

MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN GYMNASTICS

A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING MOTIVATION, CONFIDENCE, AND MENTAL FOCUS

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SECTION I - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

MENTAL TOUGHNESS OVERVIEW

What is Mental Toughness?

Mental toughness is defined as an innate and learned psychological edge that consists of attributes, such as motivation, confidence, and focus. The attributes are marked by a collection of mentally tough values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and self-regulation skills.

Having this mentally tough psychological edge can help you to cope more effectively with the troublesome, difficult, and negative aspects of competitive sport and can enable you to successfully adapt to demanding, challenging, and positive competitive situations as well.

Ultimately, acquiring these mental toughness attributes and mentally tough values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and skills will allow you to display the desired mentally tough behaviors specific to gymnastics. Among other things, these behaviors include consistently producing high level performances when you need them the most and doing the "little things" necessary for your success.

Winning isn't something that happens suddenly on the field when the whistle blows and the crowds roar. Winning is something that builds physically and mentally every day that you train and every night that you dream. ~ Emmitt Smith

FIVE KEY COMPONENTS OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

1. Tough Values are the motives, goals, and desired outcomes that mentally tough athletes possess as they attempt to achieve in competitive situations. For example, mentally tough athletes are motivated by a strong, internal desire to succeed, appreciate that being focused for competition requires great effort and preparation, value their grit and determination, and are passionate about gymnastics while recognizing that other aspects of their life are important too.
2. Tough Attitudes are the perceptions that mentally tough athletes have about themselves and the competitive environment. For example, mentally tough athletes perceive themselves to possess unique strengths that set them apart from their competitors, view themselves as capable of being one of the very best in gymnastics, think of themselves as being able to push through their perceived limits, and consistently raise the bar regarding their performance.
3. Tough Beliefs are the convictions and expectations that mentally tough athletes hold to be true about themselves and the competitive environment. For example, mentally tough athletes believe 100% in their ability to respond to challenges, expect themselves to thrive under pressure, believe in their abilities to stay relaxed and block out personal problems during competition, and expect to start performing well again in a matter of time when they struggle.
4. Tough Emotions are the psychological and physiological feelings that mentally tough athletes experience in response to competitive situations. For example, mentally tough athletes feel positive and even more determined to succeed when faced with adversity, are not overwhelmed by feelings of pressure to meet others' expectations of them, feel capable of responding to uncontrollable events that happen to them during competition, and can experience some satisfaction when they notice improvement in their routines regardless of whether they win or not.
5. Tough Skills are the plans, strategies, and actions mentally tough athletes use to regulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in competitive situations. For example, mentally tough athletes stay confident during meets whether they are performing well or not, remain calm and do not overthink in pressure situations, quickly forget about their mistakes and mentally let them go, and center their thoughts on aspects of their performance that they can control.

THREE KEY ATTRIBUTES OF MENTALLY TOUGH ATHLETES

Recent research has revealed that mentally tough athletes possess a number of common psychological attributes regardless of the sport they play.

In addition to mentally tough values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and skills, there are three other key mental toughness attributes: **(1) Motivation**, **(2) Confidence**, and **(3) Focus...**



SECTION II - MOTIVATION

MOTIVATION DEFINED

Motivation is characterized by possessing an insatiable, internal desire to succeed, having a disciplined, goal-directed orientation, being competitive with self and others, and owning a determined, "go-the-extra-mile" work ethic. There are six types of motivation.

1. Intrinsic Motivation to Know refers to engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction that one experiences while learning, exploring, or trying to understand something new. For example, athletes primarily motivated in this manner do gymnastics because they experience sheer pleasure while learning new training techniques or discovering new performance strategies.
2. Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish refers to engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction that one experiences when attempting to accomplish or create something. For example, athletes primarily motivated in this manner might do gymnastics because they experience personal satisfaction while mastering difficult training techniques or perfecting their abilities.
3. Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation refers to engaging in an activity to experience stimulating sensations derived from one's engagement in the activity. For example, athletes primarily motivated in this manner might do gymnastics because it is fun and exciting and they enjoy the feeling of being totally immersed in the activity or the movement itself.
4. Extrinsic Motivation (Internal Pressures) refers to engaging in behavior that is reinforced through internal pressures such as anxiety or guilt. With this type of motivation, athletes internalize pressures that formerly came from external sources. For example, athletes primarily motivated in this manner might do gymnastics because they feel external pressure to be the best and desire to avoid feelings of embarrassment.
5. Extrinsic Motivation (External Pressures) refers to engaging in behavior that is completely controlled by external sources. With this type of motivation, athletes attempt to gain rewards and avoid negative consequences. For example, athletes primarily motivated in this manner might do gymnastics not for fun but exclusively to obtain monetary rewards and praise from others or to avoid criticism from their coaches or disapproval from parents.
6. Amotivation refers to engaging in behavior that is neither intrinsically nor extrinsically rewarded. Amotivated athletes often feel helpless and do not perceive a connection between their actions and the outcome of their actions. In this motivational state, athletes often feel incompetent and no longer identify any good reasons for continuing to train.

MOTIVATION IN MENTALLY TOUGH ATHLETES

Mentally Tough Athletes...

- ✓ Set long-term and short-term (process and outcome) goals that are realistic, measurable, and time-oriented.
- ✓ Develop detailed plans for attaining their goals.
- ✓ Track their progress.
- ✓ Compete primarily against themselves.
- ✓ Understand that they are in control of their attitude and take responsibility for their behavior and preparing themselves to be successful.
- ✓ Pursue EXCELLENCE, not PERFECTION.
- ✓ Know why they participate (motivation) in sport and what they want to accomplish (mission). By keeping this knowledge in mind, they are able to make their daily behaviors consistent with their mission.
- ✓ Are able to bring an intensity/passion to their participation in sport, regularly invest energy, push their limits, push themselves toward improvement and push through difficulty.
- ✓ Pursue knowledge of their sport and try to understand the process of what it takes to improve/excel in their sport.
- ✓ Have an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and how their behavior affects their performance.
- ✓ Know the parts of their performance that are in their control and they strive to master these aspects.
- ✓ Bring a positive attitude to the team environment.

Skills/Strategies: Goal Setting, Evaluation of values, motivation, and attitude, Mission statement, Awareness, Knowledge

MOTIVATION EXERCISES

STRATEGY 1 - Identifying People You Admire

Research shows that people with specific and defined goals are more likely to succeed in life than those without. One way to increase motivation and define goals is to be inspired by your favorite heroes and personalities in sport. This exercise will help you formulate your goals using this approach.

- Identify a hero or a successful athlete whom you admire most.
 - Write the name of this person on a piece of paper.
 - On a blank page, write the critical personality attributes that made the person successful and famous.
 - Below that, write the actions you should take to become as successful as this hero.
 - If you are with a group, discuss your heroes/athletes and what you need to do to have success.
-
- ✓ What patterns of actions (such as positive thinking) help you to become like your hero?
 - ✓ What three actions would you choose to implement as soon as possible based on what you learned from this exercise? Write your answers on a blank page.

Take a minute to reflect on the attitudes that characterize a good gymnast and the attitudes displayed by other athletes impress you the most. How would you rate yourself on those characteristics? Fill in the chart below with your answers.

