

WELLNESS PLAYBOOK



MIND HEALTH



TO MY WNBA COMMUNITY,

Thank you for picking up this Wellness Playbook. Thank you for taking a moment today to think about your mental well-being. Regardless of who you are, or where you are in your journey, this is an important step.

Just because you're a professional basketball player — playing in front of cheering fans, signing autographs, living out a dream — it doesn't mean you can't face obstacles. We all have something that can affect our mental health, whether it's not getting enough sleep, a significant injury, the pressures of parenthood, or a challenge we were born with.

After all, we're only human.

But we're also part of a team, a family, a community. And together, we have the power to lift each other up — and continue this conversation about mental health, in our game, in this country, and throughout the world.

It's a conversation that I've seen change so much over the past decade, and together we can keep this going and make way to transform conversations into actions. This playbook can help provide a foundation, both for our wellness and for supporting each other. So that we all know where to start, and if needed, we all know where to turn.

Warmest Regards,



Chamique Holdsclaw

“ I WASN'T HONEST ABOUT
NEEDING HELP. I WAS JUST
GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS,
TRYING TO KEEP STUFF TOGETHER. ”

— Chamique Holdsclaw

WNBA Legend

ESPN The Magazine





INTRODUCTION

Your voices have sparked a conversation.

The stories you've shared have helped bring attention to the issues of mental health and wellness for fellow players, front offices, and the fans who follow our game.

Reaching the highest levels of your sport doesn't make anyone immune to mental health challenges. And whether it's the stress of the spotlight, life on the road, or social media, there can be constant challenges throughout the year.

The goal of this playbook is to help you clear whatever hurdles stand in your way. After all, you stretch before games. You watch what you eat. You lift, and you run. Your mental wellness is just as important as your physical wellness.

You are players — the best in the world — but you're also people. And on the pages that follow, you'll find a core set of wellness skills and drills that you can put into action.

**Together, we can build a community of support —
and continue this conversation.**



TEAM STAFF

Use this playbook as a reference guide to share with players. The drills in this playbook provide instructions on sitting down with players and walking through quick mental health exercises. The playbook's broad approach to mental health makes it good introductory material to include as part of your team's wellness programs. You can also use these skills for yourself.

WNBA MIND HEALTH

WNBA Mind Health is a platform to help the WNBA family identify and navigate mental health challenges, strengths, and opportunities. Through trainings and educational toolkits, we aim to build a community of support, with wellness resources at home and on the road.

For more information, visit <https://wnba.com/mindhealth>. If you have questions or comments, email mindhealth@nba.com.

HOW TO USE THE PLAYBOOK

You face countless scenarios every day that could affect your mental health and wellness. Some you can anticipate, while others arise suddenly without giving you a chance to slow down and think about the best step forward.

The reality is that life happens at game speed. It's important to arm yourself with fundamental wellness skills that you can apply quickly to any situation.

This playbook is meant to teach you the basics of mental health and wellness. Each section covers a different skill that helps form the foundation for a strong mental game. Paired with each skill is a drill, or short exercise, that puts the skill into practice.

Feel free to skip around to find the particular skills that you need at a given time. Let this playbook be a reference guide that can equip you with strategies to face whatever comes your way.

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STIGMA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Many people grow up without the chance to explore mental health topics in a supportive environment. Some families or environments may have even actively discouraged open discussion about the topic. The stigma around mental health is a reality, but it can be overcome.

The following exercises may feel difficult or uncomfortable. But as with any activity – from driving a car to a jump shot – these things become more natural with practice. Whatever your situation, pushing through any initial discomfort can lead to growth.

A full-page photograph of Los Angeles Sparks player Katie Lou Samuelson. She is wearing a purple jersey with yellow trim, featuring the number 33, the team name "Los Angeles", and logos for "UCLA Health" and "EquiTrust". She is holding a Wilson basketball with both hands above her head, looking upwards with a focused expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

I WAS ABLE TO SPEAK
TO A MENTAL HEALTH
PROFESSIONAL, SOMEONE
WHO HAD MORE
KNOWLEDGE THAN I DID.
WHEN I STARTED TALKING
ABOUT THINGS THAT
I DIDN'T THINK MADE
SENSE, IT MADE PERFECT
SENSE TO THEM. AND I
FELT THIS WEIGHT LIFTED
FROM ME.

— Katie Lou Samuelson

Los Angeles Sparks, WNBA Player
ESPN

STAYING SHARP

As professional athletes, you are constantly in tune with your bodies.

You know what you can — and probably shouldn't — eat on game days. You know what you need to do to get ready. And you know how to keep your body sharp over the course of a season.

Your mind can be like a computer, always assessing: How do I feel? How much do I have left? Is that a normal ache or an injury?

When it comes to your mental wellness, it's really the same approach. It's important to check in with yourself from time to time, evaluating *how* you feel and *why* you might be feeling that way.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Your mental wellness is just as important as your physical health. Your emotions determine so much of who you are as a person and how you go about your day. They can affect how you feel, how well you concentrate, and how you interact with teammates, friends, and family members.

WHERE DO I START?

It might be helpful to think about this in the framework of six **Keys to Wellness**. If something's off in any key, it can affect your overall mental wellness.



We need to talk about [mental health] more. We need to continue the conversation, to elevate the conversation ... to take away the stigma from it.

