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1:00-1:05: What Is Emotional Wellness and Why Is It Important

Emotional health is an important part of overall health. Health isn't just physical!

It is about having an optimistic (positive) approach to life and being able to enjoy life. It is being able to handle challenges in your life.

Emotional Wellness is about the ability to accept, understand, and express our feelings. Which allows you to react to situations and express your feelings. It allows you to be in control of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

"A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." (World Health Organization)

1:05-1:10: Your Role as a Health Messenger

- As a Health Messenger you can share the Strong Minds tools with your teammates, friends, coaches, family.
 - Individually- sharing strategies of Strong Minds
 - Teams- as part of practice, pre-game, or post-game, finds ways to incorporate Strong Minds strategies
 - Social Media- work with your Program staff to add messages related to Strong Minds strategies (videos, posts)
- Be there as a friend/support for your teammates
- Encourage your local Program to add Strong Minds
- *ACTIVITY: Ask the athletes for additional ideas for how to be a supportive teammate*

1:10-1:20: Recognizing Signs of Stress in Teammates

A person who's "stressed out" is usually feeling strong emotions (like sadness, or worry, or feeling mad) that are really uncomfortable. Stress can also make your body really tense – making it harder and harder to feel calm and relaxed. For a lot of us, we have to calm our bodies before we can calm our feelings. Everyone experiences stress and often stress can be a good thing.

ACTIVITY: Ask the athletes why stress can sometimes be good?

Even though we may not be able to control what stresses us out, we can do things to help ourselves feel better when we're stressed.

ACTIVITY: Ask the athletes to write or draw on a post it note 1 thing that causes them stress. Ask 3 athletes to put their post it note on a print out of an outline of a person. Tell the athletes that this person may not feel "stressed out" by these stressors. Then have the rest of the group put their post it note on the person. Explain that this may be the point that the person feels overwhelmed by the stress. Then, discuss the signs of stress.

Emotional signs that a teammate may be stressed:

- Becoming easily upset or mad
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Having difficulty relaxing
- Feeling bad about yourself (low self-esteem)
- Avoiding others
- Inability to focus
- Constant worrying
- Poor judgement/decision making
- Worrying a lot

Physical signs that a teammate may be stressed:

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach
- Tense muscles
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Trouble sleeping
- Nervousness and shaking
- Stomach issues
- Aches and pains

ACTIVITY: Have all of the signs of stress printed around the room and ask the athletes to put stickers on the signs they have seen with their teammates before.

1:20-1:40: Strong Minds Strategies

We are now going to go over some strategies that you can incorporate in practices with your teammates to help them relax.

- **Stress and you:** This stress ball is one way you can use your body to get rid of stressful feelings. Squeeze the ball slowly for 3 seconds, hold, then slowly release the ball for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- **Strong Messages:** Sometimes it's helpful to have a written list of encouraging statements you can read or look at – kind of an individual pep-talk to yourself. Let's take a moment to write down (or say out loud) a few things you could say to yourself to stay positive and focused.
- **Strong Breathing:** Deep breathing is a very common tool to help people feel more relaxed. Take a slow breath in through your nose (3-5 seconds), hold your breath (1-2 seconds), and slow breathe out (3-5 seconds). Repeat 5 to 10 times.
- **Strong Stretching:** Stretching is not only good for our physical health, but also for our emotional wellness. We will practice some stretches that will help us to feel more relaxed (Use the Strong Stretching Handout)
- **Strong Supporting:** People can really be helpful to us when we are feeling stressed or upset. Let's take a moment to think about who you can rely on to be supportive. It is also important to remember that being kind to others and showing support helps reduce your stress. Can you think of a couple people in your life that you support and a couple people in your life that support you?

ACTIVITY: Select a few post-it notes from the earlier activity and ask the athletes to identify a strategy to recommend to a friend. Then, using the signs of stress on the walls, select the signs with the most stickers next to it. Ask the athletes to identify what strategy to recommend to a friend experiencing that sign of stress

ACTIVITY: Have each athlete select a partner or assign partners. Ask them to pick one of the Strong Minds strategies and role play with their partner. After about 3-5 minutes, have the partner groups switch roles. If time allows, have the athletes switch partners and select a new strategy.

1:20-1:40: Strong Minds Strategies

ACTIVITY: As a Health Messenger, how could you incorporate these Strong Minds strategies into practices with your team?

The last station of Strong Minds, is when the athlete sets a goal for how to incorporate Strong Minds into competition or everyday life. An example of this is if an athlete feels a lot of stress at the doctor's office. He/she could use a stress ball for 5 minutes while sitting in the waiting room for an appointment.

ACTIVITY: Have athletes write a SMART goal on how they will incorporate a Strong Minds strategy into practice with their team. Examples: At the beginning of every soccer practice, I will have our team practice deep breathing for 3 minutes. After practice, I will lead the team in some Strong Stretching techniques and provide the stretching handout to all of my teammates. I will ask our Special Olympics communications staff member to post a few positive messages each month on the social media accounts. I will have each person on my team create a luggage tag with a positive message and give it to a teammate for his/her sports bag.

Supplies

Pens
Post-it notes
Index cards
Print out of an outline of a person
Signs of stress printed
Stickers
Handouts

Resources

Tips for Stress (1 per athlete): https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/health/disciplines/strongminds/Strong-Minds-Tips-for-Stress.pdf?_ga=2.18366201.1574967777.1536854141-2039200653.1523464125

Strong Stretching (1 per athlete or a couple laminated copies):
https://www.dropbox.com/s/4wnx332hyh0v6ap/StrongMinds_Exercise_Handout.pdf?dl=0