

# Managing Stress and Maintaining Joy



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Parent**

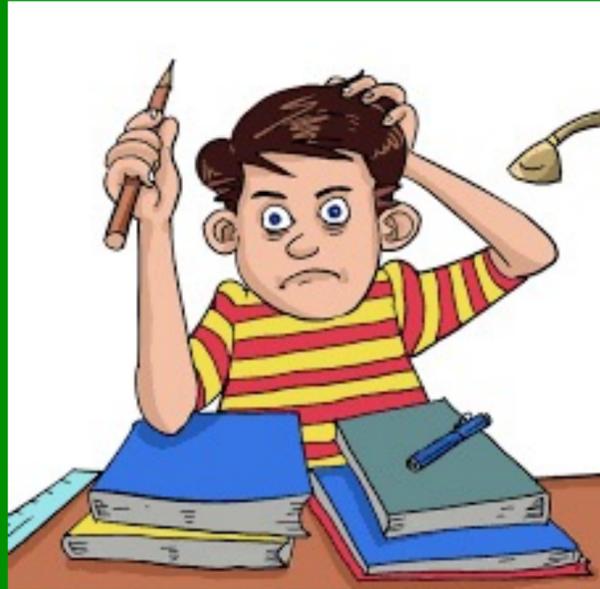
***Let's join together in dialogue to understand, address and build strategies to manage today's stressors and re-establish soccer as a haven for happiness, self-expression and joy for our youth athletes!***



# What is Stress?

## Cleveland Clinic Definition of Stress

“Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, the human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. That’s stress. Stress responses help you adjust to new situations. Stress can be positive, keep you alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger. For example, if you have an important test coming up it might help your body work harder and stay awake longer. But stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.”



# Physical Signs and Symptoms of Stress

- Aches and pains (outside what would be expected for playing a sport)
- Chest pain or heaviness
- Feeling like your heart is racing or pounding
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Stomach aches
- More susceptible to colds, weakened immune system





## Chronic stress can lead to emotional and mental symptoms such as:

- Anxiety or irritability
- Depression (can often manifest as anger or in outbursts)
- Sadness
- Suicide



# Anxiety versus Depression: How are they different?

- Anxiety can involve worry or fear (s) that you can't control



- Depression can be thought of as a pervasive sadness, loss of pleasure in things that used to bring you happiness, and even anger, sleep changes, self-injury



# Unhealthy Behaviors Associated with Stress

Chronic stress can lead to maladaptive behaviors to cope with the feelings that can be very harmful

- Eating disorders: both overeating and restrictive behaviors
- Compulsive behaviors such as shopping or excessive internet use
- Smoking
- Use of drugs



**Can Stress be Positive?**



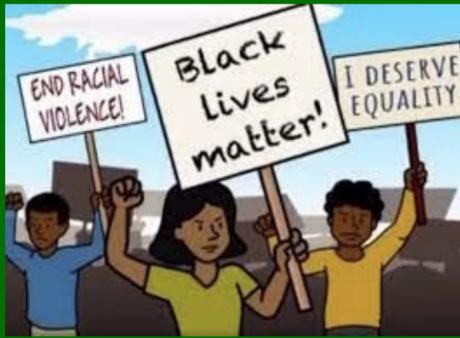
“Pressure is a Privilege.”  
Billy Jean King



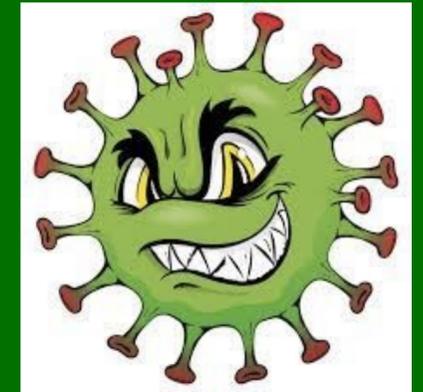
## 1999 Women's World Cup

- Playing in largest venues in America against FIFA advice
- Launch of the prologue predicated on winning and winning alone
- Sell out stadiums
- Regain the title of World Champions having lost in 2015
- Still stress, how you can use to your advantage





# *But, not all stress is good stress*



- It has been a difficult time.
- Racial violence, LGBTQ hate crimes, War, Pandemics...your generation dealing with new stressors
- Isolation from two years of COVID, loss from COVID
- Players juggling school, peers, soccer, applications, social media...family issues...
- Recruiting Conveyor Belt
- Playing at an elite level, winning national championships, pursuing a college scholarship or position, playing time, Many at this club and others want to play in college.
- Large number of players from DA and ECNL club end of quitting within two years of college, why?



