

Alston for Athletes



Ambition
Accountability
Awareness
Achievement



Exercise Guide

Exercise Guide Categories

1. Performance Anxiety
 - a. Generalized Anxiety
 - b. Grounding
 - c. Reframing
2. Goal Setting
3. Self-care
4. Fear or excessive worrying
 - a. Fear of failure
 - b. Worry bank
5. Self-talk and negative thoughts
 - a. Automatic thoughts
 - b. Negative labeling
 - c. Affirmations
6. Setting Boundaries
7. Energy Management
 - a. Progressive Muscle Relaxation
8. Time Management
 - a. White box
9. Communication
10. Emotional Management and Mindfulness
11. Burnout/ Lack of Motivation
 - a. Cultivate joy
12. Confidence and Self-esteem
 - a. Reflections
13. Prepare and Reset
 - a. Pre-performance routines
 - b. Cues
 - c. Nutrition
 - d. Sleep Hygiene
14. Key Reminders (Bonus)



Anxiety

Address that we WANT the feeling of fear, that means we accept it. We aren't eliminating symptoms, we are working on our response to them. I want to feel weird, awkward, and frustrated. Emotions are okay. You don't have to "fix" it. You say "I can handle this." If I seek out these feelings, then I'm facing my fears. I don't need perfection or control. Stop avoiding the fear. Step back from the content. Change mindset. I want it to be strong to tackle it. It's okay to be uncomfortable, it's how you handle the response to this.

When we are under stress — the brain turns on the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which governs the flight, fight, or freeze response. You'll notice the activation of your SNS if you have shallow breathing, tense shoulders, increased blood pressure, or an upset stomach

When you release tension with a big sigh or exhalation, you may be able to reverse the fight-or-flight response and slip into a state of relaxation. A sigh of relief releases carbon dioxide and changes the biochemistry in your brain and decreases your stress hormone.

Oxygen is the anecdote for stress & anxiety & the "butterfly feeling in our stomach". Having better oxygen balance in your body allows you to perform better. If you focus on breathing correctly & allowing oxygen into your body, you'll have better blood flow as well helping your muscles operate more efficiently.





Exercise Breathing

Learn how to breathe slower: In order for this to be as effective as possible, you have to use this before you need it in panic & practice it. Focus on something other than the physical symptoms, and learn how to use rhythmic box breathing.

Try these breathing techniques:

1. Navy SEALs use box breathing - Inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4, repeat.
2. Inhale through your nose for a count of 5, hold for a count of 7, exhale through your mouth to a count of 9, and repeat. Say: Energy in, fatigue out if this helps you

Do this when you are nervous, angry, taking a test & don't know an answer, waiting to perform, during warmups, before you are about to present when someone is frustrating you when you need to reset emotions when trying to relax the body & be loose. Use it in practice & use it often so it becomes automatic when competing.





Exercise Grounding

Use counting down associated with objects to distract the brain & lower the intensity of the emotion. You are “grounding” your emotions & bringing them back down a notch instead of amplifying.

In this process, your brain feels more in control of a situation. While grounding isn’t a cure for anxiety or stress, it does take away the severity of the experience & it’s a useful technique to bust out when the hardest moments happen.

Remember you are redirecting your brain from the emotion you are experiencing. Once you interrupt the pattern of focus, it can be calmer. This decides what your brain is focusing on & takes away the magnitude of the anxiety, frustration, stress, and nerves, so you can do what you already know how to do without emotions taking over. We’re trying not to become suffocated with emotion & make decisions with logic.

CATEGORIES TO USE:

Colors 5-4-3-2-1 Name 5 things you see that are blue, 4 things that are black, 3 things that are white, etc. You can change up the colors, but you are trying to refocus your attention & think about something completely different than over analyzing the situation. You may use different colors and mix it up.

Another option is **Alphabet 5-4-3-2-1** Name off 5 things that start with A, 4 things that starts with B, 3 things that starts with C, 2 things that starts with D, 1 thing that starts with E – you don’t have to “find” these items, just name them off. You can start with a different letter every time so you don’t just memorize the items.

Another option is **SENSES 5-4-3-2-1** List out 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste. You can change up the order of these anytime. For taste, make it something you wish you could eat right now & try to taste the item! If you don’t have enough “smells” around you, focus on smells you like: fresh cut grass, salty beach air, cookies baking, clean clothes, etc.

Another option is **RANDOM CATEGORIES** - List out 5 tv shows you watched, 4 things you could order at a Mexican restaurant, 3 professional players, 2 friends you have, 1 place you want to visit or go on vacation. Here’s another example: 5 people you last talked to, 4 movies you like, 3 things you turned in for school this week, 2 rides at Disney you like, 1 song you like.



Exercise Reframe

You can't make anxiety disappear, but you want to avoid unnecessary anxiety & tolerate your symptoms better. Your brain wants to tell you that you'll feel bad or should be scared or worked up over.... Recognize it as temporary so it disrupts your life less. Move toward the stressful thing. Avoidance increases anxiety. Exposure treats anxiety. You can learn to better withstand it. Desensitize yourself in steps: Public speaking example where you perform steps beforehand. You practiced being anxious. The idea is to imagine yourself in the tough spot, so you've been there before when you're actually in real spot.

Emotional Fire Drill – know your response before you react. RESPOND NOT REACT!

Cognitive triangle: Feelings, thoughts, behaviors. All influence each other. Thoughts lead to feelings. Feelings lead to behavior. Thoughts sabotaging you? Are you distorting your thinking?

Think of three examples of anxiety producing thoughts and rational counter statements from your own life.

Anxiety Producing Thought	Rational Counterstatement



Reminders

1. You need a break. Several breaks every day. If you carry a lot of worries, you also tend to carry guilt if you take time off.
 - **Taking breaks is the most productive use of time.** If you reach burnout, then whatever you do isn't effective anyway.
2. Recharge batteries so you can gain strength & clarity. Go out with friends? Video games? Reading? Keep track of different types of rest activities that work for you.
3. **Stop the negative talk.** “I look stupid”, or “that was my fault”, “I hate practice”, or “this sucks.” Don’t fight thoughts.
 - Use replacement language. You don’t need to be mega-optimistic or positive. Start with: I’m allowed to make mistakes. These feelings won’t hurt me. It’s okay if I’m a few minutes late. I don’t have to be first. I’ll be all right. I need some downtime.
4. During sleep you consolidate new memories. **Get more sleep.**
5. **Try to eliminate “should” “need to” or “have to” thinking: I should be able to do this.** I should be in the top 10. I should weigh this much. I need to workout 6 days a week. I have to get in finals. When you do this, you’re basing everything off of other’s expectations.
 - Expectations typically lead to disappointment & it sends a signal to your brain that the item that’s important to you is a chore & a threat.
 - Try using “want” language: **I want to do well. I want to accomplish this.**

Goal Setting

Mindful attitude when goal setting: **Create a culture of “outwork(ing) yesterday”**, strive to be 1% better every day. We are not attaining perfection, but excellence.