Characteristic or Attitude of Top Athletes	Rate Yourself (1-10)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

MOTIVATION EXERCISES STRATEGY 2 - GOAL SETTING

Motivation is best achieved by having clear goals. These goals need to be your own goals for yourself, not someone else's goals for you. The first step in achieving a high level of motivation is to set useful goals. Following are guidelines to maximize the effectiveness of goal setting.

Goals provide purpose and a sense of direction, which in turn increases motivation.

There are three types of goals:

1. Process Goals: focus on the development of your own skills, usually for immediate accomplishments.
2. Outcome Goals: focus on the results of a routine or meet; the end result you are trying to achieve, usually a win or placing (e.g., win Olympic Gold, win World Championships, win Nationals).
3. Performance Goals: Focus on improvements compared to you own past performance, (e.g., personal best, competing against yourself).

Set Goals using the **SMARTEST Goal Setting System:**

Set Short & Long-Term Goals - set both types of goals, short-term will help to keep you motivated towards your long-term goals.

Measurable Goals - need to be able to measure (usually with a number to make it concrete) the differences between where you are and where you want to be.

Achievement Strategies - things you're going to do in order to achieve your goal (i.e., attend each practice, stay focused on training plan, eat properly, get enough rest, maintain weight in a good range).

Realistic Goals - make sure your goals are within your ability (e.g., if you train typically 2 hours a day, a non-realistic goal would be training 6 hours a day the next week).

Time Bound Goals - should be able to put a time limit on when you want to achieve your goal (i.e., by end of the week, by the end of the training camp).

Exhibit Goals - place reminders of your goals in places where you can see them (i.e., on your mirror of your bathroom at home).

Seek Support - ask others, whom you trust, to help you out in your quest to achieve your goal.

Target Obstacles - before beginning your quest, attempt to list things that may keep you from your goal so if those things happen, you can be prepared.

Personal Goal Sheet

My Long Term Goals Are:

My Short Term Goals Are:

My Team's Goals Are (even though gymnastics is an individual sport you need to work together to be successful and sometimes there are team events):

Possible Obstacles:

Ways to Overcome Obstacles

Effort and purpose are not enough without purpose and direction. ~ John F. Kennedy

FOR YOUR GOAL JOURNAL

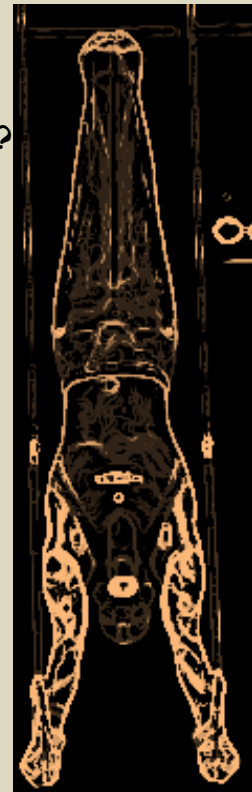
SMARTTEST Goal System: Keep these guidelines in mind as you determine goals and record progress in your journal.

Personal Goal Sheet: Use what you developed today as a starting point.

Achievement Strategies: Write down things you are going to do that will help you achieve your goals.

Journal: Questions to address in your journals:

1. What progress did I make toward my goal(s) today?
2. What obstacles kept me from achieving my goal(s)?
3. What things helped me in achieving my goal(s)?
4. What strategies am I using to reach my goal(s)?
5. How am I doing today?



GOAL PAGES

Date: _____

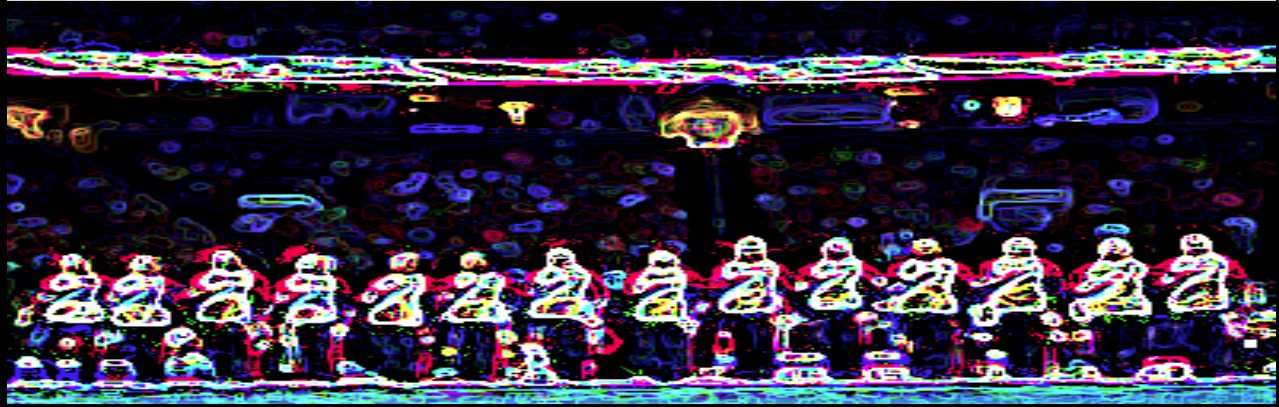
This is a goal for the: day / week / month / season / other _____
(Circle one)

Goal:

Today my progress toward my goal was:

Challenges I faced in reaching my goal were:

Tomorrow my goal is:



MOTIVATION EXERCISES STRATEGY 3 - ENHANCE COMMITMENT

AN IMPORTANT FACET OF MOTIVATION IS KNOWING WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING ...WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH (MISSION)...AND THEN COMMITTING YOURSELF...GIVES YOU INSPIRATION, FOCUSES YOUR ENERGY AND EFFORT, AND HELPS SUSTAIN YOU THROUGH CHALLENGES.

Step 1 - Identify Reasons for Participating in Gymnastics

Ask yourself: Why do I participate in gymnastics? Or what do I enjoy about gymnastics?

Step 2 - Identify Reasons for Persevering through challenges in Gymnastics

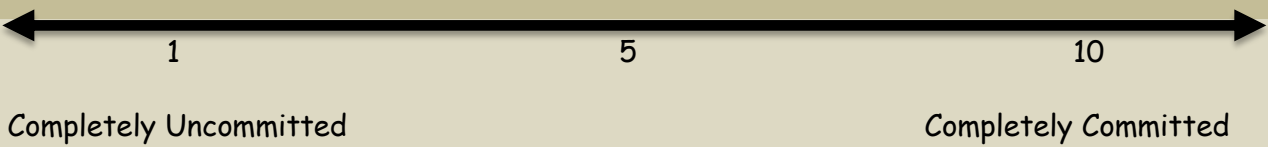
Ask yourself: Why not quit?

Step 3 - Clarify Your 'Mission' in Gymnastics

Ask yourself: What do I want to accomplish this year in gymnastics? What do I want to get out of my participation?

Step 4 - Establish Your Level of Investment To Your Gymnastics Mission

Ask yourself: How committed am I to accomplishing the things that I have stated above (in question 3)?



Step 5 - Develop your Legacy in Gymnastics

Ask yourself: What do I want to be known for on this team? What do I want to be remembered for when I leave this team?

Looking Back From the Future

Being a model person, leader, and athlete requires vision, persistence, definite plans and an ability to reflect on your current state so you can see what you need to do next to get there.

This exercise helps you think about yourself from a future view point so that you can better see what you want and if you are going in the right direction to get there.

1. Imagine that you are 90 years old and you want to explain to your grandchild what you have achieved in life. What would you say?

