

Chairman Wilborn and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Luke Town. My wife, Carla, and I are the owners of Advanced Baseball Academy LLC and Advanced Fastpitch Academy, located in Stilwell KS. We started our business back in August of 2011. Please allow me a minute to explain why we started our business and my concerns today concerning the mental health of the youth.

I am in my 30th year of coaching baseball and softball and am highly active in the communities for not only our area of Kansas and Missouri, but on a national level as well.

I am not addressing issues concerning our business. This mandatory shut down has been an extremely hard struggle to keep our heads afloat, and we still have not received any SBA help, but we have the life experiences to overcome this setback. My concerns are in a different area that is having a devastating affect on a particular demographic to the citizens of Kansas and our nation.

From 2005 until Spring of 2011, I coached baseball as a rule 10 certified coach at an area high school before starting our business. In those six years, there were seven teen suicides and several attempts, in that school alone. The first time I saw one of my former players laying in a coffin, because he chose to end his life, it made a dramatic impact on not only how I coach, but why I coach. That experience changed who I was and to this day, I still have a difficult time talking about it.

I am now a transformational coach/mentor. That is the "how I coach." The why I coach is to transform lives. Our mission has been to create a competitive, safe environment in a non-threatening, drug-free culture. Sports, especially baseball and softball, are great tools to teach our youth how to deal with and overcome adversity, create passion to instill a work ethic and to teach them how to reverse perfectionism, which so many of our kids are suffering from this crippling disease.

We created a program philosophy called IMPACT. IMPACT is an acronym for what we teach, and it stands for: Integrity, Motivation, Positive, Accountability, Caring, Time. We felt an obligation and a calling to create a program to help young people and attempt to prevent teen suicide.

I love what I do. It has gone well beyond a business and has become a passion and a ministry. My wife and I put in 70 to 80 hours a week working.

When you show these kids a goal with these phases, they can see the goal. Now they can make plans on how to reach that goal and score. But when the goal post is moved just as they are kicking the ball and they can see that they have no chance of scoring... they become emotionally devastated and demotivated.

When the cure is worse than the disease, hope is lost. When these kids lose hope, you'll be watching another statistic make a dramatic climb. TEEN SUICIDE!

Our government has closed the schools. Isolated them by taking away physical contact with their friends, removed sports out of their daily lives and have replaced routine and stability with panic, hysteria, and inescapable uncertainty. The conditions are ripe with this forced isolation for depression, anxiety, substance abuse and hopelessness. The stage is set for an epidemic of teen suicide.

I had one of my athletes schedule a meeting to come in and talk with me Thursday, May 14th. (The same day that our governor made the decision to add Phase 1.5.) This athlete is a junior in high school. The athlete has decided to stop playing the sport and just quit the team. When I asked why, the reply was, "My dream is dead. I have no chance now to attend the college I have dreamed of playing since I was a little kid." The athlete went on, "When I spoke to the college coaches of my dream school, who were at one time interested in me, now they told me that they are no longer interested in me as a prospect and they will not be recruiting anyone from the 2021 class because their rosters were too full." (All college athletes gained another year of eligibility when schools pulled the plug on their seasons. High school athletes do not get a "Do-Over" forcing a backup in the recruiting process)

This 17-year-old kid has been contemplating suicide and is at a higher risk of losing her life from self-infliction than the Covid 19 virus.

I have been in contact with nearly all of my 300 athletes and their parents. A vast majority of the athletes in my program are suffering from depression and anxiety. I have included several emails that I have received from parents and players and their concerns. (Please take a moment to read them.)

We are not alone. It is happening all over the country and in the Midwest. I have found several reports of an increase in mental health calls.

Milwaukee County's Emergency Medical Services Division has seen a drastic increase in calls for mental health concerns and drug overdoses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been a 70 percent increase in EMS responses to mental health concerns, a 54 percent increase in responses to drug overdoses and a "very concerning" 80 percent increase in responses to suicide attempts.

