



COACH'S TALK

REMEMBER: Players need to know that you care about them. Your role demands a strong sense of responsibility for mentoring and teaching skills beyond the game on the ice. You're also in a unique position to educate your players that mental health challenges can affect anyone, and to encourage them to keep a supportive eye out for each other. Coaches are only as important as the team decides they are.

Green is the colour of mental health. The experiential act of taping a stick in the dressing room and listening to a coach deliver a mental health message can be powerful. Please feel free to tailor the chat for your age group and share some of yours or your coaching staffs personal experiences. For younger players (Novice and younger) this message can be a simple one about teamwork and remaining "positive" with the green tape being symbolic of that. For older teams you can get more in depth with a focus on the message, resources, and taping in the dressing room. Hockey players can be creatures of habit, it is understood that some high level players may want to minimize the green tape they use.

Use the Coaches Talk below as a guide. Feel free to use your own words and share some of yours or your coaching staffs personal experiences with mental health. Choose whatever time you feel works best for your team to deliver this message.

Hey team,

A little addition to our pre-game dressing room routine this weekend. It's called **Buddy Check for Jesse** and it is a project started by a hockey Dad in Victoria, BC whose son had some mental health challenges.

Unfortunately, Jesse died by suicide on October 29, 2014.

Jesse's Dad coaches and has sons who play hockey. He happens to be a Sport Medicine Physician.

The Dad and Coach realized that he wanted to help all you guys become a little more aware of, and expand your understanding and acceptance of mental illness. Suicide can be just one aspect of mental illness and the chat to you today is not focused on that. It started in the dressing rooms of his own boys' hockey teams. It is now my/our turn to share it with you.

I'm sure that many of you are aware of words and feelings like nervousness, worry, anxiety, depression, ADD, Autism, drug abuse, addiction etc. Many of you even experience it personally, in your family, or through acquaintances or friends. If you haven't had any exposure to this yet, trust me, you will someday. It is a part of all of our lives. Today, I/we wanted to talk to you all briefly about this subject.

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As a coaching staff, a parent, and a regular person just like all of you, we feel it is important that you learn more from us than just the X's and O's of hockey, hard work on the ice or in the gym, and systems play.

Being a good player and teammate involves more than just the “game”. It involves being aware that some players in this dressing room have mental health challenges on a daily basis.

The important thing is to realize that a mental illness is no different than any other medical condition such as your buddy with asthma, your friend with eczema, or your teammate who just broke their leg and will be out for a few months. Just because you can't see it clearly doesn't mean it isn't there. And just like your teammate that needs time, and your support, to recover from a healing or broken bone, so does your teammate who is going through or recovering from an emotional issue/crisis. Or maybe your teammate is just a little “different” from what you are used to. That is OK too. We are all unique in our own way.

Remember, these challenges can happen to anyone—the best skater, the best hitter, the best stick handler, and the player who looks like they will go on to a promising high level career. We have all heard and seen stories about top level athletes who experience all sorts of mental health challenges in their life. No one is immune to this!

Very importantly, just because it may make you uncomfortable doesn't make it right to judge, bully, or ignore someone. If they are already struggling or feeling self-conscious or embarrassed, the last thing you want to do is make it any worse for them!

We all play a super important role in each other's life; especially in this dressing room and on this team. A simple pat on the back of a friend who is upset, asking your coach how to help out a teammate, or telling a trusted parent or adult you are worried about yourself or someone else can be helpful.

Each of you has been given some green tape to use on your stick. This is the colour of “mental health” and this weekend we will think about what I/we have said while we use the tape and play our game(s). Think about the words and message you heard today. Our team and this sport is more than just what goes on out on the ice.

There are some printed cards for each of you to take home after the game. Put it in your wallet/backpack/hockey bag. Your families and spectators have received information about the project and website. Hopefully they can help you or someone you know be supported, receive some help, and most importantly avoid being judged, bullied, or treated unfairly in any way.

Ok, thanks for your attention everyone. And see? It isn't that difficult to talk about this topic. The more we can do this with each other the better off we will all be.