If you ask the average youth sports coach if they feel the need to be trauma sensitive and responsive, you might get an answer like, "We really haven't encountered any players who've been victims of trauma." But how do you know? That, and other trauma-related questions were answered for participants in a session at the 2017 Play Like a Champion Today Leadership Conference. You can view the full presentation by Bill Matthews and Carrie Hastings by clicking here! According to the latest statistics, 26% of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four. Four of every 10 children in America say they experienced a physical assault during the past year, with one in 10 of those receiving an assault-related injury significant enough to require medical attention. One in five children witnessed violence in their family or their neighborhood during the previous year, and more than 60% of youth age 17 and under have been exposed to crime, violence and abuse either directly or indirectly. These statistics do not take into account kids who are traumatized by divorce, substance abuse or death of a family member.

So chances are that if you are a youth coach, you HAVE encountered players who have experienced significant trauma. You just didn't know it. Signs that a player has suffered trauma include:

- Benign fouls or small incidents escalating into verbal and/or physical aggression
- Quitting the team for an apparent minor incident
- Lack of self-awareness re feelings/behaviors
- Inability to develop friendships or pro-social relationships with coaches
- Lack of focus/concentration
- Difficulty abiding by the rules of the sport or team.
- Additional signs include: being overwhelmed by their feelings of fear, concern over their own safety, headaches and stomach aches, unusually reckless or aggressive behavior, and guilt or shame.

As a coach, you have tremendous influence over your players; you don't need to be a mental health professional, and "you don't have to have the right letters after your name or any letters after your name" to help these kids, according to Dr. Allison Jackson, founder of Integration Solutions, an organization that provides consultation, education, and technical assistance to those invested in the lives of children, families and adults impacted by emotional trauma.
The Weekly Game Plan

This week, pay special attention to the non-verbal cues given by the participants on your team at practice. How are they acting? Do they appear to be energetic, joyful and having fun? Are they lethargic or seem uncomfortable at any point? Let this help inform your coaching these kids. Being aware of what's going on with the kids on your team will help you get the most out of them individually and as a team!

"Coaching is about human interaction and trying to know your players. Any coach would tell you that. I'm no different."

~ Bill Parcells

Chris Coghlan, 2009 National League Rookie of The Year is just one example of an athlete who experienced trauma as a teenager that nearly destroyed his career and his life. Click here to see his story.

Over the course of this program year, Play Like a Champion Today will be providing additional information and tools on trauma sensitive and responsive coaching. We are calling this our Y-STAR Series (Youth-Sports Trauma Awareness and Responsiveness). Stay tuned!

A Prayer for Coaches

Heavenly Father, guide me as I try to coach my team to build each player's character and boost their self-esteem. May I keep an even temper and remember it's a game; let me not have favorite players, but treat them all the same. Grant me patient wisdom as I praise them or correct ...Remembering that I must work to earn each one's respect. Lord, whether we may win or lose, may all who are watching see the kind of coach at every game that you would have me be. Amen.

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This and other great prayers for athletes, coaches and competition are available via the Play Like a Champion eBook of Prayers. Click here to download yours for free today!