2. Imagine that you are 90 years old and are reflecting back at life. What regrets do you think you would have and how strongly do you think you would think about them?

Step 6 - Putting Your Words to Action

Over the past 7 days, how much did my DAILY BEHAVIORS reflect commitment to what I want to accomplish and be known for?

1	5	10
Not at all		100%

Increase the Likelihood that you will achieve the desired result by establishing and maintaining a consistent pre-performance routine. Develop your own Pre-performance routine using the time guidelines below.

Preparation for Optimal Performance—Physical & Mental

Day before:

Evening before

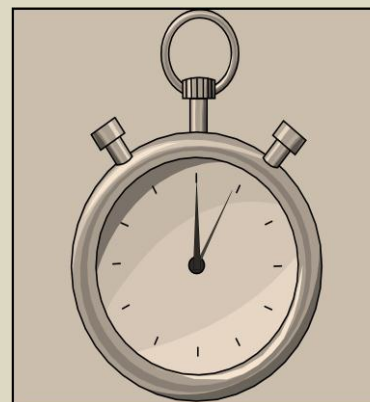
Morning of

One hour before

20 minutes before

5 minutes before

30 seconds before



MOTIVATION EXERCISES STRATEGY 4 - ENHANCE COMMITMENT

ANOTHER IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS IS CONTROL. BECAUSE GYMNASTICS MEETS ARE COMPRISED OF THINGS THAT YOU CAN CONTROL AND OTHER THINGS THAT YOU CANNOT, YOU MUST CHOOSE WHERE YOU PUT YOUR ENERGY, AND LET GO OF THE OTHERS. CONSIDER THAT OTHER STUFF UNIMPORTANT AND STAY FOCUSED ON THE THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL. MENTALLY TOUGH ATHLETES PERFORM AT THEIR BEST WHEN IT COUNTS.

Step 1 - Identify a few factors below that contribute to your performance. What factors are in your CONTROL? And What factors are out of your CONTROL?

IN your control	OUT of your control



MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN GYMNASTICS

Step 2 - Now, take a few minutes to think about what factors affected your performance positively or negatively. What were you focused on? Were these 'influencing' factors in or out of your control?

	Best Performance	Worst Performance
Who were your competitors?		
What were you thinking or saying to yourself at the time of the performance?		
Describe your emotional state.		
Describe your energy level.		
What were you focused on during the performance?		

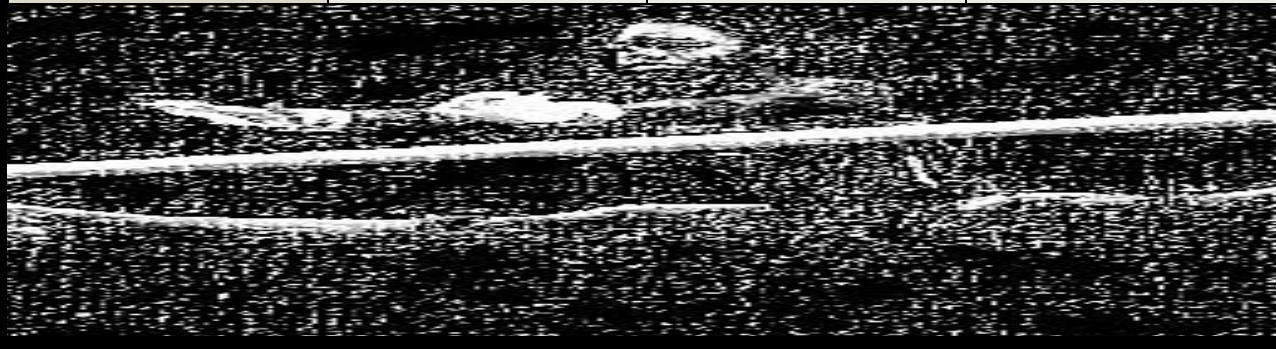


MOTIVATION EXERCISES

Strategy 5 - INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS

Although many athletes experience excitement and butterflies in their stomachs before an important event or meet, knowing what factors turn those positive and enhancing feelings into anxiety can help you (a) identify your 'triggers', (b) cope with those feelings more effectively, and (c) ultimately perform your best.

<p><i>Green</i> <i>Performing Well</i></p>			
<p><i>Yellow</i> <i>Beginning to experience problems (e.g., anxiety, distractions)</i></p>			
<p><i>Red</i> <i>Serious Problems performing (e.g., choking)</i></p>			



MOTIVATION EXERCISES

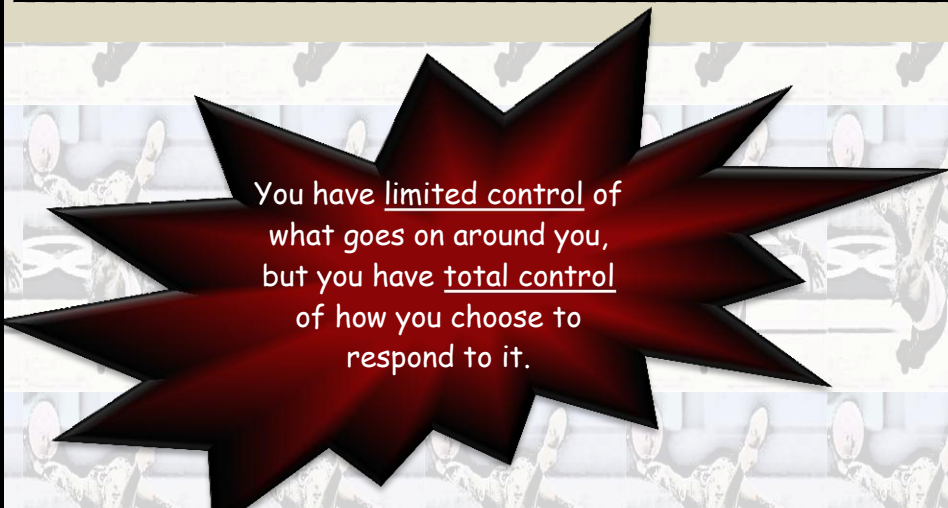
STRATEGY 6 - LOOKING BACK TO INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS

THINK BACK TO IMPORTANT EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE SO FAR AND RECORD HOW THEIR DECISIONS HAVE SHAPED YOUR LIFE.

- ✓ Make a list of all the important events in your life (both positive and negative) in a chronological order. These events should have been under your control so don't include natural and uncontrollable accidents.
- ✓ For example a good decision with a positive outcome could be:
- ✓ "I decided to train with a different coach and competed for the next 3 years under him/her. My success in gymnastics increased my confidence in my physical ability tremendously."
- ✓ A decision with negative or unsuccessful outcome is:
- ✓ "I started drinking at 14 and it reduced my performance in my sport considerably."
- ✓ If you are doing this in a group, share your list with your teammates and explain how you feel about your past choices and experiences.

How do you feel about your past decisions?

How important is it to make decisions quickly and effectively and how can this habit affect your life?



You have limited control of what goes on around you, but you have total control of how you choose to respond to it.

The more concerned we become over the things we can't control, the less we will do the things we can control. - John Wooden

Motivation Exercises

Strategy 7 – Maintaining Motivation

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, it's hard to maintain your motivation. This can occur for a variety of reasons, often unique to you as an individual. If your motivation is inconsistent, ask yourself the following questions and write your answers below (you can also journal about any of these questions if you want to explore in more depth):

What were the reasons I got into gymnastics?

