

Energy Control (Relaxing & Getting Pumped up)

Relaxation:

- Develop your ability to recognize & control your anxiety levels by doing relaxation exercises.
- Practice relaxation drills at home the same way you practice other skills before competition.
- Drill #1: “Progressive Muscular Relaxation”
 - Flex and relax each muscle group of the body
 - Be aware of the tension and of the feeling of relaxation as you stop flexing
 - As you move through the drill, be aware of how relaxed your whole body is becoming.
 - Once the body is relaxed, focus on calm, controlled nasal breathing.
 - End your session with a transfer situation (e.g., imagine performing / competing while relaxed; imagine a cue word/image/idea that represents the relaxed state—you can use this word/image/idea before competition to relax).
- Develop relaxation skills/routines that can be done before and during competitions. Other drills:
 - Create a shorten version of the above process to do before you compete, or during breaks
 - Centre & focus during competition (e.g., take a big breathe and say a focusing statement)

Energizing:

Tips on how to increase energy levels...

- Exercise or perform some type of brief, intense physical activity to get your blood pumping.
- Stimulate your nervous system: shake your hands nervously, slap yourself, jump up & down...
- Visualize yourself getting pumped up, imagine your energy levels rising (be creative).
- Energy Transfer: Convert negative feelings (anger, worry, butterflies...) into positive energy.
- Talk to yourself...(scream)...try to get energy stirred up inside you; ready to explode out.
- Listen to music, trash talk, or talk to teammates, etc...get excited!
- Sleep and eat well before, during & after competitions so that you have energy stores available.
- Conserve energy by regulating your body temperature, activity & pre-competitive stress level.
- Summary / Application:
 - Imagery, self-talk, special cue words/ideas/images, regulate feelings in your body
 - Do things physically, mentally, and emotionally that get you into any idea “zone”
- Getting energy during competition: creative, metaphoric imagery can help you to manage pain and fatigue during competition...sometimes, it is an issue of mind over matter. Imagine yourself drawing energy from opponents, or from the crowd...imagine that energy fuelling you!

Breathing: A Relaxation, Concentration, and Positive-Thinking Tool

Why Breathing Matters & Why It Works!

- Emotion-Breathing connections are perfect examples of Mind-Body relationships
 - Because of how these are connected, there can be a spiral with increasingly intense breathing and greater arousal, anxiety, and emotional distress.
 - When we have more adrenaline and emotion, our breathing becomes more rapid. As a result of that, emotions become more intense, uncomfortable, and distracting. When we relax and centre our breathing, our emotions become more controllable and functional – they help us to perform better rather than distract from performance.
 - Adrenalin and negative emotions like anxiety or anger can help athletes to perform at their best. But too much emotion makes it difficult to: (1) be confident; (2) focus and be present in the moment (vs. overthinking); and (3) function at our best.
- This makes breathing an incredible way to control our emotions, save energy, prevent over-thinking and negative-thinking, and to centre.

How to develop Breathing as a mental skill...

- Like everything, perfect practice all the difference. Practice transforms any skill, making breathing more effective, creating a quicker impact.
- Here are some of the benefits of practicing breathing skills at home:
 - You will gain more control of your breathing and feelings
 - You will be able to centre and focus more quickly
 - You will be more aware when your breathing or emotions are too intense
 - This means you will be able to adjust breathing/emotions sooner
 - Create calm aim before strong winds shift turn into hurricanes
 - Done the right way, you will sharpen your ability to drop negative thoughts
 - You will concentrate better, and
 - You will be able to stay in the moment better, not focused on the past or future.
- Steps for mindful breathing practice
 - Whether you are walking, laying down, or sitting, find good **posture**.
 - Good posture helps you relax, breath properly, and do the activity longer
 - Breathe from your **stomach**/diaphragm – your stomach goes out on in-breaths
 - This type of breathing is more relaxing and more effective.
 - It helps to prevent tension in the chest, shoulders, and neck.
 - Focus on your **breath**: the feeling of air going in and out.
 - You may keep your focus on a single point, like the tip of your nostrils, and feel the air going in and out through that point; or
 - You may breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth; or
 - You may focus on your whole-body breath: following the air as it comes through your nose, travels to your lungs, expanding your stomach and chest. Feel how different parts of your body and different muscles all work together to create each breathe; and focus on how unique each breathe is.

