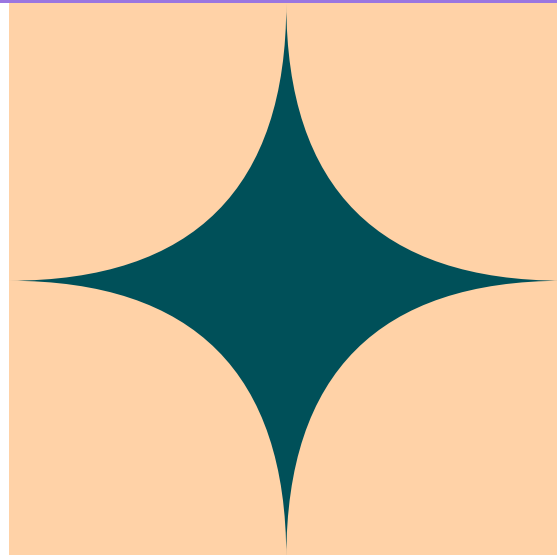


PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS TRAINING

THE SMART BOOK

A COACH'S GUIDE BOOK



by Emma Majernik
and Jack Murphy

01

What is Psychological Skills Training?

02

What is Mental Toughness?

03

PST Methods and Techniques

04

Designing a PST program for your athlete

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Disclaimer for the following information. These techniques and skills are recommended by Educational Sports Psychologists. For treatment or assistance for more serious psychological ailments consult from a Clinical Sports Psychologist.



WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS TRAINING?

PST is the systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of **enhancing performance**, increasing enjoyment, or achieving greater sport and physical activity self-satisfaction

PHASES:

1. **Education** - PST is so important!
2. **Acquisition** - learning the mental skills
3. **Practice** - employ these skills in training

The ultimate goal of PST is **self-regulation** – the idea is that the athlete will be able to utilize these skills and know when to use them, all on their own

IMPLEMENTATION AND CADENCE

It is most optimal to implement PST during the off-season, especially to help the athlete get accustomed to it. However, it should NOT take the place of physical training altogether

Training sessions should be about **10 – 15 minutes, 3 – 5 days / week**

As the athlete begins their PST sessions, frequency and duration can be altered depending on what is most beneficial to the athlete

PST MYTHS

- ✗ PST is a quick fix!
PST must be practiced over time and integrated into your daily training regimen. "Trust the process!"
- ✗ PST is only for elite athletes!
It has proven to be effective for both high level and developing athletes
- ✗ PST doesn't work!
Has been proven to drastically improve performance and self-efficacy in athletes

WHAT IS MENTAL TOUGHNESS?

An athlete's ability to focus, rebound, from failure, cope with pressure and persist in the face of adversity. It is a form of **mental resilience**

Athletes who are mentally tough have a high sense of self-belief and a high sense of control

Mental toughness can be enhanced through:

- intense and competitive practices
- motivational training environment
- coping with failure
- simulating pressure situations
- providing instructional and supportive feedback

IMPORTANT NOTES ON MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Mentally tough athletes may be less likely to seek mental health counseling because they may think they can handle it on their own

REMEMBER to emphasize the importance of mental health. Your athlete should feel supported to seek help if they need it. Mental toughness does NOT mean they must go it alone!

4 C's OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

CONTROL

The ability to multitask while still being able to make an impact rather than being controlled

COMMITMENT

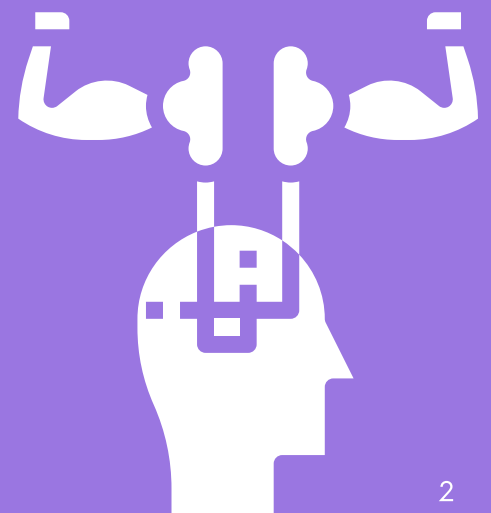
A high dedication and resilience towards achieving goals in the face of adversity

CHALLENGE

Converting perceived threats into situations for personal growth regardless of the environment

CONFIDENCE

Perserving strong belief in oneself amidst struggle and failure



Imagery

A form of simulation (usually a script of some kind that is read aloud to the athlete) that involves recalling from memory experiences and shaping those moments into meaningful images (ex. going through a game time scenario)

Effective imagery has two key components: **controllability** (the athlete can manipulate the images) and **vividness** (utilizing all senses, including kinesthetic!)

Self Talk

Self-talk is defined by any statement or thought about the self. Appropriate and beneficial self-talk focuses on the present and keeps one's mind from wandering.

Effective self-talk is specific, short phrases, positive, kind, said with meaning to oneself, repeated often.

Utilize thought-stopping to improve self-talk. Identify negative thoughts as they arise, stop them, and respond to them with positive task-relevant thoughts.

Goal Setting

Goals need to be **Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Timely (SMART)**.