When I first started doing gymnastics, what did I like about it?

What kept me coming back?

How much of that do I still feel today when I'm doing gymnastics?

If I don't feel much of the motivation that I had when I first began doing gymnastics, what keeps me in it now?

In competition there are always unexpected events and challenges. Learn NOW to put a positive spin on them and cope quickly. You don't have time for negative thinking when you are up next!

Motivation Exercises

Strategy 8 - Maintaining Motivation By Staying Positive

To be more optimistic and find positive points about negatively perceived situations.

Write down 3 sentences that describe a negative situation. For example, "My car broke down this morning on my way to practice" or "I got injured in practice today."

Now, find as many positive points as possible about the negative situations you chose and write those on a separate piece of paper. You can do this individually or in groups. Your goal is to find as many positives about the situation as possible. If you are doing it in groups, you can compete against other groups.

- ✓ How easy was it to see positive in the negative?
- ✓ If you struggled, what was difficult about this exercise?
- ✓ What did this exercise teach you?
- ✓ How can you use what you learned to adjust your attitude about other unexpected issues that arise?

SECTION III - CONFIDENCE

CONFIDENCE DEFINED

Confidence is characterized by believing in one's ability to achieve goals, having faith in one's ability to reach potential, revealing one's competence, and wanting to be the person that makes the difference.

Sport Confidence refers to the belief or degree of certainty that athletes usually possess about their ability to be successful in sport.

This belief or degree of certainty is a trait and therefore is considered to be a type of global self-confidence.

For example, athletes who possess a high amount of sport confidence are likely to believe in their ability to (a) execute the skills necessary to be successful, (b) perform under pressure, (c) achieve their competitive goals, and (d) meet the challenge of competition compared to the most confident athlete they know.



CONFIDENCE EXERCISES

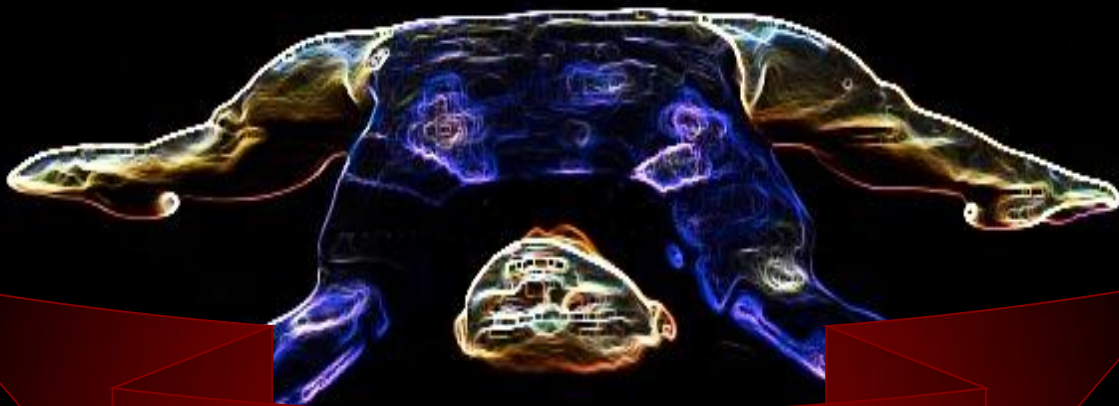
STRATEGY 1 - DEVELOP CONFIDENCE WITH POSITIVE THINKING

What are you saying to yourself right now?

Imagine yourself in one of your top performances....what were you saying to yourself?

When you are performing poorly, what do you say to yourself?

Look at the difference between the statements in these sections. Work on using more thoughts during training and competition that are associated with good performances.



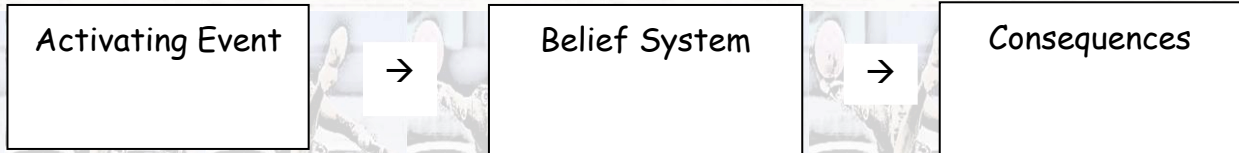
BELIEVE that you can successfully perform the desired skill or technique.

If I walk out on the court and think the next player is better, then I've already lost. ~ Venus Williams

CONFIDENCE EXERCISES STRATEGY 2 -KNOW YOUR ABC'S

ABC Model for Positive Thinking

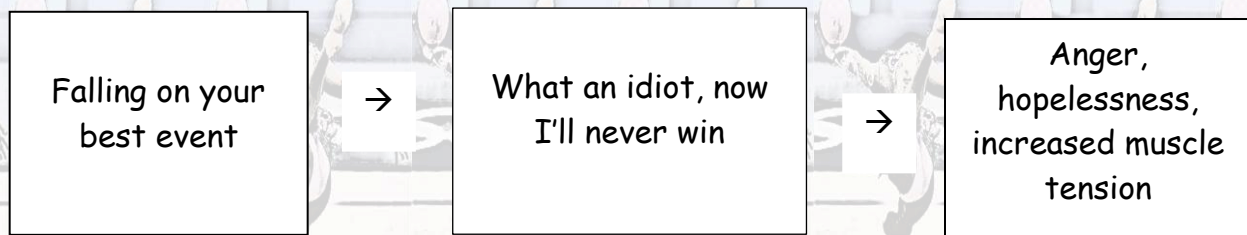
How you think about events affects how you feel and behave.



Activating Events: Those things you become involved with (coaching, practice, competition).

Belief System: How you think about yourself, other people, and what is happening.

Consequences: How you respond, with emotions or actions, to events in your life.



Thinking negatively about yourself other people, or the events in your life often leads to negative consequences, such as feelings of sadness, low motivation, and poorer performance. Learning to think positively and rationally can lead to success.

CONFIDENCE EXERCISES

STRATEGY 3 - Staying Positive by 'Depositing' Your Negative Thoughts

'Flush' or 'Bin' Negative Thoughts...

Your mind is your most powerful ally. Confident athletes create powerful confident feelings through their thinking that enhance performance. Following are some techniques to get control over your thinking.

