Courage

Teacher Guide

athletes for hope champs

CHICAGO SKY FOUNDATION
PRESENTED BY MAGELLAN

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CHAMPS is a program created by Athletes for Hope to inspire the next generation of youth to learn the importance of physical activity, mental health, and leadership from athlete role models.

Welcome!

The program's curriculum focuses on social-emotional learning by pairing interactive exercises with leadership lessons to promote physical and mental health. There are six units with each unit of the curriculum containing on-demand videos, a student workbook, and a teacher guide. Depending on availability, we also offer the opportunity for selected schools to have athlete virtual or in-person visits.

LEARN MORE

Curriculum Overview

athletes for hope champs

Our program is designed around the

CHAMPS

curriculum

- **C** OURAGE
- **H** ONESTY
- **A** CCOUNTABILITY
- **M** INDFULNESS
- **P** OSITIVITY
- **S** TRENGTH

	Mental Health Objective	**Leadership** Objective
Courage UNIT 1	Recognize courage is needed to understand and manage emotions	Recognize the benefits of overcoming fear
Honesty UNIT 2	Understand how to be truthful with how you are feeling and learn to share important information with trusted adults	Understand how to be truthful in what you say and do in your interactions with others
Accountability UNIT 3	Learn to take responsibility for the choices you make that can help you be at your best	Learn to take responsibility for how your words and actions affect others
Mindfulness UNIT 4	Learn skills and techniques to help you slow down and be present and aware of your thoughts and feelings	Learn to be aware of how others are feeling
Positivity UNIT 5	Foster a healthy mindset that looks at things in a productive way	Encourage the uplifting of others
Strength UNIT 6	Foster an understanding of resilience	Learn to lead despite adversity

athletes for hope champs	Mental Health Pillar	Leadership Pillar	Physical Activity Pillar
C OURAGE	Awareness of feelings and emotions	Be fearless	Begin a new sport or activity
H ONESTY	Ability to talk about emotions	Be truthful	New skills take time to develop into habits
A CCOUNTABILITY	Identify choices that lead to healthy habits	Be responsible	Consistency over time produces results
M INDFULNESS	Learn tools to regulate emotions	Be present	Embrace being in the moment
P OSITIVITY	Promote a positive mindset	Be positive	Positive self-talk helps you enjoy the process
S TRENGTH	Embrace healthy resilience	Be unstoppable	Adversity is an opportunity for growth
	Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It refers to how we think, feel, and act and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices.	The ability of an individual or multiple people to influence, guide and inspire others. Leaders set a good example and help others when they are in need.	Any activity that involves moving your body. It includes everyday activities, physically active play, and organized sports and exercise.

Courage

Word of the Month

Definition

Making good choices in the face of fear or obstacles; not letting fear hold you back from exploring new opportunities, developing our skills, and doing what is right.

Objectives

- Recognizing courage is needed to recognize and manage emotions
- Recognize the benefits of overcoming fear

Goals

- Help Students to discover and talk about feelings and emotions
- Help Students be fearless and authentic
- Encourage trying a new sport/physical activity/exercise

Core Questions

- What is courage?
- Why is being courageous sometimes difficult?
- How do you show courage with mental health?
- When is a time where you tried something new? How did you feel?
- How do you show courage in your class?
- How does courage help you lead?

Program Structure

Week 1

Watch the Unit Video

Featuring Megan Montefusco, Orlando Pride NWSL

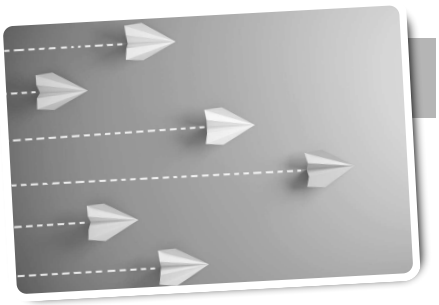
→ **Print out & distribute student workbooks**

Week 2

Mental Health Lesson plan

Go through the Mental Health lesson plan in the student workbooks.

Week 3



Leadership Lesson plan

Go through the Leadership lesson plan in the student workbooks.

Week 4

Re-watch the Unit Video

Take a few minutes to review the month's word and invite students to share how they've applied it in their lives.

Re-watch the unit video to help reinforce the messaging, themes, and topics from the unit.

Program Resources

CHAMPS LIVES

(30-45 min)

For each word of the month we will host a **virtual session with a high profile athlete**. Be on the lookup for emails regarding the dates throughout the month!

