

Do you know how to practice communal care?

You've probably heard of self-care, but have you heard the term 'communal care'? As a member of a team, whether you're in a leadership role or not, you can be practicing communal care to help your teammates—and to help yourself in the process. But how do you do this?

Here, [TrueSport Expert](#) Nadia Kyba, MSW, President of Now What Facilitation, explains what exactly communal care is, why we need it, and how to bring this idea to your team.

The Problem with Self-Care

In modern society, whether you're reading magazines or scrolling TikTok, there's a lot of [discussion of self-care](#), ranging from seeking help from a licensed professional therapist to taking bubble baths to ease stress. But the issue with self-care, Kyba explains, is that it puts the burden of care on the people who are already struggling. To practice self-care pressures people to make themselves well—and it doesn't always work. This is where the idea of communal care comes in.

What Is Communal Care?

Communal care is the shift from self-care to a [community focus](#). Unlike self-care, where you're expected to help yourself, and it's your problem and responsibility to take care of yourself, communal care is based around asking for help and giving help when you can. "Communal care is a shift where people in your community—which can be your team—are committed to being there for one another, recognizing that sometimes people aren't able to take care of themselves," says Kyba. "It's really about paying attention to how everyone on your team is doing, and figuring out what it is that they need to feel better."

Communal Care Recognizes Privilege

To be in the position to practice self-care usually [requires some level of privilege](#): It's hard to make time for a bubble bath or to pay for a session with a therapist if your family is struggling financially and you're working an after-school job in addition to playing a sport. Communal care is about each person [recognizing their privilege](#), and acting accordingly. Communal care means asking how you can best serve your teammates. This may mean a more affluent teammate offering a ride to the teammate who's usually left waiting for the bus after practice, or even accepting and acknowledging that teammates who are working after-school jobs may not be able to make every practice but shouldn't be benched due to their circumstances.

Communal Care Starts with One Student

If your team seems disjointed and you don't feel as though you're practicing communal care right now, it only takes one teammate to start the process. There are two ways to begin creating a culture of communal care for your team: Offer help or ask for it.

Be Proactive and Be Curious

"Pay attention to what's going on with your teammates," says Kyba. "If there's an issue going on in their family or in their community, pay attention to that. You don't need to pry—just be open and listen. And if you think an athlete is going through a hard time, it's okay to ask them, 'What can I do to support you?'" The goal here is to offer help before they need to ask for it: The onus

shouldn't be on the person who's struggling to ask for help. Ideally, their community is already offering it."

Stand Up for Each Other

You may also consider how to use your privilege to help a teammate. For example, if you hear another team use a racial slur, rather than waiting for the target of the slur to complain, you can address it yourself knowing the negative impact it could have.

Ask For Help First

Often, a team isn't practicing communal care because no one feels comfortable asking for help—even if everyone on the team would be happy to provide that help! And it is hard to ask for help, especially for someone who's truly struggling. To make it easier for other teammates to ask for help, one of the best things that you can do is to find ways to ask for help yourself. "Once one person is okay asking for help, it becomes normal for the team," says Kyba. "Even asking for help with little things can create a safe space where your teammates can now ask for what they need."

Don't Overcommit—Be Realistic

You shouldn't be the only person on the team who's helping everyone else. Reading this article, it's easy to see how some athletes would fall into the trap of focusing so much on communal care that they end up overextended and drained. But how do you practice communal care while still preserving your own mental wellness? It's important to remember that taking on the emotional burdens of others doesn't help them, or you. The key is trying to find practical ways to offer help and support—without losing yourself in the process.

If you offer to drive someone home every day of the week for the whole season versus having everyone with a car on the team picking a day to drive your teammate home, you're not only potentially overcommitting yourself, you're denying the team the opportunity to join in the communal care.

Offer Options Rather Than Asking

It's tempting to ask a teammate who's struggling, 'Do you need help?' The problem with that well-intentioned question is that it's too easy for your teammate to simply say no out of fear. Instead, ask, 'How can I help?' Whenever possible, Kyba recommends offering specific ways that you can help, whether it's bringing extra food for a teammate for race day breakfast, offering a ride home from practice, or suggesting doing some extra practice together to work on their jump shot. Offering specifics takes the onus off the person who's struggling and makes it easier for them to accept the help, says Kyba.

Helping Others Helps You

Communal care is actually a great form of self-care! [Research](#) has shown that when you help others, your mental state improves as a result. "If you're thinking, 'I don't have time to help this person, it's going to cut into my self-care time,' that's just not true," says Kyba. Of course you need to make time for yourself and do what makes you feel good. But often, helping others is going to make you feel better than any traditional method of self-care.

Takeaway

Communal care ensures that people who are struggling have the support they need without having to ask for help or feel like a burden. Research also shows that helping others is actually great for your own mental wellness!



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