, get the help they need, and take perspective.
- **Teach stress management skills in the moment.** Do not make them a big deal. Small, repeatable skills work best.

STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS →

- Naming stress or emotion helps tame them: Naming stress or emotion helps tame them: "Rate your stress on a 1-10 scale." "Where do you feel stress in your body today?" "What are you feeling right now?"
- "Stress resets." A quick walk, a hot shower, 10 minutes listening to music or petting the cat, and intentional [breathing exercises](#) can really help.
- Gently offer perspective: "What would you tell a teammate in your shoes?"
- Pay attention to your teen's identity beyond sports. Ask about non-athletic wins like kindness, effort, or leadership. Encourage other outlets.
- Support social connection with peers and other caring adults.

WHEN SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT MY ATHLETE'S STRESS LEVEL?

In this process, some stress is expected. If your athlete's stress starts to change the way they usually act, it is important to take note or take action. Below are some signs of an overload of stress:

EMOTIONAL SIGNS →

Some concerning signs include irritability, tearfulness, mood swings, increased anxiety, and even panic. You might hear or observe...

- Language that signals hopelessness - "I can't do this anymore"
- Harsh self-talk or shame - "I suck as a swimmer. No one wants me."
- Constant second-guessing - "I can't believe I said that in the interview." "Why wasn't I more on point at the soccer clinic?"
- Feelings of dread around practice or competition
- Losing the joy of the sport
- Only feeling 'good' when sports outcomes are strong



BEHAVIORAL SIGNS →

- Avoiding calls, emails, texts
- A drop in grades
- Obsessively checking calls, emails, texts
- Being more argumentative at home
- Missing assignments
- Over-indulging in sweets, caffeine, energy drinks or other substances to manage stress
- Withdrawing from supportive friends and family
- Overtraining and refusing to rest when in pain
- Trouble focusing or forgetting important details

PHYSICAL SIGNS →

Some physical signs that stress is building up:

- Sleep changes
- Unexplained tiredness
- Stomach aches or nausea
- Nightmares
- Frequent illness or injury
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches
- Slower recovery when ill or injured

IF I AM WORRIED AND I SEE WARNING SIGNS, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Start with a bid for connection. Be warm, specific, and calm. “I’ve noticed you are sleeping less and that you seem on edge. I’m concerned about you.” Ask short questions and listen to the answers. “What feels the hardest in all of this lately?”

NEXT, WHEN YOUR TEEN’S STRESS IS HIGH, HELP THEM STABILIZE AND SIMPLIFY:

- Pick one recruiting task for the week.
- Identify *one* recovery action they can do each day (sleep, snack, downtime, music).
- Create a list of non-urgent tasks that can be paused for a week.
- Offer choices “Would you like to talk now and make a plan or check in after a break and some dinner?”
- Collaborate on a plan: What simple changes can your athlete make this week to reduce stress? What support do they want from you? When will you check in again?
- Involve their club/high school coach for realistic guidance and load management, their trainer if pain or injury is escalating, the school counselor for academic stress and prioritization support.
- Call your pediatrician if you see sleep problems, exhaustion, anxiety symptoms, or appetite issues.





WHEN SHOULD I CONSIDER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT OPTIONS?

Sometimes, our athletes need outside support, and recognizing that, while hard, is a sign of providing great care. A rule of thumb is to bring in mental health support options if you and your athlete have tried the stress management strategies listed above and you do not see the stress getting better, or if your teen resists self-care and stress management at all costs. Talk to your pediatrician and reach out to a mental health professional or sports psychologist if stress begins to escalate. They can help with coping strategies, building confidence, and managing perfectionism.

SEEK SUPPORT URGENTLY IF YOU HEAR OR SEE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Talk of self-harm
- Wanting to disappear or not wanting to be here
- Severe hopelessness or inability to function
- Dangerous substance use
- Rapid, extreme behavior changes.
- Stay with your teen in these cases, seek immediate help, and use emergency resources if you need them.

HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY

- “I’m here. We’ll take this one step at a time.”
- “Let’s focus on what you can control today.”
- “Rest is a performance strategy.”
- “It’s okay to ask for help.”

HURTFUL THINGS TO SAY (EVEN IF WELL-MEANT)

- “Just relax.”
- “You should be grateful.”
- “This is your big chance—don’t mess it up.”
- “Everyone else can handle it.”

WEEKLY “WELL-BEING CHECK-IN (5 MINUTES, AFTER REGULAR RECRUITMENT CHECK-IN)

- “What felt like a win this week?”
- “What felt heavy?”
- “Where’s your stress from 1–10?”
- “What do you need more of this week—rest, support, fun, structure, space?”
- “What’s one thing I can do that would genuinely help?”

Recruiting is temporary; **your teen’s relationship with stress, identity, and self-worth will last a lifetime.** When you protect sleep, boundaries, connection, and self-compassion—and respond early to warning signs—you help them perform better and feel better. Ultimately, your athlete’s well-being is far more important than a roster spot.



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The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie

This resource was generated in collaboration with Dr. Suzanne Button, Clinical Psychologist for [the Children's Home of Poughkeepsie](#). The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie is a 179-year-old organization that provides a full range of Community Based and Residential Services, giving hope and healing to at-risk children and families throughout the country.

Positive Coaching Alliance

PCA's vision is to build a world where youth benefit from a positive sports experience with a coach who inspires them to become the best version of themselves in the game and in life. We train coaches and partner with youth sports organizations, parents, sports leaders, and communities to make youth sports more positive, equitable, and accessible to all kids regardless of social or economic circumstances. **For more information, go to [positivecoach.org](https://www.positivecoach.org).**