Distraction & Tips:

- The kind of breathing I am recommending here is, to be frank, boring. That isn't a bad thing though! It's actually what's going to make you a better athlete!!
- It is how we manage the boredom that makes it a special tool worth developing.
 - First off, if it is boring, that means you will be easily distracted. If you are easily distracted, that means you have to concentrate harder and you have to refocus more often when you do lose focus!

- Conclusion: the simplicity of the activity is what is truly helping you to develop concentration and refocusing skills. The fact that the activity involves breathing is what will help you to develop relaxation/centering skills and self-awareness (you're more aware of "bad breathing" and the stress or loss of focus from that).
- And that leads us to the most important comment or tip on this handout, the foundation for creating a great breathing skill or tool...What do you do when you lose focus?
 - This may sound too simple, but it is what it is...you get back to your breathe!
 - When you lose focus
 - In fact, this leads me to a really helpful question that I ask clients: Based on everything you've read, which do you think is better in a 5-minute breathing session 1) to only be distracted 2-3 times, but for 20-30 seconds each time, or 2) to be distracted 15 times but only for a second or less?
 - Don't bother multiplying those or figuring out the total time out of focus.
 - The question is about your refocusing skills, which are more important than your concentration in a way.
 - A tenth of a second distraction rarely impacts your performance as much as a 5-second or a half-minute distraction.
 - Focus on your breath. This seems simple, so let's also identify what not to do:
 - Don't focus on your distraction any longer; Don't focus on why you were distracted; Don't feel bad about being distracted.
 - All of these things (above) delay your refocus and extend the distraction, so don't fall for them. Get back to the task & be in the moment: breathe!
 - It's in this way that the activity perfectly trains you for your sport because it keeps you in the moment (where you perform your best) and it helps you to drop negative or distracted thoughts quickly.
 - You learn to put the task ahead of the tendency to over-think!
- Other Tips:
 - Don't move your chest, shoulders or neck too much – it creates tension.
 - Try to breathe without effort to naturally find the most calm/centred pattern.
 - I use a metaphor to help me: I imagine at the start of a session that my head is like a muddy pond; with each breath, the mud settles and the water becomes clearer; by the end there is only clear water.
 - An athlete can think quickly and see clearly through clear water. An athlete's movement are smooth, powerful, and precise in clear water!

How to use breathing in practices, training, and competitions...

- Breathing is great because it is subtle and quick. You can practice breathing to relax or to centre your focus while you compete, in the dressing room, before competitions, or at practice.
- Especially when you train your breathing skills, just taking 1-2 breaths can be very effective. This allows you to use breathing for 5-minute, 30-second, or a 2-second coping strategy.
- In addition to using breathing as part of pre-, mid-, and post-competitive routines and strategies, use breathing to transition to the venue. As soon as you get there, breathe!
- Specific times or ways to incorporate breathing to centre and refocus in soccer:
 - During warm-ups when you check equipment or get water or fuel
 - When you are walking before a set piece (corner, throw in, free kick, etc.)
 - At half before the team gets together
- Ways to include breathing in your strategies:
 - Dump → Centre (2-3 Breaths) → Refocus or Reframe
 - Breathe like a spinning bike wheel
 - Counting with Breathing – "Down from 100 by 7s" or "Square 10-5-10-5"