They should be a mixture of performance (focus on achieving standards), process (actions the athlete should engage in during performance), and outcome goals (focus on the result).

PST COMPONENTS

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Arousal Regulation

Somatic anxiety reduction (physical relaxation) – progressive relaxation: feel the tension in your muscles and then let go of the tension sessions may start at 30 mins and decrease in length with practice; and breath control: deep breathing exercises

Cognitive anxiety reduction (mental relaxation) – meditation; autogenic training (focus on producing physical sensations of warmth and heaviness to promote relaxation)

Multimodal approach – a combination of mental and physical techniques when both somatic and cognitive anxiety is present

Concentration

Main components: focusing, maintaining, situation awareness, and shifting (attentional focus).

Attention can be either broad (ex. taking in where teammates are on the field) or narrow (i.e. focus on one object or cue). As well as external or internal.

DESIGNING A PST PROGRAM FOR YOUR ATHLETE

01. DISCUSS YOUR APPROACH

Build trust and a good relationship with your athlete. If possible, involve a professional to help guide the process

02. ASSESS MENTAL SKILLS

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of your athlete (subjectively or objectively) through conversation. Consider the unique demands of your sport and ask about other possible stressors in your athlete's life. Observe your athlete in practice and with the team

03. DETERMINE WHICH PSYCHOLOGICAL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES TO USE

Emphasize that multiple types of mental skills are important for success and that skills are qualities to be honed and built upon. When selecting which skills to focus on keep in mind time constraints on your athlete, how receptive your athlete is to PST, and if it can be feasibly integrated into the competitive season. **Make sure to go in-depth with a few skills, rather than spreading your athlete too thin by covering all skills at a high level**

TYPES OF SKILLS TO CONSIDER

Foundational Skills

Basic mental skills and "intrapersonal resources" that an athlete can utilize to achieve success (ex. self-confidence)



Performance Skills

Mental abilities essential to athletes for sport performance and execution (ex. attentional focus)

Personal Development Skills

Mental skills that represent developmental benchmarks of personal development. These skills are conducive to advanced psychological functioning through self-determination (ex. interpersonal competence)

Team Skills

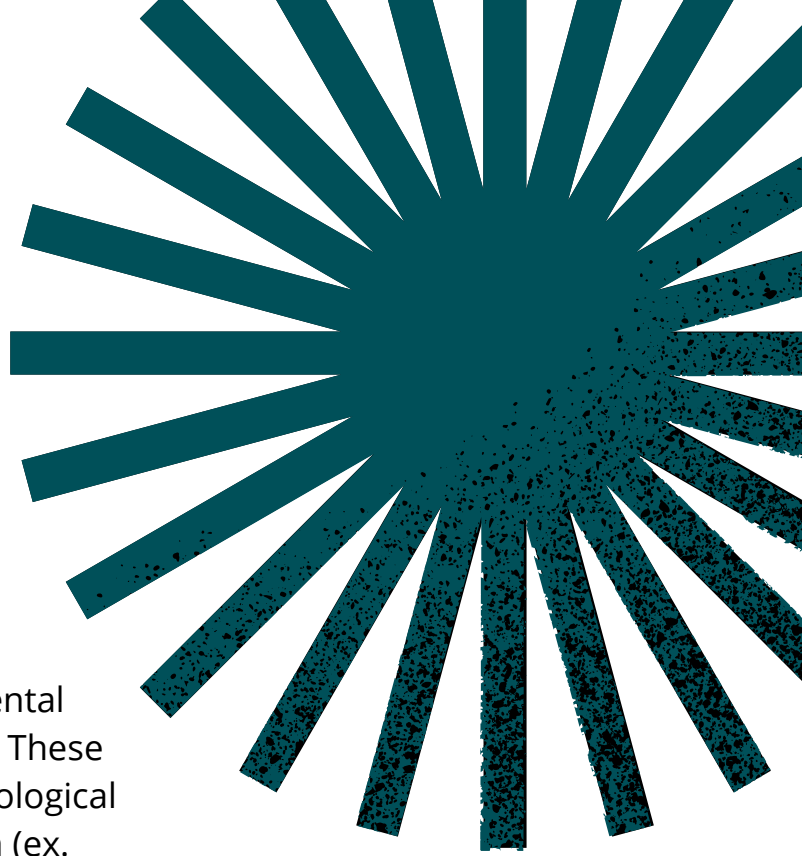
Shared qualities that enhance a team's chances at overall success as well as a strong team climate (ex. leadership and team cohesion/confidence)

04. DESIGN A PST SCHEDULE

If possible, hold frequent and short meetings with your athlete (ex. check-ins before or after practice) and again, try to start the program before the season begins. PST should ultimately become a part of daily practice

05. EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

Check-in with your athlete, utilize observation and other forms of review to evaluate progress like one-on-one conversations with your athlete. The program should be adapted as needed



A note from the authors: While PST has greatly benefited athletes of varying levels and backgrounds, we recognize the financial burden associated with hiring an SPC as a deterrent to its accessibility, especially in marginalized communities. Although best practices suggest that SPCs administer PST programs, this booklet allows coaches and athletic staff to do the same. Our hope is that this offering adds momentum to a growing library of informative, open-source resources on psychological/mental training so that someday, all athletes will be able to train smarter, not just harder. - EM & JM



