

## COACHES NOTES

Gentle Reminder: More than ever, players need to know that you care about them. Coaches are only as important as the team decides they are. Your role commands responsibility for mentoring and teaching skills beyond the game. You are 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.

Green is the color of mental health. Please incorporate the use of green (green tape or green laces are simple and inexpensive to use and purchase) with your players. Uniting through the color green gives the players a sense of togetherness and alerts the spectators to the importance of mental health.

Feel free to share some of yours or your coaching staff's personal experiences with supporting or living with mental health challenges. This conversation is not meant to intimidate you or your players, nor are you meant to be seen as an expert in the field of mental health.

The Buddy Check Talk is also not meant to be a lecture on medical facts and treatment. It simply opens the door to conversations and allows you to present a topic that the players would not usually expect from a Coach. Almost anything you say will impart an impactful message and plant a seed for the future in the minds of your players. Our previous experience has proven this.

For younger players the message can be a simple one about teamwork, kindness, and remaining "positive", with the color green being symbolic of that. For older teams you can speak more in depth with a focus on the message, resources, and personal experiences surrounding mental health.

The Coaches Notes below can be used as a guide for your Buddy Check Talk. Choose whatever time you feel works best for your team to deliver this message.

Keep in mind that your players may be feeling some extra stress because of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Hey Team,

Something a little different today. It's called a Buddy Check for Jesse chat and it is a project started by a Dad in Victoria, BC after one of his kids, Jesse, had some mental health challenges.

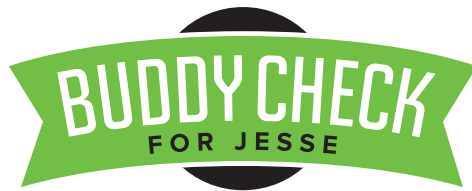
Unfortunately, Jesse died by suicide on October 29, 2014.

Jesse's Dad is a coach and has sons who play a number of sports. He is also a Sport Medicine Physician in Victoria, BC.

This Dad and Coach realized that he had a responsibility to help all of you become a little more aware that your teammates and friends may be experiencing some emotional challenges or mental illness. It is super important that in addition to playing this game you also realize that being kind and compassionate are skills that will make you a better person and take you further in life. Being sensitive to what some of your friends/teammates may be going through is possibly the most important life skill you can learn.

Suicide can be just one aspect of mental illness and the chat to you today is not focused on that.

This discussion started in the dressing rooms of Stu's own sons' hockey teams. It is now my 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, 100% you will someday. It is part of all of our lives. Today, I wanted to talk to you all briefly about this subject.

As a coach I feel it is important that you learn more from me than just the X's and O's and strategy of *(insert sport here)*.

Being a good player and teammate involves more than just the "game". It involves being aware that some of your teammates have mental health challenges to manage on a daily basis. For some, they can briefly forget about them when they are playing the game, and for others, their problems are intrusive enough so that they come with them to the rink/ballpark/court/pitch etc.

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 acts or looks 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 most skilled, the fittest, the can't-miss prospect, the smartest, the one who looks like they have the "best" home, the loudest, the nicest, and the most quiet one. 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! You wouldn't tell someone with a broken leg to "just get over it" or someone who just lost a close friend or loved one to just "suck it up". It is no different with mental illness... you don't just "snap out of it" on demand!

Be aware of the language you use! Everyone comes from different backgrounds, religions, and some may have sexual orientation anxiety that concerns them in certain situations. **YOUR WORDS MATTER!**

We all play a super important role in each other's life; and you have an especially important role with those you train and play with. 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. Just knowing someone cares can go a long way to helping someone feel supported.

You guys are the ones who can make a difference in each other's lives. You guys are the ones who can have a positive impact on our society. You guys are the ones who can destigmatize mental health challenges and allow more of us to reach out for help.

Green is the color of "mental health." We have green tape/laces/t-shirts, etc (insert what your team has in green here) that signify that we support each other and are trying to initiate change through our sport. Take to heart the words and message you heard today. Our team and this sport is more than just about the game we play.

There are some printed cards for each of you to take home. Keep it handy. Educate your friends and family about our discussion. Direct them to the website and resources. 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.

Never hesitate to do a "Buddy Check". You may end up making a huge difference in someone's life.