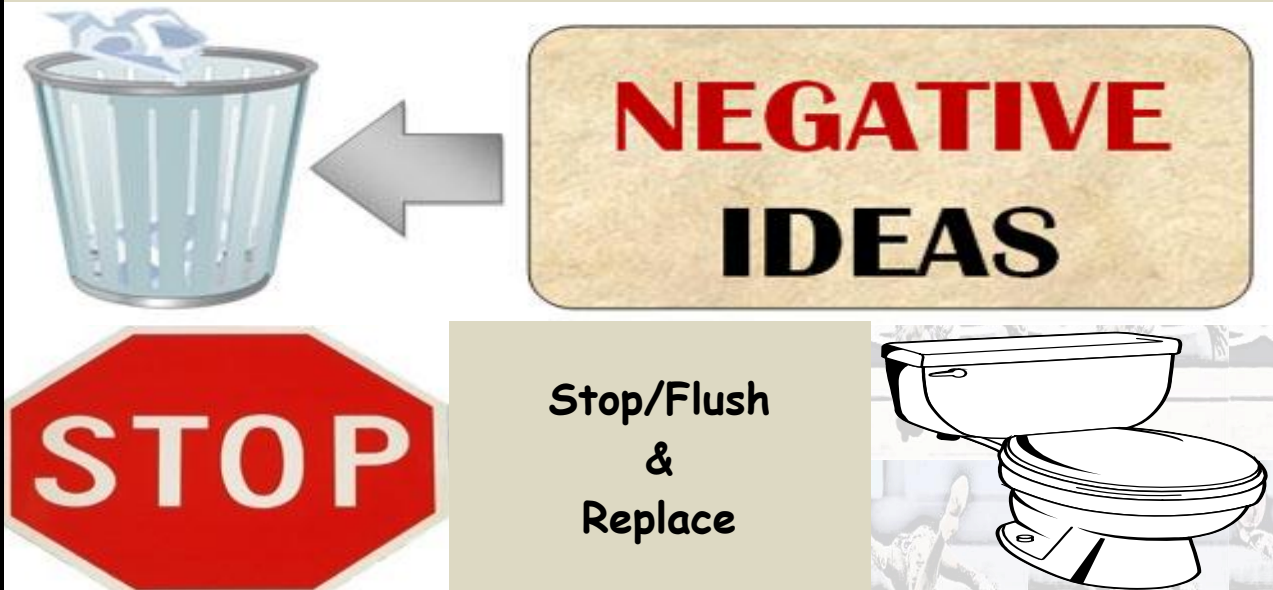
Step 1 - Thought Stopping

Recognize negative thoughts...

Say "STOP" and picture a red stop sign.

Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts.

For instance, you might say to yourself: "I have a bad feeling about this meet." → "STOP" → Flush the negative thinking → "Breathe, then focus on what you are doing well."



Step 2 - Challenge Your Negative or Irrational Beliefs

Argue with yourself...

Show yourself how irrational and inappropriate beliefs can create negative thinking.

For instance, you may challenge the self-talk statement: "I am a horrible gymnast" by saying to yourself "I made one mistake, but everything else was good. That doesn't make me horrible."

Step 3 -Reframe Your Negative Self-talk into Positive Self-talk

Look at Events Differently...

Find alternative, more helpful ways of viewing an event

For instance, you may reframe the self-talk statement "I only got 3rd place" to "Last year I got 8th place, and this year, I was able to improve by 5 places."

Your opponent, in the end, is never really the player on the other side of the net, the swimmer in the next lane, or even the bar you must high-jump. Your opponent is yourself, your negative voices, your level of determination. ~ Grace Lichtenstein

Confidence Exercises Strategy 4 - Clarify Expectations

THE POSITIVE THINGS YOU SAY TO YOURSELF DURING WORKOUTS, BEFORE COMPETITION, AND DURING A MEET, WILL AFFECT YOUR PERFORMANCE. YOU PROVIDE YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT AND CHART YOUR OWN DIRECTION TOWARD SUCCESS. TO HAVE EFFECTIVE SELF-TALK, YOU MUST PRACTICE IT CONSCIOUSLY AND REGULARLY.

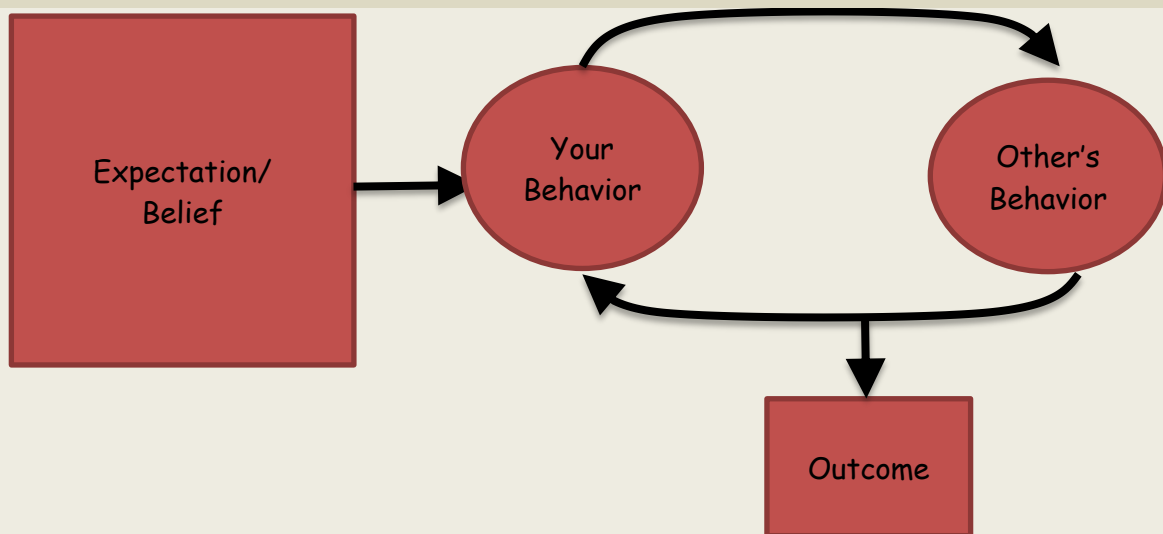
SELF-TALK CAN BE WORDS OR SHORT PHRASES AND SHOULD ALWAYS BE POSITIVE. WHEN YOU SAY WORDS OR PHRASES TO YOURSELF, YOU SHOULD SAY THEM SINCERELY, NOT SARCASTICALLY. IF YOU REPEAT PHRASES AS IF YOU BELIEVE THEM, THEN OVER TIME YOU WILL COME TO BELIEVE THEM AND YOUR MIND AND BODY WILL RESPOND ACCORDINGLY. THIS PHENOMENON IS CALLED "SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY."

In 1950's, a four minute mile was considered physically impossible. No one had come closer than 1.5 seconds to the four minute barrier.

On May 6, 1954 Roger Bannister ran the mile in 3 minutes 59.4 seconds. By the end of 1957, 16 runners had broken the four minute barrier.

As soon as Bannister ran under 4 minutes, everyone believed it was possible and more athletes achieved this goal.

What changed after Bannister broke the record?



Confidence Exercises Strategy 5 - Develop Positive 'Cue' Words

Developing a "cue word" is an important part of your preparation.

The cue word may serve many purposes for you, including:

- relaxation ("calm", "relax")
- psyching up before a competition ("power", "win")
- energizing during a competition ("energy", "push")
- refocusing on the task ("focus", "right now")

Use Cue words to encourage, focus, and motivate yourself during competition

Good Technique Reminder

Response to Poor Technique



Confidence Exercises

Strategy 6 - Changing Negative to Positive

Negative Self-defeating Thoughts

- ✓ I can't believe I have to compete without enough warm-up.
- ✓ You idiot.
- ✓ There's no sense in practicing. I have no talent.
- ✓ The judges are biased. I won't be able to get a good score.
- ✓ I am so nervous; I will probably mess-up.
- ✓ I'll take it easy today and go hard next workout.
- ✓ This is too hard, I don't know if it is worth it.

Positive Self-enhancing Thoughts

- ✓ No one likes to compete without the best warm-up, but I can adjust just as well as anyone.
- ✓ Ease off. Everyone makes mistakes.
- ✓ I've seen good gymnasts work hard to be successful. I can get better if I practice.
- ✓ There's nothing I can do about the judges, so concentrate on my skills and showing what I can do.
- ✓ I've practiced a lot, just breathe and go for it with everything I've got.
- ✓ The next workout will be easier if I go hard now.
- ✓ Of course it's hard, but the rewards are worth it.

