

## COACHES CHAT - VERSION 2

Hey Team,

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

As your coaches, we realize that we have a responsibility to help all of you become a little more aware of emotional challenges you or your teammates may be working through, including mental health disorders.

It's important to know that we all have the power within us to help each other become more aware of our mental health. We feel it is important that you learn more from your coaches than just the X's and O's and strategy of our sport. Being a good player and teammate involves more than just the "game".

It's important that you understand that we all have "mental health". Your mental health affects many things in your life and because mental health is invisible, it may or may not be noticed by those around you. In fact, you may not be aware that your mental health is affecting your life. You may just have a feeling that something feels "off". Feeling "unsettled" all the time isn't how everyone feels, so if that's something you're going through, it may be time to reach out for support.

Sometimes everything is going well for us at home, with our sport, and with our friends. We feel stable. Sometimes, our mental health gets challenged and we don't feel so great. It may be for a short period of time or sometimes it impacts us for a longer period of time.

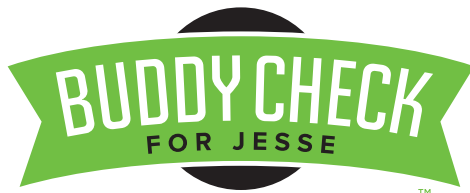
Mental health challenges are no less important than physical injury. Both need care, support, compassion and time to heal. It's important to understand that your mental health is no different than your physical health. We all sprain ankles, injure knees and shoulders, get concussions, have chest colds, asthma—the list goes on. When you're physically sick or injured, time to recover and support from loved ones helps. This is the same for a teammate who is going through or recovering from an emotional issue/crisis. It is all treatable and time to recover and support from loved ones helps.

Going to a strength and conditioning coach to improve skills, work through injuries, etc. is no different than going to a counselor, who also helps you improve your skills and work through issues. Both of these professionals help you become a better athlete and person.

Being sensitive to what you, your friends, teammates, and family members may be going through is possibly the most important life skill you can learn. Learning not to be judgemental, opinionated, and overly critical of yourself and others is a valuable attribute to have in your life. This leads to a more kind and compassionate society.

Continued...

**HELPING COACHES SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH**



I'm sure that many of you are aware of words and feelings like nervousness, worry, anxiety, depression, ADHD, 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 an inevitable part of all of our lives.

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. OUR WORDS MATTER.

Importantly, just because someone's differences may make you uncomfortable (by the way, that is a "normal" feeling) it doesn't make it right to judge, bully, or ignore someone. If they are already struggling, feeling self-conscious or embarrassed, the last thing they need is for you to point out their differences, potentially making it a harder experience for them.

Remember, mental health challenges are often invisible. 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 health... you don't just "snap out of it" on demand.

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, the cutest, and the most quiet one. We have all heard and seen stories about top level athletes (see list on website) who experience all sorts of mental health challenges in their lives. This list is long. Being great at a sport does not make you immune to being human.

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. You are in a community. 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.

The players on this team are the ones who can make a difference in each other's lives. You are the ones who can have a positive impact on our society. You 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/wrist bands/laces/t-shirts, etc (mention what your team has) that shows we support each other and are trying to initiate and amplify positive change. We are more than just the sport we play.

There is a printed card for each of you. Keep it handy. Educate your friends and family about our discussion. Direct them to the website, social media, and resources. Hopefully they can help you or someone you know feel supported and less alone—without judgement feeling bullied or treated unfairly. Never hesitate to do a "Buddy Check". You may end up making a huge difference in someone's life.