— **Natalie Achonwa**

Minnesota Lynx, WNBA Player

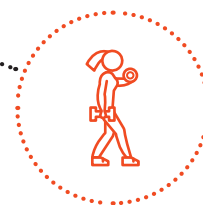
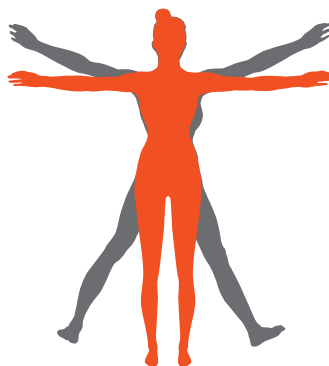
The Next

STAYING SHARP

Social: This is about you and the people in your life. It's important to have a support network – to feel like you're connected to others, to feel like you belong.

Emotional: This is about you and your feelings. It all starts here: How you're feeling can affect your happiness, your relationships, even your ability to excel on the basketball court.

Intellectual: What are you interested in? What gets you excited to learn more? This is about finding activities that promote curiosity, learning, and creativity.



Professional: For many, playing professional basketball is a dream come true. But it's still important to gain satisfaction and long-term financial stability from your work.



Spiritual: This is about finding a sense of purpose in your life and developing meaningful connections. Some people find spiritual wellness in faith communities or volunteer opportunities.

Physical: You are no strangers to this one. And just as healthy habits – eating well, sleeping well, exercising regularly – can affect you as *players*, they can also affect you as *people*.

STAYING SHARP

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT SOMETHING COULD BE OFF?

This is different for everyone. That's why it's important to have a good sense of yourself, and to realize when things seem off.

But here are some of the things to watch for:

- Feeling distant or isolated
- Mood swings
- Feeling angry or irritated
- Changes in sleep habits or appetite
- Excessive worrying
- Feeling numb or hopeless
- Substance misuse

WHAT IF I CAN'T SEEM TO FIX IT ON MY OWN?

There is always support available.

If you're seeing changes in your usual self, it may be a sign that you could use a little help. Pay attention to how often – and how long – you feel this way. How much is it disrupting your ability to function?

If you feel you may be in emotional distress, you can speak with a primary care physician, your team mental health or HR contact, your league office or union resource, a clergy member, or another trusted individual. If you or someone you know is in emotional or suicidal crisis, contact a counselor: Check with your insurance provider or contact the **24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or **text TEAM to 741741** for 24/7 access to a trained Crisis Text Line counselor.



We can never fully understand what someone else is going through, or what they've been through – in the same way that no one else can ever fully understand what we're going through, or what we've been through.

— **Elena Delle Donne**

Washington Mystics, WNBA Player
The Players Tribune

KEYS TO WELLNESS WORKSHEET

Practicing your mental health without taking a close look at your current state of mind is like practicing your jump shot while wearing a blindfold. This short exercise will help you identify the areas where you are doing well and where there is room for improvement.

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not like me at all, 5 = very much like me) rate how closely each statement reflects your current situation.

Identify the areas where you rated yourself the lowest. Use these to guide you through the rest of the playbook.



SOCIAL

I feel connected to and supported by the people around me.



EMOTIONAL

I am successfully engaging with and managing my feelings.



PROFESSIONAL

I find it easy to balance my basketball career with my other interests and goals.



INTELLECTUAL

I believe I can change my habits to better fit the way I want to live.



PHYSICAL

My daily stress level does not affect my sleep or physical health.



SPIRITUAL

My purpose and values guide my actions.

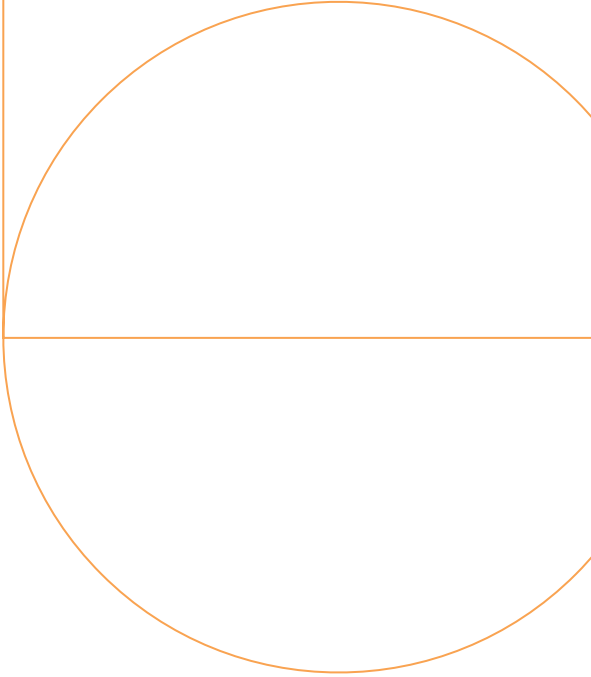
3 QUESTIONS

Your court awareness gives you a sixth sense about what is happening during a game. You can predict which direction the ballhandler is going to drive, when your teammate is going to cut, and how the ball will trace an arc from your hand into the bottom of the net.

Awareness is also central to strengthening your mental game. With greater awareness of your mental life, you can notice subtle changes in your mood or behavior that signal tension or stress. Identifying stress early will help you address problems before they become serious.

