



MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

# MIND MATTERS

## MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUTH SOCCER

A Tampa Bay United Resource for Players, Parents & Coaches

**70%**

of kids quit sports  
by age 13 due to burnout

**1 in 5**

youth experience a mental  
health condition each year

**20%**

reduction in anxiety with  
regular sport participation

Sources: Changing The Game Project | Sports Health 2025 | Mental Health & Physical Activity 2025

# THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN YOUTH SPORTS

Understanding the Challenge | Data-Driven Insights

Youth athletes face unique mental health pressures — from performance anxiety and burnout to the fear of failure and social comparison. At Tampa Bay United, we believe that a player's mental well-being is just as important as their technical development. The data tells an urgent story.

## 1 in 5

youth experience a mental health condition each year

## 70%

of kids quit sports by age 13 due to burnout\*

## 45%

of youth athletes cite burnout as their reason for quitting

## 20%

reduction in anxiety & depression with regular sport

\*Changing The Game Project | †Women's Sports Foundation, 2024 | ‡Sports Health, 2025

## BURNOUT: YOUTH SPORTS' SILENT THREAT

Burnout is defined as **physical and mental exhaustion** combined with a diminished sense of accomplishment in sport. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2024), it is one of the **primary reasons children leave organized sports**.

### Common Warning Signs in Young Athletes:

- Chronic muscle or joint pain without clear injury
- Personality changes — withdrawal, irritability
- Decreased performance on the field
- Loss of enthusiasm for practice or games
- Sleep difficulties / prolonged recovery times
- Declining academic performance
- Elevated resting heart rate

### Risk Factors That Increase Burnout:

- Early single-sport specialization
- Playing on multiple teams simultaneously
- Excessive pressure from coaches or parents
- Win-at-all-costs training environments
- Insufficient rest and recovery time
- Lack of athlete voice and autonomy

**Did You Know?** Athletes in highly specialized sports face a 70–93% increased risk of injury, often linked to mental and physical burnout. (American Academy of Pediatrics)

*“Our findings suggest that the current youth sports environment is less than ideal for everyone, and that barriers to participation need greater attention.” — Dr. Laura Upenieks, Baylor University, Sociology of Sport Journal (2024)*

# THE POWER OF SPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Research-Backed Benefits | How Soccer Protects Young Minds

While challenges exist, the research is clear: **when youth sports are done right, they are one of the most powerful tools we have for protecting young people's mental health.** A 2025 meta-analysis in Sports Health found that sport-involved youth report fewer depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction than non-participants.

## Reduces Depression

Sport-involved youth show significantly fewer depressive symptoms (Sports Health, 2025).

## Eases Anxiety

Regular physical activity can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression by up to 20% (Mental Health & Physical Activity, 2025).

## Builds Resilience

Organized sports improve mood stability, emotional regulation, and coping skills (Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2023).

## Boosts Self-Esteem

Physically active youth show higher self-esteem and confidence across all age groups (U.S. Dept. of Health, 2023).

## Social Connection

Team sports provide built-in social networks that protect against loneliness and isolation.

## Long-Term Health

Youth who play sports continuously have fewer symptoms of anxiety & depression as adults (Ohio State, 2024).

### Girls & Sport: A Powerful Connection

Mental health disorders are 1.5–2.5x LOWER for girls who play sports compared to those who never played. 29% of girls who never played sports show moderate-to-high depression symptoms, vs. significantly fewer among active players.

(Women's Sports Foundation, Thriving Through Sport, 2024)

## TBU'S MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT — RESOURCES FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Tampa Bay United is committed to supporting the whole athlete. We've developed a **Mental Health Toolkit** designed to bring awareness and provide vital resources to players, families, coaches, and our broader community.

<b>Cope Notes</b>	<b>Crisis Center of Tampa Bay</b>
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**Text-Based Mental Health Support**  
 A subscription-based text service delivering random, unpredictable positive psychology nudges throughout the day — proven to boost mental wellness. TBU members receive a special discount.

→ [copenotes.com](https://copenotes.com) | Use Code: **TBU25**

*Want to suggest additional resources? Submit an anonymous request at [tbusc.com/resources/mental-health](https://tbusc.com/resources/mental-health)*

**24/7 Crisis Support**  
 Free, confidential crisis counseling and support services available around the clock for anyone in the Tampa Bay area. No situation is too small to reach out.

→ [crisiscenter.com](https://crisiscenter.com) | Call 2-1-1

## WHAT YOU CAN DO: TIPS FOR EVERY ROLE

FOR PLAYERS	FOR PARENTS	FOR COACHES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's okay to not be okay — reach out to a trusted adult</li> <li>Take rest days seriously; recovery is part of training</li> <li>Talk to your coach or a trusted adult if you're feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>Remember: your worth is not your performance on the field</li> <li>Stay connected with teammates — community is protective</li> <li>If stress feels unmanageable, text or call 2-1-1 (Crisis Center)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasize effort, learning, and fun over wins and stats</li> <li>Watch for warning signs: withdrawal, irritability, lost enthusiasm</li> <li>Avoid post-game critiques — ask 'Did you have fun?' instead</li> <li>Ensure your child has at least one sport-free day per week</li> <li>Normalize mental health conversations at home</li> <li>Reach out to TBU staff if you have concerns about your child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a mastery climate — focus on personal growth, not comparison</li> <li>Check in with players individually, not just about performance</li> <li>Recognize and respond to signs of burnout early</li> <li>Allow athletes to have a voice in training decisions</li> <li>Partner with parents to monitor overall well-being</li> <li>Use sport-based mental health awareness programs in team settings</li> </ul>

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

**For Parents**

- “What’s the part of soccer you look forward to most?”*
- “Is there anything about soccer that feels stressful lately?”*
- “How’s your energy been — do you feel rested after practice?”*

**For Coaches**

- “How are you feeling this week — not just physically but overall?”*
- “What part of training has felt hardest for you mentally?”*
- “Is there anything I can do to make practice feel better for you?”*

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** TBU stands united in supporting every member of our community. If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach out.

**Cope Notes** — [copenotes.com](https://copenotes.com) | Code: TBU25

**Crisis Center of Tampa Bay** — [crisiscenter.com](https://crisiscenter.com) | Call 2-1-1

**Full Toolkit** — [tbusc.com/resources/mental-health](https://tbusc.com/resources/mental-health)