

# Coach Mental Wellness Conversation Starter

Simple ways coaches can check in with athletes without overstepping.

## Important Safety Disclaimer

This resource is for educational and informational purposes only. It is not medical advice, mental health treatment, crisis counseling, diagnosis, or a substitute for a licensed physician, therapist, psychologist, counselor, athletic trainer, school professional, parent/guardian, or qualified professional. Coaches should follow all organization policies, mandatory reporting requirements, and parent/guardian communication rules. If an athlete may harm themselves or someone else, is in immediate danger, or you believe it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. In the U.S., anyone in emotional distress or suicidal crisis can call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org.

## Purpose of This Guide

Coaches are not therapists, and they should not try to diagnose or treat mental health concerns. But coaches are often trusted adults who notice when an athlete is frustrated, withdrawn, overwhelmed, angry, anxious, or simply not acting like themselves.

This guide gives coaches simple, respectful language to check in, support confidence, and encourage the right next step without overstepping personal, family, or professional boundaries.

## The Main Goal

Create a team culture where athletes feel seen, safe, and supported while still understanding that coaches must involve parents, guardians, school leaders, medical professionals, or emergency support when a concern is serious.

## The Coach's 3-Step Check-In

### 1. Notice With Care

Look for changes in body language, energy, attitude, focus, or behavior. Do not assume you know the cause.

### 2. Ask Simply

Use short, calm questions. Let the athlete choose how much they want to share.

### 3. Connect to Support

If something feels serious, involve the right adults and professionals. Do not carry it alone.

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Respectful words coaches can use after difficult moments.

## Before You Check In

Listen and encourage, but do not diagnose, promise secrecy, or bypass parents and policies. If something feels serious, connect the athlete to the right adults and professionals.

## Helpful Check-In Phrases

Moment	Helpful Coach Language
Athlete looks unusually quiet	"You seem a little quieter than usual today. Want to talk, or do you need a few minutes?"
Athlete is upset after a mistake	"Take a breath. One play does not define you. Let's reset and get the next one."
Athlete is angry in the dugout	"I can tell you care. Let's calm the body first, then we can talk about what happened."
Athlete says they are fine but look off	"I hear you saying you're fine. I just want you to know I'm here if something changes."
Athlete is nervous before a game	"Nerves mean you care. Let's focus on your routine and one pitch at a time."
Athlete had a tough game	"Today was hard, but I still saw effort. We'll learn from it and move forward."
Athlete is overwhelmed	"You do not have to solve the whole game right now. Let's take one breath and one next step."
Athlete needs space	"That's okay. Take a few minutes. I'll check back in with you later."

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What to notice, ask, and do next.

## Quick Observation and Response Guide

What You Notice	Coach Check-In Question	Possible Next Step
Repeated frustration	“What usually helps you reset after a tough moment?”	Teach a short reset routine and monitor patterns.
Withdrawal from teammates	“I noticed you seem a little distant today. Is there anything you want me to know?”	Check back later and involve parent/guardian if concern continues.
Fear of mistakes	“What is one thing you can control on the next play?”	Refocus on effort, routine, and controllables.
Crying or emotional overload	“You are safe. Let’s breathe first. We can talk when you are ready.”	Give space, involve a trusted adult if needed.
Concerning comments	“I’m glad you told me. I need to help connect you with the right support.”	Do not promise secrecy. Follow policy and escalate immediately.
Ongoing behavior change	“I care about you as a person, not just a player. Let’s get support around you.”	Inform parent/guardian and appropriate staff/professional.

## What Coaches Should Avoid

- Avoid saying “toughen up,” “stop being emotional,” or “just get over it.”
- Avoid diagnosing, labeling, or assuming you know what is happening at home or school.
- Avoid using embarrassment, sarcasm, or public criticism as motivation.
- Avoid making athletes feel like their value depends only on performance.
- Avoid carrying serious concerns alone. Bring in parents, guardians, and qualified professionals.

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Build a healthy team culture without becoming a therapist.

## Simple Team Culture Habits

- Start practices with one quick focus word: effort, response, reset, courage, or together.
- Teach athletes to separate identity from performance: “You are more than one game.”
- Normalize mistakes as part of learning while still holding athletes accountable.
- Praise response, preparation, body language, coachability, and teammate behavior.
- Create a reset routine: breathe, release, refocus, next pitch.
- Remind athletes that asking for help is a sign of maturity, not weakness.

### When to Involve Parents or Professionals

If sadness, anger, anxiety, withdrawal, panic, hopelessness, unsafe comments, self-harm talk, major behavior changes, or emotional struggles continue or feel concerning, involve a parent/guardian and the appropriate qualified professional. If there is immediate danger, call 911.

## A Simple Coach Script

Use this when an athlete seems emotionally overwhelmed but is not in immediate danger:

- “I care about you as a person, not just as a player.”
- “I noticed something seems a little off, and I wanted to check in.”
- “You do not have to share everything with me, but I want you to know you are supported.”
- “If this is bigger than baseball or fastpitch, we can help connect you with the right adult.”
- “Let’s make sure you are not carrying this alone.”

## Optional Coach Reflection Notes

Use this space to note team patterns, communication reminders, or athletes who may need a supportive follow-up. Keep notes respectful and private.

Date	Athlete/Team Moment	Supportive Action Taken	Follow-Up Reminder