

The nature of fear



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!



The nature of fear

Fear of injury, fear of failure, fear of success may all be linked to self-doubt, and restrict or inhibit athletic performance.

Fears associated with sport, set limits and create barriers/ mental blocks for many athletes. Consequently, the once energetic, highly skillful athlete suddenly becomes extremely cautious and statue-like and is overcome by fear!

Essentially mental blocks can be a result or consequence of athletes becoming pre-occupied with the OUTCOMES or END RESULTS of events. When this happens the athlete often becomes anxious,

tense, apprehensive and they commonly develop a negative frame of mind. They may feel that their skills don't meet the challenge of the situation or competition.

Tips for overcoming fear

In order to perform well at any time, especially while under pressure, you need to be relaxed, confident, in control and focused on the processes at hand.

Below, are some mental skills which may assist an athlete in overcoming their fear and mental blocks and barriers -

- Develop **process** rather than **outcome-based thinking**.

- **Segment** or break your skills and routines into manageable pieces. For example, a golfer breaks their swing technique up into smaller steps or processes rather than feeling overwhelmed that they must play the 'perfect' shot.

Remember, shot by shot.

- **Get back to basics**, - don't get too complicated. Focus on the things you can control such as your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

- Practise some **relaxation/ breathing techniques**, as well as using **mental imagery**.
- Develop a **good routine**. For example, warm up, warm down/ evaluation routines.
- Treat every situation/event/ training session as a new one.
- Don't dwell on past experiences, especially if they have been overwhelming.



REMEMBER the above are all mental skills, and just like physical, technical and tactical skills they need to be practised often if they are going to be effective.

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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