Wellbeing Corner

(30-45 min)

For each Word of the Month, we will host a **virtual session with a clinician and athlete** to discuss the mental health implications of the Word of the Month. Additional mental health resources, developed by our Wellbeing Team, are available on **pages 10–15** to provide you with further tools and support to extend these conversations with their students.

Courage

Mental Health Lesson Plan

Courage

Mental Health Objective

Definition

It takes courage to notice your feelings without running from them and to ask for help managing them when you need it.

Objective

Recognizing courage is needed to understand and manage emotions.

Warm Up Activity: Courage Charades

5 MINUTES

Preparation

Write down a list of simple, courageous acts on small pieces of paper. Examples might include:

- Standing up for a friend
- Trying something new
- Speaking in front of a group
- Facing a fear

Some students may experience worry or anxiety that goes beyond normal fear. This is not a lack of courage, but it's a signal that they may need extra support.

Activity

- Divide the kids into small groups or pairs.
- Have one child from each group pick a piece of paper and act out the scenario without using words, while their group tries to guess the action.
- After the charade is guessed, discuss briefly why the action required courage.

Post Activity Discussion

- Once every child has had a turn, gather together and discuss different forms of courage they acted out.
- Ask them questions like, "How did it feel to imagine doing that courageous thing?" or "Can you think of a time when you did something courageous?"

Physical Activity: Exercise Circle

5 MINUTES

Students gather in a circle and one at a time go into the middle and do some iteration of physical activity.

This can include:

- **Stretch**
- **Exercise**
- **Dance**
- **Jumping**

This person in the center is the leader for those 30 seconds and uses courage to help the group. Have the whole group count to ten in unison during each physical activity.

Scenario Discussion

10 MINUTES

Allow students to pass if they're not comfortable sharing. Do not probe for specifics.

You're struggling with a math unit and have a test on Thursday. Normally, you get math, but this unit feels tough, and you're anxious about asking for help. How can you find the courage to ask for help and boost your confidence for the exam?"

Follow Up Questions

- Has anyone ever been nervous for a test?
  - Emphasize that its okay to feel anxious
- Who are people you could ask for help?
- What’s something in sports that could make you nervous like a test?
  - How do you gain confidence in that situation?

Takeaway

It takes courage to listen to what your body is telling you. It’s good to recognize your feelings so you can learn how to manage them. When we feel scared, a part of our brain called the amygdala turns on. This is our brain's alarm system. Courage is not the absence of that alarm but learning to act even when the alarm is going off. And if that alarm is going off constantly, have the courage to ask an adult to help me with it.

Courage

Wellbeing Corner

Quick Reference

Overall goal in six words: Notice. Ask. Listen. Support. Connect. Escalate.

The goal of this guide is not to diagnose but to help identify areas of concern, offer the appropriate support and provide resources. Below is an example of the Tier System of the guide.

TIER 1: NORMAL

Nervous before a game or a test. Shy at first. Upset after losing. A bad day that lifts. Normalize. Coach.

TIER 2: SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATION

A change you have noticed. Still coming to school, still playing, still with friends. Ask privately. Listen. Tell the parent or guardian what you noticed. Check back within a week.

TIER 3: REFER

Weeks, not days, or any real drop in school, friends, sleep, or play. Repeated stomachaches or headaches with no clear cause. Won't come to school, goes silent when called on, won't join in. Or they ask. School counselor plus parent or guardian; school nurse first for anything physical. Tell the child you are connecting them, and why.

TIER 4: IMMEDIATE

Any statement about wanting to die, not wanting to be here, or hurting themselves. Any disclosure of abuse or fear of an adult. Immediate danger. Crisis protocol now. Stay with them. Designated staff and mandated reporting. 988 (call, text, or 988lifeline.org) for you as the adult; 911 if immediate danger.

- **The difference between Tier 1 and Tier 3 is not how big the feeling looks. It is what it is costing.** A child who cries before the game and then plays is Tier 1. A calm-looking child who has quietly stopped talking in class is Tier 3.
- **Two weeks is a pattern guide, not a waiting period.** If something worries you today, act today.
- **Children this age show distress in the body and in behavior before words.** Stomachaches, headaches, clinginess, tears out of proportion, a slide back to more childish behavior, poor sleep. Physical complaints go to the school nurse first.
- **Take "I wish I was dead" seriously every time, even from a nine-year-old, even if it sounds dramatic.** Stay calm, stay with the child, follow your crisis protocol. You are not the one who decides whether they meant it.
- **Three things never to do:** diagnose; comment on a child's body, weight, or eating (including praise); promise to keep a secret you cannot keep.

