

Who Should Use This Guide?

This guide is intended to help parents of children and adolescents seeking to enhance their athletic performance. Most coaches and elite athletes agree that the mental game is the most important element in consistent, high-level achievement in sports. Yet, so little time is devoted to it. What is the mental game? What does it mean to be “mentally tough?” Mentally tough athletes perform their best within their own limits—physical ability, financial, time, etc. They enjoy their sport, work hard toward their goals, and apply the same mental skills they learned from their sport to the classroom, their relationships, and their careers. Sport psychology is the scientific study of how psychological factors affect a person’s motor/sport performance and how participation in physical activity affects psychological development in sport. Below are some sport psychology tips to help your children improve their mental skills and their athletic performance.

Tips for Parents

4 Mental Skills for Optimal Performance

- **#1. Effective Thinking**

- Identify Problematic Thoughts
 - Negative thought patterns can greatly impact your performance. Be aware of these thoughts and modify or change them.
i.e., “I always choke and make dumb mistakes.”
- Replace Negative Thoughts with Positive Thoughts
 - Self talk can significantly influence the outcome of your performance.
 - i.e., “Come on; Focus right here; You can do this; I love to complete, it’s okay to make a mistake.”
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- **#2. Managing Emotions**

- Identify Your Emotions
 - i.e., Fear, nervousness, anxiety; frenzied excitement, anger.
Performance anxiety on game day is common and sometimes referred to as “choking” or “freezing.” Feeling nervous or anxious may interfere with your sports performance.
- Coping Skills
 - i.e., Relaxation training, visualization, imagery, yoga, meditation, positive self-talk
The way athletes talk to themselves and interpret a stressful situation can increase or decrease arousal and anxiety. Developing your coping skills can give you the necessary tools to manage your emotions.

- **#3. Motivation and Goal Setting**

- Motivation
 - Motivation for change occurs when you see a discrepancy between where you are and where you want to be (Miller et al., 1992, p. 8).
Identify what motivates you—being part of a team, earning a college scholarship, qualifying for state championship, etc.

- Goal setting
 - The key to goal setting is identifying the right type of goals. Research has identified certain factors that consistently increase the effectiveness of goals setting and achievement of those goals.
 - Self-determined; Specific and objective (rather than vague and subjective); Moderate difficulty; Short and Long term; etc.
- **#4. Well-being in Sport and Life**
 - It is important to maintain a balance between sport and other activities. Athletes can experience depression, anxiety, problems with substance use and abuse, eating disorders, gambling issues, relationship concerns, athletic injuries, post-concussion problems, and issues adjusting to life after sports. Psychologists are trained to help athletes manage these issues so they can thrive on and off the field.

Books & Web Sites

The Sport in Mind, www.thesportinmind.com

Local Resources

Dr. Elizabeth C. van der Oord at Daily Behavioral Health, **14538 Grapeland Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44111, 216-252-1399**, www.dailybh.com

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