According to an April 14, 2020 article in the Kansas City Star, there is a 22% increase in domestic violence calls in Kansas.

Last month another High School Senior from Blue Valley West in Johnson County took his own life. Was it related to this shutdown and the pandemic? I am not sure. But I do know that from the conversations I am having with the high school athletes in my program and what they are hearing from their friends, that many are feeling hopeless. Several of my older kids in the program have told me they have concerns with some of their friends attempting suicide. Nearly all of my older kids are struggling with depression.

- One mother of a 9-year-old told us that she has started taking her son to see a therapist for depression. The son is losing interest in doing things that make him happy. He doesn't see the need to keep practicing baseball or going to school.
- Another Father in our program told me that his 10-year-old son has been talking about death a lot and what kind of funeral he wants, if he dies. His son is very depressed and is having panic attacks.
- One of my high school athletes told me that she can't sleep at nights. She is having a hard time having good thoughts about the future. She too described that sometimes in the night, she has a hard time breathing like she is drowning. (Classic signs of a panic attack)
- A 14-year-old boy called me today, Saturday May 16th, after I notified all the program athletes that the Governor had changed the phases and we have to cancel practices next week. He said,

“Coach, I am really struggling right now. I feel like I will not get to go back to school, hang out with my friends and not get to play baseball again. Can’t we just break the rules like so many other teams are doing? A lot of my friends who play for other clubs are practicing. Is it ok if I go practice with their team?” (Remember the “I” in IMPACT?) My answer was, “I am sorry kiddo, unlike some, integrity is important to us. We will continue to follow the rules.”

This new phase is hurting the athletic programs like ours, who are following the rules. There is a great number of private teams and other clubs who are not following these rules and guidelines. They are running team practices on Church fields, school fields, and privately owned fields.

From March 12 to today, May 16th, we have lost thousands of dollars during this forced shutdown without any support from the government, now we are at risk of losing clients because we will not cheat. It is hard to teach integrity to kids and do the right thing and follow the law, when they see their friends doing what they want to do. They are seeing their friends and adults not respecting authority and it becomes pretty easy to follow their lead.

The isolation is not only weakening their immune systems, it is weakening their minds. The mental health of our kids right now is not in a good place for a vast majority. These young minds do not have the life experiences to put things in perspective. I am very fearful that illegal drugs and alcohol abuse from depression and hopelessness will be on the rise. But I am more fearful that the suicide rate will go through the roof and will become a pandemic worse than Covid 19.

We started this entire shutdown to flatten the curve. To keep the hospitals from becoming overwhelmed. We are going to get past the point of rescue, if we do not allow our community to open back up. At least lift the restrictions on youth sports. Let the parents make the decisions on what is best for their kids.

I understand that our government thinks they are trying to protect us from this virus and slow down the spread, but who is going to protect us from our government. The solution is becoming worse than the problem. The solution of isolation is causing devastating effects on the mental well-being of not only adults, but especially our young minds. At this point, the Cure is worse than the disease.

Respectfully,

Luke Town

Owner/Mentor

Advanced Baseball/Fastpitch Academy

7380 W. 162nd St., Stilwell KS 66085

Here are emails that I am getting from my Parents and players.

This parent wanted her and her daughter to remain anonymous I did remove the names.

Coach Town,

Is there any way you can talk with "my daughter"? She is a mess right now. I am extremely worried about where she is mentally and emotionally.

She got the news this morning that the practices that were planned for the 18th have now been canceled due to the Governor adding the new phase. She is heartbroken. She burst in to tears and sobbed uncontrollably. I have not seen her cry like this since she was 7. She said, "Nobody understands how much this means to us. We cant go to school, we cant practice softball or play games, we cant go to a movie, we cant even have friends over." It is so hard for a 14 year old to understand these things and they can be a little melodramatic, but I fear this is going to a different level. Shame on our Governor for changing the plans after giving our children a glimpse of the sunlight.