How to Use this Supplement

Each CHAMPS teacher guide gives you the lessons, athlete videos, games, and scenario discussions. This supplement adds the mental health context, so that when a child says or does something unexpected during a lesson, you know what you are looking at and what to do next. It does not replace or change any CHAMPS content.

One page per CHAMPS value, each with the same four sections: a key statistic, questions you can actually use, sports mental health clinical points tied to that unit's own activities, and when to connect a child to support.

Your role is critical. You are not being asked to diagnose but in many ways you are the first line. The International Olympic Committee built two separate tools for diagnosis: one for clinicians to assess, and one for coaches, families, and teammates to recognize. You are doing the recognition job, which is vital. You see these children more hours a week than almost any other adult, and that is your advantage.

Sourcing conventions. CHAMPS anchor means content from the Athletes for Hope CHAMPS teacher guides. Sports mental health addition means clinical context added from CDC and HRSA child health surveillance, IOC and sport consensus, and peer-reviewed research. Every figure is listed with its source at the end.

On the numbers. National data on children's mental health is usually parent-reported and covers ages 3 to 17. Wherever an ages 6 to 11 figure exists, that is the one used. When a figure comes from older students, it is labeled as such and should be read as a general direction, not an exact count for this age group. Sources and years are listed on the last page.

Courage

CHAMPS Anchor

- **Mental health objective:** recognize that courage is needed to understand and manage emotions.
- **Leadership objective:** recognize the benefits of overcoming fear.
- **Activities:** Courage Charades, Exercise Circle, Rock Paper Scissors Party, Thunderdome.

Key Stat

About 1 in 13 children ages 6 to 11 (7.5%) currently has a doctor-diagnosed anxiety problem, and it is rising: among children 6 to 17, diagnosed anxiety climbed from 8.2% in 2016 to 12.8% in 2023. Only about 6 in 10 children with anxiety get treatment.

Source: Diggs & Olfson, Academic Pediatrics 2026 (NSCH 2016-2023, parent-reported, provider-diagnosed); Ghandour et al., J Pediatr 2019 (treatment).

In a class of 25, two children likely have a diagnosed anxiety problem and at least one more is struggling without a name for it. The Courage lesson brings fear into the room on purpose. That is the right idea. It also makes you the adult in the room when "normal fear" turns out to be something more.

Questions to Ask

"Where does scared show up in your body? Your tummy, your chest, your hands?"
(Kids this age feel it in the body before they can name it.)

"Who is a grown-up you would tell if you felt scared a lot, not just once?"

"What used to be scary and isn't anymore? What changed?"

Sports Mental Health Clinical Points

Sports mental health addition

- **What "beyond normal fear" looks like at this age.** Normal fear settles with a little reassurance or a minute to warm up. Fear that needs more help does not settle. Look for: avoiding the same thing every time, not wanting to come to school, going silent when called on, or stomachaches and headaches that show up on school mornings and disappear on weekends. The question is never how big the fear looks. It is what the fear is costing the child, and whether it has lasted for weeks.
- **Kids show it in the body first.** "My stomach hurts" right before Charades or Thunderdome is information. So are clinginess, tears that seem too big for the moment, irritability, and trouble sleeping. Send physical complaints to the school nurse first so a medical cause is checked. Tell the counselor too.
- **Protect the child who freezes.** A child who will not act out a charade or compete in Thunderdome is not being defiant. Do not force it. Do not make passing visible. Give them a job instead (timekeeper, judge, scorekeeper). In Rock Paper Scissors Party, notice the child who is always out first. Never point out a scared child in front of the group. It teaches the whole class that fear is embarrassing.
- **"Allow students to pass. Do not probe for specifics" is a safety rule.** Kids this age do not filter. Some will say something worrying in front of the class: about home, about a person they fear, about not wanting to be alive. Say: "Thank you for telling me. Let's talk more after." Ask nothing else in front of the group. Move on. Follow up privately the same day. Do not promise to keep it secret; tell the child who you will talk to and why.
- **The takeaway line is the referral cue.** "If that alarm is going off constantly, have the courage to ask an adult" is exactly right. When a child tells you the alarm is always on, they have asked. Tell them what happens next: "I'm going to talk to Ms. [counselor] so she can help too." Say "you've seemed worried lately and I want to help," not "you have anxiety." One is an observation. The other is a diagnosis.
- **Fear of a person is a different pathway.** If a child's fear points at an adult or at home rather than at a situation, that is a reporting question, not a courage lesson. Teachers are mandated reporters. Follow your district process without investigating first. Do not tell the child to be brave about it.

