



Mental Health & Youth Sports

Today more than ever, mental health is a key concern for families, schools, and communities. Children and teens are navigating increasing academic, social, and digital pressures. In this environment, physical activity—and particularly team sports—can play a vital role in supporting and enhancing mental well-being.

Research shows that regular physical activity can help combat anxiety and depression, while releasing natural endorphins that improve mood, reduce stress, and promote emotional balance. Team sports not only support physical health but also build resilience, confidence, and meaningful social connections.

SLEEP

A day of physical activity helps children unwind and sleep better. Whether they're running drills or scrimmaging, the physical output helps prepare the body and mind for restorative rest.

Sleep Recommendations:

- Ages 6–12: 9–12 hours per night
- Ages 13–18: 8–10 hours per night

Insufficient sleep is linked to an increased risk of obesity, injury, poor academic performance, and emotional difficulties. Sports participation can help counter these risks by promoting better sleep habits.

RESILIENCE

Not every game is a win—and that's a good thing. Through the ups and downs of sports, young athletes learn how to handle disappointment, bounce back from mistakes, and keep showing up. These experiences build resilience, an essential skill for managing life's inevitable challenges both on and off the field.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Team sports offer a powerful antidote to isolation and screen fatigue. They create spaces where kids can bond in person—laughing on the sidelines, high-fiving after practice, and sharing slices of pizza after a big win. These genuine, in-person interactions foster strong friendships, reduce feelings of loneliness, and promote a sense of belonging.

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Well-structured youth sports programs go beyond wins and drills. They cultivate an inclusive, supportive environment where kids are surrounded by caring adults and teammates. A simple pre-practice "team check-in" or huddle can set a positive tone and help players leave behind the stress of the day. Feeling connected to a team or club contributes to mental and emotional security.

CONFIDENCE & CHARACTER

Whether it's making the team, scoring a goal, or sticking with practice week after week, sports provide many opportunities to build confidence. Success in sports often comes from effort and consistency, reinforcing the idea

that hard work pays off. Over time, this builds character that young athletes carry into all aspects of life.

DISCIPLINE & DEDICATION

To thrive in sports, young athletes learn the importance of showing up, staying focused, and committing to their goals. These lessons in discipline and dedication often translate into academic and personal success. Players also learn to be accountable—not just to themselves, but to their coaches and teammates.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Sports are a natural stress reliever. Physical activity helps regulate stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline while boosting endorphins. Just 20 to 30 minutes of exercise a day can bring about a sense of calm that lasts for hours after the activity ends.

LIFE SKILLS

Youth sports help kids develop important life skills such as:

- Teamwork
- Decision-making
- Leadership
- Time management

These skills often evolve naturally as players work toward a shared goal. Studies show that students involved in athletics tend to earn higher grades, have stronger self-esteem, and develop a greater sense of personal responsibility.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING: FUN

At the heart of it all, youth sports should be fun. The joy of running onto a field, trying something new, celebrating with friends, or simply being part of a team—that's what keeps kids coming back. When sports are enjoyable, the mental health benefits naturally follow.