I am really concerned about the mental state of all my kids right now, but especially "M". My husband and I are trying to get her in to a therapist, but they all seem to be booked up for months right now. We were told to take her to an emergency room, but that is the last place I want to take her right now. I am afraid that she is going to be a statistic. She is not sleeping, not eating very well, and has pulled herself away from all of us even more. She is extremely depressed!

I would appreciate it if you could give her a phone call. She really looks up to you and I trust your voice to be in line with ours. One of your funny stories would go a long way with her right now.

Thank you,

L.

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to ask that kids sports are permitted to resume immediately. As data has continued to show, COVID-19 poses the least risk to youth. However, mental health is a growing concern. We have seen a large decline in our daughter's mood, mental state, and physical condition since she's not been able to participate in sports. We are concerned that the isolation, combined with a lack of physical and mental stimulation, is presenting a health crisis for our daughter and her peers.

Please, for the sake of our children's health, allow sports to resume immediately.

Regards,

Dr. Kirk and Merinda Iodice

Alyssa Iodice's parents

Coach Town

Oh my goodness! You have GOT to be kidding me. This is absolutely ridiculous and is like driving a dagger into my kids' hearts. The constant toying with my kids' emotions like this is heartbreaking to me as their parent. To see their excitement peak at the anticipation of getting to play ball again and then plummet without warning is literally killing them.... their spirits. Lincoln was itching with anticipation to start play again, and Hazel said, "Mom, I'm so excited to play softball again, but mostly I am super excited to be with my teammates again and to actually see them in real life (not on a computer).

Luke... seriously, we have to get a message to the governor and her people that this has GOT to stop!! Let the kids play. Let the parents decide what is best for their kids. And let's have the governor step back. It is time to move on and place our Faith in God.... fear is the enemy here.

I am heartbroken over this. My eldest daughter already lost out on her HS track season and a good chunk of her club volleyball season. Now 2 more kids of mine are starting to lose out.

Thank you for advocating for our kids.

Brendon McIntire

Hey Luke,

Writing a quick note to let you know how disappointed I am with the state's decision to delay team sports (including practices again).

As you know Braylon suffers with self-esteem. Baseball is the one thing that has really allowed him to gain more confidence and be more comfortable in his own skin. With baseball being taken away from him I've noticed him going back to his old self at times. I've also seen him not be as active. I fear it's depression.

I know you want things back just as bad as I do, I just wish that the solution didn't come at such a drastic cost to our children. It's not as much about the physical that I'm worried about, it's the mental side that I fear will have a long-lasting effect on my kids.

Thanks for letting me vent.

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Luke,

Kids have had it rougher than adults during this lockdown period. We as adults, have to still support the family with food, work, and some goods. Those activities force social interaction. Our kids on the other hand don't leave the home. Other than a trip to a lake to go fishing Hudson has been at the home since lockdown. It is affecting his mental health as well as

he wonders if he will be good enough or smart enough to do all of the things he did before with school and sports. Practicing on things alone is just not the same as working with coaches and teammates, or teachers. (we both discovered what awful teachers we would be!!!) We would very much like to get him outside and playing with his friends.

*Throwing/Hitting a baseball from many **yards** away will help him and others get back to being social and experience the comradery of his baseball team.*

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your program!

Shawn and Jolyn Daniels

Luke,

I, like many other parents, are dismayed by the decision to delay the start of youth sports. I worry that people aren't understanding the impact that COVID is having on our children and the role that sports can play in returning some level of normalcy and hope into their lives.

I'm really concerned for our children as so many of them look to sports as an outlet from the stress and rigors in their lives. Personally, my son has shared that he feels like he doesn't have an outlet from everything that is going on these days. For him, baseball was the outlet that afforded him the opportunity to connect with friends, forget about his troubles and really focus on something that, for him, represent pure joy.

I'm worried about him not having, as he put it, "the one thing that let me be me," and the affect that is having on him. He needs something to look forward to and for him, like so many kids, sports represent hope and opportunity. We need to give our kids back their hopes and dreams.