Even the littlest bit of stress can completely alter the way you think. If we are distracted and feeding into that then we miss the opportunity that may arise because negative thoughts can do the opposite of a positive thought and completely distract us from the present moment. If you judge your abilities before you have experienced mindfulness and presence, you are not giving yourself a chance.

Goal setting comes down to **perseverance**. The more you fail the stronger you become. Failing is not for the weak. Use set backs as a chance to grow and gain momentum.

“I have not failed I just found 10,000 ways that did not work.” - Thomas Edison

It may take some time or error before succeeding, But the difference between a good athlete and a great athlete is having perseverance in the face of obstacles and hardship. Great athletes are finding joy in the grind and doing the same mundane thing over and over.

Try this and then write it down as a reminder:

- Choose one word or feeling that you'd like to **embrace** this season and one word that you would like to **release** from your life (words like fear, insecurity, negativity, perfection, anger)

- On your inhales, silently say to yourself the word you'd like to **embrace** more in the season and on your **exhales**, silently say to yourself the word you'd like to **release** in the season





Exercise

Goal Worksheet

My specific, measurable, authentic, realistic, and timely goal is...

My target date is _____

The person or people that will hold me accountable ...

This goal is important to me because...

Steps to achieving my goal

-
-
-
-
-
-

Visual representation of my goal

The quote that inspires me to stay motivated

How will I celebrate once I achieve my goal?



Self Care

Give attention to your physical and psychological well-being.

A helpful way to think about the importance of self-care is to imagine you are a water bottle and the water inside is your “energy.” You pour yourself out all the time into many “cups” representing everything and everyone requiring your time, your attention, and your energy: Sports, friends, school, family—the list goes on and on. Your water bottle would constantly be empty if you didn’t refill it regularly.

Think of self-care activities as the opposite: as ways to refill your bottle. Who are the people, places, things, and situations, that keep your water bottle full?

Self-care does not have to take a huge chunk out of your day or week. It can be 1, 5, or even just 10 minutes. You’d be surprised how something so small can revamp our day and mindset.

Chances are you probably already do these things; however, do you think them as “chores” or taking care of yourself? Let’s redefine what self-care means to you.

- Cleaning your room
- Walk, bike, run while listening to music
- Soaking in a bath
- Drinking hot tea
- Read a book
- Play with your pet
- Bake or cook something
- Drive or walk to a beautiful view and enjoy the scenery
- Buy or pick flowers for yourself
- Eat a mindful meal-no screens
- Say no or setting boundaries
- Call a friend or loved one
- Create a gratitude list
- Watch a Youtube video/TikTok and learn something new
- Use Lavender oil and take a few deep breaths
- Take a nap
- Watch your favorite show
- Drink some water
- Clean out your practice or school bag
- Unplug from social media





Fear and Worry

Emotions come & go – they are physical & immediate reactions & only supposed to last 90 seconds. However, you choose how you feel or respond. Feelings last when they are reinforced & talked about; they're a result of what you're focusing on, which you have control over. They become your mood & how you see yourself if you keep reinforcing that emotion.

You will still sense emotions & nerves, except you don't "feel" anxious. **YOU define the feeling. You say, I am feeling ready & excited. I feel prepared. I trained for this. I'm capable of this.** You own your story, don't let someone else determine how you feel.

Think of emotion as a response, & feeling is an interpretation of it. The emotion of fear can come up, but you don't have to choose to feel frightened & back down. You choose how you want to feel, regardless of what emotions come up. For example, anger can be an emotion, but bitterness is a lasting feeling. Choose how long you hold onto something by what you keep talking about.

Give yourself feedback, but let go of the interpretation of it. Try not to determine what it means, like "Why'd they pull me?" - just focus on what can be changed or how to adapt in your performance.

Imagine a reminder bridge. Pull from past experiences. What is something that you remember being afraid of or anxious about but figured it out & do now with no problem? **You don't know how to do these things YET.** Use the word YET when talking about worries – I'm not good at this drill YET. You're giving your brain hope.

Resource: The How We Feel app is a mental wellness tool designed to help users track and improve their emotional health. It allows individuals to log their moods, emotions, and feelings in a simple and intuitive way. Users can record how they feel each day, identify patterns in their emotional states, and reflect on the factors affecting their well-being. The app offers insights and personalized tips to promote better mental health and emotional awareness. It aims to support users in understanding their emotions and building healthier habits over time.



Exercise

Pre-Plan Response

What are 4-5 triggers (things that frustrate you or push your buttons) that are common for you? Come up with a RESPONSE (logical & strategic plan) Ex: Coach yelling at me. Someone passes you. Ride to practice. Getting pulled from a game. Making an error. PRE PLAN those thoughts or questions you ask yourself, so you talk to yourself NOT listen to the typical garbage. If your brain has a plan, it takes away the fear of the unknown. All of this is done so the brain feels in CONTROL. Perceived control allows you to perform better.

Trigger	Preplanned Response





Fear of Failure

You might experience some or all of the following symptoms if you have a fear of failure:

- A reluctance to try new things or to get involved in challenging projects.
- Self-sabotage – for example, procrastination, excessive anxiety, or a failure to follow through with goals.
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence – commonly using negative statements such as "I'll never be good enough to get that promotion" or "I'm not smart enough to get on that team."
- Perfectionism – A willingness to try only those things that you know you'll finish perfectly and successfully.

What Causes the Fear of Failure? We all have different definitions of failure simply because we all have different benchmarks, values, and belief systems. A failure to one person might simply be a great learning experience for someone else.