Mental Imagery Fundamentals & Skills Training

A. Background Information

- ✓ **Definition:** A mental experience that mimics real experience. Using your imagination to rehearse/practice plays, skills, situations, and events.
- ✓ **How imagery works:**
 - Imagery strengthens the connection between the mind and the body.
 - Imagery simulates neuro-muscular commands and cognitive processes that occur when you experience the situations/skills in real life. The *specificity* principle!
- ✓ **Benefits of mental imagery:**
 - Imagery allows you to *practice* and mentally reinforce movement patterns. You can become more automatic at well-learned skills, fine-tune newer skills, and create new motor programs (commands) for completely novel skills that you cannot yet perform.
 - Imagery allows you to practice dealing with *special situations* that you do not experience often, but that you have to be prepared for (i.e., imagine a championship competition).
 - Developing imagery skills promotes mental control, concentration, and self-awareness. Also, the power of positive images: you must see success before you can be successful!
- ✓ Imagery ability differs across individuals, but it is a skill that everyone can learn and improve
- ✓ **2 Key variables:**
 - **Vividness** (realistic picture)
 - Try to integrate all possible sensory, emotional, and contextual cues
 - **Controllability** (not just a passive, or static picture)...you can move while imaging!

B. Types of Imagery

Imagery may be used in a number of ways and for a variety of situations. Be creative and figure out what works best for you in different situations! Here is a list of different ways to use imagery:

- ★ ***Perspective** – you can imagine a scene from an internal (1st-person perspective), or an external perspective (3rd-person: like a video camera). Use which ever is best for you, but try to develop your ability to use both angles, because they each have an ideal time and place
 - 1st-person: Best for **perception-action** activities and for focussing on **body position**. You can shift to 1st-person when your imagery is more complex & “real.”
 - 3rd-person: Best for activities where **positioning of people** is important. This is usually good for getting the general concept of the image early on, & then shift to 1st.
- ✓ **Skill Development / Mental Practice** – Imagine yourself learning and improving on a skill. Imagine that you make a mistake, identify the error, correct it, & then you do it perfectly. You can also see yourself performing a skill (perfectly) during a competition. Continue to imagine yourself performing until you can perform the skill perfectly, and automatically.
- ✓ **Motivational & Energizing Imagery** – Imagine energy, vitality, power, endurance...achieving your goals and doing something great – not anything impossible – just seeing the ‘best you.’
- ✓ **End-state Imagery** – See yourself accomplishing your goals (Squat 250 lbs.); or, imagine a perfect result/outcome (e.g., you win the championship and celebrate you’re your teammates!).

- ✓ **Rehearse Strategies** – Imagine sequences of skills, situations, reacting to your opponents, making decisions, implementing strategies, executing plays, and plans. This will improve your ‘game-smarts.’ You can also rehearse coping strategies, routines, and mental training strategies (e.g., imagine how you will react when losing, or after you make a mistake, or after a criticism)
- ✓ **Affect-State (emotional) Imagery** – Imagine feelings and moods. This may include imagining a beautiful scene to help reduce anxiety. It can also include simply trying to produce a real feeling from memory (e.g., remembering how happy you were last competition). This is perfect for imagining ‘being in the zone’—the *feeling* of playing at your best!
- ★ ***Metaphoric / Symbolic Imagery** – Use meaningful symbols that are appropriate for a movement, situation, or feeling. (your hand is a knife: cutting water...you are a bear: strong).

C. Recommendations for Training Imagery

- ★ Start **simple** and add **detail** over time... *Generalizability versus Specificity*
- ✓ Be relaxed at the start of your session: this makes it easier to control your session
- ✓ Be complete: imagine all the details of the situation/movement. Stimulate all of your senses & emotions. Make your imagery material as competition-specific and as realistic as possible.
- ✓ Try to use old memories and experiences to make your imagery more detailed & real.
- ✓ You may want to integrate music, recorded sounds, touch, smells etc. to enhance the realism.
- ★ Make a schedule & develop scripts. Sessions should be 5-20 min. long—do more if you can!
- ✓ You can plan your session, then create recordings and videos that include instructions, sounds, positive messages, affirmations, and auto-suggestion (e.g., “you are a mountain / you will not fail / you only get stronger as you compete / be in the moment”), that you can listen to, imagine, or repeat out loud...It can work a bit like hypnosis!
- ★ Develop **core skills** (vividness & controllability) & **specific application**
- ✓ You do not have to be perfect. It is okay to lose concentration or to make mistakes.

