



Eating Disorders & Student Athletes

A Guide for Coaches & Teachers



About ANAD

ANAD is a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization providing free, peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder. Our peer-led programs are available to anyone struggling with disordered eating and body image, regardless of eating disorder type or diagnosis. Through support and education, we strive to relieve suffering and provide hope.

Our work is made possible by the compassionate and dedicated volunteers who are the heart and soul of ANAD. They answer helpline calls, facilitate support groups, mentor those in recovery, and share their own stories to support others on their healing journeys.



About This Guide



ANAD advocates for the development of healthy attitudes, bodies, and behaviors. ANAD believes that early detection of eating disorders save lives. So we work to educate parents, teachers, families and communities about the dangers through a variety of mediums including our website, newsletter, and educational outreach events & programs.

Our mission in providing schools with guidelines is to help school personnel provide an optimal learning environment while promoting healthy physical and emotional development of all students. The School Guidelines Program provides teachers, coaches, guidance counselors and parents with the information, tools, and support which can help them to effectively assist at-risk students, as well as those who already have been identified as having an eating disorder.

Student Athletes & Eating Disorders

Background

Eating disorders may be particularly hard to detect among athletes due in part to secretiveness, stigma, and symptom presentation. Athletes may also be less likely to seek treatment for an eating disorder due to stigma, accessibility, and sport-specific barriers.

What role does a coach play in eating disorder awareness?

Coaches and trainers need to educate themselves on the dangers and on the signs to look for in an athlete that may be suffering from an eating disorder. They must be able to recognize when healthy training routines turn into an obsession or when the athlete turns to drastic measures to become thin and succeed in their sport.

What should I do when my sport has weight categories?

Weight in some athletic sports is a necessary factor in establishing fair competition among athletes. However, other than in those cases where athletes must fit in necessary weight categories, coaches should minimize their focus on student-athlete's weight and appearance. If your sport does have weight categories, **BE REALISTIC** about what category that athlete should be in.

Coaches should also bring in nutrition experts to educate the athletes on healthy eating and to make them aware of how important it is to eat properly, especially when involved in such intense training.



Student Athletes & Eating Disorders

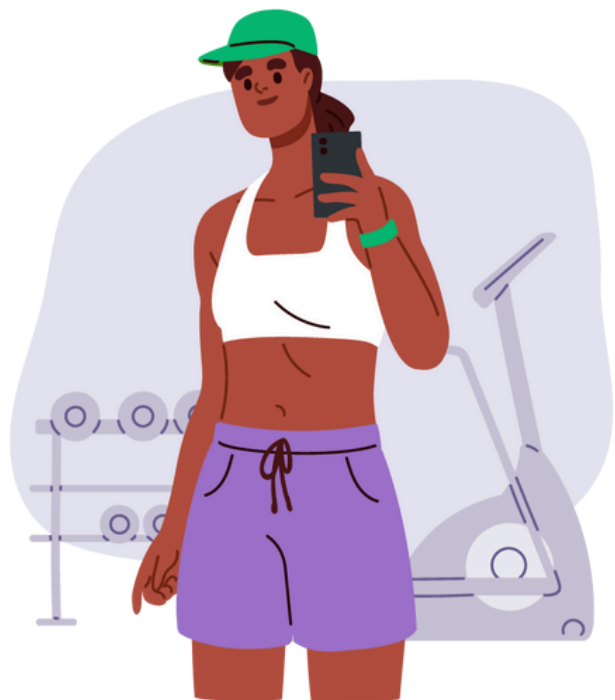
What are some factors that put athletes at higher risk of an eating disorder?

- The belief that a low weight is necessary for excellent performance
- Training for a sport since childhood or being an “elite” athlete
- Low self-esteem
- Coaches who focus only on success and performance
- Performance anxiety
- Pressure regarding athletic ability from coach, friends, family
- A lack of relationships or interests outside of the chosen sport

What are warning signs of an eating disorder in an athlete?

Common warning signs in athletes may include but are not limited to:

- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Loss in endurance
- Loss in coordination
- Loss in muscular strength
- Loss in speed
- Muscle cramps
- Overheating
- Fainting
- Frequent injury
- Stress fractures
- Dehydration



Student Athletes & Eating Disorders

How can I promote wellness with athletes and performers?

Assess your coaching style and consider the following:

- Do you have a positive coaching-style rather than a performance-oriented coaching-style?
- Do you encourage athletes to support and encourage healthy attitudes towards size and shape?
- Do you inadvertently promote “fear of fat” in athletes by your words and actions?
- Do you make negative comments about other people’s sizes and shapes?
- Are you prejudiced against overweight children and adults?
- Do you allow students to bully one another over appearance, size, or shape?
- Do you tell athletes that lower body weight will improve performance?
- Do you focus only on success and performance rather than on the athlete as a whole person?

How can I educate my athletes and build self-esteem?