When to Connect to Support

TIER 1: NORMAL

Shy at the start of charades. Nervous before a test. Wants a friend beside them in the Exercise Circle. Normalize and coach.

TIER 2: SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATION

Sits out the same activity every time. Stomachaches on gym days. Quieter than usual for a week or two. Ask privately and gently. Tell the parent or guardian what you noticed. Check back within a week.

TIER 3: REFER

Fear or worry lasting weeks. Missed school or a pattern of not wanting to come. Goes silent when called on. Repeated stomachaches or headaches with no clear cause (nurse first). A child who asks for help. School counselor plus parent or guardian, telling the child first.

TIER 4: IMMEDIATE

Any statement about wanting to die, not wanting to be here, or hurting themselves. Any disclosure of abuse or fear of an adult. Immediate danger. Crisis protocol now; stay with the child; designated staff and mandated reporting. 988 (call, text, or 988lifeline.org) for you as the adult; 911 if immediate danger.

Source List

Athletes for Hope CHAMPS materials

- Athletes for Hope. CHAMPS Program. https://www.athletesforhope.org/afh-champs-program-2/
- Athletes for Hope. CHAMPS Teacher Guides, Units 1 to 6: Courage, Honesty, Accountability, Mindfulness, Positivity, Strength (Word of the Month, Mental Health Lesson Plan, Leadership Lesson Plan).

National data on children's mental health

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health (National Survey of Children's Health, 2021-2023). https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data-research/index.html
- Bitsko RH, Claussen AH, Lichstein J, et al. Mental Health Surveillance Among Children, United States, 2013-2019. MMWR Suppl. 2022;71(2):1-42. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/su/su7102a1.htm
- Diggs DT, Olfson M. National Trends in Clinically Recognized Anxiety Among U.S. Children and Adolescents. Acad Pediatr. Published online June 24, 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2026.103357
- Heffernan ME, Macy ML. Trends in Mental and Physical Health Among Youths. JAMA Pediatr. Published online April 21, 2025. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2025.0556
- Danielson ML, Claussen AH, Bitsko RH, et al. ADHD Prevalence Among U.S. Children and Adolescents in 2022: Diagnosis, Severity, Co-Occurring Disorders, and Treatment. J Clin Child Adolesc Psychol. 2024;53(3):343-360.
- Ghandour RM, Sherman LJ, Vladutiu CJ, et al. Prevalence and Treatment of Depression, Anxiety, and Conduct Problems in US Children. J Pediatr. 2019;206:256-267. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30322701/

Sleep, physical activity, adversity, and protective factors

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Sleep: How Much Sleep Do I Need? (American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommendations by age). https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about/index.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity Guidelines for School-Aged Children and Adolescents (Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd ed.). https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/index.html
- Verlenden JV, Fodeman A, Wilkins N, et al. Mental Health and Suicide Risk Among High School Students and Protective Factors: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023. MMWR Suppl. 2024;73(4):79-86. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/su/pdfs/su7304a9-H.pdf
- Swedo EA, et al. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Health Conditions and Risk Behaviors Among High School Students: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023. MMWR Suppl. 2024;73(4). https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/su/pdfs/su7304a5-H.pdf
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Adverse Childhood Experiences. https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html

Bullying

- StopBullying.gov (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Facts About Bullying (National Center for Education Statistics School Crime Supplement 2021-22; YRBS 2023). https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Bullying. https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html

Mindfulness evidence and recognition tools

- Kuyken W, Ball S, Crane C, et al. Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of universal school-based mindfulness training compared with normal school provision (the MYRIAD cluster randomised controlled trial). Evid Based Ment Health. 2022;25(3):99-109. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35820992/
- Gouttebarge V, Bindra A, Blauwet C, et al. International Olympic Committee Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1 (SMHAT-1) and Sport Mental Health Recognition Tool 1 (SMHRT-1). Br J Sports Med. 2021;55(1):30-37. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32948518/

If a child is in crisis (keep these numbers handy)

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988, or chat at https://988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24/7. Available to you as the adult calling about a child. Press 2 or text in Spanish; ASL available at 988lifeline.org/ASL.
- Crisis Text Line. Text HOME to 741741 to reach a trained crisis counselor, 24/7.
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline. Call or text 1-800-422-4453. Available 24/7 with counselors and interpreters if you need help deciding whether to report.
- Your state's child abuse reporting number and your school's crisis protocol come first. Keep them written next to this page.

