



# NBA COACHES ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY HEALTH BULLETIN

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**MIND HEALTH**



**NATIONAL BASKETBALL  
COACHES ASSOCIATION**

# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been increased conversations about the intersection between mental health, sport and performance. In part, these discussions have been driven by individuals who have courageously shared their personal stories and in doing so have challenged us to embrace our mental health and emotional experiences as simply a part of the human experience. In addition, the events of this past year and continued efforts to navigate our collective and personal realities have resulted in an increased awareness about the importance of taking care of our overall health and well-being.

In this month's health bulletin, the NBCA has partnered with NBA Mind Health to provide information and resources about mental health and wellness for coaches. Mind Health is the league's mental health platform, which services the entire NBA family (coaches, players, referees, team executives and employees, etc.) and aims to humanize mental health and position it as an essential element of wellness and excellence both on and off the court.

The information that follows was provided by NBA team mental health and mental performance professionals and will be broken down into three general areas:

- 1. Strategies for managing stress and mental health**
- 2. What to do if you are concerned or how to refer someone for help**
- 3. Coaching resources**

# I. STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

*Dr. Kensa Gunter, Director, Mind Health*

*Dr. Alex Auerbach, Director of Wellness and Development – Toronto Raptors*



Being a coach can be an energizing and rewarding experience, and due to the multiple responsibilities and pressures that often accompany this role, at times it can also be stressful. Some of the common stressors experienced by coaches include:

- Difficulty balancing personal and professional responsibilities.
- Intense and demanding schedules.
- Managing athlete/personnel concerns.
- Family/marital/relationship concerns.
- Concerns about finances.
- Managing pressure and performance expectations from self and others.
- Organizational challenges.
- Little to no attention dedicated to self-care.

We experience stress when the demands being placed on us outweigh our capacity to manage them. Stress is experienced in different ways and can affect us **physically** (e.g., headaches, muscle tension, disruptions in sleep and appetite), **emotionally** (e.g., increased irritability, sadness, anger, emotional numbness), and/or **behaviorally** (e.g., isolating from others, being "short" with people, micromanaging behaviors, decreased productivity).

Prolonged stress can make us more susceptible to illness, can contribute to feelings of burnout, and may increase engagement in unhealthy coping behaviors (e.g., substance use, impulsive behaviors).

Managing stress and taking care of your mental health requires an intentional, proactive approach in which health-promoting activities are integrated into your routine on a regular basis rather than being utilized only in moments of intense stress or crisis. Of course, this is important for your own health, but given your position as an authority figure and model for others, this could also have a ripple effect on your team. If players and other staff see you, a coach, prioritizing mental health and self-care, this may give them permission to do the same. On the next page are some common and effective mental wellness strategies. Identify the strategies that work for you and make a point of adding them to your daily/weekly routine.



## SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

### Meditate

As a member of the NBA family, you have access to Headspace, a great app that introduces the fundamentals of meditation. Research suggests that just 10 minutes of practice every day for 2 weeks can lead to significant structural changes in our brain that help us to process information more effectively, make better decisions, and be less reactive to stress.

Follow the prompts below to sign up for a Headspace account and access its library of content. Click [here](#) to visit the NBA landing page.

1. Enter the email address associated with your Headspace account, which generates an automatic email titled: Join Headspace for NBA Team Staff.
2. Click the "start enrolling" link in the email, which will direct you to the registration page on Headspace.
3. Enter your first name, last name and team email address (in lowercase) and create a password.
4. Click "Join NBA's Team."

## Get outside

Spending just 2 hours a week outside in nature is enough to mitigate the effects of stress that accumulate during the week.

## Move

30 minutes of exercise 3 times a week improves mood, reduces stress, and pumps up our endorphins. This has benefits for both our physical and mental health.

## Detach from work

Set aside time each week to engage in an activity that's fulfilling outside of work. It can be spending time with family or friends, reading, doing something creative or any other hobby that allows you to relax and recharge that is away from the game.

Reach out for help in those moments when you need assistance beyond self-care. Remember that support is available via your team mental health professional(s). Services are **confidential** and professionals are trained to address a host of concerns and to support you in managing stress and the demands of work.

## MANAGING YOUR PERSPECTIVE: GRATITUDE AND ADDRESSING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

*Dr. Alex Reed, Team Psychologist – Denver Nuggets*



### Cultivating Gratitude

Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives and, as a result, may also connect to something larger than themselves as individuals – whether to other people, nature or a higher power.

### Here are two ways to cultivate gratitude:

- The "three good things" exercise:
  - » Each day for at least one week, write down three things that went well for you that day. The items can be relatively small (e.g., "my partner made the coffee today") or large (e.g., "I earned a big promotion") (Obtained from <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/three-good-things>).