However, here are a few ways to reduce the fear of failing:

- Analyze all potential outcomes – Many people experience fear of failure because they fear the unknown. Remove that fear by considering all of the potential outcomes of your decision. Our article Decision Trees will teach you how to map possible outcomes visually.
- Learn to think more positively – Positive thinking is an incredibly powerful way to build self-confidence and neutralize self-sabotage. Our article Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking, and Positive Thinking is a comprehensive resource for learning how to change your thoughts.
- Look at the worse-case scenario – In some cases, the worst-case scenario may be genuinely disastrous, and it may be perfectly rational to fear failure. In other cases, however, this worst case may actually not be that bad, and recognizing this can help.
- Have a contingency plan – If you're afraid of failing at something, having a "Plan B" in place can help you feel more confident about moving forward.

Start by setting a few small goals. These should be goals that are slightly, but not overwhelmingly, challenging. Think of these goals as "early wins" that are designed to help boost your confidence.



Exercise Worry Bank

To help alleviate your worries, it helps to set aside a small amount of time to worry each day, known as “worry time.”

During this time, you record your worries, and after the time has elapsed, you stop worrying.

Instructions: Set your timer for five minutes. Write down your worries in the spaces below.

Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					

After the fifth day has passed, go through your worry banks and circle the worries that come up the most frequently.

Upon circling your most frequent worries, consider the following:

- Why are these worries coming up so many times
- How likely are they to come true?
- What can I do to reduce the number of times I worry about this?

Repeat the worry bank exercise daily to reduce the time you spend worrying throughout the day.

Self-Talk and Negative Thoughts

The average human has 60,000 - 80,000 thoughts in a day, and 90% of those thoughts are negative recurring thoughts about ourselves from the day before. So what we are saying to ourselves every day is either helping or harming our self-esteem and self-efficacy, which ultimately affects our performance and day-to-day.

It's scientific fact that if you change how you view things, you change how you perform.

GOAL: Say what you want to achieve, not what you want to avoid. We tend to focus on what we lack & our weaknesses, instead of our strengths. Confidence & productive thinking can be learned! You don't have to be super positive or fake – like I'm going to get a hit, you can reframe your thoughts to: connect, square up, and lead with your hands. Basically, you want to give your brain instructions of what you want your body to do, not what you're afraid might go wrong.

Your brain holds onto the last word you said, so it can't be a don't or can't think, because it's focusing on the negative part that you're trying not to do. You have to say what you want to happen!

Why is this worth doing? Your brain has the ability to rewire itself & physically change based on what it's exposed to. This is called Neuroplasticity. So whatever you are repeating out loud, reinforcing, or focusing on determines what gets imprinted in the brain. Your image of yourself & your ability to perform is based on how you think. You perform in the future like you talk today. The cool part? No matter what you've said in the past, you can un-do if you repeat it enough. Even if you don't believe the productive thoughts, you're saying at first, if you repeat them, your brain starts to believe them! Try not to be unrealistic & say: I'm going to get this – who knows you might not on this attempt – so you'd say “here is what I want to happen or here is what I want to focus on” Maybe: I deserve to be confident because that's true, versus I feel confident right now. OR I'm working on my confidence! What you say is how you play.



Self-Talk and Negative Thoughts Continued

Avoid these phrases: I need to, I should, or I have to....

The brain perceives this as a threat & a chore to do. It makes the task much longer to complete & much harder. When you use 'need to, have to, should' - your brain feels like it has no other option then it sends signals to make your muscles tense up, you get tight & you're rigid in your movements, which changes your form, your accuracy, your speed, etc. YIKES, & you have control over what comes out of your mouth! Here is what you do instead - USE: I want to.... Or I get to.

Avoid: I have to go to practice, USE: I want to go to practice to get faster. Avoid: I need to clean my room, USE: I want my room clean so that I can chill. Avoid: I have to do my homework, USE: I want my homework done so that I can watch Netflix. Avoid: I should be a starter or I should have this time by now, USE: I get this opportunity to compete, I'm not there YET OR, I'm on my own journey, trust the process.

This is not an easy fix because you are changing years worth of negative thinking, so reminding yourself 50 times a day to reframe your thoughts is time consuming, but as time goes on it gets easier and our confidence builds.





Exercise

Automatic Thoughts

Our thoughts control how we feel about ourselves and the world around us. Sometimes our thoughts happen so quickly we fail to notice them, but they can still affect our mood. These are called automatic thoughts. Identifying negative automatic thoughts and replacing them with new rational thoughts can improve our mood and performance.

Trigger	Automatic Thought	New Thought
EXAMPLE: I made a mistake at work	"I'm probably going to be fired. I always mess up. This is it. I'm no good at this Job"	:"I messed up, but mistakes happen. I'm going to work through this, like I always do"



Exercise

Negative Labeling

Negative labels can hurt your future, but positive labels can help you achieve your goals and attain better opportunities. Ultimately, the label you wear depends on you: you can change your negative labels by changing your actions and showing others your strengths and positive traits.

Write out any negative label anyone has called you or maybe a word you have called yourself; add emotions or all the things that bothered you after you've experienced frustration.

It's like a brain dump - get rid of all the annoying things that pushed your buttons. Physically writing down all the things you need to get out of your head, so you no longer carry them with you everywhere. A couple of ideas of when to use this tool:

- After a tough performance or practice
- After an argument with a friend or parent
- After receiving criticism from a coach or teammate
- After you hear a rumor
- After a coach pulls you or changes your playing time
- After a tough test
- Deciding on switching teams or before tryouts to release worries
- Before a big competition to get rid of distractions

You are releasing all the stress by physically writing them down. As the words become tangible on the paper – you “released” them. The optic nerve sees them & thinks you “got rid of it” physically. Doing the exercise is imperative versus just saying it out loud.

After you've put all the things that stung on paper - crumple it up & throw it away, shred it, or you can go outside or burn it with a candle lighter. It doesn't matter how you get rid of it, just do it.

Your brain sees this as freeing up space to have more energy to go into the next thing you're trying to do. It's a simple technique but it's quite powerful for freeing up brain space. You don't want to store it all, you want have the opportunity to start the next practice, or next day with a fresh slate.



Exercise Athletic Affirmations

Highlight the affirmations that are relevant to you and focus on 1-3 every day. Even if you don't believe it in the moment, keep repeating it until you start to emulate the affirmation.

