



BETTER ATHLETES  
BETTER PEOPLE



## How Coaches Can Help Athletes Work Through Tragedy And Cope With Grief

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**"I coach 12 & U. The mother of one of my players just passed away. What can I, and the rest of the team, do to help and support her?"**

### PCA Response by Eric Fischer, PCA Marketing Manager

Thank you for reaching out to PCA. I'm deeply sorry to hear about your player losing a parent. I do not personally have any first-hand experience in dealing with the death of a player's mother, but I have dealt with the death of a teammate, and our organization has worked with coaches who have needed to handle difficult situations like the one you're experiencing now. At PCA, we offer our sincerest condolences to you, your team, and in particular, the family that is most directly coping with loss.

To answer your question, we are drawing from materials submitted as part of the nomination process in our national Double-Goal Coach® Award program. Tom MacLean, a youth football coach in Michigan, received one of our awards in part, for using football to rally his community and to help players and their families cope with grief. As one of his nominators explained, "In the years that our sons have played, we have had some terrible tragedies in the St. Regis community. Parents have lost children. Children have lost parents. At each and every turn, Tom has brought the broader community together to lift these families up from whatever has befallen them. The strength and resiliency of the human spirit is amazing, and Tom coaches us to remember that time and time again."

Recalling the death of a player's father, Tom explained, "It was a really tough deal. But this boy told his mom he had to get to practice because he knew we were going to pray for his dad. That boy set such an example, understanding how much our prayers meant. It was really beautiful. I told them, 'You're going to face things in your life that are going to be very tough to deal with, and sometimes there's no operating manual on how to get through it. But you've got some key things. You have your faith, family and friends. And you have lessons from football. Sometimes the other team is on your five yard line and you're tired, but you battle, and you don't give up, and even if you lose the game, if you tried your hardest you can walk off the field with your head held high. The same thing happens in off-the-field situations, where loved ones pass away.'"

*continues*

## Working through tragedy, continued

"Thank you. I will definitely use this information to help my player and the rest of the team through.

Below is a photo taken tonight before our game of the team showing their support for my player and her family. Sophia couldn't make it to the game but I sent the photo to her father and let him know that she was there in our hearts and the team fought back from an 11-run deficit to tie the game because she was our driving force and inspiration."



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