

Healthcare Providers



Talking to Parents & Athletes About Sports Injuries

After a child suffers a sports injury, healthcare providers wear many hats—confidante, healer and, in many cases, mediator between a parent and athlete. Parents want their children to be healthy, happy and successful in everything, including athletics. Kids want to continue playing and not worry about the injury. Your job is to remind them that this is youth sports—it's about the kids learning lifelong lessons about teamwork and good health.

Open communication throughout the treatment process is essential. As a healthcare provider, it's important to stress that the lifelong risks of ignoring recommendations far outweigh the short-term benefits of winning a game. As healthcare providers know, overuse injuries, especially in younger athletes have long-term consequences that parents and athletes need to recognize. As a healthcare provider it is important to stress rest and recovery for future success both on and off the field.

What can I do as a healthcare provider to prevent parents from overreacting or becoming difficult following an injury?

- Listen and empathize with their concerns. Be sure you understand the source of their reactions.
- Explain your views and recommendations, specifically addressing their concerns.
- Define a detailed outline of options and recovery recommendations, and ask for their thoughts on the treatment plan.
- Stress that everyone involved wants the child to be healthy and hopefully return to playing.
- Highlight the risks involved with not following guidelines.
- Highlight the benefits of following guidelines, including a more rapid return to playing.

What can I do as a healthcare provider to keep injured athletes on the recovery path?

- Educate the athlete on the risks of not following the recovery recommendations especially as it relates to overuse and trauma, including cutting their playing season short and having health consequences in the future such as arthritis.
- Highlight that playing sports is not about just winning a game, but also being part of a team—and by following directions for recovery the athlete is helping their team.
- Emphasize that a full recovery improves the athlete's chances of continuing to play sports into adulthood.

How can I establish what a positive outcome should be?

Parents are generally receptive to an approach that benefits their children in some form. You should make it clear that you want to work together with the parent and athlete to resolve the health issue. Based on this common ground, you can define a positive resolution. In many cases a successful outcome is simply having the parent's opinion heard and understood.

Whatever the other issues/pressures, it's important to stress to the parent that you want to work together to create a solution, whether that is resting an athlete or taking a step back during a practice or game.