Sadly, my son and I drove by a public golf course yesterday and saw that it was packed with golfers. They weren't social distancing. They weren't wearing masks. They weren't reducing the risk or spread of COVID. They were out enjoying their lives and, I guess, getting their sense of normalcy.

As we drove by my son looked at me and said, "Dad, how does this make sense? The adults get to make sad choices and put their families at risk, but somehow, it's too dangerous for me to even go to baseball practice? Dad, I just don't get it."

Honestly, I don't get it either. I don't understand how we've lost the focus on the physical and mental well being of our youth and have decided to further delay their opportunity for hope.

Thanks,

Derek

Senators,

Thank you for taking the time to hear the perspective of some of your constituents - particularly leaders such as Coach Town.

I am the father of both 14 year and 10 year old daughters that happen to be players in Coach Town's program. I'd like to share with you the impacts the shelter at home order has had on their emotional and mental well-beings.

Like most children, both have missed the ends of their school year and miss seeing and being with their friends. Our daughters attend Catholic school and the 8th grade year in particular is an important one in their lives. My 14-year-old daughter has missed Confirmation (a key step in her faith journey) as well as 8th grade graduation. She has been a part of the AFA program for many years now and in addition to helping her work towards her athletic goals in softball, this program is one that takes a unique focus on developing community leaders and people of character. The time she has missed with the regular program activities and time with her teammates has only been an additional detriment to her mental and emotional well-being. She has become "quick to trigger", overly stressed - to the point of tears when it came to dealing with some of the virtual schooling, and increasingly I find her isolating herself from others.

These are serious warning signs to any parent of a teenager these days. And now, just when there appeared to be a light at the end of the tunnel that would allow her to resume some form of normalcy in her life in terms of spending time with her teammates and practicing (in a safe, socially distanced and responsible manner), the Governor has chosen to "move the goal posts".

Believe me, my wife and I understand that in the grand scheme of things we're talking specifically about youth sports here on the surface. But deeper down - we are parents concerned about the mental well-being of our daughter.

I also coach the 14u team for AFA and I see the impact this is having on the other 12 girls on this team as we interact through virtual training sessions. I can tell you directly that this is having concerning negative effects on many of the girls well-being. I am concerned about depression, self-esteem, and in some cases an urge to physically harm themselves. I have had one conversation in the last several weeks with a parent who discovered a girl was "cutting" herself. Although these measures in response to COVID-19 are not solely the source of issues such as this, they certainly exacerbate these problems. I urge you to ask the Governor and KDHE officials to reconsider this phase 1.5 approach, return to the plan that was in place, and allow our youth and small businesses to return to action.

Respectfully,

Bryan & Susanna Dickerson

12913 W 124th St

Overland Park, Kansas 66213

This next email is from one of my 14-year-old girls whose name is going to remain private.

How am I mentally, well let's see. It feels like I may not be able to see any of my teammates who I love and miss. It feels like I'm being told I can't see my sisters because the governor doesn't want me to. That's who my teammates are to me; they're my sisters. As an only child it hurts not being able to see your sisters. Yes, I can always text them or face time them but it's not the same as seeing them on the field playing the game we all love. I can't practice or play in tournaments, unlike some friends of mine. But I can't even begin to express how much I miss them on the field. My favorite quote is "Stars can't shine without darkness", but when will this darkness end. When will things go back to normal. There's so many questions I have along with many other people. Whenever I need to blow off some steam I go to the field and bring my team. Normally I would be able to hangout with my teammates or other friends after a tournament but I can't. Softball is my way out and my way to relieve stress but ever since Corona happened I don't have that way out. So I go to my room and try to figure out another way. It's been about three and a half months and I have still yet to find a way that works just as well as softball. So, how am I mentally, on a scale of one to ten. Ten being amazing, I'm about negative 50. No, that's not an exaggeration.