Positive Thinking Worksheet

Below are listed several situations that you might face during an upcoming practice or competition. In this exercise, first identify negative/irrational thoughts you might have about the situation. When I tell you to, generate more positive, self-enhancing statements that you could substitute.

The beginning of the meet is minutes away...

Negative, ineffective thinking

- a.
- b.
- c.

Positive, effective thinking

- a.
- b.
- c.

You do not feel like you are as in shape or as talented as the other gymnasts you are competing against...

Negative, ineffective thinking

- d.
- e.
- f.

Positive, effective thinking

- a.
- b.
- c.

You make a mistake early in the meet & your coach gets upset...

Negative, ineffective thinking

- g.
- h.
- i.

Positive, effective thinking

- a.
- b.
- c.



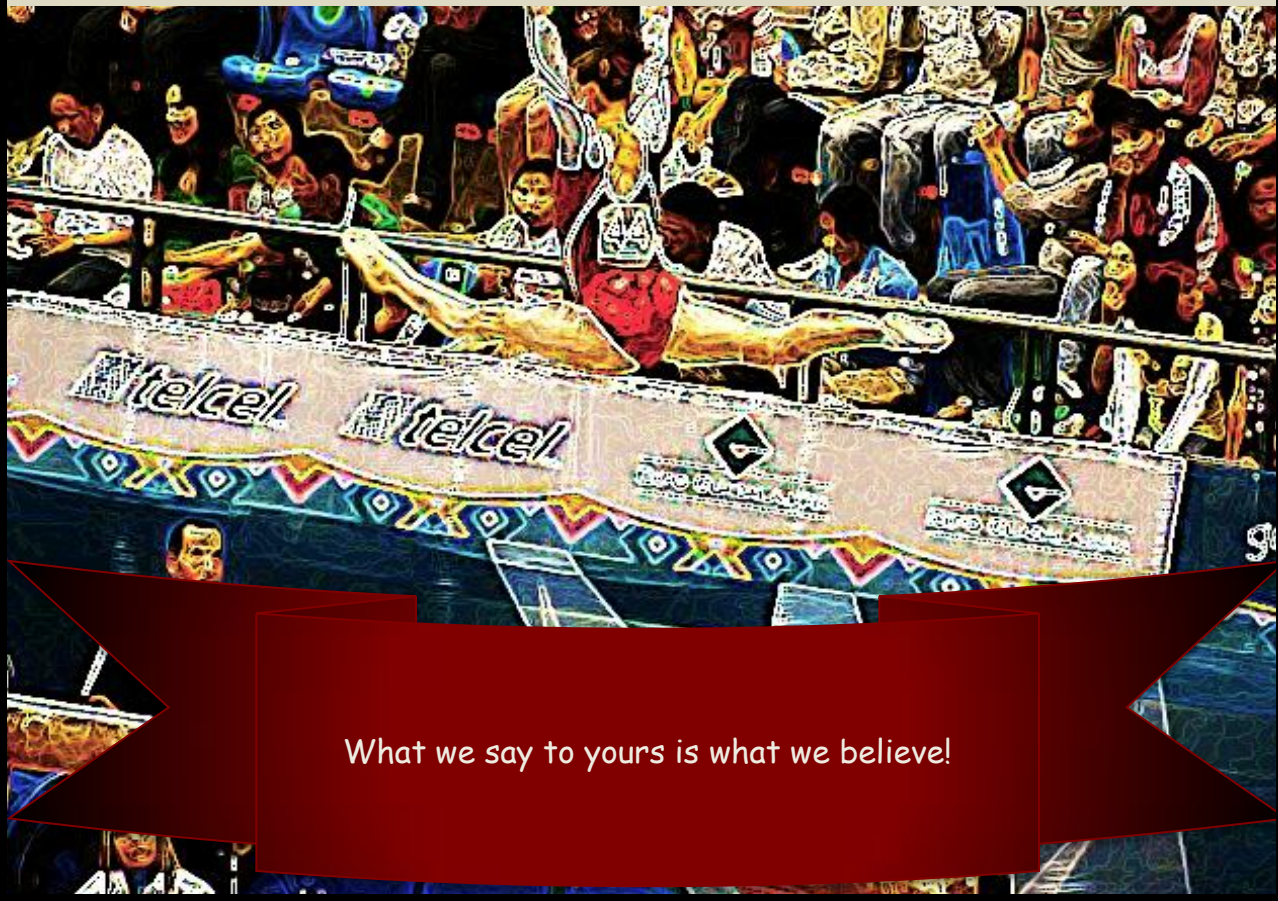
Confidence Exercises Strategy 7 - Performance Review

Find 15 minutes in the 24 hours after a meet. Reflect on the performance and write down.

1. Positive points
2. Negative points
 - Read the Negative points, analyze, share them with coach and/or teammates, then **THROW THEM AWAY**.
 - Focus on Positive points and recall the emotional connection and self talk associated with that part of the performance.

Take Home Points

1. Individualize your Confidence Plan.
2. Periodically monitor your plan and make adjustments.
3. Ask others (teammates, coaches, friends, family) to help you with positive statements



Confidence Exercises Reminders For Building Self-confidence

1. Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts
2. Fake it until you make it
3. Expect to win
4. Give yourself and your team credit for success
5. Let Go Of Uncontrollables
 - a) Officials/judges
 - b) Coaches' decisions
 - c) Teammates' decisions
 - d) Ability of other competitors
 - e) Environment
 - f) Crowd
 - g) Noise
 - h) Others _____



SECTION IV - FOCUS

FOCUS DEFINED

Focus is characterized by thinking clearly and in the present moment, concentrating on the task at hand, ignoring internal and external distractions, and regaining mental control following unexpected, uncontrollable events.

A mentally tough athlete who demonstrates focus has an intense ability to be so engrossed in his or her performance that nothing else matters. Sometimes, however, there are factors that can detract from that focus. Below are some of those factors. Keep in mind that mentally tough athletes are able to control these factors and reduce them at will.

1. Performance Worries refers to distracting thoughts that athletes might experience related to worry and negative self-evaluation over performance and competition. For example, athletes distracted by these thoughts during a meet might think about previous mistakes they have made, having a bad day, or not being able to win.
2. Irrelevant Thoughts refers to distracting thoughts that athletes might experience that are not related to performance or the execution of the task in a constructive way. For example, athletes distracted by these thoughts during a meet might think about other people such as their friends, what they are going to do later in the day, or personal issues.
3. Thoughts of Escape refers to distracting thoughts that athletes might experience related to not wanting to participate or wanting to withdraw from competition. For example, athletes distracted by these thoughts during a meet might think about quitting, being fed-up with the competition, or not wanting to get out there.



ATTENTIONAL FOCUS IN MENTALLY TOUGH ATHLETES

Mentally tough athletes

- ✓ Focus on the present moment of competition and on successes not on failures from previous moments or worries about future performance/outcomes.
- ✓ Know what is important to pay attention to during each part of their athletic performance.
- ✓ Know how to shift/maintain their attention to what is important and block out distractions (internal and external).
- ✓ Know how to reestablish focus when it is lost.
- ✓ Have a specific, consistent routine before performance that prepares them mentally and physically.
- ✓ Balance their life as an athlete and a whole person.
- ✓ Use each performance as a learning experience for the future.
- ✓ Find fun and enjoyment in sport participation.
- ✓ Know that they have limited control of what goes on around them (teammates, competitors, coaches, etc.), but that they have total control of how they respond.
- ✓ Know that mistakes and setback will occur and have a plan to compensate and adjust.
- ✓ Are aware that emotions (anxiety, excitement, frustration, anger, disappointment) are a normal part of sport, and these emotions at optimal levels can facilitate good performance.
- ✓ Know how to control emotions when they are too strong and could impede performance.