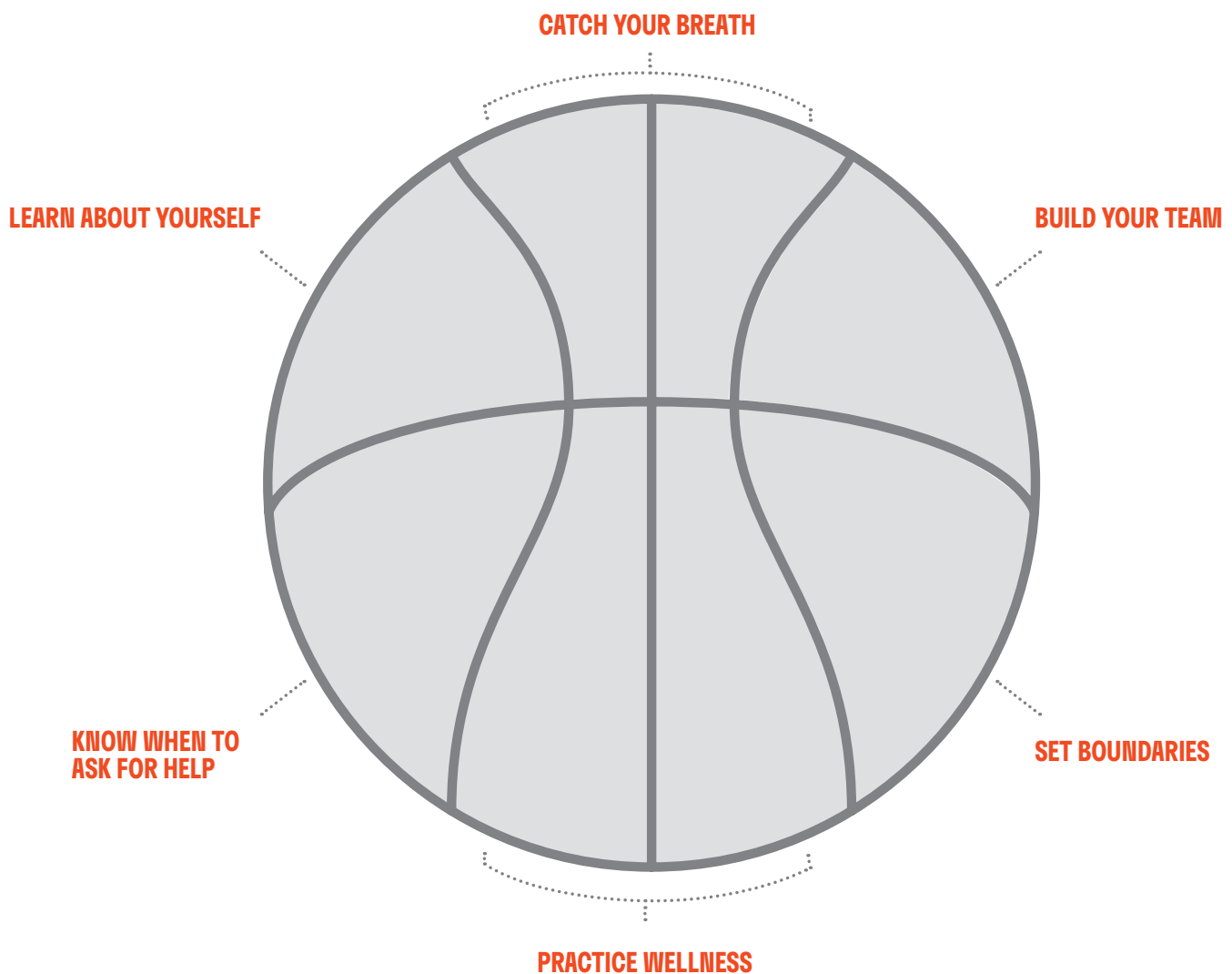
Becoming more aware of what you are experiencing can start with simply asking yourself three questions.

Ask yourself these questions several times a day until it becomes a habit. This practice allows you to check in with yourself and apply the skills found in the playbook.

- 
1. How am I doing?
 2. Who am I with?
 3. What am I doing?

THE SKILLS

Just as passing, rebounding, dribbling, and defense are different skills that you must master to become a great basketball player, there are different mental skills that can help you boost your overall wellness. The skills in the following sections provide a general understanding of mental health and wellness. They can be read in any order, so feel free to pick the sections that are most relevant to you right now.



There is no right path to strengthening your mental health. Every skill is connected, so no matter which path you choose, this playbook can help you improve your self-awareness, your ability to manage stress, and your inter-personal and self-care habits.



“AS ATHLETES,
WE KNOW THE
BLUEPRINT FOR
THIS. YOU WORK AT
IT. YOU BUILD THESE
SKILLS. MENTAL OR
PHYSICAL, IT’S A
SIMILAR APPROACH.”

—Taj McWilliams-Franklin

WNBA Legend
WNBA Basketball Operations and
Player Relations Manager

LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF



IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS
AND STRESSORS

OVERVIEW

As an athlete, you know a lot about how your body works and how it performs under different conditions. But do you have the same awareness of how your mind works?

Just as an injury can slow you down physically, mental “noise” can affect your performance on and off the court and create challenges in all areas of your life.

To combat this, you can develop a keener sense of the inner workings of your mind, identify your strengths and growth opportunities, and make a plan to improve your ability to handle stress.



SKILL



IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS

Your position on a basketball team reflects the strengths that you bring to the court, such as ballhandling, passing, rebounding, and spot-up shooting. Similarly, your role in your family and community is determined by the strengths you bring to the court of life.