To whom it may concern:

My name is Lindsay Sutton. I have been an educator for 20 years. I have my school counseling degree and was a counselor for 12 years. I had to step back from that role because of the number of suicide threats and attempts of children. In one year, at one school, we had 17 threats, from elementary students! Every one of those threats were issues and concerns that we took seriously. It was so overwhelming and a lot of stress for me to bare that I had to walk away from a job I loved so much. Our kids are hurting and we have to do something as a society.

I have one son (12 years old) and two stepdaughters (14 & 16). All three kids are very active in sports. My son and one of my stepdaughters struggle with depression and are on medication for it. The sports they play are their outlet. They are really struggling at home right now being away from their friends, their coaches and their favorite sports. These are things that they love and that are important to them. It keeps them motivated and happy.

I am not only speaking for my kids, but for all kids across Kansas, when I say that mental health was a huge problem before all of the shutdowns and it has really intensified and even MORE of a problem with being on lockdown. We need to step in and help! Mental health is just as important as physical health.

I completely agree with the Governor shutting things down for a couple of weeks, but I feel that we are at a point where we need to start having some normalcy for our kids. Pediatricians are saying the same things in regard to mental health being a huge concern right now. I feel like the steps my son's baseball club was planning to take, for the safety of our kids, was enough for me to feel good about him playing again, even with having asthma. Please reconsider changing the guidelines for youth sports. I know that parents and kids are willing to take whatever precautions we need to in order to get back on the fields!

Sincerely,
Lindsay Sutton

Coach Town,

Good afternoon. I was very disappointed to see your email this morning regarding the governor's decision to keep youth sports off the field for two more weeks. I can't speak for anyone else, but for my son, this is about more than baseball. This is about being accountable. This is about having coaches who provide discipline and structure. This is about having peers to be responsible to and for. This is about having the upperclassman to turn to when pressures of a teenage boy get to them. Someone to say "hey, I understand, I've been there too, you don't have to turn to drugs, you don't have to turn the alcohol, we're here for you". As parents we try to provide these things at home, but as anyone who has raised teenagers will tell you, mom and dad aren't always who they want to hear from. Coach, I am very concerned about where my son is mentally. He is not the same kid he was 3 months ago. He is starting to distant himself away from us. He is very negative in the things he says. He is losing hope and his ambition to continue to work hard on school and the sport he loves and motivates him.

Since starting your program, my son has gone from a good student getting A's and B's to being a great student with a 4.0 GPA. He went from a kid who had a good work ethic to a kid who has a great work ethic. He wants to be a success and he wants to achieve great things. But every week that goes by he keeps asking, "when are we going to get to go back the way things were". I see the stress in his eyes, I see the mental anguish it is taking on him. It's crippling these children to keep them locked down. We are asking for some sort of help to get back to some sense of normalcy. I'm afraid if we put this off much longer, the problem it is going to cause far outweighs anything we've seen yet.

Thank you for your understanding and your support.
Sincerely Mark and Lori Driskell
612-419-3786

This is from a 14-year-old Male in the program.

Dear Coach Town,

I am disappointed that I cannot play the sport I love and that I cannot spend valuable time with my teammates. My experience with this whole pandemic hasn't been too bad because I am fortunate enough to have a healthy home life, but I do know kids that have had troubles with their emotions and mental well-being. This is a quote

from one of those kids, "School is my safe place, school is where I can escape the chaos at home" For me, I have been playing ball for as long as I can remember and I am tired of being cooped up and just being inside my house. Baseball gets my mind off of things and the field is my happy place. I don't want it to be taken away from me or anyone else that loves the game. Thank you Coach, for being our leader and carrying us through a hard time.

Sincerely~ Vance Pringle

Hi Coach,

Had a feeling this email was coming but definitely hated seeing it! I agree this whole isolation situation is taking a huge toll on our youth.

