

# RECOGNIZING ISOLATION IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT- ATHLETES

## AND HOW TO HANDLE IT

### High School Student-Athletes

Connecting with teammates can be an intimidating task, but, it is not impossible.

#### For new athletes:

- **Be Humble** - Being recruited is an exciting new step. However, do not confuse your energy around being recruited with entitlement. You were chosen for a reason, but you have to continue to work hard. Keep a healthy perspective.
- **Be Observant** - Listen to what your teammates say and watch what they do. See how your teammates treat each other, the custodial workers, academic advisors, etc. See if they honor people's time well, how they relate to fans, and how they carry themselves. Ask yourself if their behaviors are ones you want to aspire to emulate.
- **Be Willing to Ask for Help** - Transitions can be tough. Learning a new routine or a new style of play on top of adjusting to school life can be overwhelming. Your teammates can probably relate. If there are teammates you feel comfortable reaching out to, approach them and don't feel shy about picking up the phone.



#### For returning athletes:

- **Be Helpful** - Be approachable and available. Tell them about your team culture, give unofficial tours of the school or brief them on who's who. Think about the things you wish you'd known when you first stepped foot into the team.
- **Be Interested** - Everyone has a story. Take interest in how your new teammate's journey to the team unfolded. Be intentional about making a genuine investment of your time so you'll have a deeper point of connection whenever you hit the field.
- **Be Inclusive** - Invite your new teammate to a place you enjoy. Don't let them sit alone in the dining hall. If they're not interested or have other plans, just let them know the invitation is always open. Team cohesiveness contributes to the overall emotional health of your team.



### Controlling what you can control during COVID-19

Creating a **schedule** in a time where so much is changing is crucial for your mental health. By creating a schedule for each day or week, you can help fill your day with meaningful tasks that matter to you and help combat isolation and loneliness.

- Making a schedule can help relieve some stress
- Writing information down can help
- Accountability strengthens ten-fold when we write things down



### Coaches of High School Athletes

There are simple strategies and processes that a coach can put in place to make sure their program values face-to-face interaction.

- Formal opportunities for athletes to speak up, contribute and connect
- Informal opportunities for athletes to speak up, contribute and connect
- Organize coffee, dinners together, community events, whatever you choose which creates the opportunity to work together in different ways



In-person interactions allows trust to develop at a much faster rate than any other type of interaction.

### Parents of High School Athletes

Isolation is expressed in terms of physical and social isolation. Look out for these in your student-athlete:

- **Physical isolation** - feelings of isolation as a result from being in a different location or having physical differences in relation to the rest of the team.
- **Social isolation** - feelings of isolation as a result from missing social interactions with the team.

Here is what is important:

- **Less than 3.5%** of all high school athletes continue to play sports at a DI level
- **Only 2%** of all collegiate athletes play at a professional level (meaning there is a 0.07% chance of a youth athlete playing professionally).
- Nurturing the **whole person**, not just one part, such as athletic success, is crucial in helping your high school student-athlete build a foundation that will carry them after they are done playing sports.



#### What you can do to support your athlete:

- Student athletes are students first
- Encourage healthy food choices
- Encourage rest
- Let the coaches coach
- Focus on character building
- Be involved and show up