Are you the one that your friends and family go to for advice on health, money, or travel? Do they rely on you for your humor, your judgment, or your leadership?

Identifying the areas where you excel allows you to tackle problems from a position of strength. This practice can reinforce your sense of purpose and create opportunities for you to apply your talents.

DRILL

STRENGTHS AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

A survey like the VIA Character Strengths survey can help you identify your strengths if you are unsure what they are.

Write down or think about what you consider to be your three biggest strengths. Recall a time in the past month when you used each strength.

EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS

Creativity	Humor
Teamwork	Good Judgment
Leadership	Gratitude
Honesty	Humility

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now consider three areas where you are not as comfortable. These are your growth opportunities, the places where you can develop your skills. Try to identify one action you could take to improve in this area or one person you could enlist to support you.



IDENTIFY YOUR STRESSORS

Stress can take a toll on your health. Over the long term, stress can wear out your body's reserves, leaving you feeling depleted or overwhelmed. It can also weaken your immune system and cause other health problems.

Extreme stress becomes trauma when a situation causes you to lose your sense of control and fear for your life or physical safety.



THOUGHTS

Trouble concentrating, racing thoughts



EMOTIONS

Feeling anxious, edgy



BODY

Body aches, headaches



RELATIONSHIPS

Quick temper, withdrawing and isolating from others



**DO YOU
RECOGNIZE
ANY OF THESE
SYMPTOMS
OF STRESS
IN YOURSELF?**

STRESS SYMPTOM CHECKLIST

DO YOU FEEL ...

- ☐ Anxious or full of worry?
- ☐ Unable to concentrate?
- ☐ Achy or sick more than usual?
- ☐ Sad or generally unhappy?
- ☐ Overwhelmed?
- ☐ Irritable or short tempered?
- ☐ Lonely or alone?

ARE YOU HAVING TROUBLE ...

- ☐ Concentrating or remembering things?
- ☐ Relaxing?
- ☐ Getting your work done?
- ☐ Making good decisions?

HAVE YOU ...

- ☐ Lost your sex drive?
- ☐ Used alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to “feel better”?
- ☐ Been sleeping too much or too little?
- ☐ Been eating too much or too little?
- ☐ Isolated yourself from friends and family?
- ☐ Neglected responsibilities?



SKILL



RECOGNIZE CHANGES

Changes in your emotional life can be so subtle that you don't even notice a problem taking root until it grows out of control.

Just as a small twinge in your ankle might signal an injury that will plague you throughout the season, unaddressed irritation or anxiety can plant the seed for more stressful episodes down the line.

A good way to become aware of these small changes and warning signs is to check in regularly on your body and mind.

DRILL

BODY SCAN MEDITATION

Find a comfortable seat and breathe slowly.

Pay attention to how you are feeling. Try to put a name to the emotions. Then notice if those emotions are producing a sensation elsewhere in your body.

Understanding the relationship between your mind and body, or your emotions and sensations, can help you develop a way to quickly identify which thoughts or situations are causing you stress.

“ I STILL STRUGGLE
WITH ANXIETY...
THAT'S NEVER GOING
TO GO AWAY... BUT
I DON'T THINK IT'S
ABOUT THAT. IT'S
HOW YOU MANAGE
IT AND HOW YOU
CHOOSE YOUR
OUTLET. ”

— Skylar Diggins-Smith

Phoenix Mercury, WNBA Player

PopSugar



PRACTICE WELLNESS




MINDFUL PRACTICE

OVERVIEW

Like practicing your shot, or stretching before a game, practicing wellness should eventually become second nature.

Your physical health as players is a key priority, day in and day out. But you should hold your mental wellness up to the same standard. Find moments to catch your breath. Stay on top of stressors. Build your boundaries and networks of support.

And don't wait until there's an issue or a challenge. There are steps you can take every day.



“YOU DON'T JUST HEAL
OVERNIGHT. YOU DON'T
JUST MAGICALLY BECOME
BETTER, BECAUSE
MENTAL HEALTH IS AN
ONGOING THING. IT'S
SOMETHING YOU'RE
GOING TO HAVE TO
MAINTAIN, JUST LIKE
YOU MAINTAIN YOUR
PHYSICAL HEALTH.”

— Imani McGee-Stafford

Former WNBA Player and Law Student

FanSided



SKILL



RECHARGE

You think carefully about what it takes to compete at the highest level during a professional season: how you need to eat, when you need to work out, when you need to back off, and when you need to see a trainer.

Similarly, you should find ways to pace yourself mentally as well.

Think of your mental wellness like a battery: It's possible, at times, that you can just wear down, especially as you juggle the commitments of being a professional basketball player. That's why it's so important to actively identify ways to recharge.

Get a good night's sleep. Meditate. Reach out to an old friend. Take a break from social media. Do something you love. Or even just go for a walk. These are all ways that you can begin to recharge that battery. And if you're too busy to take a moment, at least try this: Stop multitasking and just focus on one thing at a time.

SKILL



FIND YOUR JOY

What brings you happiness? What makes you laugh? What do you look forward to doing every day, or every week?

One of the best ways to recharge your battery is to have a little fun.

So, when you're off the court, where do you find that fun? It could be making breakfast for your kids, or treating yourself to your favorite coffee drink, or making a date to catch up with a friend. Especially when you're in the middle of a season – juggling road trips or injuries or a losing streak or a personal slump – it's important to embrace these moments big and small.