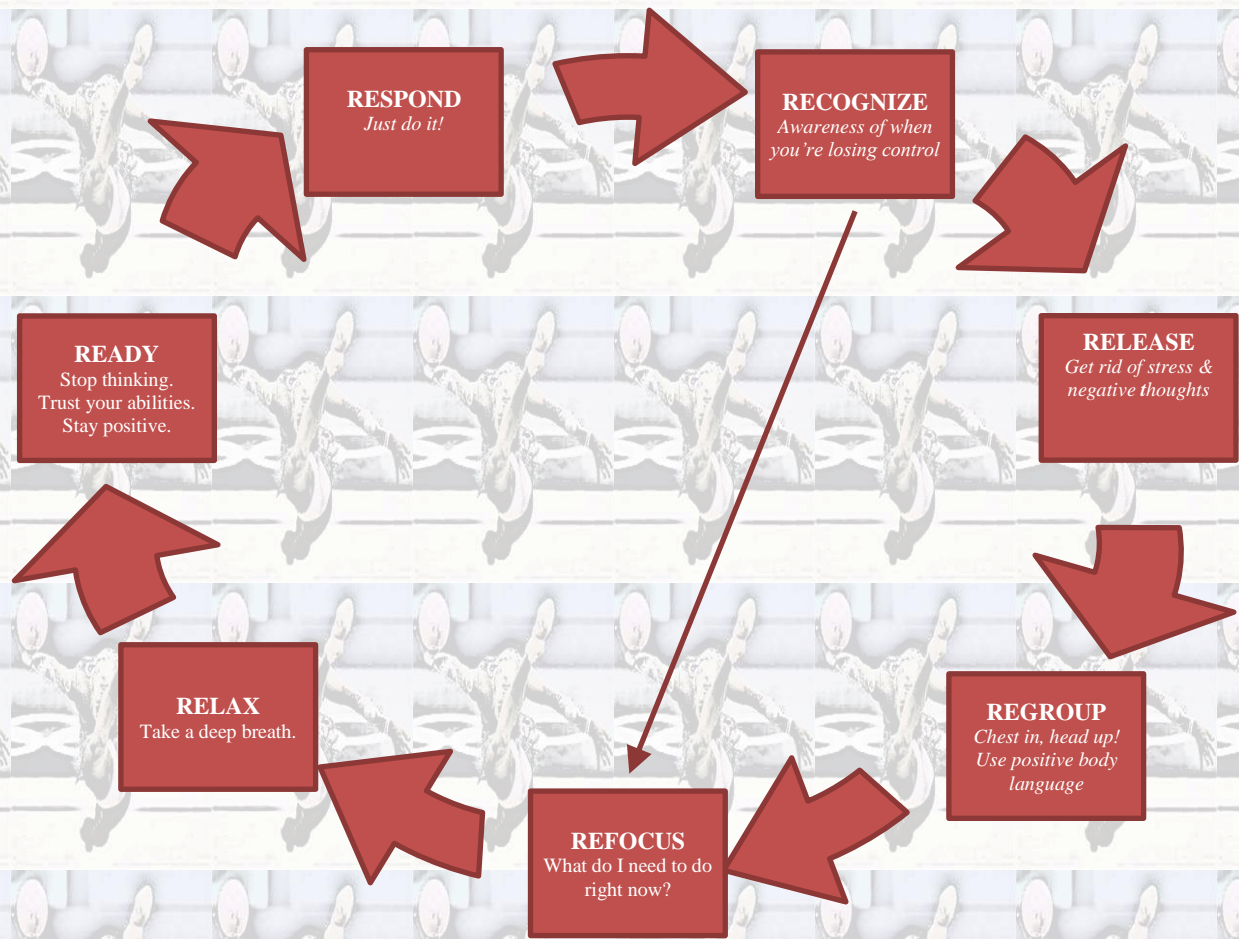
Skills/Strategies: Arousal Control, Attentional Control, Emotional Control, Relaxation, Imagery, Pre-Performance Routines, Cue Words, Focal Points, Planning for challenges, setbacks and distractions



FOCUS EXERCISES

Strategy 1 - Know Where to Focus Your Attention

- ✓ Where do you need to focus at different times during a meet?
- ✓ What is important? What I am doing right here, right now,
- ✓ What is not important? What I did before & what I might do later.



Note: This model is a modified and adapted version of Halliwell, Zaichkowsky, & Botterill's (2006) and Revizza & Osborne's (1991) models for increasing self-awareness.

My Plan is:

(e.g., breathing, focal points, cue words, and other strategies you choose).

FOCUS EXERCISES

Strategy 2 - Imagery

IMAGERY BASICS:

1. *Vividness*- recreate as closely as possible the actual experience in your mind as an image
→ use all 5 senses: sight, sound, feel, taste, hear
2. *Controllability*- learn to manipulate your images so they do what you want them to do

WHEN DO WE USE IMAGERY?

1. Before and after practice
2. Before and after a meet
3. Between events and/or days of competition
4. During your own time away from the gym
5. When recovering from an injury

WHY DO WE USE IMAGERY?

1. relaxation
2. activation management
3. stress management
4. goal-setting
5. self-confidence
6. attentional focusing
7. recovery from injury
8. practice of skills/techniques
9. correcting mistakes



HOW TO USE IMAGERY

1. **Use all your senses**
 - see in vivid color
 - hear the sounds during competition and training
 - smell the gym
 - feel the air around you and how your body feels as you move
 - taste
2. **Develop control of your imagery and visualize positive outcomes**
 - Requires consistent practice.
3. **Use internal and external imagery**
 - internal is when you see what you would see if you were looking OUT of your eyes
 - external is what you would see if you were watching yourself on a video monitor
4. **Practice imagery regularly**
 - Practice makes permanent!
5. **Practice imagery in a relaxed state**
 - remember the relaxation exercises that you learned
6. **Develop coping strategies through imagery**
 - in your mind, practice dealing positively with the unexpected before it happens
7. **Use cues or triggers to help your imagery rehearsal**
 - you can use cue words or other reminders (music, count) when you are using imagery
8. **Practice kinesthetic imagery**
 - kinesthetic means actually feeling the movements when you are using imagery
9. **Image in "real time"**
 - take the same amount of time to do imagery as it takes to actually do the skill or routine you are imaging.
 - The only exception is if you are having difficulty seeing your desired outcome in your image. Then you can try imagery in "super slow mo" or see the image frame-by-frame until everything looks right. Then you can speed it up again.

10. **Use imagery logs**

Example:

<u> </u> Date	Time	Describe Imagery	Practice Time	Success
28	4:30	practiced sticking dismounts	10 minutes	Imagined skill, but stuck only 50%

FOCUS EXERCISES

Strategy 3 - Working Through Distractions

Distractions prevent you from following through with your plan of action. That action might be a workout, an exercise, a frame of mind focus of your mind, or any other activity or mental frame that contributes to your gymnastics goals. Distractions, however, can be minimized if you (1) are aware they exist, and (2) commit to handling them in a productive manner.

