Strong Minds Clinical Director

Special Olympics Health
MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

Strong Minds is an interactive learning activity focused on **developing adaptive coping skills.** Competition provides a natural opportunity to develop active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness under stress, such as: thinking positive thoughts, releasing stress and connecting with others. Athletes try a few different active coping strategies as they move through the stations. Before exiting, athletes identify the strategies they like best and volunteers provide them with visual reminders to use these tools in competition and in daily life.

Purpose & Goals

The goal of Strong Minds is to improve the emotional well-being of Special Olympics athletes and people with ID by increasing awareness and use of healthy coping strategies. This is achieved by:

- Teaching athletes practical coping strategies for competition and everyday life.
- Helping athletes identify coping skills that work best for them.
- Providing resources for athletes, coaches, and caregivers to support emotional wellness.
- Increasing access to community care by:
  - Training mental health professionals on how to effectively serve individuals with ID.
  - Connecting local mental health providers who are interested in working with people with ID to athletes and their families.

Contact:
Amber@specialolympicsarkansas.org

Importance & Impact

Pilot data from Strong Minds events found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes in the U.S. face significant stresses on a daily basis, but have access to only a few adaptive coping strategies (Hartley & MacLean, 2010)

- **12%** of athletes report having no coping strategies
- **62%** mostly use avoidant strategies (e.g., not think the stressor), which is associated with increased depression
- **26%** mostly use active strategies (e.g. doing something to help themselves to feel better), which is associated with increased well-being