

Effective Mindfulness to assist you in and out of sport



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!



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to be able to focus all your attention on the task at hand and on the present moment, and then having an awareness of how being in that moment makes you feel and how it impacts your thoughts and bodily sensations.

The ability to focus on the right thing at the right time is a skill athletes need to be very good at. For example, not being able to overcome a mistake in a game of AFL and dwelling on it, rather than getting your thoughts back in the game requires you to be able to shift your focus from something negative to back to the task at hand.

This requires the skill of mindfulness. Focusing on the task at hand allows you to have clarity, with your thoughts, feelings and behaviours and helps you to fully 'engage' in that task.

Having such a focus is often beneficial to athletes when they are competing. It can help with your ability to handle pressure,

stress, anxiety and improve your confidence and concentration.

Mindfulness can be practised on and off the sports arena and is a good skill to practise daily to support your mental and physical well-being.

It really is about taking time out each day to allow calmness and clarity within your thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Ways in which you can engage in mindfulness could include –

- doing some meditation (e.g., using a guided meditation within an App, or simply listening to music (or not – what works for you!) and closing your eyes in a comfortable place and focusing on your breathing)
- deep breathing techniques
- keeping a gratitude journal and writing down 2-3 things each day that you are grateful for
- engaging in some random acts of kindness.

All of these mindful strategies can promote a healthy mind and body.

So next time you go for a walk –

- be mindful and present within the natural environment
- listen to the birds singing
- smell the beautiful rose garden you may pass by
- observe and appreciate the amazing landscape of the beach
- say hello to a complete stranger.

You may just feel better for it!

If throughout a day either on or off the sporting field, you find yourself feeling 'out of sorts', or you find your thoughts 'drifting' away from the task at hand, take a minute to become aware of this and try doing a 'sensory check' to ground yourself and shift your thoughts and feelings to the present moment and the task at hand.

For example, when you find yourself thinking about a past negative sporting performance whilst you are at training and attempting to learn a new skill, stop for a moment and take a few deep breaths, and do a sensory check paying attention to you and your surroundings.

Ask yourself what can I see, hear, feel, smell, taste? This often helps to 'ground' you in the moment or task at hand and shifts your feelings and thoughts from what was distracting you, in this case a negative past performance.

This can help you 'kick start' a new focus of mindfulness and allow you to focus on the task at hand.

By practising mindfulness daily, it may help you feel, calmer and clearer in your thoughts, feelings and behaviour which may help with improving your athletic performance and your overall mental and physical wellbeing.



We hope you liked 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.**

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