

TALK, TRUST, SUPPORT

— THE —

ULTIMATE PARENT PLAYBOOK FOR TEEN ATHLETES





A NOTE FROM ONE ATHLETE PARENT TO ANOTHER

I get it—teenagers don't exactly come with a manual, I certainly had many times I wish they had. And when they start closing (slamming) doors and giving one-word answers, it can feel like you're locked out of their world. But I've learned something as a mom of a high-performing teen athlete: even when they act like they don't want us involved, **they *still need us***—more than they'll ever admit.

Checking in doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be a deep conversation or a breakthrough moment. Sometimes it's just sitting with them, offering a snack, asking how practice went, and being okay with "fine" for now. What matters most is that they know you're watching, you care, and you're not going anywhere.

If your gut tells you something's off—listen to it. We know our kids better than anyone. And if that instinct nudges you to seek out a school counselor, a pediatrician, or a mental health professional, that's not a sign of weakness. That's parenting strength. Because showing up and asking for help when it's needed? That's how we raise strong, supported kids who can thrive on and off the field.

You're not alone in this. And neither is your child.

With you in it,

LD Harris

SIGNS OF STRESS IN TEEN ATHLETES

Behavioral:

- ✓ Sudden changes in sleep patterns (too much or too little)
- ✓ Withdrawing from friends, family, or teammates
- ✓ Avoiding practices, games, or conversations about sports
- ✓ Frequent procrastination or lack of motivation
- ✓ Increased screen time or social media use to escape

Emotional:

- ✓ Increased irritability or mood swings
- ✓ Tearfulness or emotional outbursts over small issues
- ✓ Expressing self-doubt or “I’m not good enough” thinking
- ✓ Fear of letting others down
- ✓ Loss of passion for things they used to love

Physical

- ✓ Frequent headaches or stomach aches
 - ✓ Sudden changes in appetite
 - ✓ Clenched jaw, tense posture, or shallow breathing
 - ✓ Complaints of fatigue despite rest
 - ✓ Recurring minor injuries or slowed recovery
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HOW TO RESPOND WITH SUPPORT, NOT PRESSURE

Stay calm and present.

Your composure helps them feel safe and seen.

Validate their feelings.

Say things like: “That sounds really tough—want to talk about it?”

Listen more than you lecture.

Give them space to process without rushing to “fix” it.

Create safe routines.

Sleep, nutrition, and unstructured downtime help regulate stress.

Encourage professional support if needed.

A counselor, coach, or sports psychologist can help.

FUEL THE TALK:

41 PARENT-FRIENDLY STARTERS FOR TEEN ATHLETES

- ? How did that race feel? What do you think you did really well?**
- ? What’s something you’re proud of from today’s practice?**
- ? Was there a moment that felt easier than you expected?**
- ? Which teammate made you smile today?**
- ? What part of today’s workout made you feel strongest?**
- ? If you could relive one part of today’s game, what would it be?**
- ? What’s something you learned today—about the sport or yourself?**
- ? Who stood out today for giving great effort?**

- ? Did anything surprise you about how today went?**
- ? What's one little win you want to remember from today?**
- ? What's one thing you're excited to work on next?**
- ? Was there a moment today when you pushed through something hard?**
- ? Who do you think had a really good attitude today?**
- ? If you had to give yourself a shout-out, what would it be for?**
- ? What's something your coach said today that stuck with you?**
- ? How did your body feel today—strong, tired, something in between?**
- ? If you could freeze-frame one highlight from today, what would it be?**
- ? What's one way you helped someone else today?**
- ? What did you enjoy most about being with the team today?**
- ? If practice had a theme song today, what would it be?**
- ? What's something that made you laugh today?**
- ? What was your favorite drill or moment today? Why?**
- ? Is there a teammate or coach you really admire? What do you like about them?**
- ? What's one way you've grown this season that you're proud of?**
- ? Was there a time today you felt really focused? What helped?**
- ? What's something you're better at now than you were a month ago?**
- ? If you had to teach someone what you did today, what would be hardest to explain?**
- ? What part of your game or skill set are you most confident in right now?**
- ? Was there anything you handled better today than you would've in the past?**
- ? What's your favorite part about game days or meets?**
- ? If you could replay one moment in slow motion, what would it be?**

- ? What's one mindset shift that's helped you recently?
 - ? How do you want to show up for your next practice or game?
 - ? What's something you're doing now that your younger self would be impressed by?
 - ? What's one thing you want to try or do differently next time?
 - ? What part of today made you feel most like yourself?
 - ? What would your highlight reel from today include?
 - ? How do you think today's effort builds toward your long-term goals?
 - ? If you could text your future self about today's practice, what would you say?
 - ? What's one thing I can do to support you better right now?
 - ? What's been the hardest part of this week for you—and how are you handling it?
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QUICK STRESS-RELIEF TIPS FOR TEENS, PARENTS and FAMILIES

Here are **15 simple, proven ways** to help alleviate stress in teens, teen athletes, parents, and families. These are quick, accessible ideas that can easily fit into busy schedules:

Prioritize regular sleep

Teens benefit from consistent sleep—aiming for a weekend “catch-up” of up to 2 extra hours helps reduce anxiety, but more can disrupt rhythms.

Mindful deep breathing

A few minutes of deep breaths (like 4-7-8 breathing or diaphragmatic breaths) calms the nervous system.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Tensing then relaxing muscles builds body awareness and eases tension.

Use grounding techniques

Try the “5-4-3-2-1” method: name five things you see, four you feel, and so on.

Spot wellness in nature

Spending even 120 minutes per week in green spaces improves well-being.

Play calming music

Listening to relaxing or mood-lifting music reduces tension and boosts mood.

Engage in a creative activity

Art, coloring, or journaling helps teens process emotions and find calm.

Try quick puzzles or games

Sudoku, crosswords, or jigsaw puzzles shift focus and provide satisfaction.

Take short breaks from screens

Even brief digital detoxes help reset mood and lower stress.

Move in new ways

Do gentle yoga, tai chi, mindful stretching, or a walk to loosen tension.

Mindful walking

Walk slowly with focus on breath and surroundings.

Play with a pet

Spending time with animals lowers cortisol and boosts mood.

Guided imagery

Use a soothing mental image or recording to “transport” and relax.

Mini meditation sessions

Even 1–5 minutes of meditation can improve clarity and calm.

Connect with a friend or family member

Talking about feelings—even briefly—creates emotional relief and support.



Disclaimer:

This toolkit is not a substitute for professional mental health or medical advice. If you have serious concerns about your teen's mental or physical health, always consult with a qualified healthcare provider or licensed professional.

Trust your instincts—early support can make all the difference.

Tough Teen Athletes

Visit our website for more great information:



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Unleash Your Potential**