BUILDING HAPPINESS

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN

When times are good, and things are going well, it can be easy to forget that it's still important to check in with yourself. Sometimes, you can catch cracks in your wellness before they become issues. For example: A poor night's sleep might be the sign of underlying stress.

Similarly, when you're stressed out or feel as though there are too many things to do, it can also be easy to stop paying attention to the things that might make you feel better.

That's why it's so important to have a plan in place. Whether you're feeling great, or struggling with a challenge, following your plan can keep you on top of your mental wellness.



BUILDING HAPPINESS WORKSHEET

SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT

So how are you taking care of yourself right now? This might help you decide how to take care of yourself going forward. Fill out the self-care assessment checklist by putting a number from 1 to 5 in the check boxes next to each item.

1 = FREQUENTLY 2 = OCCASIONALLY 3 = SOMETIMES
4 = RARELY 5 = NEVER

PHYSICAL SELF-CARE

- ☐ Eat regularly (i.e., breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- ☐ Eat healthy foods
- ☐ Avoid use or misuse of tobacco and alcohol
- ☐ Maintain a healthy weight
- ☐ Exercise regularly
- ☐ Take time off when sick
- ☐ Dance, swim, walk, run, or do some other physical activity that I enjoy
- ☐ Get enough sleep
- ☐ Make time away from phones and other screens

PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE

- ☐ Make time for self-reflection (e.g., think about my values, experiences, and future plans)
- ☐ Engage in personal psychotherapy (e.g., think about who I am, what makes me behave or think the way I do, and what I might change to be the person I want to be)
- ☐ Write in a journal



- ☐ Read books or magazines
- ☐ Do something in which I am not an expert or the person in charge
- ☐ Let others know what I need and want to feel happy or secure
- ☐ Let others take care of me occasionally
- ☐ Say no to extra responsibilities when I already have enough
- ☐ Try new things

EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE

- ☐ Spend quality time with people whose company I enjoy
- ☐ Maintain contact with people I value
- ☐ Treat myself with love and respect by reflecting on my good qualities and accepting that I can't be perfect
- ☐ Take time for comforting activities, people, relationships, and places
- ☐ Allow myself to feel and express emotions (e.g., laughing or, crying)

SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE

- ☐ Spend time with nature
- ☐ Participate in a spiritual community
- ☐ Be open to inspiration
- ☐ Cherish my own optimism and hope
- ☐ Value the nonmaterial aspects of life
- ☐ Cultivate my ability to identify what is meaningful and its place in my personal life
- ☐ Meditate/pray
- ☐ Support causes I believe in (e.g., by volunteering)

If you filled in most boxes with 1 or 2, congratulations! You are doing a lot of things right to take good care of yourself.

If you filled in most boxes with 3, 4, or 5, you probably are approaching stress overload and may need to find a healthier balance between your needs and those of everyone around you. The next drill will allow you to commit to taking care of yourself and reducing your stress.



DRILL



BUILDING HAPPINESS WORKSHEET

MAPPING OUT STRESS RELIEVERS

Self-care means that you find time for yourself and the activities that will keep you healthy and in balance as you face the demands of work, home, and life in general.

Refer back to your self-care assessment. Based on these results, let's make a list of activities that will help reduce your stress. Try to make the activities as specific as you possibly can. For example, if you had a score of 3, 4, or 5 in "Eat healthy foods," you could modify that activity to be "Eat one piece of fruit at lunch each day," to make it as clear and actionable as possible.

Consider adding activities from all the areas in the self-care assessment: physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual self-care.

ONCE A DAY



ONCE A WEEK

ONCE A MONTH

WHenever I NEED IT!

CATCH YOUR BREATH



BREATHING AND
MINDFULNESS

OVERVIEW

Between family time, practice, travel, media appearances, and games, it may feel as if you're running every minute of every day and there is no time to stop and catch your breath.

In this whirlwind of activity, negative emotions can grow under the surface and become more serious conditions such as anxiety and depression.

To keep stress from building up, take a step back and pay attention to how your body and mind are feeling. Learning ways to re-center yourself can help you find stillness in the middle of all the hustle and bustle and change the way you react to stresses.



SKILL



MANAGE STRESS

Stress is like a light switch that your body flips on when it encounters a difficult task such as a hard workout or a tough conversation with a loved one. Problems crop up when that switch never shuts off. When your mind jumps from one stressful situation to the next without rest, even small setbacks can feel like full-blown disasters.

Letting go of stress is easier said than done. But just as you can learn other skills, you can learn to relax and stay loose in the face of difficult emotions, which will make tackling the challenges of daily life easier.

DRILL

GUIDED IMAGERY

Reduce tension in your body and mind by visualizing a place where you feel at peace.

1. Sit or lie back with your eyes closed.
2. Imagine a peaceful, relaxing place, such as a favorite chair, a quiet park, or the beach.
3. Place yourself in that image. Try to see and feel your surroundings as vividly as possible. For example, feel the warmth of the sun on your back or the breeze on your skin. Imagine what each of your five senses is experiencing in that place.

Headspace teaches you how to use mindfulness and breathing techniques to manage stress. Access hundreds of bite-sized guided meditation sessions made for busy schedules.

Check with your team's HR staff to receive a download code for a free Headspace subscription.



HEADSPACE®



SKILL



RETRAIN YOUR BREATH

How you breathe directly affects how your mind and body feel. If you've ever grunted through a hard workout or gasped sharply during a horror film, you've seen firsthand the way your breath changes depending on the situation.