For reporting, planning, and going deeper

- Child Welfare Information Gateway (HHS Children's Bureau). Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect. https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/manda/ (state-by-state search: https://acf.gov/cb/law-regulation/state-statutes-search)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools: An Action Guide for School and District Leaders (2023). https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/index.html
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Resources for educators on trauma and child stress. https://www.nctsn.org/audiences/school-personnel
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Facts for Families (plain-language guides on specific conditions, free). https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/

All sources and links were checked in September 2026. Where a figure comes from a survey of older students, that is stated on the page where it appears.

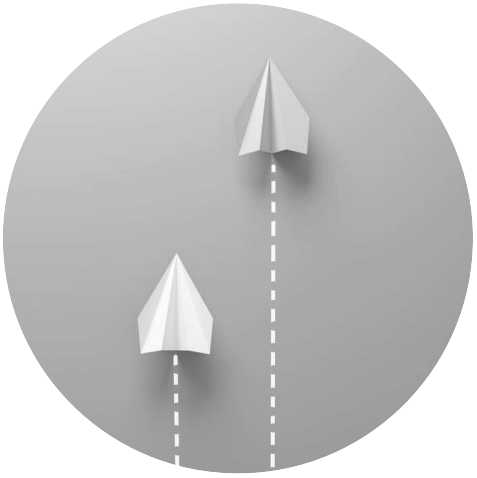
This supplement supports the CHAMPS curriculum. It is educational material for teachers and does not constitute clinical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Teachers should follow their own school or district policies on crisis response, mandated reporting, and family notification, which take precedence over any guidance here.

Courage

Leadership Lesson Plan

Courage

Leadership Objective



Definition

Making good choices in the face of fear or obstacles; not letting fear hold you back from exploring new opportunities, developing our skills, and doing what is right. (BRAVERY)

Objective

Recognizing the benefits of overcoming fear and uncertainty.

Warm Up Activity: Rock Paper Scissors Party

5 MINUTES

Rules of the Game

- Start by everyone pairing up, spread out.
- Then they play rock paper scissors
  - The winner will go onto the next round and be the leader for their team
  - Who ever loses becomes a member of the winners team and cheers them on
- The next round is the same find another team with a similar amount of fans and play rock paper scissors
  - Then again the winner will stay the leader of the team
  - The loser will become a member of the winners team along with their team members
- Go until there are two teams and have a showdown where the teams cheer on their leader

Post Activity Discussion

- “What did you learn about being a leader?”
- “Was it hard to make decisions quickly?”
- “How did your team help you as a leader?”

Physical Activity: Thunderdome

5 MINUTES

Divide students into teams

#s depend on class size

Explain the rules

Each team will send one player at a time to compete in each challenge located in the "Thunderdome" (i.e. middle of room, front of room, etc.)

- The players will not know the challenge until each team sends someone to the Thunderdome
- Players cannot go more than once
- The player who best accomplishes the challenge scores a point for their team The team with the most points wins!
- Start the game Challenge Examples:
  - Can jump the furthest (standing long jump)
  - Can hold a plank for the longest amount of time
  - Has the best balance (who can stand on one leg the longest; this may get long unless you add some challenging elements – e.g. standing on one leg with eyes closed, standing on one leg while doing ankle circles, etc.)
  - Can do the most jumping jacks in one minute.
  - Can hold a wall squat for the longest amount of time

Scenario Discussion

10 MINUTES

"You're playing basketball, and you notice that no one has passed the ball to Carson, the new student. Now you have the ball—your friend is calling for it, but Carson is wide open. How can you show courage and inspire others to do the same?"

Discuss the scenario with the class and decide what the students would do.

Follow Up Questions

- If your friends ask you why you made your decision after what would you say?
- What are some good things that could happen if you pass to Carson?
- If Carson misses what would you say to him after?

Takeaway

- When you choose to be brave and not let fear hold you back from doing what is right, you can inspire people around you to be courageous too!

Get Involved.
Be Inspired.

We want to hear from you!

About Athletes for Hope

Educating athletes on their potential to make a positive impact on the world, connecting them with the causes they care about & inspiring others to do the same.

Any Questions? Want to schedule a visit?

Reach out to **Kendra Coleman** at kcoleman@athletesforhope.org

athletes for hope champs

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