Challenge: Add more affirmations to your list that are meaningful to you

- I am confident in my ability
- I have the skills needed to perform well
- I can stay focused under pressure
- I can perform well in tough competitions
- I feel mentally strong, I can stay positive throughout the competition
- I like the challenge of competition
- I am dedicated and excited to practice.
- I am an amazing athlete.
- I am a strong competitor.
- I have amazing stamina.
- I am committed to my training.
- I can jump high.
- I am a highly skilled athlete.
- I am a winner at whatever I compete in.
- I am a fast person.
- I will continue to perform my best under pressure.
- I am turning into the greatest athlete.
- Through practice, I will achieve my full athletic potential.
- My stamina is constantly increasing.
- I will push myself to become the best athlete in my sport.
- I will always be focused on winning.
- Every day my skills become stronger and stronger.
- I will always enjoy the training process.
- I will practice every day.
- I will always surpass the athletic expectations others have.
- I have always loved training harder than my competitors.
- I naturally focus my mind when I need to concentrate.
- I naturally achieve all my athletic goals through hard work.
- I naturally have strong athletic abilities.
- Motivation is easy for me to find when training.
- I have a very high level of endurance.
- I enjoy practicing hard.
- I always win and love the feeling of winning.
- I naturally have high stamina.
- Moving quickly comes naturally to me.

Setting Boundaries

Healthy boundaries can serve to establish one's identity. Specifically, healthy boundaries can help people define their individuality and can help people indicate what they will and will not hold themselves responsible for. More generally, the consequences of not setting healthy boundaries often include "stress, financial burdens, wasted time, and relationship issues, which can cause mental distress."

Advantages of Health Boundaries:

- Improved mental and emotional health
- Influence others behavior
- Avoidance of burnout
- Developed sense of identity and autonomy

Sometimes we feel like we are trapped into certain conversations, but we can kindly navigate our way out of it.



Setting Boundaries

Continued

Gentle, yet assertive examples to try:

- I can help you, but I can't do it for you.
- I know you're upset, but that doesn't mean you have to take it out on me.
- I care about what you have to say, but I do not have the mental capacity/space to hold anymore right now. Can we try tomorrow?
- I'd like you to understand what I'm feeling, but I don't need help problem solving right now.
- Do you have the mental space to listen to what I have to share right now?
- I need some time to process this by myself.
- Thanks for your feedback, let's come up with compromise that works for both of us
- I feel hurt when you don't consider me in making decisions. I'd like to be included in them.
- I do want to spend time with you, but I need to recharge right now alone.
- When you dismiss my opinion, I feel disrespected.
- I don't expect you to read my mind, this ____ makes me feel ____.

How to challenge the thoughts with other questions:

Are my thoughts helping me or making this situation worse?

Are there any ways I have dealt with this before?

Does my thought start with "I should" or "I have to" Is it really that way?

What are the chances that the thing I'm thinking will actually happen?

Would this matter next week? Month? Year?

Am I overestimating how bad it will be?

Combat peer pressure statements:

That's interesting, why would you say that?

That's interesting, why would you ask that?

What do you mean by that?

Did you mean to say that?

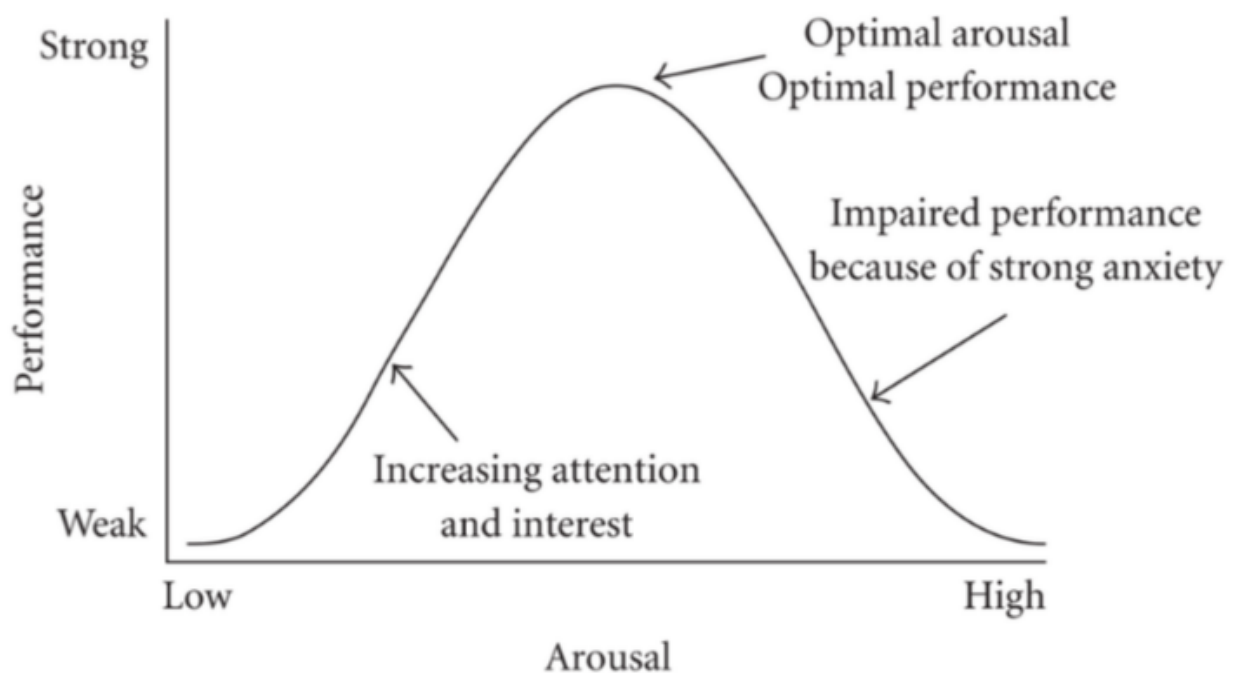
Energy Management

Principles of Energy Management:

- Whatever receives energy gains strength
- Energy expansion prompts discomfort which produces growth
- Positive rituals should be used to manage energy like pre-performance, sleep & hydration
- Negative energy should be kept out of comfort zone - create boundaries (cue or thought stop)
- High self-esteem invests in energy & low self-esteem drains energy
- Stay focused on the present

Take a look at the Arousal and Performance bell curve. When we are too aroused, stressed, or anxious our performance decreases, just as it does when we are not motivated, or aroused enough.