During periods of mental stress, your breathing can become fast and shallow, which can cause your body to react as if responding to a threatening scenario. For example, tightness in the chest is a common symptom of anxiety and a signal of distress.

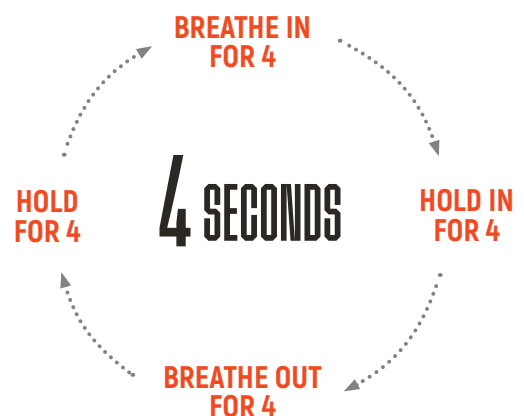
Learning to control your breathing can help you calm racing thoughts and focus on the task at hand. It can even help you fall asleep at night.

DRILL

BOX BREATHING

Box breathing is a simple technique that you can use to calm your nerves and regain focus.

1. Inhale for four seconds.
2. Hold your lungs full for four seconds.
3. Exhale for four seconds.
4. Hold your lungs empty for four seconds.





SKILL



CREATE SPACE

One way to create more mental space is to put physical distance between you and the things that are causing you stress. Walking is a tried and true way to reset your emotional state and regain balance. It may sound simplistic, but even a short walk can kick-start stress-fighting processes in your body.

Creating space between you and your stressors allows you to work through problems in a calmer state. It helps you slow down and tune in to the workings of the outside world rather than focus on angry or anxious thoughts.

DRILL

MINDFULNESS WALK

Set aside 10–20 minutes to take a walk outside by yourself.

A local park or area with green space is best, but even a walk around the block outside the hotel after a game will do.

As you walk, notice as many positive things around you as you can. These can be sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations. Pause for a moment as you notice each object of awareness, don't just let it slip past you. Think about what it is about that thing that makes it pleasurable to you.

BUILD YOUR TEAM



BUILDING & MAINTAINING
RELATIONSHIPS

OVERVIEW

Your team has your back on the court, but it is important to build a supportive team in your personal life too. These are the people that you will rely on long after your playing days are over.

Today, it is easier than ever for people to reach you through social media. You should be careful when deciding who to let into your social circles and who you lean on for support.

Surrounding yourself with a close circle of friends and family members will help sustain your well-being through life's challenges. With the help of this team, you can ignore the noisy outside world and focus on being the best person and basketball player you can be.

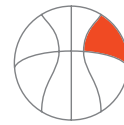
“I WAS SUPER
INTIMIDATED ABOUT
GOING TO SEE A
THERAPIST ... BUT
AFTER I RUPTURED MY
ACHILLES AND WENT
FROM MY HIGHEST HIGH
TO MY LOWEST LOW,
I WENT TO TALK TO
SOMEONE AND IT WAS
COOL. IT WAS NORMAL.”

—Breanna Stewart

New York Liberty, WNBA Player

The Players' Tribune





SKILL



FIND THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO LEAN ON

One way to maintain a sense of balance in life is to focus on strengthening relationships with people who add meaning to your life. Don't spend your time and attention on those who do not have your best interests at heart.

Think about a time when someone came through for you against all odds. That person is likely part of your core team, one of your closest companions. Whenever you are experiencing a difficult period, these companions are the first people you should call on.

Not everyone you meet is able or willing to be a go-to person in your life. Identifying the people who give you strength will let you know who to turn to when you're in need.

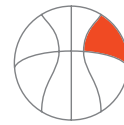
DRILL

IDENTIFYING YOUR TOP THREE

Write down three important people in your life. They could be teammates, coaches, friends, or loved ones. Consider the strengths each person brings to your relationship with them. What do you bring to the table?

Revisit this list next time you are facing a personal challenge. Based on their strengths, which of these people could you go to for help?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



SKILL



BUILD TRUST

Trust is a vital part of strong relationships. One of the best ways to build and deepen trust between you and a companion is to show your own trust through your body language.

Closed body language like crossed arms or limited eye contact can make you appear bored or dishonest, and this can erode the trust between you and the person you are talking with.

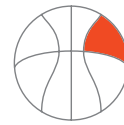
On the flip side, open body language projects confidence and ease. Steady eye contact and a relaxed posture conveys respect and encourages trust even in the briefest interactions.

DRILL

POSITIVE POSTURE

Your posture can affect how you feel and how others perceive you. Slouching on the bench during a late-game timeout or crossing your arms during a difficult conversation can negatively impact both your mindset and the people around you.

Next time you find yourself in a stressful situation, take a moment to notice your posture. If you are hunched over, try sitting straighter. If you are frowning, try pushing yourself to smile. Even these small actions can send positive signals from your brain to the rest of your body.



SKILL



PRACTICE EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to understand a problem from another person's viewpoint and to imagine what they might be feeling. Practicing empathy has been shown to make people feel closer and more connected. One way to practice empathy during a conversation is to withhold judgment and acknowledge the other person's point of view. Summarizing aloud what they said to you not only communicates to them that you hear and understand what they said, but it also helps you to take in their experience more fully before you respond with your own thoughts and feelings.

To find common ground, put aside your urge to "win" the discussion. This practice can help diffuse tense conversations, both on and off the court.