- **Engage** in frequent and open discussions about positive body image.
- **Explain** the relationship between good nutrition and performance.
- **Explain** how weight control behaviors, such as fasting, restricting, self-induced vomiting, and use of laxatives, diuretics, or diet pills are dangerous and can hurt performance.
- **Emphasize** that student athletes are at risk for undernourishment and dehydration, which can cause loss of muscular strength and endurance, decreased speed, loss of coordination, and poor judgment.
- **Encourage** athletes and performers to speak with you or another adult if they think they or a friend have an eating disorder.
- **Empower** athletes in areas over which they have more control—such as strength, physical conditioning, and mental and emotional components of performance
- **Do not** require weigh-ins or tape-measure checks, body fat measurements, or discuss weight in an evaluation of a student’s ability and performance.

Body Mass Index & Testing in Schools

Understanding the Body Mass Index (BMI)

It's important to note that the Body Mass Index (BMI) is a screening tool, **NOT** a diagnostic tool, nor a single marker for the child's health status.

Because of recent legislation on both the federal and state levels, many schools feel pressured to screen as a part of the "prevention" program, but are unaware of the concerns voiced by many professionals.

Many professionals believe that BMI screenings may have unintentional negative consequences. These consequences can stigmatize and potentially be harmful by contributing to negative self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and eating disordered behaviors.

Conducting testing and distributing BMI results in a public setting can be a humiliating experience, fostering comparison and teasing. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Executive Summary on BMI testing, "The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force concluded that insufficient evidence exists to recommend for or against BMI screening programs for youth in clinical settings as a means to prevent adverse health outcomes."

ANAD does not support BMI screening programs in schools.

With issues related to possible ineffectiveness, unknown outcomes, costs, and potential for harm, ANAD does not support BMI school screening programs. We recommend that schools stop BMI screenings and redirect their resource to evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention programs.

We recommend that physicians/healthcare providers determine the BMI for all children and adolescents in their practices and offer appropriate interventions to those who are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight. Because the BMI changes with age, it must be evaluated yearly, plotted, and reviewed in the context of other assessments.

Body Mass Index & Testing in Schools

While ANAD recommends that school do not weigh students, we understand that this decision may be outside of your control as an educator or coach. As such, please consider the following:

- BMI is NOT an indicator of health, in fact it may further weight stigma
- Limit the screening to an identified need and purpose. (Why is this information needed on the specific person?)
- BMI testing should only be done by a qualified healthcare professional. Having a professional manage screenings increases the likelihood that the task will be carried out in a caring, accurate and sensitive manner.
- All healthcare professionals should receive adequate training and be aware of their attitudes regarding weight issues.
- NEVER post BMIs with or without student names.
- If your school communicates BMI with parents, consider training parents on how to handle information. A typical response for parents and other well-meaning individuals is to try and control their child's weight by limiting access to food. Dieting during adolescence has been found to increase the risk of obesity and almost every eating disorder.
- Children who are still growing should rarely have a goal of losing weight. Instead, limit high fat and high sugar foods and increase activity levels. As the child grows, their height and weight should stabilize to a healthy point.



Including Eating Disorders in Your Curriculum

Don't:

- Do not show movies of persons with eating disorders. The majority of people with eating disorders will tell you that they learned their tricks on what to do from movies.
- Don't teach or promote calorie counting.

Do:

- Consider showing students the video Body Talk made by Body Positive, Killing Us Softly 3 by Jean Kilbourne, Shame Full, or America the Beautiful and American the Beautiful 2 by Darryl Roberts. (PG Version)
- Teach children the health hazards of dieting and why it is unhealthy to use fad diets. Teach students how to not support a \$50 billion dollar dieting industry and how to honor their bodies by not using diet pills.
- Teach students about resisting media pressure to be thin at all costs and ways to overcome body image issues.
- Teach students about the hazards of steroids.
- Teach students about the use of airbrushing and Photoshop in advertisements and how they perpetuate unrealistic images and ideals.
- Teach media literacy that helps students analyze the various methods of persuasion, so that they can learn to think critically of advertising.



Appendix A: ANAD On Campus Resources

Virtual Support Groups

Our support groups provide a free, virtual space where people can come together to find community in recovery. These peer led groups fill a gap in care, providing an accessible, understanding space for folks at every stage. In addition to our general support groups, ANAD offers a **Teen & Young Adult Support Group** for students as well as **Caregiver Support Groups** for parents and loved ones.

On Campus Groups

ANAD works with local colleges and university to help set up on-campus support groups. Contact hello@anad.org to learn more about bringing an ANAD support group to your school.

ANAD Helpline

Our helpline is available Monday through Friday from 9A – 9P CT and offers connections to eating disorder support near you, and a warm voice when you need it. If you would like a referral to a professional or group, or just need to talk for a moment, call the helpline at the number below.

1-888-375-7767

Visit anad.org to learn more about eating disorders, available resources, and ANAD's programs.