D. Skills & Drills

- ✓ Practice developing vivid images
 1. Use pictures and switch between open-eyes and closed-eyes
 2. Recall scenes from your own memory: check for details by comparing your image to a checklist / script.
- ✓ Integrate mental practice with physical practice at all stages of learning
 - Use MI before, during, and after practice and competitions
 - You can do this away from practice too—in any environment
- ✓ Create number lines, the alphabet, or seasons by drawing them in your mind (see & feel it!)

Step 1: Identify BEST EVER and WORST EVER Performances

Think about 2-3 of the **best** games you have played in the last year or two. Do not focus on the result (win, loss, points, etc.), but on the performance (you played to your full potential). List the games:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Think about two or three of the **worst** games you have played in the last two years. Do not focus on the result, but on the performance (you played the worst hockey you are capable of). List the games:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Step 2: Identify HELPFUL & HARMFUL Emotions

Think about your best-ever performances. Circle the words from each of the lists below, that describe how you feel when you are playing your **best** (just before and during the game, but focusing on feelings that led to performing well, not feelings that came up after playing well). Reflecting on your **worst** performances, underline the words that describe how you feel when you play poorly (before and during the game). Select 3-8 helpful feelings (associated with your best performances) and 3-5 harmful feelings. Do not identify more than one word on each line. For example, "cheerful, merry and happy" are all very similar, so pick the BEST word for each group. If you want to use your own word, go ahead. For example, "angry, aggressive, furious, violent" are close, but "attackinø" is a better word. so write that.

active, dynamic, energetic, vigorous
 relaxed, comfortable, easy
 calm, peaceful, unhurried, quiet
 cheerful, merry, happy
 confident, certain, sure
 delighted, overjoyed, exhilarated
 determined, set, settled, resolute
 excited, thrilled
 brave, bold, daring, dashing
 glad, pleased, satisfied, contented
 inspired, motivated, stimulated
 lighthearted, carefree
 nice, pleasant, agreeable
 quick, rapid, fast, alert
 Your own emotion: _____

afraid, fearful, scared, panicky
 angry, aggressive, furious, violent
 annoyed, irritated, distressed
 anxious, apprehensive, worried
 concerned, alarmed, disturbed, dissatisfied
 discouraged, dispirited, depressed
 doubtful, uncertain, indecisive, irresolute
 helpless, unsafe, insecure
 inactive, sluggish, lazy
 intense, fierce
 jittery, nervous, uneasy, restless
 sorry, unhappy, regretful, sad, cheerless
 tense, strained, tight, rigid
 tired, weary, exhausted, worn out
 Your own emotion: _____

Step 3: Identify your Zone of Optimal Performance

Next to each word that you have circled, write out the optimal intensity level for each emotion from 0-10. For example, "I play my best when...I am confident (8-9.5, meaning 7 is not confident enough, and 10 is too much), anxious (3-5, just a little bit for adrenalin), and calm (7-10, this means I can think quickly)."

If you think it is helpful, next to each word that you have underlined, write out the intensity level when you play your **worst** (do this from 0-10). For example, "I play my worst when...I am angry (6-10, between 3-6 is aggressive, which is great, but more than that is too much), worried (4-10, different than anxious, this is negative energy), and tense (7-10, this means I am tight and overthinking)."

Step 4: Simplify Your Zone!

After all this, simplify the description of your zone to the 3-5 feelings that are most essential. List those feelings below and include the optimal range for each. For example, "Confidence 7-10; Calm 3-8; Aggressive 6-8"

Name: _____

Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Personal Inventory of Mental Skills & Competitive Plan

This sheet should be completed a few days before competition. It will help to remind you what to focus on, as well as what skills you have that will help you to focus better & perform at your best.

Goals for this competition...

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Motto, belief, or attitude for this competition

CUE WORDS

Statement	When to do it...

MENTAL IMAGERY

Cue / Focus	When to do it...

RELAX (Reduce Worry & Anxiety)

What to do...	When to do it...

ENERGIZE (Increase Positive Energy)

What to do...	When to do it...