# Soccer Even though We Love it, Can Be Stressful



- Position
- Playing time
- Scholarship pursuit
- Start or don't start
- Performance
- Don't rock the boat mindset creates silence
  - Players try to please won't engage in conversation with coach and at times parent
  - By product is often we create a conditioning to mistreatment
  - No longer fun

*Recognized and Unrecognized stress for the athlete will not lead to better performance.  
Nor will it help with overall well being and happiness.*

# The Recruiting Treadmill



- Why call it a treadmill?
- Most important decision you'll make is what is best for you.
- No one can decide that for you.
- You have to decide first do I really want to make the commitment now and 3-4-5 years from now to play college soccer?
- If the answer is yes, then you need to know this about yourself
  - Do I need to play all the time? Do I want to grow into a role? Or could I be happy being on the bench potentially all four years for best program possible?
- Do not let anyone decide this for you
- It can be a major source of stress if you don't match what you want with what's the best fit for this? Just because your best friend is going D1 doesn't mean D3 is any less of a soccer experience. And more importantly, it doesn't mean you'll enjoy it less.
- Be honest with yourself about what you want and what schools and coaches match this.

*"Have a vision and then create your own reality.  
Otherwise, someone else will create it for you."*

Tony DiCicco  
Two-time World Champion  
Olympic gold Medalist

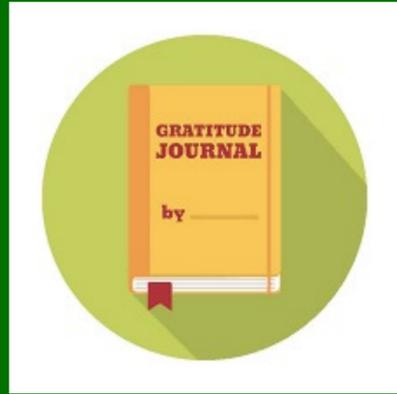
*What are some of the stressors  
you face that we as coaches or  
parents might not appreciate?*

# Self -reflection: Being True to yourself and *YOUR* journey

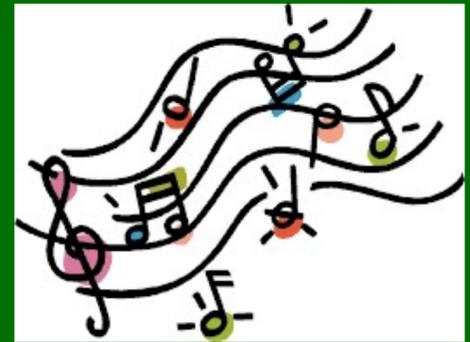


What are ways we can begin to change this?

- 1) Control what you can control
- 2) But speak up when things fall off what is right
- 3) Be true to yourself and your goals
- 4) What is right for your best friend might not be right for you
- 5) Do you have space to speak up to family? Coaches? About what you want and how to get there?
- 6) Does soccer bring you joy?
- 7) Knowing your support systems
- 8) Recognizing when you're under stress what does that look like? Recognizing when a peer is under stress?
- 9) Knowing what is acceptable and what isn't
- 10) How do you protect yourself? What are your coping mechanisms? What do you do to dissipate stress?
- 11) If you could tell your parents or coaches more about how you're really feeling without judgment would you?
- 12) What's the best way to communicate your needs for you?



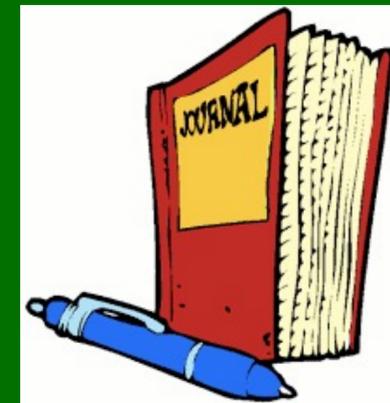
# Learning to Diffuse Stress More Consistently, *not* Just in Crisis



What things could you do day to day to more natural diffuse the inherent stress in your life?

Let's start with identifying ten ways to begin decreasing stress:

1. Having someone to talk to? Someone who will not judge you. Friends, family, church, teacher, counselor...coach,...
2. Gratitude journaling
3. Journaling
4. Meditation
5. Breathing exercises
6. Music
7. Exercise
8. Knowing what works for you-Movies, reading, art...
9. Build in time with peers
10. Positive self-talk, Counseling if needed



# Stress Reduction Skills

*No one plan fits all but try some of these and see what works best for you!*

- *Meditation*
  - *Gratitude Statements*
  - *Journaling*
  - *Breathing Exercises*
- 
- *“When I’m at a meet, and I’m really nervous, and I can feel the adrenaline, and my heart is racing, I try to take a step back and really work on my breathing [because] I feel like if I work on my breathing techniques and my heart’s not racing so fast, I can get into my zone,” Simone Biles says.*

# Meditation

Can be used to stress reduction, anxiety, focus, and performance.  
Christen Press, USWNT Star uses it to help her overcome pressure.



