**WHAT ARE EMOTIONS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT FOR PERFORMANCE?**

Emotions or feelings are an important component of total human functioning and they are

extremely significant for team and individual sport performance. They can provide

the athlete with the energy that triggers the joy of performance, or they can shift dramatically toward despair and hopelessness when things go wrong or expectations are not met.

Athletes need to understand the causes and consequences of their dominant emotions and moods, and they need to know how to control them effectively.

Eight emotions have been identified as important in sport: anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, hope, relief, happiness, and pride.

**What is Anxiety?**

Anxiety can be a positive emotion when it reflects excitement or eagerness to perform well

because the athlete feels well prepared and because he or she has coping responses in place

to meet the demands of the task. But anxiety can be a negative emotion if it reflects feelings of

apprehension; such feelings usually occur because the athlete does not feel well prepared.

**Why is Anxiety Relevant to Sport Performance?**

Anxiety can be functional — it can improve performance by facilitating appropriate

thoughts or actions.

Anxiety can be dysfunctional — it can detract from performance by causing

inappropriate thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Each athlete should seek to identify and understand the specific causes of his or her anxiety

and the resulting consequences for performance.

Several skills can help athletes control their anxiety, including breathing control exercises, mind-

to-body relaxation exercises, body-to-mind relaxation exercises, visualization strategies, positive self-talk, and thought-stopping techniques. These may be developed individually and then

combined into routines that athletes can develop, refine, and implement in practice.

**WHAT IS STRESS, AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO ANXIETY?**

**Definition of Stress**

Competition is about testing an athlete’s abilities against an opponent or the clock in a particular

environment. By its very nature, competition may cause stress. An athlete experiencing stress is therefore (1) recognizing a challenge and (2) perceiving that he or she may not meet the challenge.

**Common Causes of Negative Anxiety**

* Tiredness/loss of sleep
* Poor/lengthy travel arrangements or other organizational problems
* Changes in environmental conditions
* Physical tension/tightness
* Changes in physiological states (e.g. increased heart rate, pulse rate)
* Fear of disappointing others (e.g. parents, teammates, coach)
* Fear of making a fool of themselves by failing at the task, especially when others are watching
* Fear of not being skilled enough or fit enough to meet the challenge
* Fear of not making a team selection, event selection
* Fear of injury or re-injury
* Perceived importance of the competition (or making a qualifying time)
* Poor travel arrangements or other organizational problems
* Other aspects of life that cannot be successfully “parked”
* Poor decisions by officials (being DQ’d)
* Lack of social support

**What is something that I get stressed out about? (ex: swim meets, a test at school)**

**TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING ANXIETY**

**Before You Begin: Pulse Rate**

Record your radial (wrist) pulse rate for 15 seconds. Do this twice, and take the average value

(count in-between pulses at the end of the 15-second period as one-half a beat). Then multiply

by 4 to obtain your heart rate in beats per minute. This is your heart rate; it will be affected by

your arousal or anxiety level, as well as by coffee consumption, recent meals, etc.

Through the following series of exercises, we will attempt to lower your heart rate significantly.

**Breathing Control**

In addition to heart rate, breathing rate and depth are indicators of anxiety. Managing breathing

rate and depth is a prerequisite of relaxation. Relaxation is in turn a prerequisite of visualization,

a mental-preparation technique that we will explore later in this document.

**Controlled Breathing — Kinesthetic Controlled Breathing:**

The technique for this type of controlled breathing is as follows:

* Close your eyes.
* Feel your stomach move out; keep your chest and shoulders steady.
* Slowly inhale, feeling the air in your chest increase and your shoulders rise.
* Hold your breath.
* Slowly exhale, feeling a release in tension as your shoulders and chest drop and your
* stomach relaxes.
* Now shift to listening to your breathing.

**Controlled Breathing — Audio-controlled Breathing**

The technique for this kind of controlled breathing is as follows:

* Close your eyes.
* Hear yourself slowly inhale and exhale air as you breathe.
* Slowly inhale.
* Hear the air pass through your mouth and nose.
* Feel the build-up of tension in your chest.
* Slowly release the air.
* Hear the sound of air passing through your nose and mouth.

**Visualization Exercises**

Feeling relaxed is a prerequisite of effective visualization.

Begin with a familiar image to help athletes buy in.

Visualization and imagery are often used interchangeably. However, there are subtle

differences. Visualization generally involves seeing the actual skilled performance or

routine. Imagery is more creative and often combines an image such as a graceful swan

or a powerful animal or machine with powerful words that in themselves create images.

**Learning to Visualize**

Stage 1: Find a comfortable position, take two or three deep breaths, and say Relax as you

breathe out. Once you feel relaxed, go to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Visualization exercise for all the senses.

Now you are feeling relaxed, imagine a place you might go when you want to get away from it all; a place that was/is special to you; a place with which you associate good feelings; a place in which you feel peaceful and safe.

* Imagine the scene in your mind; add as much detail in your mind as you can.
* Focus on the sounds you might hear in the situation you “see” in your mind.
* Focus on the sensations you would experience in your body (e.g. touch).
* Focus on the smells associated with the image in your mind.

After you finish, take a few moments to write down the factors you found easiest to see, feel,

smell, hear, etc., and those that were hardest. These will be the important visualization cues that

you can use as you build your images in practice or in skill rehearsal.

**What is a special place that I can think of? (ex: the beach)**