If you scale yourself from 1-10 (1 = not a care in the world and 10 = very anxious/in panic), we want to be at a “sweet 6”, which is a perfect balance of optimal arousal to meet optimal performance.





Exercise

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

When you're experiencing anxiety, stress, or worry, the body responds by tightening up. Progressive muscle relaxation is a relaxation technique that helps you release the tension you're holding in your body & feel more relaxed & calmer. This is a great tool for when you're tight or stiff or maybe even just carrying tension you don't even realize is affecting your body.

When you're tense, your nerves are carrying worry messages instead of stimuli for smooth, coordinated muscle movement. Then your performance suffers because you're rigid & stiff. If we just say "relax my muscles" you tend to get the reverse reaction.

The technique is simple: working through the body, tense one muscle group at a time & then release the tension & notice the contrasting feeling of relaxation. Not only does progressive muscle relaxation help relieve anxiety in the moment, but with regular practice, it can also lower your overall tension & stress levels. You may find your mind wandering into thoughts or worries & this is normal. When this happens, try to release these thoughts, & relax.

Let's do this together; start with your left hand and arm. Take a deep breath and pretend you are squeezing a lemon in your hand. Squeeze it as hard as you can [Hold for 5 seconds]. Now pretend you have dropped the lemon on the floor and think or say 'relax.', then let your deep breath out and unclench your fist. [Repeat the same process with right hand].

1. Face and nose, by wrinkling the nose. Release.
2. Jaw, by biting down hard on the teeth and clenching. Release.
3. Shoulder and neck, by pulling the shoulders up to the ears and the head down into the shoulders, like a big shrug. Release.
4. Arms and shoulders, by stretching the arms out in front, then over the head, and finally relaxed by their side. Release.
5. Place palms together and press them against one another. Release.
6. Make a fist and squeeze with forearms. Release.
7. Stomach, by tightening it very tight and making the stomach very hard. Release.
8. Legs and feet, by pushing down on the floor hard with toes spread apart. Release.

Letting go of every bit of tension. Feeling the warmth and heaviness of your relaxed body. Falling even deeper into relaxation. Your mind calm and rested...When you feel fully alert, you can get up and end the exercise. Going on with your day... enjoying a renewed sense of relaxation and calm.

Time Management

1. Map out what you're currently spending time on – Take time to audit each activity that you spend time on & create a thorough list. What is the cost associated with each thing you spend time on?
2. What's the best use of your time – write out where your energy is best spent for the goals you have or life you want to lead. For example: but it may be things that contribute to your goals – strength workouts, PT stretches, creating a new assignment, journaling for a clear mind, foam rolling, listening to an audiobook on my drive
3. Make a 'Not-to-Do' list - Write out the things that you need to stop doing because they are contributing to your stress or aren't the best use of your time. Ex: social media after 9pm, drinking sodas, checking my phone as soon as I get up, checking as soon as I hear a notification ping, not saying I'm overwhelmed.
5. Create a schedule – take your lists you just created: of your time audit & fill out per hour of your day what you choose to fill your day. We tend to think in 'all or nothing' behaviors, & we say we don't have enough time, but that's rarely accurate. So let's see if we have places that we can gain the feeling of more time

Communication

Effective communication is essential for student-athletes to succeed both in their academic pursuits and athletic careers. The ability to balance the demands of sports and education while maintaining healthy communication channels with coaches, teammates, family, and professors is vital for personal growth and performance. By fostering strong communication skills, student-athletes can navigate the challenges of their dual roles and set themselves up for success.

Communication with Coaches

- **Clear Expectations:** Coaches and athletes should have open discussions about training schedules, goals, and performance expectations. This ensures that athletes understand what is required from them and can better manage their time and efforts.
- **Feedback:** Constructive feedback is essential in an athlete's development. Regular communication of feedback allows athletes to understand their strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Respect and Professionalism:** Mutual respect between athletes and coaches fosters a positive environment. Athletes should feel comfortable discussing concerns, and coaches should be approachable.

Communication with Teammates

- **Teamwork and Trust:** Effective communication among teammates is the foundation of successful team dynamics. Building trust through open conversations fosters collaboration and support, both on and off the field.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Disagreements or misunderstandings may arise, but it's crucial for athletes to approach such situations with openness and honesty in working together to help resolve conflicts and maintain unity within the team.

Communication with Professors

- **Time Management:** Student-athletes need to communicate with professors about their athletic commitments, especially when there are scheduling conflicts due to games or training. Informing professors in advance can help ensure understanding and flexibility.



Communication continued

Communication with Family

- **Support System:** Family plays a key role in a student-athlete's journey. Regular agreed upon communication with family members helps athletes stay grounded and supported in both their academic and athletic pursuits.
- **Balance and Boundaries:** It's important for athletes to maintain a healthy balance between their athletic career and personal life. Communicating their needs and setting boundaries as appropriate with their family ensures they can focus on both their sport and studies without feeling overwhelmed.

Mental Health and Well-being

- **Open Discussions:** Mental health is a critical aspect of a student-athlete's well-being. Open dialogue about mental health challenges should be encouraged, both with coaches and support staff. This fosters a supportive environment where athletes can seek help when needed.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Developing healthy coping strategies for stress, pressure, and performance anxiety through communication can help athletes maintain focus and balance in their lives.

Resource: Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High is a book that offers practical strategies for handling difficult conversations effectively. Written by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, the book focuses on how to communicate successfully in high-pressure situations where emotions run strong and stakes are high. It provides tools to stay calm, keep the dialogue constructive, and work toward positive outcomes, even when there are strong opposing opinions. Whether in personal or professional settings, this book helps readers navigate crucial conversations with confidence and skill.



Schedule

Week of _____

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
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10						

Emotional Management & Mindfulness

Letting go of Emotional Suffering:
Mindfulness of your current Emotion

1. Observe your emotion
 - a. Note its presence
 - b. Step back
 - c. Get unstuck from the emotion
2. Experience your emotion fully
 - a. As a wave coming and going
 - b. Try not to block emotion
 - c. Try not to push the emotion down or away
 - d. Don't try to keep the emotion around
 - e. Don't try to increase the emotion
 - f. Just be a witness to your emotion
3. Remember you are not your emotion
 - a. Do not act on the sensation of urgency
 - b. Remember when you have felt different
 - c. Describe your emotion by saying "i have the feeling of _____", rather than, "I am _____."
 - d. Notice other feelings that you have at the same time you feel the strong emotion
4. Practice respecting and loving your emotion
 - a. Don't judge your emotion
 - b. Practice willingness with your emotion
 - c. Radically accept your emotion

Emotional Management & Mindfulness Continued

Powerful Phrases to say to be more in CONTROL of our emotions.