Below is a list of constructive ways to cope with distractions. At the bottom of the page, fill in an appropriate coping mechanism for specific distractions you may experience. You can't avoid distractions completely so **how** you chose to deal with distractions is crucial. Those choices have consequences for your gymnastics.

CONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS

- ✓ REPEAT GYMNASTICS GOALS TO MYSELF.
- ✓ FOCUS ON POSITIVE SELF-TALK
- ✓ CONCENTRATE ON THE REASONS I WANT TO SUCCEED.
- ✓ TAKE A BREAK, AND THEN RETURN TO THE ACTION.
- ✓ COUNT TO 10, AND THEN ATTEMPT THE EXERCISE AGAIN.
- ✓ LEAVE THE SITUATION.
- ✓ REPLACE MY DISTRACTING THOUGHTS WITH SOMETHING ELSE MORE PRODUCTIVE.
- ✓ TUNE IT OUT, AND FOCUS ON MY BREATHING AND VISUALIZATION.
- ✓ REMIND PEOPLE I HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS I NEED TO MEET.
- ✓ TELL PEOPLE ABOUT MY GYMNASTICS GOALS; THEIR SUPPORT HELPS ME.
- ✓ ALLOW ANOTHER PERSON TO HANDLE THE DISTRACTION FOR ME.
- ✓ FOCUS MY MIND ON THE "BIG PICTURE" TO WORK THROUGH THE ISSUE.
- ✓ SEE THE SITUATION AS A TEMPORARY DISTRACTION THAT I CAN IGNORE.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN GYMNASTICS

WITH THESE STRATEGIES IN MIND, CONSIDER HOW YOU MIGHT BEST HANDLE THE DISTRACTIONS LISTED BELOW

- ✓ A loud noise in the gym _____
- ✓ People who want to chat during my workout _____
- ✓ A gymnastics teammate who isn't concentrating _____
- ✓ Phone calls during practice/conditioning time _____
- ✓ Coach yelling at me or a teammate _____
- ✓ People who I don't want watching me train _____
- ✓ Being in a bad mood _____
- ✓ Too hot or too cold in the gym _____
- ✓ Soreness or stiffness in my body _____
- ✓ People who want to hang out with me a lot _____
- ✓ Teammate who appears to be in a bad mood _____
- ✓ Equipment doesn't feel right _____
- ✓ I had a bad day and find myself thinking "life stuff" _____
- ✓ My biggest distraction is _____
- ✓ Another big distraction for me is _____
- ✓ Other ways I can cope are _____

FOCUS EXERCISES

STRATEGY 4 - TEN SECOND RELAXATION BREAK

STEP 1: SMILE AS YOU SAY TO YOURSELF...

"MY BODY DOESN'T NEED THIS _____."
(IRRITATION/STRESS/DISTRACTION)

STEP 2: TAKE A SLOW, DEEP BELLY BREATH...

... COUNT TO FOUR SLOWLY ON THE INHALE AND ON THE EXHALE.

STEP 3: TAKE A SECOND BELLY BREATH...

... CLOSE YOUR EYES AT THE TOP OF THE INHALATION.

... AS YOU EXHALE...IMAGINE (VISUALIZE AND FEEL) SOMETHING WARM

... ENTERING YOUR BODY AT YOUR HEAD

... AND FLOWING DOWN INTO YOUR HANDS AND FEET.

... HEAVINESS AND WARMTH ARE FLOWING IN.

... THINK TO YOURSELF "I AM CALM."

STEP 4: OPEN YOUR EYES.

CHAMPIONS AREN'T MADE IN THE GYMS.
CHAMPIONS ARE MADE FROM SOMETHING THEY HAVE DEEP
INSIDE OF THEM- A DESIRE, A DREAM, A VISION."

~ MUHAMMAD ALI



FOCUS EXERCISES

STRATEGY 5 - PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION SCRIPT

- ✓ Get into a comfortable position. Begin breathing deeply, and then close your eyes. Continue to breathe deeply, releasing tension every time you exhale.
- ✓ Allow any tension to leave your body and any concerns about your day to leave your mind.
- ✓ Now focus on the muscles of your right arm.
- ✓ Tense those muscles as much as you comfortably can for 5 seconds.
- ✓ Now release the tension and allow your right arm to relax for approximately 45 seconds.
- ✓ Tense the muscles of your right arm again for 5 seconds and release for 45 seconds.
- ✓ Notice the contrast between being tense and being relaxed.
- ✓ Now focus on the muscles of your left arm and tense for 5 seconds, release for 45 seconds, tense for 5 seconds and release for 45 seconds.
- ✓ Again, notice how it feels for those muscles to become very relaxed.
- ✓ Now alternate tensing and relaxing [tense (5 seconds), relax (45 seconds), tense (5 seconds), and relax (45 seconds)] as you did with your arms for the following 5 muscle groups: (1) face area, (2) neck, (3) torso (upper body), (4) right leg, and (5) left leg.
- ✓ After you have proceeded through all muscle groups, scan your body to see if any tension remains.
- ✓ If you notice tension anywhere, make a note of it and let it go.
- ✓ Remain in this state of relaxation for several minutes, and recognize how your muscles feel to be this relaxed.
- ✓ Remember that you can return to this state as needed in the future.
- ✓ When you are ready slowly bring yourself out of the relaxed state by (1) moving your fingers and toes, (2) moving your arms and legs, (3) moving your head and neck, and (4) opening your eyes.

FOCUS EXERCISES STRATEGY 6 - ENERGIZING SCRIPT

Sometimes, though, you can be too relaxed and not "psyched up" enough for training or a tournament. Then you need to energize.

Energizing Steps

1. Close your eyes and eliminate distractions as much as possible.
2. Focus on the practice or competition situation.
3. Begin taking deep breaths.
4. With each inhale say "energy in."
5. With each exhale say "fatigue out."

Energizing Imagery Script

For this script begin by using energizing breathing.

In your mind, say the following: "I can feel my body gaining energy with every breath. With every inhale, I bring energy in; with every exhale, I send fatigue out. I can see the energy moving into my muscles as they prepare to propel me through the field. I feel strong and powerful, yet at the same time my movements are effortless. I know exactly what to do and my body does it with energy."



APPENDIX A ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out these youtube videos to improve your motivation!

- ✓ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UizlkbS61mQ&feature=related>
- ✓ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WO4tIrjBDkk&feature=g-vrec>
- ✓ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZIk-IQYLBM&feature=related>

Motivational Movies:

- ✓ Miracle
- ✓ The Mighty Ducks
- ✓ Rudy
- ✓ Rocky
- ✓ Breaking Away
- ✓ Goal
- ✓ Friday Night Lights
- ✓ Karate Kid
- ✓ Bend it like Beckham
- ✓ Cinderella Man
- ✓ The Jackie Robinson Story
- ✓ Hoosiers
- ✓ Ali
- ✓ We are Marshall
- ✓ Pride
- ✓ The Rookie
- ✓ A League of their Own
- ✓ Field of Dreams
- ✓ Seabiscuit
- ✓ The Natural
- ✓ Remember the Titans
- ✓ Chariots of Fire
- ✓ Radio
- ✓ Bull Durham
- ✓ Hoop Dreams
- ✓ Invictus