

# Mental Wellbeing Tip Sheet

## When to move towards a mental health conversation with a student:

- **Recognized warning signs:**

Possible warning signs someone is struggling to function in daily life: low energy, lonely, not eating or sleeping normally, feeling sick often, wishing the day away, depression, anxiety, withdrawing from social interactions, avoiding normally enjoyable activities, thoughts of suicide, self-harm (i.e. picking fingers until bleeding, cutting, alcohol and/or drug use).

## What is my role in dealing with mental health issues in student-athletes?

### 1) Sit with them in the pain

- Pray and ask God for a heart of empathy.
- Acknowledge God as our Prince of Peace and ask the Lord to help others experience that reality.
- Provide an environment of emotional safety where they can share honestly without judgment.
- Observe and listen.
- Use “soft eyes”- not always looking directly into their eyes but focusing in front of the person. This helps them feel more comfortable.
- Validate their feelings. “Feelings just are.” Consider walking through a feelings chart if they are having a hard time identifying how they are feeling.
- Practice the OARS model of communication (see below for explanation) for help in active listening.

### 2) Fight stigma and shame

- Know what kinds of things are helpful to say and what kinds of statements you should avoid (for help on this, see below).
- Steer clear of trying to diagnose.
- Avoid any language of trying to “fit it”.

### 3) Point them to professional resources

- Ask if they’ve ever explored getting professional help; only refer if asked (have multiple resources for them to choose)

- Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions like, "have you had thoughts of hurting yourself?"
- Know your local campus resources (many are free), and be ready to give important contact numbers if necessary. If there is a clear emergency, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (or soon to be 988) or 911.
- Offer encouraging scriptures/Bible study/resources for the journey and pray for them.

## **IMPORTANT REMINDERS:**

- Remember your limitations. Our focus is on spiritual well being. We are not licensed professional counselors and therefore cannot diagnose students or use diagnostic language under any circumstances (see attached staff involvement graphic for clarity of role).
- Keep first things first - PRAY! We are not God. He alone is our help in times of trouble. He is the Prince of Peace. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you listen well and respond with grace and truth. Thank the student for the humble opportunity to be invited into this hard space with them. From a biblical perspective, our mental health includes our relationship with:
  - God
  - Others
  - Ourselves
- If it seems they are struggling may be necessary to ask if they've ever considered getting help for what they are experiencing. If they ask your opinion about getting counseling, instead of saying "I think you should get counseling." phrase it as, "If I was in your situation I would consider talking to someone trained in the mental health field."

## **Supplements:**

### **Compassion in light of God's transforming love and grace**

- You might also want to ask if they'd be open to you sharing a helpful processing tool (see attached document by Claire and Scott Opplinger). This tool can help us as we walk through the confusing, surprising, and sometimes unexpected experiences God allows in our lives. What is God saying to me in this? What does He want me to do about it?

### **OARS Model For Listening**

- **Open-ended** questions or observation. Avoid asking 'why' questions. i.e:
  - Tell me more about ...*
  - In what ways does ... bring up those feelings?*
  - How have you tried to solve what you're feeling?*
  - What have you thought about doing?*
  - What would it be like if you didn't have this struggle?*
  - If you could wave a magic wand over this situation, what would be different?*

*What have you tried previously that worked?*

*What is the worst thing that might happen if you tried ... ?*

*Can you think of a time when you weren't feeling this way? What was different then?*

*On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel you're doing right now? What would it take for you to move one point up the scale?.*

- **A**ffirm the student's situational reactions.
- **R**eflect your understanding of what they are going through - repeat back to them what they've shared with you.
- **S**ummarize the info you know as you go. Simplify the situation.

## **Video clips**

Former AIA student who works as a mental health counselor – <https://youtu.be/Dz9-vHV-Kp8>

AIA wrestler, Lavalley's mental health comeback – <https://youtu.be/3L95rIWfNQo>

## **Examples of helpful things to say:**

- “I may not be able to understand exactly what you are experiencing, but I care about you and want to help.”
- “You are important to me. Your life is important to me.”
- “Tell me what I can do now to help you.” (offer suggestions, such as, can I bring dinner tonight)
- “You might not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change.”
- “You're not alone in this. I'm here for you.”
- “I'm here for you. We will get through this together.”
- “Have you ever considered getting help for what you're experiencing?”
- “If you ever decide that you need help, I have names.”

## **Examples of hurtful words to avoid:**

- “It's all in your head.”
- “We all go through times like this.”
- “What do you want me to do? I can't do anything about your situation.”
- “Just snap out of it. Look on the bright side.”
- “Just pray about it”
- “You'll be fine. Stop worrying.”
- “Here's my advice ...”
- “What's wrong with you? Shouldn't you be better by now?”

## **Offer encouragement from Scripture:**

- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 1 Corinthians 16:14
- Isaiah 40:31
- Isaiah 43:2
- Isaiah 53:5
- Jeremiah 29:11
- John 1:5
- John 11:35
- John 16:33
- Joshua 1:9
- Matthew 11:28
- Psalms 18:19
- Psalms 46:10
- Psalms 91:11-12
- Psalms 94:19
- Psalms 139:14
- Psalms 143
- Proverbs 31:25
- Romans 8:38-39
- Romans 8:31
- 2 Timothy 1:7

# Experiencing compassion in light of God transforming us

**Think of a recent experience that caught your attention. A time when you thought, did, felt, or said something that surprised you, seemed confusing, or didn't feel good. It could be a response to another person, a situation you were in, or information you received.**