Say I'm excited. The brain likes instructions & holds onto the last word you say. So don't label nerves, or say I'm nervous, or say I'm so stressed, then your body will react that way & you will amplify those characteristics. If you say "I'm excited" it's a brain hack that lowers the production of adrenaline because you're telling your brain you're safe & okay & you want to feel this way.

Don't talk about what went wrong. For example: avoid injury or bad falls or bad shots or what you don't like. This just reinforces them. you say I'm ready to get out there or I'm focusing on what is awesome right now or I'm ready to tackle this event or this is worth it, it actually prepares me to handle anything that gets thrown at me. You are allowed to talk about what to adapt, what to change, what you learned from it, what experience you gained, what you'll do differently next time – but not what went wrong.

Look at suggestions/feedback as ways to get better. Every time there is a correction, you get stronger. When there is more to fix, there is an opportunity to be way better. Feedback is good, that means they are spending time helping you & want you to get better.

Put the word YET on the end of anything you're frustrated with (haven't accomplished yet). I haven't mastered this drill yet. I haven't moved up in the line up yet. My serve isn't consistent yet. I haven't made this interval YET. I'm not a starter yet. I'm not back 100% yet. The brain needs to perceive hope & control of growth.



Burnout and Lack of Motivation

Burnout is a response to chronic stress and over-fatigue. It often comes from a “more is better” mentality, which is common in sports. Ultimately, burnout can take a very harmful mental and physical toll on the body, so it’s important to stay diligent and work to prevent burnout.

Here are some signs that you or your team may be experiencing burnout:

- Loss of stamina, chronic fatigue, and diminished school or sports performance
- Increased frustration, irritability, and moodiness
- Persistent anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem
- Difficulty focusing, learning new things, and retaining information
- Disproportionate reactions to normal, everyday stressors
- Physical deterioration such as joint pain, weight loss, and frequent sickness
- Loss of enjoyment when playing sports

If you are showing any of these symptoms, you may be experiencing burnout. Burnout can be treated with proper mental and physical rest, hydration, nutrition, and coaching to reframe the psychological pressure you put on your sport. If burnout becomes serious, the individual experiencing it may need physical and/or psychological evaluation and care by a licensed professional.



Burnout and Lack of Motivation Continued

4 Ways To Cultivate Joy in Sports:

It is said the difference between a good athlete and a great athlete is - the great athlete will find joy in doing the same mundane thing over and over again, never complaining.

Do what you love and love what you do.

1. Find Purpose in the Struggle - real joy is purpose-filled.

- losing a game, messing up, or disappointing ourselves = tough times are the cost of admission.
- JOY means finding PURPOSE in the losses, the long training days, and the difficulty that comes with being in a competitive sport.
- Create a culture that supports the dichotomy that you can be pissed, sad, and frustrated and ALSO feel joy.

2. Practice Gratitude

- Gratitude takes focus off yourself and instills an appreciation for things that can't be scored, like camaraderie, friendship, accomplishment, and blessings, whether big or small. And, by being grateful, we can tap into what makes us tick as athletes, driving us harder to do better.
- At any given moment, you're either building a case for or against your sport. So pay attention to your inner dialogue through wins, losses, long practices, and everything in between, and ask yourself, "What argument am I making?". It's so easy to get stuck in a negative cycle and start collecting reasons why your sport sucks.
- I'm grateful that my sport helps me feel strong, and fit
- I'm grateful that my sport brings my family, friends, and community together
- I'm grateful to be able to make so many fun memories with my teammates



Burnout and Lack of Motivation Continued

3. Focus on Abstract and Small Wins

- Winning matters. Winning is important, but winning can also take on many forms.

Winning can mean:

- Fighting hard the entire game and never giving up
- Being brave & taking risks
- Pushing yourself harder than you thought possible
- Pulling up your teammates when they have lost hope
- Playing being better than you did the day before.

4. Train Your Brain

- Practice visualization - re-connect to the childlike love you once had for your sport. It reminds you what made you love it in the first place. Describe all 5 senses, and make this visualization as fully immersive and individualized as possible.
- Don't over complicate things, go simple and back to the basics to find your "why" to keep pursuing the sport you love.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

CONFIDENCE IS LINKED TO THE WORK YOU PUT IN. You are ready because you've been preparing for this moment. When you honor the work you've put in, your confidence will grow stronger. When you put in the work, YOU get better. And if things aren't working out for you, you haven't failed. There's just more work to do. Trust your training!

LET GO OF SELF-DOUBT. Break the habit of worrying & self-doubt. You can break habits. Think about something good, compliment yourself, a solution, or gratitude. Evaluate the merit of criticism you receive, but never allow any one person's opinion to determine your self-worth. You choose your reactions to people every time. YOU decide how you see yourself.

Our self-concept is determined by comments, experiences, & competitions that get imprinted through Social Experiences like whom we surround ourselves with, and comments we take in from people. Take some of it in, accept feedback, & move on, be able to have your own perspective as well.

Reflect:

Don't let someone else define you. Who are the good Influences/Pushes us?

To whom do you give too much power to/Need to spend less time?

How much credibility are we giving these people, how much power over us? How long do we hold onto their comments? How much of it is opinion-based & not necessarily true?

The next thing that defines self-concept is Social Comparisons: With the right mindset, comparison can be good, because it pushes us to try new things & to reach our potential, which maybe on our own, we didn't think possible. You can't justify yourself compared to someone else – I'm kind of good, but compared to so & so, I'm just okay. Comparison is only healthy when we use it for inspiration to better ourselves and unlock our potential.



Confidence and Self-Esteem Continued

Reflect:

Who do you need to stop comparing to?

Who pushes you to do more/try new things?

Strengths to focus on?

The last piece of self-concept is Reflected Appraisals: This is how you think others see you; the things you do or don't do based on when people are watching you. It's how your behaviors are motivated. For example, when someone walks by, you work harder or if someone is watching, you pick up the piece of trash. These are the decisions you make based on how you want to come across.

