

# MENTAL SKILL TRAINING

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## *Mental Skill Training (MST) – a practical tool for coaches*

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### KEY POINTS

- Mental skills are best developed when they are part of everyday practice
- Select 1–2 mental skills to develop during the season (e.g. self-confidence, attention, focus, etc.)
- Selected mental skills and strategies need to be fitting to the players developmental stage (bio-psycho-social development)
- Integrate mental strategy into training session
- Mental skill to be trained has to match the mental strategy
- Through the application of MST the performance of players will be improved

## MENTAL SKILLS AND MENTAL STRATEGIES

MENTAL SKILLS	MENTAL STRATEGIES
<b>Mental skills are qualities that a player can develop through the regular application of mental strategies in training.</b>	<b>Mental Strategies are methods used to build mental skills.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Self-confidence</li><li>– Focus</li><li>– Energy management</li><li>– Motivation</li><li>– Competence</li><li>– Anger management</li><li>– Productive thinking</li><li>– Performance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Goal setting</li><li>– Imagery</li><li>– Physical relaxation and arousal regulation</li><li>– Thought control / self-talk</li></ul>

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### PRE TRAINING SESSION PREPARATION

- Who are the players you are working with?
  - E.g. U10/U14/U18
- What are your players needs (mental and emotional)?
  - E.g. U10: Concrete thinkers, fundamental movement skills and starting to be competent using different movements in different environments, focus on present moment
  - U14: self-reflective; onset of puberty; possible need to re-learn sport skills; increased self-awareness
  - U18: able to consider information from multiple sources; almost mature; exert control over own feelings and emotions
- Training session drill or skill to be used to practice the mental skill
  - E.g. Passing – receiving; on-timer; slalom and shooting over obstacle
- How long are the players going to perform the drill?
  - E.g. Each player 10x; for 15 min
- Define the mental skill to be trained, taking the mental and emotional maturation of the players into consideration
  - Self-confidence, focus, energy management, motivation, competence, anger management, productive thinking, performance
- Define the mental strategy to be used to develop the mental skill
  - Thought control, goal setting, imagery, relaxation or arousal regulation

### DURING THE TRAINING SESSION

- Explain the drill/skill to be trained to the players
  - E.g. Slalom skating with puck and shooting over an obstacle at the net
- Explain the mental skill to be trained with the drill/skill and how the mental strategy helps with developing the mental skill
  - E.g. Energy management can be trained with arousal regulation through applying breathing techniques
  - Skating with the puck and shooting can be stressful, its easier to control the puck when the body is under control. Breathing helps to keep the body under control
- Instruct players to use the mental strategy during the practice session
- Reinforce the players through feedback and comments to use the mental strategy
- Communicate with the player and ask for feedback on when mental strategy was used and what the effect was
- Repeat the application of the mental strategy in several practice throughout the season
- Communicate with players if there are other situations where the mental strategy could be applied

### References

- Zakrajsek, R.A., Lauer, E.E. And Bodey, K.J. 2017. Integrating mental Skills and Strategies into Youth Sport Training: A Tool for Coaches. International Sport Coaching Journal, 4, 76-89.
- UK Coaching 2018. Developing Young Players' Mental Skills.

## **MENTAL SKILL TRAINING**

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### **ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF MENTAL SKILLS AND MENTAL STRATEGIES**

#### **SELF-CONFIDENCE**

- Players show self-confidence when they have an upright and power posture
- Example Moulding game:  
One player stands in a slumped down and drooped position and partner models player into power posture
  - Through this players will produce a positive self image of themselves

#### **COMPETENCE**

- Players like and want to show that they are capable of doing and learning things by themselves
- Example:
  - Assist the development of players by supporting their need to do things by themselves and give them encouragement through positive and corrective feedback when and where necessary
  - Through the application of the goal setting strategy, players will show increased competence

#### **FOCUS**

- Players are focused when they are in the present, concerned with what they are doing right at that moment
- Example:  
When doing cross-overs players focus/pay attention on the precise execution of each step
  - This is a method of including thought control into training

#### **ENERGY MANAGEMENT**

- In order for players to perform, they need to be in the correct state of arousal/excitement
- Example:
  - If player is too excited, through use of breathing technique (2s in and 4s out) players can be calmed down
  - If player is not feeling energized, through power breathing (fast in and powerful out) energy levels are heightened

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### ANGER MANAGEMENT

- Players might need to be able to control their anger during a game or practice situation
- Example:
  - Through the application and practice of thought control/self-talk and arousal regulation strategies, players can learn to control their anger to be able to focus on the situation at hand

### MOTIVATION

- Players are motivated to play ice hockey for different reasons. For the coach to support each player best, it is important to understand the players' reasons for playing
- Example:
  - Coach supports players through praising good effort, and not just focusing on the outcome, by taking the players' reasons for playing into consideration
  - Through applying a goal-setting approach during practices, players will be able to achieve their desired outcomes which will increase their motivation

### PRODUCTIVE THINKING

- Players often tend to use negative words during self-talk and when giving internal feedback to themselves
- Example:
  - Teach players to use positive and affirmative language during self-talk, use of positive cue words and thought stopping for positive outcomes during game and practice situations