



## Supporting Young Athletes After a Sports Injury

There are benefits to playing sports for most kids. However, there are unfortunately times when young athletes get hurt. Sometimes they only miss a few games, and other times it can be more serious. For many, an injury can bring about a myriad of emotions including sadness, frustration, anger, and anxiety. They might experience changes in appetite, disturbances in sleep, or become isolated and disengaged. They also struggle with fear of movement, reinjury, and performance after the injury. They need space and resiliency to deal with it, recover, and return should it be their choice.

*So, how can we help youth athletes cope with emotional and physical pain during recovery? How can we help rehabilitation go as smoothly as possible? What kind of support is best? Fortunately, researchers and clinicians have some answers to these questions.*

### Tips for Parents, Caregivers and Coaches:

- 1. Manage parental anxiety.** Take time to recognize how your own anxiety may increase theirs.
- 2. Model and foster resilience.**
  - Teach and model coping skills; help manage anxiety and stress
  - Encourage focus on positive and gratitude
  - Practice mindfulness
  - Encourage maintaining connection with peers and teammates
  - Maintain healthy habits; sleep, nutrition, approved exercise
- 3. Emphasize and remind the child of their identity beyond being an athlete.**
- 4. Set realistic expectations; be honest.**
- 5. Have conversations, listen attentively, be non-judgmental, be empathetic, be curious, ask questions...**
  - Encourage the athlete to express their feelings about (Anger. Anxiety. Sadness)
  - Validate their feelings
  - How they feel about returning to sports
  - Ask do they have any worries about returning to the game
  - Ask what you can do to best support them
- 6. Reduce pain by providing positive emotional experiences.** Physical pain isn't the only challenge after a sports injury. Research shows that negative emotions can influence pain perception. On the flip side, research also suggests that inducing a good mood through music, arts, and other positive experiences can help reduce pain perception.
- 7. Think about how you may answer some of their questions - even if you don't know the answer, and how you can respond in a supportive way.** Here are some examples of questions they may ask: What if I lose my position? Did I let my team down? What if I am no longer able to play at the same level?

