

6 Easy Ways Coaches Can Practice Self-Care

As a busy coach, the idea of making time for self-care can seem overwhelming or even unimportant compared to the endless tasks on your list. But carving out time to take care of yourself will significantly help your body and mind, while also making you a better coach and a better role model for your athletes. For example, as athletes see you practice self-care, they'll learn how to prioritize their own well-being too.

Here, [TrueSport Expert](#) and licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Melissa Streno, explains what exactly self-care means, how to add it to your busy schedule, and how to help your athletes do the same.

1. Understand what self-care is (and isn't)

To determine the best ways to incorporate self-care into your life, it's [important to understand what self-care is](#) and what it isn't. For athletes and coaches, Streno explains that it's common to think of self-care in a purely physical, 'health-focused' context that involves stretching more, eating only healthy foods, and trying to perfect a sleep schedule. While these activities are important, Streno warns against becoming hyper-fixated on these activities or doing them for the wrong reasons.

"Self-care should be self-maintenance, things that make someone feel good, makes their life feel easier, boosts their mood, or helps contribute to health outcomes," says Streno. "It should be enjoyable, not a chore."

Simply put, self-care is the act of taking time for yourself and finding activities that help you slow down, rest, recharge, and reconnect, she adds. It can be focused on your physical health—but focus on mental and emotional health is just as important. Busy coaches may not have time for self-care cliches like bubble baths on a daily basis, but Streno notes that self-care can be as simple as putting on a 'good mood' playlist as you drive to work and really listening to the music.

2. Get vocal about your self-care practices

Self-care is as important for your athletes as it is for you, and you can help your athletes find their versions of self-care by sharing your own experiences. You don't need to give them all the details, but you can share that you gave yourself a 60-minute break to decompress and relax the night before.

"Athletes are sponges, and they model the behaviors and practices that they see, especially from people they look up to, like coaches," Streno says. "If they see that you're making time to take care of yourself, they're going to be influenced by that. So, when you model self-care and make it clear that it's a priority, they'll begin to understand how critical it is to their overall health and well-being."

3. Remember self-care will look different for everyone

When you role model self-care, it's important to remember that everyone will have their own version. Your version may be taking time to do yoga stretches and listen to a podcast in the morning, while an athlete may prefer blasting hard rock and dancing for five minutes, and another may consider a green smoothie in the morning to be the ideal self-care. Even watching TV can be a valuable type of self-care.

"Moderation and balance are critical to sustainability and consistency, even with self-care," says Streno. "Self-care can't be too rigid, or it stops feeling good and can turn into obsessive behaviors that can actually be harmful."

Instead of eliminating things like scrolling social media, consider setting boundaries or implementing variations, like setting a certain time to turn off the phone each night or adding some gentle stretching while scrolling. Or consider doing something different every other night, like watching a show or calling a friend.

4. Avoid the stigma of laziness

For many people, self-care often can be interpreted as being 'lazy.' This is especially common in the sports world, where the 'go hard' mentality is equated with success, and it can be hard for coaches and athletes to grasp the benefits of slowing down.

"Often, those in sport consider self-care to be lazy, unproductive, or not disciplined, so they skip it altogether or it turns into unhealthy obsessive behaviors," says Streno. "But what if we focus on how self-care leaves us feeling recharged or refreshed? I often see athletes [who take time to do relaxing activities end up being happier and better recovered](#). It also helps them avoid burnout if they're not afraid to rest and give their bodies and brains a break."

5. Help athletes practically incorporate self-care

Both athletes and coaches are notoriously busy – going from work and school to practices, games, strategy sessions, and conditioning. This is why Streno highly encourages both coaches and athletes to schedule self-care, just like they would schedule time for practice.

This could mean booking an entire weekend of downtime, or it can be just 30 minutes wherever there's a gap in activities. Even taking a few minutes here and there can be effective. The key, says Streno, is that these moments are intentional, meaning that they are viewed as moments of self-care rather than random moments in the day.

6. Self-care helps your team grow stronger together

Self-care isn't just about the self; it can have broader ramifications for your team. "Self-care helps with recovery, both mental and physical," says Streno. "It gives athletes balance and helps [coaches and athletes connect better as a team](#)."

Coaches also need to ensure that they're respecting each athlete's different needs for self-care in order to have the strongest team possible. As you make it clear that self-care is an important

priority, you may find that some athletes do require more rest and recovery than others. In those cases, Streno notes that it's important for the coach to ask why the athlete needs extra time, and if there's something else the coach can do to provide the athlete with the support that they need. What may initially sound like an excuse from an athlete may be them asking for help. "As self-care becomes the norm for your team, it allows you to engage in those conversations from a positive place," she adds.

Takeaway

As a busy coach, making time for self-care can seem impossible. But there are small moments throughout the day and week where you can carve out this time to take care of yourself—and teach your athletes to do the same.



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