- Write a thank you letter or text to someone in your life.
  - » Express your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life. This is incredibly powerful for both you and the person who receives this letter or text.

## Managing Negative Thoughts

When we are feeling stressed, angry, worried or down, we are all susceptible to having negative thoughts and thinking errors. These errors can include:

- **All-or-nothing thinking.** You see things in black-and-white categories – it is either one thing or another. There is no room for anything in between these two polarized positions or for a both/and perspective.
- **Jumping to conclusions.** When things happen, you make negative assumptions and interpretations even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.
- **"Should" statements.** These statements usually reflect a feeling of inadequacy and a belief that you are supposed to be more, better, or different than you are – "I should be able to handle this." "Musts" and "oughts" are also common thought offenders. Emotional consequences can include anxiety, anger, feeling deflated or feeling in over your head.

A great way to manage these types of thoughts/errors can be by asking yourself a question to disrupt the thought.

Questions can include:

- » Are my thoughts helpful to me in this moment? What would be more helpful?
- » If my best friend or someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
- » How do I want to respond in this situation? Can I do that?

By asking yourself these questions, you stop the negative thought in the moment and can refocus. You can give the great advice you'd give to a player or loved one to yourself. (Adapted from Hunter, Goodie, Oordt and Dobmeyer – 2009).



## MINDFULNESS MOMENT

*Dr. Luke Patrick, Team Psychologist,  
Portland Trail Blazers*

As a coach at the highest level of the game, you already have great skills for managing hectic schedules, competing demands, pressure to win, and the frustration of loss. As a human being, you may also have days when the coaching life seems like it's trying to get the better of you. Mindfulness is a way to promote nonjudgmental awareness in the present moment. Mindfulness practices can be thought of as drills for recentering, or for stepping briefly out of the busy world of "doing" into a more centered mode of "being."

The science behind mindfulness indicates that regular practice can:

- Improve heart health.
- Help maintain mental sharpness.
- Boost immune response.
- Buffer against cellular aging.
- Promote a positive emotional state.

As with any skill, the key to mindfulness mastery is regular practice! If you are new to meditation and mindfulness practices, this [article](#) may be helpful as you think through how to get started.

For a quick and easy drill to sharpen your mindfulness capacity, try the activities below:

- One-minute meditation
- "Two-minute Tune-in Timeout" video
- 5-minute meditation

## II. WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED/HOW TO REFER SOMEONE FOR HELP



### How do I know when someone needs to see a mental health professional?

*Victor Schwartz, M.D., DLFAPA – Mental Health Consultant  
– NBA Mind Health*

Think for a moment about the last time you or a family member had a headache. Did you call your doctor or go to an ER? Chances are pretty good that you did not do either one. How did you make that decision? How did you decide this was a routine problem and not a serious one? If you did call the doctor or go to an ER, think back about why you made that decision. If you did not, what would have made you decide you needed to seek medical help?

The point is that we all constantly make intuitive decisions about the severity and urgency of medical problems and we usually (not always) make pretty good ones. If you did not seek medical attention, it may have been because:

- You had a pretty good idea why your head hurt.
- The pain was not severe.
- The pain improved over some time in a predictable way, either by itself or with some simple intervention (e.g., Advil, Excedrin).
- There were no other concerning symptoms like fever or vomiting or lightheadedness.
- It was not seriously interfering with other areas of functioning like sleep or concentration.
- It was not part of a recurring pattern.

If one or more of those things had been different, you might have considered calling your doctor and if the pain was intense or several of these other things were happening simultaneously, you might have gone to an ER. Determining when additional support may be needed to address mental health

concerns involves a similar process to the one described in the scenario above. We experience emotional "aches and pains" all the time. Very often these emotions are a response to specific situations (e.g., an argument with a friend) and oftentimes, they will resolve with some time and/or deliberate attention (e.g., a conversation or apology). In contrast to physical symptoms such as pain, swelling or fever, when we are talking about mental health, we can experience disruptions in or problems with **emotions** (e.g., sadness, anxiety, anger, apathy), **thinking** (e.g., difficulty with memory or with focusing and concentrating) or **behavior** (e.g., isolating from others, impulsivity, notable changes that are inconsistent with one's typical behavior).

If problems in feeling, thinking or behavior fit any of the descriptions below, it makes sense to reach out for assistance or refer the person to a professional:

- Too intense or causing too much pain or distress in regard to either one's personal feelings or interactions with others.
- Lasting too long (generally 2 weeks or more).
- Getting worse as time passes.
- Causing problems in functioning (sleep, work, concentration, enjoyment), or resulting in the person becoming a danger to self or others.
- Keep happening over and over, representing a pattern of behavior versus an isolated event.

