

# Strong Body, Mind, and Choices

## Why Staying Substance-Free Matters

**Your Edge Is Everything:** Athletes work for split-second advantages — alcohol, nicotine, and cannabis slow your reaction time and weaken focus.

**Injuries Last Longer:** Substances interfere with muscle repair and sleep cycles, which means slower healing and a higher chance that a minor injury has a more serious impact.

**Scouts Notice More Than Stats:** Coaches and college recruiters look for discipline, reliability, and smart decision-making — substance use is a major red flag that can cost you opportunities.

**Your Brain Is Still Developing:** Using substances during high school years impacts not only your developing brain, but also your thinking, memory, and coordination.

## The Risks You Can't Ignore

**Alcohol:** Weakens coordination, slows reaction time, worsens dehydration, and increases injury risk.

**Cannabis:** Impairs memory, learning, attention, and coordination; early use is linked to higher odds of mental health disorders.

**Vaping/Nicotine:** Damages lung function and endurance, which directly lowers performance in every sport.

**Prescription Misuse:** Misusing painkillers or stimulants is dangerous and can lead to dependence or overdose.



## Mental Health & Stress - The Pressure Behind the Game

**High School Sports Are Intense:** School deadlines, social pressures, and performance expectations stack up fast. Many turn to substances to blow off steam — but it's not an effective approach.

**Substances Impact Your Brain:** Regular use while young can disrupt attention, memory, motivation, emotional regulation, and decision-making — all essential for performing under pressure.

### Healthy Coping Options that Actually Work:

- Intentional breathing, mindfulness, or short reset breaks
- Talking with a coach, counselor, athletic trainer, or trusted adult
- Getting good sleep and nourishment (your brain and body depend on it)



## Choose To Be... Substance-Free!

Set competitive goals that require a clear mind and a strong body.

Surround yourself with teammates who respect your commitment.

Plan ahead for situations where substances might be offered — your decisions in those moments define your discipline.

# Parents: Supporting Your Athlete



## Your Role Matters

- **You're an Influence:** Teens often look to parents for guidance - even when it doesn't seem like it. Consistent messages about health, responsibility, and safety matter.
- **Understand Their World:** Student athletes face unique pressures - competition, performance, and social expectation.



## Talking about Substances

- **Set Clear Expectations:** Make your stance on substance use known—especially during sports season.
- **Know the Culture:** Understand team traditions and social events where substances may appear.
- **Encourage Balance:** Help your teen manage time between sports, school, and rest.
- **Celebrate Effort, Not Wins:** Reduce pressure by valuing hard work over results.



## Conversation Starters

- *"How are you feeling about the season?"*
- *"Balancing school and sports is hard; how's that going for you?"*
- *"When you feel stressed, what helps?"*
- *"Please talk with me; I'm here to help."*

## Mental Health & Stress Management

### Warning Signs

Changes in behavior can signal stress, burnout, or potential substance use, watch for these signs:

- Decline in athletic performance, concentration, or coordination.
- Skipping practice or withdrawing from teammates.
- Mood swings, irritability, secrecy, or sudden shifts in sleep and appetite.

Athletes often hide stress- regular, low-pressure check-ins are key.

### Healthy Coping Strategies to Encourage

- **Prioritize Sleep:** Recovery and emotional regulation depend on it.
- **Balanced Nutrition:** Fueling well helps both mental and physical performance.
- **Protect Downtime:** rest and unstructured time are crucial for preventing burnout.
- **Normalize Support:** Let your teen know that seeking mental health support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

## Resources & Support

- [BWC Refusal Skills Tip Sheet](#)
- [Parent Stress Line: 1-800-632-8188](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Athletes Don't](#)

