



Strong Minds is an interactive learning activity focused on developing adaptive coping skills. Competition provides a natural opportunity to develop active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness under stress, such as: thinking positive thoughts, releasing stress and connecting with others. Athletes try a few different active coping strategies as they move through the stations. Before exiting, athletes identify the strategies they like best and volunteers provide them with visual reminders to use these tools in competition and in daily life.

Importance and Impact

Pilot data from Strong Minds events found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes in the U.S. face significant stresses on a daily basis, but have access to only a few adaptive coping strategies (Hartley & MacLean, 2010)

- **12%** of athletes report having no coping strategies
- **62%** mostly use avoidant strategies (e.g., not think the stressor), which is associated with increased depression
- **26%** mostly use active strategies (e.g. doing something to help themselves to feel better), which is associated with increased well-being

Purpose of the Exam and Goals:

- Increase athlete awareness of active coping strategies that can be used in competition and in life
- Support athletes to identify stress management/coping strategies that they like and think they will use
- Provide resources on good coping for athletes, coaches & caregivers
- Start conversations about stress, coping and emotional wellness
- Provide training and experiences for mental health student and professionals to discuss emotional well-being with individuals with Intellectual Disabilities.

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