



Coach Stress & Well Being

Burnout from stress is unfortunately an all-too familiar problem for coaches in sport. While coaches dedicate themselves to creating a positive, rewarding and fulfilling sport experience for their athletes, they often neglect their own self care in the process.

Sources of Stress for Coaches

Competition

- Pressure from self and others to meet unrealistic performance targets.
- Ensuring that athletes reach their potential.
- Conflict with officials/referees

Parent Relationships

- Trust and communication issues.
- Setting expectations for parent behaviour.

Peer-coach Relationships

- Alignment on coaching philosophies.
- Personality conflict.

Club/Organizational Relationships

- Funding/lack of funding.
- Challenges with facilities & playing fields.
- Job insecurity.
- Lack of recognition.
- Being judged solely on the performance of athletes.

Athlete Relationships

- Disruptive behaviours.
- Lack of focus/concentration/commitment.
- Team cohesion issues.
- Recruiting, selecting and dropping athletes

Personal

- Conflicting demands with family.
- Health issues.
- Overcommitment to multiple roles.
- Lack of regular sleep/physical activity.

Strategies for Combating Stressors

Club/Organizational Relationships

Set short- and long-term goals with your athletes.
Identify milestones along the way that can be celebrated.

Peer-Coach Relationships

Before the season starts, set time aside for the team coaches to share their individual coaching philosophies and collectively set goals for the season.

Parent Relationships

- Host a preseason meeting with parents to define roles and behaviour expectations.
- Require that coaches and parents sign a code of conduct.

Club/Organizational Relationships

- Understand what is and is not within your control (facilities, etc).
- Engage with a mentor.

Athlete Relationships

- Develop a set of team values and behaviour expectations with your athletes.
- Outline consequences for behaviours that do not align with team values.
- Require athletes to sign a code of conduct committing to these team values.

Personal

- Be honest with those around you about your mental health. Not only will this create a sense of relief, but it will also role model positive mental wellness for those around you (family, athletes, etc.).
- Do some type of physical activity each day. Even a short walk will have a positive effect on stress reduction.
- Set boundaries and commitments in your personal life. Eg. Tuesday/Thursday dinners with your family or no answering emails after 9pm.
- Schedule your physical activity like you would a practice or team meeting. Building it into your daily timetable makes it more likely you will follow through with it.

Support Networks

Surrounding yourself with a solid support network is one of the most important health & wellness tools that coaches can use. Just as athletes require a strong support system around them in order to thrive, so do coaches.

Strong support networks include individuals who:

- Exhibit enthusiasm & positive energy.
- Are good listeners.
- Stimulate you emotionally and intellectually.
- Focus on others and how they can give back (service-oriented).
- Hold others accountable.
- Are trustworthy.

Self-Care

Equally important to a strong support system is a coach's commitment to self-care. Most coaches are service-oriented by nature, and give their time and energy willingly to help their athletes reach their potential. Although it's understandably quite difficult to pull back, it's critical for coaches to monitor their own energy reserves and acknowledge when they're running on empty.

You're not in the best position possible to help your athlete's development when you are neglecting your own health and wellness.

Recognizing Signs of Burnout

Use the activity below to gauge your current coaching stress level.
Created by Wade Gilbert for his book *Coaching Better Every Season*,
available for purchase at Canada.HumanKinetics.com.

Question	Not at all how I feel	Somewhat how I feel	Exactly how I feel
I don't look forward to coaching as much as I used to.	1	2	3
I feel physically and emotionally worn out from coaching.	1	2	3
I don't feel that I can cope very well with the demands of coaching.	1	2	3
I don't feel like I'm accomplishing many worthwhile things as a coach.	1	2	3
Athletes and others I work with don't show the same level of commitment that I do.	1	2	3
I don't feel supported in my coaching.	1	2	3
There is a lack of communication and trust where I coach.	1	2	3
I don't feel secure in my current coaching position.	1	2	3
I question if the amount of time and energy I spend on coaching is worth it.	1	2	3

References

Kylie McNeil, "Understanding Burnout and Self-Regulation Capacity in Canadian Developmental and Elite Sport Coaches" 2018. University of Ottawa Research.

Richard C Thelwell, "Coping with stress as a sports coach: Putting theory into practice" 2012, *Managing Stress: From Theory to Application*.

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