For us personally we know Maddie has been struggling even wanting to get out of bed each day and do her schoolwork, softball drills or just do life in general. We've noticed her becoming withdrawn from things that normally would bring her joy. Her spirits were lifted when she was able to do lessons again this week with Coach Hawks & Coach Thompson and was ready to get back next week with her team that she misses so much. As you know Maddie overall is a pretty private person who always says "I'm good" or "Things are good" when there has been an obvious shift in her well-being. She's already stressed about her playing ability for the upcoming season due to not being able to workout with her team and this is affecting her overall confidence in herself already. Softball is her passion and I am concerned with all this going on could make her want to hang up the cleats. All she wants to do is be with her teammates and coaches and get back to something that brings her happiness. I think it's unfair that organized sports are not allowed to start practicing with restrictions, at least allow teams to get together when all these other types of businesses are allowed to open and being in larger groups of people inside a facility. I feel this toll on our kids is going to be far larger than people realize, let them get back to some type or normalcy! I've seen on Facebook where some teams have already started doing team practices last week which makes no sense to me.

I appreciate all that AFA has done for our kids throughout the quarantine as I know it's been hard on everyone! We truly appreciate how much you care for all your players and their well-being. This is why we know we are at the right place!

Will we be able to still do lessons until we are able to get the teams back together?

Thank you for your time!

Angela Horsley

Coach Town,

Thank you so much for being an advocate for our players/daughters.

My daughter Porscha (Pj) has played softball since the age of 8, she is now 17. Her friends are those who share the diamond with her, she misses them dearly, but understands the gravity the Serious nature of the pandemic. Softball is and has always been her outlet for life stressors. She is craving the adrenaline, comradery, and structure that softball gives her. This is a pivotal year for her as she is going into her senior year; this is her time to show colleges that she is worthy of being a part of their program. She has dreamed of being a collegiate athlete since grade school. The fear of the recruiting process weighed heavy on her prior to the pandemic, but now adding the fear of the unknown, and the feeling of seclusion it has taken a toll on her mentally and physically. She expresses to us her feelings of being secluded, Confusion and worries of what her future may hold. She tries to hold back her tears; she is strong, but You can only imagine being a 17 year old girl during a time when everything In her world has been turned upside down. Navigation of this world without a pandemic is a skill these young minds are trying to figure out.

Pj needs her sport, her coaches, her teammates. She needs this piece of her world put back together, maybe not exactly how it was, but different is better than nothing at all. We have to look at the long-term impact of the separation from an outlet like softball. Please consider allowing our kids to get back to the diamond, back to working hard, and getting their mind off "The worlds" problems that they have yet to inherit.

Thank you,

Elizabeth

Coach Town

Ja'Hawn has struggled with depression for years. Sports are his outlet. We know that exercise and human interaction are both powerful ways to battle depression. It is also difficult to control everything an 18-year-old does. To this point he has listened to what I have to say, and is limiting his contact with others. I fear that won't happen for much longer. I would much rather have him with adults that I trust around kids whose parents that I trust, than possibly choosing to go hang out with other kids in uncontrolled, unsupervised situations. I personally am very careful in this whole situation. I'm a teacher so I get the privilege of staying home, and I will continue to do so. I also understand that kids take risks. I can guide Ja'Hawn but I can't control him, he's 18. Even if I felt like there was some risk to him practicing baseball right now, it is a calculated risk that we can agree on with people I can trust. I fear if this goes

on much longer he will start taking risks that are far less controlled which will not only put him, and my family in danger, it will put a strain on the relationship Ja'Hawn and I have built over the last three years.

James

Read this one below

To Whom it May Concern;

"As a parent of a 15, 13 and 8 year old, it's safe to say our family spends the majority of our free time in competitive sports. Whether it's tournaments or practices, this is our happy place! And it's important to point out that it is by their choice and has been since they were young. Whether baseball for our son or softball for our daughter, it is their outlet in life. It is their social life, it is their exercise, it is their passion, and it was the first thing they learned to love and dedicate themselves to even as a 6 year old. Coaches are their teachers! Sports are much more than the game itself. Sports have taught my kids teamwork, failure, success, compassion, health, diet, leadership and work ethic. From the time she was 8 my daughter's goal was to make her Varsity High School softball team. She spent the last three years working daily, attending camps, never missing practice, training winters, traveling, etc. She achieved her goal, and week later learned there wouldn't be a season.

