



# ATHLETES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

## RESOURCE GUIDE



Athletes for Mental Health is an impact week chosen by our lacrosse players to destigmatize negative perceptions of mental health struggles within our athlete communities and beyond. Athletes Unlimited believes in the holistic wellbeing of our athletes, staff, and fans to ensure we can all show up as our best selves.

Emily Perrin, LMSW, is the Director of the Medical Advisory Board at Morgan's Message and Founder and CEO of Perrin Wellness and Performance. She is a Mental Health therapist and Mindfulness and Performance Coach that works with elite athletes all over the United States. As a former DI athlete (soccer, UVA) and DI coach (UPenn), Emily has firsthand experience with the mental health challenges that athlete's face today.

Together, we've created this guide to raise your awareness around mental health as well as provide helpful tips for navigating mental health struggles and ways to take action.

### **Defining "Mental Health"**

**The World Health Organization (1)** defines Mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.

In simpler terms, the mind and body are connected and constantly communicating in what is called a feedback loop, meaning mental health does not live or exist solely in our mind. Mental health is the health of our entire mind-body system and its ability to work together in order to take in, interact and then respond to the world around you.

### **\*Key and Important Reminders:**

1. We ALL have mental health and have a journey with mental health
2. Mental health is complex, multifaceted and ever changing. No two days are the same, therefore our mental health and well-being will never stay the exact same.
3. Mental Health occurs on a SPECTRUM / continuum
4. Mental Health DOES NOT mean a Mental Disorder nor is it simply the absence of a Mental Disorder or Diagnosis

### **Awareness: Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health**

There is no singular or "one way" that mental health impacts us or shows up. Mental health is complex, multifaceted and unique to each individual – an individual's **identity** (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc), **social context** (systems and environment one grew up in, familial structure, etc) and **lived experience** (past trauma, mental health) will ALWAYS impact an individual's experience of mental health, the signs and symptoms they may present AND their ability to navigate.



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Here are some general and broad signs or symptoms that may indicate you or a loved one might be navigating challenges with mental health:

1. Noticeable physical changes in appearance
2. Noticeable changes in weight or in behaviors around food and eating
3. Disturbances in Sleep and energy levels
4. Noticeable changes in mood or mood swings that seem out of character
5. Increase in worry (that seems to be about everything and is constant and persistent)
6. Impairment in day to day functioning
7. Isolation and withdrawal from social interaction
8. Self harm
9. Someone or a loved one is telling you that they are worried or in distress about how they are feeling.  
Example: "I don't feel normal" or "Something doesn't feel right"
10. Substance use or changes in substance use behaviors

### **Tips for Addressing and Navigating Mental Health**

How we address and navigate our mental health will be different for everyone. This can also change and shift as we continue to live our lives and grow in our own mental health journey. Here are 3 tips that can be helpful for wherever you or your loved one might be in this journey:

#### **Start with validation**

- a. Validation is the FOUNDATION of mental health. We must validate ourselves and others in their mental health experience. Validation means that we believe that our experience or the experience of another is real and true.
- b. The reason we validate is because emotions matter and all emotions are valid! We do not have good or bad emotions. We also do not have to like, understand or agree with an emotion (or someone else's emotion) to validate it!
- c. Validation is going to be a critical piece in allowing ourselves to then move through and navigate our emotions
- d. Ways to validate ourselves:
  - i. "My feelings are valid"
  - ii. "Its OK to feel this way"
  - iii. "This feeling is real"
  - iv. "This is hard right now"
- e. Ways to validate others:
  - i. "How you feel is valid"
  - ii. "I don't understand but I know this must be hard right now"
  - iii. "I can't quite understand what you are going through but I'd like to try"
  - iv. "I hear that you are hurting and in pain"



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### Establish an SOS list

- a. An SOS List is a small list of 2-6 people that you would describe as your inner circle. These are people that will validate you, support you and you could pick up the phone and call or text at any moment. Generally these are people that feel “safe” to us and that we can be vulnerable with, even if it’s a little scary!
- b. Once you establish this list for yourself, TELL THEM. Let these people know that they are ON your SOS list. Communication is not a 1-way street and unfortunately, humans are not mind readers. Letting these people know that they are ON your SOS list can help them be proactive at times with regards to checking in on you.

### Tips for Navigating Therapy

- a. Therapy is NOT just a space for when we are struggling. Therapy and a therapeutic relationship can be an amazing place to learn more about ourselves and explore our strengths!
  - i. Finding the right therapist for YOU is just like starting or forming any new relationship. Therapists specialize in different areas, work with different age groups and use a variety of interventions and techniques with clients. When looking for a therapist you want to make sure that you find someone that supports your needs and works with you to address your goals!
- b. If you are wondering how to find a therapist or what that entails here are a few places you can start!
  - i. Search for a Licensed Mental Health professional within your area or state! You must find a professional that is licensed in the state that you reside in. Great resources for this can be:
    1. A simple google search like “Licensed mental health professional, City, state” or searching for Mental Health practices or clinics within your area
    2. [Psychology Today](#)
    3. [The Trevor Project](#) - providing support and therapy for the LGBTQIA+ community and young people
    4. [Therapy for Black Girls](#) - provides therapists of color for Black women
    5. [Black Men Heal](#) - non profit providing therapy for Black Men
    6. [Therapy for Latinx](#) - providing therapy for the Latinx community
    7. [Trauma Institute and Child Trauma Institute](#) providing therapy for trauma survivors
    8. Check out our full resource list below as well!
- c. Insurance
  - i. If you plan to use insurance for therapy you will want to make sure that the therapist you are seeking takes your insurance plan
  - ii. Not all mental health professionals take insurance, so be sure to ask about this up front!
- d. Questions you can ask your therapist to ensure therapy will be a good fit for you or your loved one
  - i. What is your clinical or educational background?
  - ii. What types of interventions do you use?
  - iii. Do you have experience working with the issues or strengths I’m bringing to therapy?
  - iv. Do you have experience working with people like me (my background, identity and upbringing?)
  - v. What will therapy be like with you!?



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## RESOURCE LIST



### Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988 or text "TALK" to 741741

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's mission is to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide.

Black Men Heal provides access to mental health treatment, psycho-education, and community resources to men of color.

Emily Perrin, LMSW Director of Medical Advisory Council Morgan's Message and founder and CEO of Perrin Wellness and Performance.

JED Foundation protects emotional health and prevents suicide for teens and young adults in the United States by partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems. You can access their resource center by clicking [here](#).

Katie's Save is based on the principle of student choice. It is a mission to implement a university policy designed to offer students an option to enable and require the university/college to send a notification to a Designated Advocate regarding instances when the student is involved in a situation that could evolve into challenging circumstances where they may need guidance and support related to their mental health and wellbeing.

Morgan's Message strives to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health within the student-athlete community and equalize the treatment of physical and mental health in athletics. They aim to expand the dialogue on mental health by normalizing conversations, empowering those who suffer in silence, and supporting those who feel alone.

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) is an organization centered around providing resources, education and advocacy around Mental Health. NAMI also has a free [Helpline](#) you can access by call or text

OneLove Foundation empowers young people with the tools and resources they need to see the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships and bring life-saving prevention education to their communities.

Project HEAL aims to break down systemic, healthcare, and financial barriers to eating disorder healing.

Dr. Stacy Freedenthal PhD, LCSW is a Suicidologist whose work is focused on all things suicide. Stacy has a plethora of resources including a blog, books and more on her website.

The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning) young people. Reach a Counselor through the Trevor Project by clicking [here](#).

We R Native is an organization providing resources, education, empowerment and a crisis hotline for Native Youth.