"A lot of people, they don't know how to respond," Channing, now 24, said talking about her sister Christen. "The culture is that you should be strong. You need to be tough. You need to be able to thrive under pressure. Pressure is what makes us. You need to have that. And so people just want you to be able to push through it all, and it doesn't create an environment where you can openly discuss the things you are feeling."

"Stanford's an amazing, amazing school. It was an extraordinary soccer program. It's no one to blame. I was just living in my own mental hell because of the pressure that I felt to score goals and perform and win games for my team. It was never good enough. I remember playing games and having tears roll down my face because it felt like it was never going to be good enough."

Christen Press discusses how meditation helps her feel *“like I can handle anything!”*

“I think Vedic meditation teaches you it’s the long game, and it’s not necessarily about a result,” she said. “So I think if you go into the practice thinking, oh I want to be better at transitioning mentality, so I want to be scoring more goals, it’s not going to work. You kind of practice Vedic meditation to learn about yourself and learn about the world and connect with the universe and your humanity and the benefits just flow naturally from there.” Christen Press

# Gratitude Journal or Daily Gratitude Statements

*“A large study conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University showed that thankfulness predicted a significantly lower risk of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, phobia, nicotine dependence, alcohol dependence or drug use...”*

When looking for Happiness, Find Gratitude, Gratitude (NAMI)

*In a study, “one group wrote about things they were grateful for that occurred during the week. A second group wrote about daily irritations or things that had displeased them, and the third wrote about events that had affected them (without emphasis on positive or negative). After 10 weeks, those who wrote about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives.”*

Giving Thanks Can Make You Happier, Harvard Health



# Journaling

- Simone Biles used journaling to really help her with her anxiety and stress management
- She gave her concerns a voice on paper.
- By focusing a time each day for this, she could compartmentalize it and not let it consume her
- In turn, she noted she often felt much better after addressing her issues in her “worry journal.”

*“Anything I’ve written down in my worry journal, I use that hour to worry about those things then,” Biles Shared. And usually, but the time 12 or 1 (p.m.) comes I’ve already forgotten about all of my worries so that is kind of a tool that helps me.”*

**“IT’S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY”**  
Michael Phelps destigmatizes mental health issues and encourages athletes to get support and help when they need.

Some of the world’s greatest athletes on...

# Recognizing When You Need Help



Landon Donavon, former US MNT star opens up about his depression

*“One of the very first sessions, I didn’t talk at all. I wouldn’t say anything. I was like. I don’t need to be here. I am not crazy. But now I keep in close contact with my therapist. And it’s super exciting, so hopefully more people are open to going to therapy and just knowing that they are there for you.” Simone Biles*

# RESOURCES

Meditation Apps (many with free basic level, some with student discounts)

<https://www.calm.com/>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

Online/phone therapy Options

<https://www.talkspace.com>

Crisis hotlines:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255

Reporting Line

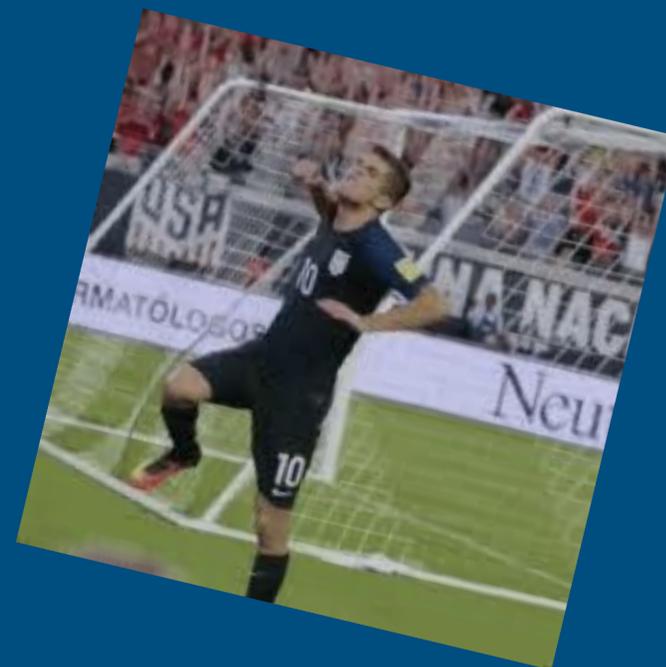
<https://uscenterforsafesport.org/>

The U.S. Center for SafeSport is an independent nonprofit committed to building a sport community where participants can work and learn together free of emotional, physical and sexual abuse and misconduct.

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/>



"If it isn't fun, it isn't soccer."  
Tony DiCicco



A special thank you to my dear friend Louise Waxler for inviting me to spearhead this important dialogue together with each of you *and* for having the the foresight on the importance of it!

Your indefatigable commitment to the game, the kids, and doing the right thing is inspiring!

**Best of luck McLean Soccer!**