My 8 year old has the same dedication. His short term goal was to travel with his team and win a tournament. In part he was probably more excited to stay in a hotel with his 8 closest friends and swim, and that's important! His dreams also continue to be put on hold!

And it's important to note that while my family is following the recommendations, I have to explain to them why 30 people are in line at Home Depot? Why is it ok for 20 people to be gathered outside an ice cream shop? Why can people work out indoors at a gym? There is no good explanation! Our most valued and vulnerable people, our kids have been left out of the reopening conversation for months. Youth sports has been brushed off as a last phase because they have the softest voices. Because our kids and parents aren't considered a business, they are left to suffer because our elected officials spent the last several weeks talking about hair, nails, massages, and bars! The mental and physical health of our kids should never take a back seat to any of these things! And regardless of which side of the argument about reopening you are on, our kids health should have been the first priority on how to open safely immediately. All they've known at this stage in their life is that they picked up a ball when they were 2 and fell in love with a sport. They've spend all if their time and effort in that sport for years, and now they are kept from taking the field while adults are complaining about haircuts! Meanwhile kids suffer with anxiety, depression, or worse! I've personally witnessed the physical and mental changes in all 3 of my kids. And all in different ways. It is unacceptable for this to continue even one more day! I refuse! I will continue to take my kids to practice and encourage and applaud their coaches for showing up at the field. I will seek tournaments in Oklahoma and spend my fees, hotel costs, and tourist dollars elsewhere until this is resolved!

Craig Sapp
Lenexa KS
913-706-3493

This Next Email was very long. I cut out the top portion of it.

This worked well for about a week and a half. From there his attitude faulted and what was once a fierce drive and dedication to the process was drastically diminished. At one point emotion took over him as we worked on hitting in our make shift training center in the garage and he began to sob. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to see his teammates again this season, he'd never be able to show his coaches how much better he has gotten and that the game he loves was for all intents taken away from him. But who can blame him? All we see on the news is "the new normal." Did they ever stop to think what an 11 year old thinks when they hear that non-sense all over the news? He hears I'm not going to be able to see my friends and teammates, I don't get to go to school again, summer is canceled, I won't be able to see my grandparents and I don't get to play baseball again. Kids unlike most adults lack the ability to think long term. They live in the present- they should, they are kids. It's the parents job to think about their future. All they need to do is have dreams. But again, think back to to the new normal phrase and you are continually sucking the hope out of children.

As we progressed through the next few weeks and through all the uplifting parenting tactics, we continued to see anxiety rise both with regards to school and baseball. We predominately felt the effects in short tempers, increased aggression and diminished perseverance. Oh but then there was hope, they started talking about opening baseball back up in early May, then it was mid-May and now it has been again pushed to the end of May. As annoying as this is for adults imagine what this does to a child. Remember they have a hard time seeing past tomorrow to begin with. Take this for example: At the beginning of the week you tell a kid he has to get an 80 on his final exam to pass the class. He gets to studying but then mid-week you tell him it's a 90. Then the morning he walks in you tell him he has to have a perfect score. Did you just stress out a bit? Personally, I had panic attacks studying for college exams the way it was. Now dealing with an ever-changing goal line, that's is purely disheartening and cruel.

There is no reason why baseball or other athletic teams can't be allowed to scheme practices such that all of the social distancing and other safeguarding measures can be met. These kids are at a tipping point and Kansas is flirting with a much greater problem for them than this pandemic. The lasting impacts of anxiety and depression in youth that haven't had chance to develop coping skills or know how to ask for help is far and away parents greater concern. Kids need their friends, coaches, mentors and the activities that fuel their passions.

Thank you for seeking our opinion Coach Town,

- Ernst Family