



SIDELINE STRONG

FREE TOOL 10 / 10

READY IN THE HEAD

A mental readiness check for return to play — because the body isn't the only thing that needs clearing.

FOR TRAINERS + ATHLETES



FOR ATHLETIC TRAINERS + ATHLETES

CLEARED TO PLAY ISN'T THE SAME AS READY TO PLAY.

Research, especially on knee injuries, shows fear of re-injury is a common reason athletes don't return to their old level — even when the body is ready. Check the head before the first game.

Athlete: rate each line. 1 = not true at all · 5 = completely true

STATEMENT		1	2	3	4	5
01	I trust my body to handle full speed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
02	I can stop thinking about the injury when I play.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
03	I feel ready to compete, not just practice.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
04	I'm coming back because I want to, not because I feel pressure.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
05	I know what I'll do if I feel pain.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
06	I can picture myself playing my best again.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
07	I'm sleeping well and feeling like myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
08	If I'm struggling, I know who to tell.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

This is a conversation starter, not a validated clinical scale. It does not replace your medical team's clearance.



FOR THE ATHLETIC TRAINER

READ IT TOGETHER.

ANY LINE AT 1-2

Talk about it before clearance: "Tell me about this one."

LINE 04 IS LOW

Pressure is driving the return. Bring in the parent and coach.

LINE 07 OR 08 IS LOW

This may be bigger than the injury. Connect One through your school's protocol.

RETURN IN STAGES – MIND + BODY

STAGE	BODY	MIND
PRACTICE REPS	Non-contact drills at speed	Imagery of the exact move that caused the injury, done cleanly
CONTACT	Controlled contact	One cue word to use when fear shows up
GAME MINUTES	Limited minutes, then full	A first-game plan, and a confidence check after

MY READY PLAN

My cue word

My first-game focus

The person I'll tell if I'm struggling

CLEAR THE HEAD, NOT JUST THE BODY.

CONNECT ONE

THE FOUR DOORS

You don't have to fix it. You have to walk them to a door.

DOOR 01

Student Services

School counselor, social worker or psychologist

DOOR 02

A Trusted Adult

A coach or staff member they already talk to

DOOR 03

The Athletic Trainer

The adult who sees them most during rehab

DOOR 04

988 Lifeline

Free, confidential, 24/7 — call or text 988

988

Call or text 988 · Chat at 988lifeline.org

Worried right now? Don't wait and don't leave them alone. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

READY FOR THE FULL PLAYBOOK?

THE ATC MENTAL READINESS MODULE

Mental skills by rehab phase, return-to-play readiness + referral workflows. → HuddleForAthletes.com

HUMAN FIRST.

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