DRILL

ACTIVE LISTENING

Use active listening techniques to make challenging conversations more comfortable.

- Put away your phone and other devices.
- Keep relaxed eye contact and nod to encourage the speaker.
- Notice any strong emotions that come up during the conversation, but try not to react.
- Allow the other person to finish their point.
- Repeat back in your own words what you heard them say. Ask them to clarify if you are not sure what they meant.



SKILL



PARENTING UNDER STRESS

The busy life of a professional basketball player can pose challenges for you and your family. Constant travel and time away from home puts physical and emotional distance between you and your loved ones.

Remember that children do not see the world the way that adults do. Talking with your children can help you understand their point of view. By understanding your children's perspective, you can help address their concerns so they don't become overwhelmed.

DRILL

PLANNING QUALITY TIME

Pick an activity that you and your children can do together when you're not on the road. Choose something that you both enjoy, such as reading bedtime stories, watching a favorite TV show, or cooking dinner.

An established routine will give you both something to look forward to every time you come home. It also presents an opportunity to check in with your children. Ask them about anything that is bothering them, and then together, explore how this can be addressed.

Watching their mom or dad leave town for road trips can be tough on children. So finding little routines when you're away is important as well. One possibility: a morning check-in on FaceTime each day at breakfast.

SET BOUNDARIES



DEFINING
BOUNDARIES

OVERVIEW

You face constant demands.

For your time. For your energy. For access. Even for money.

That can come with the territory as professional athletes, as celebrities in the spotlight. But it can also take a toll. Having to regularly say yes or no to friends, family members, and fans can cause stress, distraction, resentment, and guilt.

That's why establishing healthy boundaries is so important. Essentially, you're making a chart of what you will and won't accept, do, and share with others. This helps define who you are as a person. It can bring a sense of order to your life, allowing you to conserve your energy. And it can offer a layer of protection, especially for those in the public eye.

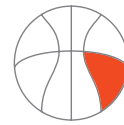


“TIME AWAY FROM THE COURT TAUGHT ME TO ACCEPT THINGS WITH OPEN ARMS. THINGS DON'T ALWAYS GO THE WAY THAT YOU PLANNED, BUT THAT'S THE LIFE — YOU WILL HAVE TO ACCEPT IT AND MOVE FORWARD.”

—Azurá Stevens

Los Angeles Sparks, WNBA Player

The Times of India



SKILL



SET PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Before you sit down to lay out boundaries, ask yourself:
Where do I already have boundaries in my life?

For example: How much do you share about yourself on social media? Are there aspects of your life that are off limits?

That could be one boundary.

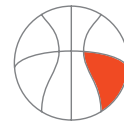
Now, where in your life do you find yourself struggling to say no, or struggling for more privacy, or feeling taken advantage of? These are areas to focus on.

DRILL

DEFINING YOUR BOUNDARIES

This drill is meant to help you determine where to set boundaries and how to set them. Take a few minutes and fill in the spaces below.

1. People may not _____.
(Example: "ask me for other commitments on game days")
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. I have the right to ask for _____.
(Example: "privacy")
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
3. To protect my time and energy, it is OK to _____.
(Example: "turn off the ringer on my phone")
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____



SKILL



BE OK WITH SAYING NO

It's usually a lot more fun to say yes than to turn someone down. No one likes disappointing people, especially when they are friends or loved ones.

But you are just one person. And inevitably, there comes a time when you can't do everything for everyone. These are the times when it's important to be fair to yourself, to not let the stress of saying no weigh you down.

When you do say no, do the following:

Be brief. Be honest. Be respectful. And be ready to repeat yourself if need be.

SKILL



LET GO

Just as it's healthy to set boundaries for others, it helps to set them for yourself. And part of that means knowing what you can and can't change. This can help you let go of memories and emotions that are still causing pain.

This doesn't mean putting up a wall between you and your emotions, but it does mean establishing a little distance. This allows you to step back and see how you're reacting to something, allowing you to better understand how a given emotion colors your thoughts and feelings.

KNOW WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP



SEEKING OR OFFERING
SUPPORT

OVERVIEW

It can be hard to ask for help. And it can be even harder to open up about a mental health challenge you might be facing.

But confiding in a trusted friend, teammate, faith leader, doctor, or counselor can lift a weight off your shoulders. It can also be empowering. Often, you will learn that many others have faced similar challenges.

Bottom line: **You are not alone.**



“MY ONLY ADVICE
FOR YOU, IF YOU’RE
FEELING LIKE I WAS
FEELING? LET IT OUT.
DROP THE MASK FOR
A MINUTE AND TALK
TO SOMEBODY. A
THERAPIST, A FRIEND,
A FAMILY MEMBER,
SOMEBODY.”

— A’ja Wilson

Las Vegas Aces, WNBA Player

The Players’ Tribune



SKILL



RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

When a mental health challenge is beginning to affect how you live your life — whether your work, your relationships, or other components — then it's time to reach out.

People having mental health challenges may be unable to do the following:

- Think clearly
- Stop the pain
- Make decisions
- Sleep, eat, or work
- Escape feelings of depression
- See themselves as worthwhile
- Imagine a future without pain

The following are some of the warning signs that someone may be having mental health challenges and may even be in crisis:

- Isolation
- Anger or mood swings
- Violent outbursts
- Reckless behavior, including gambling
- Thinking about hurting or killing themselves
- Confusion or difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Substance misuse and/or abuse



DRILL



WELLNESS ASSESSMENT

This assessment can help provide a snapshot of your current wellness. Fill out the following prompts with your physician or someone you trust.

