

Dealing with Success, Losses, Disappointment and Adversity.



Preamble

The following psychological resource for participants and athletes, has been developed by sport psychologist Fiona McCarthy on behalf of the NSW Office of Sport, as a key initiative of the NSW Government's Future Champions strategy.

For more information on Future Champions, please visit www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development

Getting to know the author

Fiona McCarthy is a registered psychologist, specialising in sport psychology and is a member of the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian College of Sport and Exercise Psychologists. Fiona owns and operates Mind and Body Balance, a business she established 25 years ago.

Fiona is the Hunter Academy of Sport, Sport Psychology Consultant and a New South Wales Institute of Sport, Sport Psychology Service Provider. Over the last twenty-

five years, Fiona has assisted many teams, athletes, parents and coaches in the areas of confidence, concentration, handling pressure, motivation, goal setting, time management, performance preparation and general well-being. Fiona has worked with numerous sports, assisting recreational level athletes to professional, international, Olympic and Paralympic level athletes, reach their full potential.



Background to these resources

The importance of having a mental 'tool kit' to support your learning, performance and engagement on and off the sporting field.

The following resources have been developed by Fiona McCarthy to assist athletes at all levels, in understanding the importance of having a suite of mental 'tools' at their disposal. These 'tools' are practical and multidimensional and will help athletes learn and develop the necessary mental skills they require to help them navigate their way through their sporting journey with a positive mindset and achieve success on and off the field.

It is well recognised that to reach the pinnacle within sport, an athlete needs a superior mindset consisting of strong and effective mental skills and strategies.

Importantly, mental skills are very intertwined and integrated, so it is recommended that you read about and put into regular practice, a number of these resources to strengthen the 'mental tools' in your kit bag!



Dealing with success, losses, disappointment and adversity

- Focusing solely on winning or outcomes is not a healthy way to look at life or sport.

Athlete/players need to develop an appropriate outlook on life/sport, which includes changing the focus from outcome to performance.
- Athletes/players who focus on outcome, judge their success and at times self-worth/identity on wins and losses, not on how they performed. They focus on results rather than effort, so that they see failures as a lack of ability.

This is not a healthy mindset to have.
- Athletes/players need to understand that being successful means attaining their personal goals or achieving more than they did the last time rather than winning the competition/game.
- Athletes/players need to make sure goals set are specific to them (and not comparing to others) and realistic.

Dealing with success

- Keep winning in perspective, be proud of your success.

Take notice of the specific parts of the performance/preparation that contributed to the success, so that you can try and repeat it.
- Think of it like creating a recipe for success. What are your key ingredients?

Take the focus off success and instead focus on how to achieve the goals you have set yourself.
- Focus on the process, it is the only thing you can control.

Using positive, key words can greatly assist you in doing this such as 'strong' and 'dominate', 'attack' and 'aggressive'.



Dealing with losses, disappointment and adversity

When dealing with adversity, it is not uncommon for athletes to feel a sense of loss or even grief. The following phases below, outline the common response athletes experience in such situations.

- **Denial** - This may involve not fully believing or accepting what has happened to you. For example, you may be in disbelief of your non-selection and think that there must be a mistake.
- **Anger/Fear** - This may involve feelings of anger, hurt or fear. For example, you might feel quite angry at your de-selection from the team.

- **Frustration/Disappointment/Sadness** - As the reality of your situation 'sinks in' you can start to feel strong feelings of sadness, frustration etc.
- **Acceptance** - In this stage you fully accept what has happened.
- **Future Planning** - This stage involves moving forward, setting goals and working towards them with a positive mindset.

All of these stages are important to go through as you transition from a negative feeling/perspective to one of a more positive perspective and learning.





During times of adversity, it is important to allow yourself to progress through the above stages.

Remember to be kind to yourself, look after yourself and communicate with the appropriate people in your support network. You are not alone.

- Remind yourself that everyone loses at some time, even the most successful sportspeople. Losses can promote learning - be honest with yourself with regards to your strengths and the areas you need to work on in your sport performance.
- Remember defeat is never a failure if you have learnt something from it.

- Always find something positive that you did during the performance, but don't compare yourself to others.
- Challenge yourself to learn and improve at the next opportunity.
- Coping with adversity can also involve learning how to deal with injuries, non-selection or de-selection.

When faced with these situations it is helpful to communicate your thoughts and feelings with people you trust and feel safe with. Such people may be those in your support network who can assist you with framing a positive perspective of the current situation.

If injured, it is vital that you seek the appropriate medical advice relating to your injury. Make sure once you have done this, you are very clear on the planned outline in moving forward with regards to your rehab and the time frames put in place to resume training and comps.

It is also of benefit where possible to get some clarity, maybe from coaches/selectors as to why you may have missed selection or been de-selected. This process should be done with positive communication and allow you to understand the areas of your performance you may need to work on.

We hope you enjoyed our tips!

Have FUN building your psychological skills and strategies and put them into practice in and out of sport!

Remember importantly, if you are unsure of any of these tips or require further advice, please talk to your Coach, Parent or consult a Sport Psychologist.

You might like to check out our NEW animated YouTube video, Developing your mental 'tool kit' to support you in and out of sport featured within the NSW Office of Sport's Pathways and Development webpages @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development>.

Check out more tips for Participants @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/social-and-recreational-sport-participants>

And our tips for Emerging and High-Performance Athletes @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/emerging-athletes>



**Future Champions -
Developing your
mental 'tool kit' to
support you in and out
of sport.**

Formal permission is required from the NSW Office of Sport to reproduce any of the information within this resource. Formal permission should be directed to the Office of Sport, 6B Figtree Drive, Sydney Olympic Park. You are required to acknowledge that the material is provided by this document or the owner of the copyright. © State of NSW 2023