

## Coach Self-Evaluation Worksheet

All coaches have different ways of interacting with their athlete(s). Interactions can vary by athlete, situation, or mindset, however, it's important to remember that addressing athletes respectfully is essential to a healthy working relationship between a coach and their athlete(s). Follow the prompts below to reflect on how you currently work with your athlete(s) who may be experiencing pre-performance anxiety.

If you have an athlete experiencing pre-performance anxiety, what do you currently do to support them?

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How do you think coaches should respond to a situation where an athlete is experiencing pre-performance anxiety?

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How can you ensure that you are addressing your athlete(s) respectfully when they are experiencing pre-performance anxiety? (You can list things you're mindful of, statements you use, etc.)

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Now that you've reflected on how you interact with your athletes experiencing pre-performance anxiety, you may be happy with how you're managing it, or you may be wondering how you can improve. No matter where you're at, we have provided some helpful tips to help you navigate how to address your athlete(s) while supporting them.

### **Working with young athletes**

- Younger athletes may be at an increased risk of experiencing pre-performance anxiety, as they can have a greater sense of insecurity and less coping strategies for dealing with the pressures of sport. Younger athletes can have the same big anxiety feelings as older athletes, so it's important to acknowledge when this happens. When talking to younger athletes, make sure you are giving them time to talk – you can do this by asking open-ended questions (i.e., How are you feeling about the game today? What do you think you did well today?). Open-ended questions provide young athletes with the opportunity to expand on their thoughts and feelings. This can be applied to older athletes too; open-ended questions are your friend! Often people elaborate more in-depth when given the space to.
  - Close-ended questions often provide little space to expand and may provide answers within the question itself. For example, if you asked a young athlete “Are you feeling excited about the game today?” they may latch on to the option you gave them within the question – *excited* – when in fact they are feeling stressed or anxious.
- It's important when working with young athletes to communicate with their parents/guardians. Some parents/guardians may prefer to address pre-performance anxiety concerns themselves. If you find a youth is displaying symptoms of pre-performance anxiety, try reaching out to their parents/guardians first. Explain that you can provide support to the youth, but if they would like to be involved (or handle it themselves) that is also an option.
  - When opening communication with parents in this capacity, explain the situation, what you think may be happening, and some strategies or skills that may help manage pre-performance anxiety, that way they can decide how involved they would like to be.
  - Three-way communication between youth athletes, coaches, and parents/guardians can provide a strong support network to an athlete experiencing pre-performance anxiety and offer them many outlets to discuss their thoughts and feelings. You can also provide parents with the link to this website ([sportpsychologyforcoaches.ca](http://sportpsychologyforcoaches.ca))!

### **Speaking to athletes**

- Telling an athlete to “calm down” or “get over it” is not an effective way to help them cope with pre-performance anxiety. Coaches must be supportive of their athletes by offering explanations of why pre-performance anxiety happens and how normal it is to feel the way they do, and by providing strategies for coping with any symptoms they may have.
- If an athlete performs poorly, a coach should not focus solely on their mistakes and should not call them out in front of colleagues, competitors, or spectators.
  - Sometimes an athlete or team may need some constructive criticism – that's a part of both individual and team sports. Coaches are often the people to offer this, but choosing the appropriate time and context is important. It's a good idea to ask your athlete(s) to reflect shortly after their performance on what they did well and possible areas of improvement. You can also make small error corrections throughout a game or event (e.g., corrections between shifts or plays) to help keep them on track.

### **Pre-game/event talks**

- When giving a pre-game/event talk, it can be challenging to recognize what is helpful versus what is harmful. While past failures can be discussed, it is best to do so in a constructive manner – label past issues as learning points to help athletes recognize what happened previously and what they need to do differently to avoid a repeat performance.
- When giving a pre-event talk, try to focus only on the current situation. Tell the athlete(s) why you think they can succeed, why they are prepared for the moment, and what they can take away from it – win or lose. Or you can ask the athlete(s) what they feel success looks like for them that day.
  - Expressing the numerous ways an athlete or team can succeed within the event (check out the Redefining Success Infographic) can also be beneficial, as it can provide short-term, attainable goals that may help to boost confidence.

### **Returning from injury**

- Athletes returning from injury are at a heightened risk of experiencing pre-performance anxiety. Fear of reinjury and readiness to perform again contribute to this. Athletes returning from injury may require extra support and acknowledgement, as well as more frequent check-ins.
  - Check-ins are important as they can help a coach recognize if the player is ready to perform or if the injury is still a factor, and because check-ins can serve as positive reinforcement for the athlete. When an athlete has to vocalize “Yes, I’m okay!”, they may begin to feel more relaxed and internalize the belief that they are ready to perform again.

### **When implementing sport psychology**

- Effectively using skills and strategies for managing pre-performance anxiety can take time and practice. If an athlete says that they are still experiencing negative symptoms of pre-performance anxiety, coaches should acknowledge that it’s normal for this to occur. Remind them that it takes time to develop the physical skills related to sport, so it makes sense that it takes time to develop the mental skills too!

### **Individual Athletes and Specialized Positions**

- Individual athletes and athletes in specialized positions (e.g., goalie, kicker, pitcher) are at a greater risk of experiencing pre-performance anxiety than team athletes. This may be because they compete alone or have different responsibilities than others on the team, which can lead to loneliness, a lack of support, and increased pressure.

### **When to call in reinforcements?**

- If you notice an athlete is experiencing severe pre-performance anxiety and it’s effecting multiple aspects of their life and personality, it may be time to call in some reinforcements. There are many options that you as a coach can provide to an athlete who is struggling, and providing these resources is just as supportive as trying to help them yourself.
  - We have provided some extra [Resources](#) you or your athlete(s) can reach out to. You can share the whole page with the athlete, or just offer the resources that may be appropriate.