



Talking with student-athletes after a traumatic community event

A practical guide for coaches of youth teams



Coaches can offer stability, connection, and a familiar routine after a community tragedy. You do not have to be a therapist or have all the answers.

Start with a short, optional team check-in

Something you can say: “People may feel sad, scared, angry, distracted, or not much different. You do not have to share. Practice can be a place to connect. If you need a break or want to talk privately, let me know.”

Set a group boundary: Do not encourage students to recount what happened or share graphic details, images, videos, or rumors. Keep discussion focused on feelings, coping, and support.

Gently redirect: “Thank you for telling me. Let’s pause the details here because everyone has had different experiences. I can check in with you privately afterward.” Follow through without shaming the student.

What helps at practice

- Keep routines predictable, but make room for breaks or lighter participation.
- Speak calmly and honestly. Avoid rumors, speculation, and graphic details.
- Invite questions, but never require students to share personal experiences in a group.
- Notice changes in mood, behavior, concentration, or participation. Check in privately.

When a student talks to you

- Listen and thank them for telling you. Do not ask them to recount details.
- Validate their feelings: “That sounds really hard.” Ask what might help right now.
- Offer a break or help connecting with a caregiver, school counselor, or other trusted adult.
- Respect privacy, but do not promise secrecy if someone’s safety is at risk.

When to connect a student with more support

Many reactions are common after a frightening event. If distress is intense, worsening, or interfering with everyday life, involve caregivers and school support staff. Follow your organization’s reporting and safety procedures. Seek immediate help for safety concerns.