Over the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

Little interest or pleasure in doing things

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Feeling tired or having little energy

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Poor appetite or overeating

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed – or the opposite, being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day



WELLNESS ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED)

Review the results of your assessment with your physician to determine next steps.

Please rate the current (i.e., last two weeks) severity of your difficulty falling asleep.

- ☐ None
- ☐ Mild
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Severe
- ☐ Very severe

Please rate the current (i.e., last two weeks) severity of your difficulty staying asleep.

- ☐ None
- ☐ Mild
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Severe
- ☐ Very severe

To what extent do you consider your sleep problem to interfere with your daily functioning (e.g., daytime fatigue, mood, ability to function at work/daily chores, concentration, memory) currently?

- ☐ Not at all interfering
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Much
- ☐ Very much interfering

In the past 12 months, how often have you had a drink containing alcohol?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Monthly or less
- ☐ 2-4 times a month
- ☐ 2-3 times a week
- ☐ 4 or more times a week

In the past 12 months, how often have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than monthly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Daily or almost daily

In the past 12 months, how often have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than monthly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Daily or almost daily

In the past 12 months, have you considered using drugs other than those required for medical reasons?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

In the past 12 months, how often have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drug use?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than monthly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Daily or almost daily

What number best describes your pain on average in the last week?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(no pain) (pain as bad as you can imagine)

What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your enjoyment of life?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(no pain) (pain as bad as you can imagine)

What number best describes how, during the past week, pain has interfered with your general life activity?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(no pain) (pain as bad as you can imagine)



SKILL



OPEN UP ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Sometimes, simply talking about mental health can be the toughest part. But healing begins with taking that step and opening up to someone you trust.

You may have difficulty finding the right words when talking about mental health. Below are some example sentences that could help you start the conversation about your wellness.

- If you feel unwell and want to talk about it with someone you trust, start by saying, “I haven’t been feeling like myself lately.”
- If you’ve been receiving treatment and want to open up about it, say, “Let me tell you about something I’ve been doing lately.”
- If you want to open up about a past mental health experience, ask, “Can I tell you about something important that happened to me?”

There's no one-size-fits-all conversation about mental health and wellness, and it might feel uncomfortable to open up. Finding the right person who will listen to you nonjudgmentally will help make it a successful conversation and put you – or keep you – on the path to feeling well.

SKILL



LEND A HAND

Some people may be reluctant to use mental health services due to past experiences. They may feel that getting counseling is a sign of weakness or personal failure.

We can all be there for others by:

- Letting them know there is nothing wrong with asking for help
- Reminding them that helping others requires we help ourselves first
- Sharing our own perspective or describing our own experiences of counseling as a positive force



DRILL

REACHING OUT

These don't have to be in-depth conversations. Sometimes, the mere act of reaching out and showing that you care can be powerful in and of itself.

Here are five actions you can take if you suspect a teammate or friend is struggling:

- **ASK.** Start a conversation by asking how they are feeling. You could ask: "How are things going?" or "How can I help?" The key is showing that you are there for them and willing to lend your support in a nonjudgmental way.
- **LISTEN.** Give them your full attention. Offer support where you can and follow through with anything you say you'll do, but don't overpromise. The goal is to reduce their sense of isolation and give them an outlet to express their feelings.
- **KEEP THEM SAFE.** If they have thought about hurting themselves, it's important to ensure their safety. Consider whether they have a plan in place or access to things that can hurt them, and take steps to remove any immediate hazards. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to get additional assistance if you are concerned about a person's safety, or call 911 if the safety concern is immediate.
- **HELP THEM CONNECT.** Offer to get them in touch with treatment professionals, community resources and services, or other people who care about them. If they are in a moment of crisis, help connect them with a local crisis hotline or the national 24/7 Lifeline. Together, you can create a network of support to address or prevent future issues.
- **FOLLOW UP.** Continue to reach out to them during and after your meeting. Give them a call, send them a text, or make a plan to grab lunch. Consistent communication is one of the best ways to show that you care and support their mental health.



DRILL

LISTENING EMPATHICALLY

This technique can be used to help make challenging conversations more comfortable. **Following these steps will show a troubled teammate or friend that you care:**

- Focus only on what your friend is saying.
- Listen actively by nodding, maintaining eye contact, or using simple words to keep the conversation going.
- Be aware of any personal biases, assumptions, or values you might have.
- Avoid rehearsed responses and pause to think before answering.
- Ask mostly open-ended questions instead of yes-no questions.
- Repeat in your own words what you thought you heard the speaker say.

DRILL

FOLLOWING THE DO'S AND DON'TS

Talking about suicide and finding help for someone who may be suicidal can be difficult. These tips can help:

DO'S

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be nonjudgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available, but do not offer easy reassurances.
- Take action. If possible, remove potential means of suicide, such as weapons or pills, or help the person to remove these means from their access.
- Get help from people or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

DON'TS

- Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.



WNBA Mind Health is a platform to help the WNBA family identify and navigate mental health challenges, strengths, and opportunities. Through trainings and educational toolkits, we aim to build a community of support, with wellness resources at home and on the road.

For more information, visit

<https://wnba.com/mindhealth>.

If you have questions or comments, email **mindhealth@nba.com**.

V!brant
Emotional Health