

Keeping a Healthy Mind & Spirit: Dr. John Heil



Dr. John Heil is a well-respected member of the Virginia Amateur Sports Board of Directors and a leader in sports psychology in Virginia.

He has been looking at the COVID-19 pandemic from a different angle, one that sees not only the deep impact the virus' disruption is causing the world economy and the sports world in general, but ways to use this crisis as a lesson for the future.

Heil asks a rhetorical, comically absurd question: "If you needed surgery would you have a friend look up a how-to video on YouTube and then perform the surgery on you?"

Obviously not, yet that is not far from the case when considering the spread of misinformation about COVID-19. The level of rumor and ill-informed conjecture is staggering. It's leading to people making decisions that could have severely adverse consequences.

First and foremost, Heil says, check the sources of information. Trust experts.

"There's a lot of noise and a lot of misinformation out there," Dr. Heil said.

Recognize bias that can be intentional – as in the case of a spokesperson or someone who stands to gain from the espoused outcome – or unintentional, like hearing a factoid about a serious topic when passed through the various filters of simplicity, brevity and flashy to attract attention (and clicks).

"We must get our information from professionals," Heil said. "Science is good at sorting out fears from facts."

Heil, the past medical chairman for VAS and a member of the board since the early '90s with only a single year off, said the lessons of sports can be translated to dealing with the psychological battles that come with being one person in a global fight with a pandemic.

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“There’s a lot we can learn from sport. Sport is a situation that teaches how to cope in times of stress,” Heil said. “We draw on the lessons of what we’ve learned: How we relate to others; how to maintain our composure; how to deal with adversity and setbacks. Plus, we have to set goals and move forward after setbacks.”

Heil shared an article from the Association for Applied Sports Psychology (link below) that offered these tips for dealing with the disruption of COVID-19, expounded upon in the article:

Everyone:

- Recognize that we are in this together.
- Recognize that the emotional roller coaster is real.
- Put your basic needs first.
- Maintain virtual communication.
- Stay updated
- Exercise is medicine
- -Monitor your mental and emotional health

Athletes and other performers:

- *Talk it out*
- *Consider how you want to continue engaging in your sport*
- *Remember your “why.”*
- *Focus on physical and mental fitness*
- *Establish a daily routine*

Coaches, teachers, and instructors:

- *Stay connected*
- *Recognize the degrees of impact*
- *Continue to be a resource*
- *Remain neutral and factual*
- *Practice and model self-care*

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- *Take care of yourself, too:*

Parents and guardians:

- *Maintain awareness and initiate action*
- *Be a positive role model*
- *Encourage self-care, creativity, and meaning-making*
- *Take care of yourself, too*
- *Reach out for help if needed*

https://appliedsportpsych.org/blog/2020/03/the-covid-19-pandemic-tips-for-athletes-coaches-parents-and-the-sport-community/?fbclid=IwAR369zPX-TNJ9OvOOmnl-VLxq1rF7VRh87AohZ_rhTocvn37itx8dMI1mmw

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