Reflect:

Which labels do you need to leave behind, then decide which ones you want to define you. Anything you need to let go of that you have repeated from parents, siblings, friends, coaches, teammates previously?

Good news is you can change your self-image & you control what you hold onto. Remember the brain constantly re-wires itself. We have to teach ourselves to picture what we want to happen & not worry about what we're afraid might happen to avoid imprinting that. Be careful not to spend time listening to other's problems either or you will inherit & imprint those problems too. Our mind becomes what we tell it most & we become who we hang around with. Your brain holds onto the last memory – so you choose the last memory, so choose what we are telling ourselves wisely.



Prepare and Reset

Exercise

Pre-Performance Routine

A pre-planned sequence of thoughts & behaviors that you engage in prior to performing. You create a pre-performance routine for you to do before a performance, it's the same every time so you feel prepared.

Research supports routines as extremely helpful to one's performance. These routines are used to lock your mindset in; we want you to be on "autopilot" & not overthink anything. This helps control the "what if" game.

It takes time to develop our own concentration routine. This should cue the body & the mind. It must be practiced consistently & well thought out. Having a protocol for unexpected events is also key – think emotional fire drill. You want to know your responses to your triggers for when things don't go as planned. You don't want emotions to drive your reactions; you want them to be planned so you stay in control of your thoughts & actions. If you finish & you still have time, start it again & keep the cycle on rotate until it's time to perform. See yourself being successful, so that's the last thing your brain is focused on.

Example of pre-game routine: Play favorite hype song, use imagery of a successful performance– 3 cycles of rhythmic breathing, say "I'm in control, I was made for this", raise arms up & smile really big, say "accelerate", PMR check of muscles, stretch out shoulders & hit legs once, play favorite song while swinging arms.





Exercise

Cues

A cue is something we do, say or see that can help us lock in and forget about previous mistakes. We want to acknowledge our mistake or error, but not hold on to it. Once you execute your physical, verbal or visual cue - connect the cue with moving forward.

1. Physical cue - what you do - Chances are you already have a physical cue that you do subconsciously to move on.
 - a. A quick hand or body movement that you can do when needing to lock in or let go of a mistake quickly
 - b. Examples: clenching fist and releasing, hit your chest or legs, swipe foot horizontally, clap, snap, adjust uniform
2. Verbal - what you say
 - a. Word, mantra, affirmation, quote or team phrase that gives you motivation and purpose
 - b. Accelerate, smooth, play loose, outwork yesterday, 1%, I'm in control, I can do hard things, breathe, I am equipped, I am resilient, Keep moving forward, I can I will, excellence not perfection.
3. Visual - what you see
 - a. A consistent visual that will be at most places you compete
 - b. Flags, bleachers, poles, scoreboards, refs, water bottles, towels, uniforms, or mascot

Letting go of mistakes quickly:

Use these questions to reset: **How do I want to feel?** not necessarily how you currently feel. You are trying to direct your mind on what to focus on. So, I might feel worried, but I want to feel: in control, relaxed, loose, prepared, intimidating, ready, etc.

Then Ask: What do I want to happen? Try to avoid the results because you may not have control over that & think of things that are effort based, such as: keep head still, squeeze legs, load early, keep my body tight, push up, etc. Ask yourself these 2 questions often to better handle your emotions.

This is tough, but I can handle it. Use a phrase similar to this to regain control of your emotions. You can acknowledge the frustration, but you have to put a phrase on the back end immediately after to tell your brain you're going to be okay. You have made it through all stressful, scary, fearful situations in the past, so this is a reminder to your brain that you'll figure this one out too. A couple different combos you might use at the beginning: this sucks, or this is frustrating, or I hate this, or I don't like this, or this is annoying, or this is tough, or this is hard. Then put the backend on it: I can handle it, or I can manage, or I'll be okay, or I'll figure it out, or this won't take me out.



Nutrition

Fueling Performance and Recovery

Proper Nutrition is essential for athletes to enhance performance, optimize recovery, and maintain overall health. Nutrition can also impact your mental game. This section of the guide focuses on the impact of nutrition and mood, as well as how to practice mindful eating as an athlete. If you would like more information regarding nutrition for performance, it is recommended to consult with a registered dietitian or nutritionist.

How nutrition impacts mood - Nutrition and mood are closely interconnected. What you eat can impact stress and anxiety, sleep, and brain function. Mindful eating can help to improve mood by promoting a balanced relationship with food while enhancing emotional resilience. Mindful Eating involves eating with full awareness of the present moment while eating, savoring each bite, and honoring what your body needs for fuel and recovery

How to Practice Mindful Eating

- Eat regularly to maintain energy levels and mental clarity.
- Stay attuned to hunger and fullness cues, ensuring you're properly fueling before and after training.
- Sit at the table and focus on your food. Avoid multitasking during meals.
- Eat when you're hungry and stop when you feel comfortably full.
- Practice self-compassion with your eating habits. There is no "perfect" way to eat.
- Notice how your body feels after meals, such as if you feel energized, satisfied, or sluggish after your meal?





Sleep Hygiene

Fueling Performance and Recovery

Just like any other part of basic self-care, your sleep behavior could also benefit from hygiene. Your sleep environment, afternoon and evening activities, coping behaviors, and sleep routine are all part of good sleep hygiene.

Maintain a regular sleep schedule:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day (+/- 20 minutes), even on weekends and holidays. This should help regulate your body's clock and enhance the quality of your sleep and wake time.
- If possible, avoid naps. If you have to take a nap, try to keep it to less than one hour and avoid taking a nap after 3 p.m. Naps decrease the 'Sleep Debt' that is so necessary for easy sleep onset. Each of us needs a certain amount of sleep per 24-hour period. We need that amount, and we don't need more than that. When we take naps, it decreases the amount of sleep that we need the next night – which may cause sleep fragmentation and difficulty initiating sleep, and may lead to insomnia.

Your evening and bedtime routine:

- Practice relaxation techniques before bedtime.
- Deep breathing and visualization of a soothing scene.
- Take a warm shower or bath about 90 minutes before bed. A hot bath will raise your body temperature, and it is the drop in body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Drink a cup of non-caffeinated tea.
- Have a light snack, but avoid eating heavy meals near bedtime.
- Wait until you are sleepy before going to bed. If you're not sleepy at your regular bedtime, try to relax your body and distract your mind. Avoid exciting books or television that wakes you up.





