





Social Media and Mental Health

A Guide for Staff

Social media can affect student-athletes' mental health. Knowing its benefits and risks can help you identify and support athletes who may be experiencing harmful effects.

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH

Social media can help student-athletes:

- Stay in touch with friends, fans and teammates.
- Create a supportive community.
- Tell their story or speak up for causes they care about.
- Build their brand and honor NIL contracts.

Social media can also expose student-athletes to:

- Harmful or harassing messages.
- Body image worries or unfavorable comparisons with others.
- Sleep difficulties affecting health, safety and performance.

Harmful effects of social media may be linked to symptoms of depression, anxiety and disordered eating. In extreme cases, they may contribute to suicidal thoughts or actions.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WELL-BEING



About **20% of student-athletes** say social media use makes falling asleep at night difficult.



Almost 30% of female student-athletes say social media often makes them feel worse about how their bodies look.

Spotting the Signs

Social media may be affecting a student-athlete negatively if you observe:

- **Changes in mood**.
- **Hopelessness, isolation or little motivation**.
- **Shifts in eating or sleep habits**.
- **Reduced confidence or doubts** about their abilities.
- **Repeatedly checking social media accounts**.
- **Changes in engagement** with teammates or coaches.

For mental health education resources and guidance, see the NCAA Mental Health Best Practices.

Discuss the link between social media and mental health with your team at the start of the season and throughout it. Explain the precautions they can take to keep their accounts protected.



Steps to Take

Discuss how to balance social media use: set boundaries, engage with purpose, build in-person relationships and take breaks when they are needed.

If you think social media may be harming a student-athlete's mental health, you can offer support in these ways:

1. Start an open conversation.

- Explain what you have seen or heard that has prompted your concern.
- Reassure them they are not alone and listen with empathy. Suggest talking to a licensed mental health provider and offer to help make that connection.

2. Discuss ways to manage social media.

- Hide or report harmful comments; report troublesome accounts. Suggest asking a friend to monitor comments.
- Change account settings to filter or mute negative words and phrases. Limit comments to accounts they follow, or turn comments off entirely.
- After a performance or event, suggest taking time to reflect before checking their social media accounts.

3. Know when to report or refer.

- Know when concerns need to be raised, especially when athletes receive threats, discriminatory messages or other harassment that could lead to self-harm or suicidal thoughts.
- Share resources for licensed mental health providers on campus.
- Display sources of help in locker rooms, coaching offices and throughout sports facilities. Encourage student-athletes to seek help when they need it.

For you or someone else in crisis, call, text or chat 988.

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