If it is so easy, why don't we do this more? Very often we don't trust our "gut," don't want to intrude,

don't know how to discuss the concerns or don't know how to find help. Also, you may not have the exact words; however, if you are concerned, say something. Fortunately, you also have access to your team mental health professional and, if needed, can reach out for guidance about how to proceed if you are concerned about yourself, a fellow coach or staff member, a player, a friend or family member, or someone else.



## ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE.

*Dr. Brenda Bursch, Team Psychologist,  
Los Angeles Lakers*

1. **Set time aside with no distractions** - Find a private space with no distractions. Without assuming that you know how they are feeling, share your observations or feelings of concern with the person. Focus on specific behaviors versus making general statements.

For example:

*"I have noticed that you don't seem to be yourself recently. You seem less playful and talkative than usual."*

*"Your social media post from yesterday concerned me."*

*Avoid statements such as: "You're not feeling depressed/frustrated/anxious, are you?" or "I heard you posted something inappropriate on social media yesterday."*

**Keep questions open ended** - In the private space, ask them how they are doing, give them time to think about it and allow them an opportunity to respond to you.

For example:

*"What's going on for you  
(on and off the court)?"*

*"How are you feeling?" or "How have  
you been feeling this past week?"*

**Avoid statements such as:**  
*"What's wrong with you?"*

**2. Allow them to share as much or as little as they want to** - Let them decide what to share at their own pace. Don't ask detailed questions or pressure them to tell you anything. Confiding in someone can take a lot of trust and courage. You might be the first person they have talked to about a struggle.

**3. Listen carefully** - Repeat what they have said back to them to ensure you have correctly understood it. Validate the feelings, even if you don't understand or think they should be feeling that way. This will show that you are listening and that you respect their feelings. For example:

*"I can understand why you have been so frustrated by how few minutes you have played over the past month. I know it is very hard not to be able to play."*

*"It is hard to have the thought that this injury means the end of your career.  
I imagine many people would have those very same thoughts."*

**4. Don't jump right into problem-solving mode or argue** - Ideally, by listening and validating, you will help the individual remember that they are competent and justified in whatever they are feeling. Do not make assumptions about what is wrong, dismiss what they are saying, or jump in too quickly with your solutions.

**5. Ask them what would be helpful** - Some individuals simply need to vent frustrations and others want help problem-solving. It is beneficial for the individual to make decisions about how to care for themselves. Decision-making can help the individual to feel empowered and will ensure you do not lose their trust by assuming you know what they want or need.

For example:

*"What do you think would be helpful for you?"*

*"What would you like to do about this problem?"*

*"Would you like me to help you problem-solve or connect you with additional support?"*

**6. Action Options** - If the individual wants help or isn't sure what would be helpful, there are several things you can do to assist. Some individuals will find it easier to pick from a list if you describe a few options. You can:

- Be vulnerable. Without shifting the focus on to you, briefly share that you have had similar struggles (if true)
- Offer to meet again for a check-in
- Discuss basic wellness strategies or share your effective coping tips

- Encourage the individual to reach out for support from trusted others
- Offer to obtain further information or referrals for the individual
- Remind the individual of available resources and ask if they want help accessing these resources.
- Reach out to your mental health and wellness team for advice on how you can best help the individual. This might be particularly useful if the individual is open to check-ins with you but doesn't want to seek care from a professional

**7. Know your limits** - It is important to role model the strength associated with asking for help by reaching out to others if the problem is serious or if you are uncertain about how to help. If you believe the individual is in immediate danger, take action to ensure they are safe. You can do this by following your team's mental health emergency action plan, by calling 911 to request a psychiatric emergency response team, or by calling **1-800-273-8255** to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

## Tips for best utilizing your mental health and mental performance professionals

*Dr. Brenda Bursch, Team Psychologist, Los Angeles Lakers  
Dr. Dan Begel, Team Psychiatrist – Los Angeles Clippers*

Your team mental health provider(s) can serve as a resource for everyone on the team including coaches, players, team staff, and/or colleagues. While only a partial list, here are some areas where your mental health and performance team (MHP team) may be able to offer assistance and support:

- Career transitions (e.g., a new role, or retirement).
- Diversity considerations (e.g., understanding and navigating generational diversity within your team).
- Family matters including relationships and parenting.
- Injury rehabilitation and return to competition.
- Leadership development.
- Management of mental health concerns for yourself or loved ones.
- Mental skills training and performance enhancement (for coaches, individual players and/or the team).
- Organizational consultation.
- Social justice and advocacy.
- Stress management and coping skills development.
- Team building and cohesion.
- Time management.

## III. COACHING RESOURCES (RELATED TO COACHING, LEADERSHIP, CREATING A HEALTHY CULTURE)



When thinking about how to use your MHP team, consider yourself, your coaching staff, other player-facing staff, front office leadership, and the players.

