

How to Help Your Overwhelmed Athlete Set Realistic Goals

Athletes today have more inputs and [reasons for being overwhelmed than ever before](#). Even in youth sport, the demands on their time are plentiful: travel teams, school teams, tournaments, required time in the gym for strength training, expectations of extra coaching in the offseason, and often, year-round play. Then, there are school and other extracurricular demands on time, including part-time jobs for some.

As a parent, you can help your athlete hone in on what really matters to them, and cut out the noise. Here are some easy ways to help your overwhelmed athlete set realistic goals.

Lead with empathy

Remember that while you have the benefit of hindsight as a parent, your young athlete may be experiencing this level of overwhelm for the first time. From your point of view, it's easy to think their stressors are trivial and overblown, [but remind yourself that your athlete's feelings are real and valid](#). This is a critically important step, because if you don't validate your athlete's feeling of overwhelm, they may stop sharing those struggles with you.

Ask good questions

Most overwhelmed athletes struggle to explain how they're feeling or even understand how many pressures they're dealing with. Before you can help them tame their schedule and set goals for the next semester, [start by helping them understand where they are right now](#). What are all of the activities they're doing now, including sports, school, extracurriculars, and part-time work? Where are they falling behind? Where are they feeling caught up? How much time is each activity taking?

Help them identify what matters to them

After identifying what's on their plate, it's time to identify what really matters. Young athletes may struggle to identify the things that truly matter to them, rather than what matters to other people in their lives. For example, they may want to excel in a sport because their coach mentioned they have natural talent or because a best friend asked them to try out. And of course, they likely believe—whether accurately or not—that there are certain things that they should do because they matter to *you*. The best way you can help your athlete is by helping them identify the things that truly are important to them.

Help them prioritize

As you help your athlete prioritize, make sure the activities (including homework and time to sleep/relax) actually fit into their schedule. Try using a daily, weekly, or monthly planner to gain a better perspective on what's realistic. Often, student-athletes are trying to fit 28 hours of activities and work into a single day. There may be some difficult decisions or conversations that come from this activity. For instance, your athlete may need to talk to the club coach about skipping some practices in favor of training with the school team. This might feel uncomfortable for your athlete, but that [discomfort](#) is a critical first step in them learning how to establish their priorities and set boundaries.

Turn their goals into SMART goals

Often, students struggle with setting goals that are challenging but realistic and actually within their control. Help your athlete think [SMART](#): Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. Once that goal is set, help them come up with a plan to get to that goal, one step at a time. Also encourage them to regularly revisit their goals and [edit the original goal](#) as circumstances change.

Takeaway

Feelings of overwhelm are common for athletes of all ages. You can help your athlete evaluate their commitments, establish their priorities, and set realistic goals that prioritize their wellness and grow their ability to set healthy boundaries.



About TrueSport

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