Sleep Hygiene continued

Preparing the mind for sleep:

- Reduce stress. If you're worried about getting your work done, make a to-do list for the next day to assure yourself you have enough time to accomplish what needs to get done. Once the chores that cause you stress are down on paper, your mind is free to relax and think more pleasant thoughts.
- If you are worried, get out of bed. Write down your worries, make a list, put it aside. The bed is a place for rest, not worry.
- Unglue yourself from false or anxious beliefs about sleep, such as the idea that a single restless night will make you sick.
- Try to avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and activities before trying to go to sleep. Don't dwell on or bring your problems to bed.

Preparing the body for sleep:

- Avoid caffeine after lunch. The effects of caffeine may last for several hours after ingestion. Caffeine is a stimulant and reaches its peak effect in the first hour but with a half-life elimination of 3-7 hours. Caffeine is a potent sleep inhibitor and it increases sleep latency, night waking, decreases total sleep time, decreases slow-wave sleep, and impairs overall sleep quality. Remember, chocolate has caffeine, too.
- Don't go to bed hungry or full. If your stomach is too empty, that can interfere with sleep. However, if you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, that can interfere as well. Dairy products, turkey, and tuna contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Tryptophan is probably why a warm glass of milk is sometimes recommended. Dietary changes can also cause sleep problems, so make gradual changes if possible.
- Avoid alcohol of any type within six hours of your bedtime. Alcohol creates the illusions of good sleep but the architecture of sleep is affected adversely. Sleep is fragmented with deep sleep initially and a rebound of REM sleep later.
- Do not smoke or ingest nicotine within two hours of your bedtime.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous exercise within six hours of your bedtime. Exercise promotes continuous sleep. However, rigorous exercise circulates endorphins into the body which may cause difficulty initiating sleep.
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light during the day. Light exposure helps maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Avoid sleeping pills, or use them cautiously. Always use sleeping pills as prescribed by your physician.



Sleep Hygiene continued

Your sleeping area:

- Remove all TVs, computers, and other “gadgets” from the bedroom.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and sex (if that’s right for you). The bedroom, and more importantly the bed, is not a place for watching TV, eating, chatting, working, etc.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and cool. Use curtains or blinds to block out light.
- If noise bothers you, consider wearing earplugs or using soothing music, a fan, or a "white noise" machine to block out noise.
- If you are a ‘clock watcher’ at night, hide the clock.
- Use a sleep mask and earplugs, if light and noise bother you.
- Extreme heat or cold should be avoided. A hot room can be uncomfortable. A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is recommended.
- If light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a slumber mask.
- If you need light, use off-light such as a night light in the bathroom or hallway.
- If your pets awaken you, keep them outside the bedroom.

If you can’t fall asleep:

- If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, leave your bedroom and find something else that will relax you enough to help make you sleepy. Don’t stay in bed awake for more than 5-10 minutes. This is called sleep restriction. Lying in bed when you're awake can become a habit that leads to poor sleep. Limiting the amount of time you spend in bed can make you sleepier when you do go to bed. That way you're more likely to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- If you find your mind racing, or worrying about not being able to sleep during the middle of the night, get out of bed, and sit in a chair in the dark. Do your mind racing in the chair until you are sleepy, then return to bed. No TV or internet during these periods! That will just stimulate you more than desired. If this happens several times during the night, that is OK. Just maintain your regular wake time, and try to avoid naps.
- Sit quietly in the dark or read the warranty on your refrigerator. Don't expose yourself to bright light while you are up. The light gives cues to your brain that it is time to wake up.
- Remaining passively awake. This involves avoiding any effort to fall asleep. Paradoxically, worrying that you can't sleep can actually keep you awake. Letting go of this worry can help you relax and make it easier to fall asleep.

If you continue to have sleeping problems, consider keeping a sleep diary. Write down when you go to bed, when you get up, how much time you spend in bed unable to sleep, total sleep time and other details about your sleep patterns.

Bonus: Key Reminders

Instructions

1. Highlight the reminders that stick out to you. Things you want to work on or remember throughout the week and relevant to your situation and environment.
2. Pick 1-2 quotes per week to focus on by writing them on a post-it note and sticking it on your mirror or somewhere in your room as a constant reminder to hold yourself accountable.

For example, at the end of the day, you can look at the post-it note and ask yourself, “Did I contribute to the solution or the problem today?” or “How did I contribute to the solution and not the problem today?” Based on your “yes” or “no” answer, brainstorm how you can be better for tomorrow.

- Doubt is the precursor to fear
- Override because of your “why?”
- Don’t let the externals control the internals
- Establish a new identity and separate yourself from the pack
- Be aggressive and assertive so the other team must adapt
- Don’t sit, wait and be reactive
- Adapt and adjust
- Buy in and hold each other accountable
- Lead by example – EARN IT
- Discipline, not desire, equals success
- Play in present. Be where your feet are
- Cut the but
- Focus on today to reach the goal tomorrow
- If it is not going to matter in five years, then do not spend more than five minutes worrying/thinking about it
- Get lost in getting better
- Don’t be who you’re not
- Own what you’re good at
- How bad do you want it? What’s the price you are willing to pay?
- Find one thing to change about your game or approach
- You don’t know where you’re going if you don’t know where you’re at
- Don’t give power away to the opponent
- It’s a choice to have control over mental skills
- Contribute to the solution not the problem
- Don’t compete half-hearted

Additional Resources

Maxu.Co - MaxU is a mental performance platform designed for young athletes aged 12-18, aimed at enhancing both their physical and mental abilities. It offers personalized assessments, training, and actionable insights to improve mental resilience, confidence, and overall performance in sports and life. Backed by over 50 years of scientific research, MaxU helps athletes, coaches, and parents optimize development through a comprehensive, secure platform. The service emphasizes mental training as a key to unlocking athletic potential and fostering lifelong success.

HowWeFeel - The How We Feel app is a mental wellness tool designed to help users track and improve their emotional health. It allows individuals to log their moods, emotions, and feelings in a simple and intuitive way. Users can record how they feel each day, identify patterns in their emotional states, and reflect on the factors affecting their well-being. The app offers insights and personalized tips to promote better mental health and emotional awareness. It aims to support users in understanding their emotions and building healthier habits over time.

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