**Your team mental health provider(s) can give you a competitive edge and support a culture of wellness if you find the right points of influence for them to be helpful. Consider the following:**

- Meet with the MHP team to learn about their areas of expertise, share your personal and team vision, and outline goals related to mental wellness and performance.
- Communicate regularly and share challenges that you are facing. Your knowledge will deepen your clinician's understanding of the issues at hand and this confidential information can be used to help them better understand team dynamics and to focus their efforts. This regular consultation may also provide a sounding board and additional support for you as well.
- The more your MHP team understands your experience, the better equipped they are to curate services to meet your and the team's needs. So, consider inviting them to team/coaches' meetings, practice, and/or on road trips, as is feasible, to educate them about the team dynamics as well as the details of the challenges faced by each group (e.g., coaches, players, performance staff, other player-facing staff) individually and collectively.
- In the same way that many teams schedule regular check-ins between players and their mental health providers, encourage check-ins with your coaching team (including yourself) as well as new coaches as they are on-boarded.

- Create preventative health learning opportunities for the staff and players that are presented by the provider.
- Talk to your team (coaches, players, health and performance team and other player-facing staff) openly about mental health and wellness, including your own experiences and coping strategies (if you are comfortable doing so), while allowing room for them to share their stories and self-care tips as well. The goal of these moments is to humanize mental health and to create a supportive environment that encourages increased self-awareness and empowers individuals to seek assistance if needed.

## WIN OR LOSE WITH PERFECTIONISM



*Dr. Marie Soller, Team Psychiatrist,  
Portland Trail Blazers*

Striving for excellence is critical for success at the highest levels. However, many facets of perfectionism hinder achievement and can cause significant harm in their wake. Understanding adaptive (positive) vs. maladaptive (negative) perfectionism facilitates the promotion of what works and minimizes what gets in the way of success for individuals and teams.

<b>Adaptive Perfectionism</b> (Positive)	<b>Maladaptive Perfectionism</b> (Negative)
High personal standards and the drive and organization to pursue them	Excessive concern over mistakes causing rumination and anticipatory anxiety
<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased performance</li> <li>• High sense of fulfillment</li> <li>• Strong sense of team and community</li> <li>• High investment of effort reliably over time</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased performance</li> <li>• Anxiety, depression</li> <li>• Anger, impulsiveness</li> <li>• Burnout</li> </ul>

**There are many opportunities for a coaching staff to promote adaptive perfectionism including the tips listed below:**

- Motivate towards excellence instead of away from failure.
- Promote a growth mindset by celebrating and expecting a high investment of energy, effort and risk taking.
- Make clear that mistakes and losses are outcomes that facilitate future performance improvement vs. proof of low ability.
- Embrace players', coaches', and other team staff members' humanity.
- Recognize their unique experiences and assets and consider their holistic identities.
- Understand priorities and goals in their lives on and off the court.

If you see an individual displaying maladaptive perfectionism remind them of available resources:

- **Emotional Agility** - Susan David
  - » An innovative approach to navigating life's challenges.
- **Group Genius** - Keith Sawyer
  - » A book about creating great teams.
- **How to Be an Anti-Racist** - Ibram Kendi
  - » Introduces critical concepts related to race and can provide insight as to areas of growth or change.
- **The Happiness Trap** - Russ Harris
  - » A simple framework for understanding common barriers to optimal well-being and what to do about it.
- **Legacy** - James Kerr
  - » An inside look at the New Zealand All Blacks and what it takes to lead a team/organization.
- **Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World** - David Epstein
  - » A book about the power for coaching from diverse fields
- **The Culture Code: The Secret of Highly Successful Groups** - Dan Coyle
  - » A resource about developing great cultures.
- **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team** - Patrick Lencioni
  - » Understanding team dynamics and the factors that get in the way of developing an effective culture.

- **The Sleep Solution: Why your Sleep is Broken and How to Fix It** - Chris Winter
  - » A book that promotes healthy sleep and simplifies the science.
- **The Tough Stuff** - Cody Royle
  - » Specifically discusses the challenges of being a head coach.



## ARTICLES:

- **Compassionate Leadership - Necessary but not Sufficient**
- **Mental Reframing**
- **Psychological Safety**
- **The Little Things (that make employees feel appreciated)**



## CONCLUSION

We hope that you found these tips useful and recommend incorporating as many of them into your daily routine as quickly as possible. Remember, new habits take time to form, but if you can start utilizing some strategies for managing stress, helping others who may be struggling with mental health and issues, and reviewing these coaching resources it can enhance your overall awareness surrounding mental health, and will put you in a great position to begin living a healthy, present, and fulfilling life!

**Stay Safe and Stay Healthy!**