

JOY IN SPORTS

COACHES EDUCATIONAL PACK

Engagement, Inclusion &
Creativity
Builds Resilience



Toolkit for coaches to promote
sustainable participation and
wellbeing in youth sports

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).



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Greetings from the JOY-team

We are delighted to present this educational pack developed through the JOY in SPORTS project. The purpose of this material is to support coaches, team leaders, volunteers, and youth workers in creating inclusive, welcoming, and joyful sports environments for children and young people.

The JOY in SPORTS project promotes inclusion, enthusiasm, teamwork, and a sense of belonging through innovative art-based methods and physical activities. This pack has been designed to provide practical tools, reflective approaches, and inspiring methods that help every child feel respected, supported, and valued in sports regardless of their background, abilities, or identity. To find out more about the process of developing this material and the whole project, please read more on [Homepage - Joy in sports](#).

We hope this educational pack encourages you to strengthen positive team culture, increase participation, and create meaningful experiences of joy in sports.

With best wishes,

The JOY in SPORTS Project Team



Welcome to Coaches' Educational Pack

How to Use this Educational Pack?

This educational pack is designed to **support everyday coaching**, not to be followed as a step-by-step programme. **JOY in Sports** is built around the idea that learning, motivation, and resilience grow through everyday experiences, reflection, and intentional practice.

The roadmap below shows how different themes in this pack are connected. Coaching situations, relationships, feedback, JOY activities, and reflection form a continuous cycle. Coaches can enter this cycle at different points, depending on their needs, time, and context.

You do not need to use everything at once. Even small changes in how you structure activities, give feedback, or reflect on practice can support confidence, belonging, and long-term engagement in sport.



The roadmap below shows the key themes of the JOY in Sports educational pack:



What JOY in Sports Aims to Support?

JOY in Sports is designed to strengthen the conditions that support both well-being and long-term performance in youth sport. **JOY aims to support:**

- enjoyment and engagement in sport
- confidence and resilience when facing mistakes and pressure
- focus and learning in everyday training
- belonging and inclusion, so every young person feels valued
- long-term participation, reducing burnout and drop-out

JOY does not replace performance goals. Instead, it supports the foundations that make sustained development and performance possible over time.

→ How to Get Started?

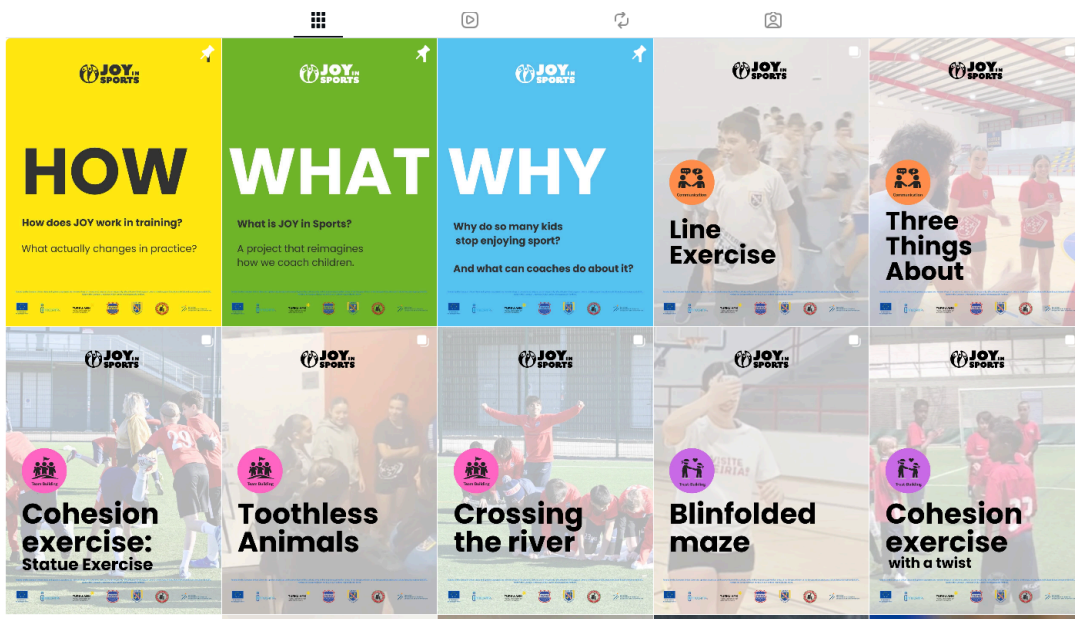
You do not need to read everything in order or apply everything at once. You may choose to:

- focus on one chapter that feels relevant right now
- use JOY exercises to support a specific group need
- reflect on feedback or relationships in your own coaching
- combine reading with practical experimentation

Many JOY exercises are also available as **short videos and instructions on Instagram**, making it easier to try ideas directly in practice.

→ [Check It Out Here](#)

[@eu_joyinsports](#) 





JOY Happens When Movement Meets Creativity

Flow, Teamwork and Youth Sports

Young athletes learn and perform best when training is **enjoyable, meaningful, and socially supportive**. When athletes feel safe, included, and focused, they stay motivated longer. **Art-based activities** and **flow-based** training can help coaches create these conditions.

Teamwork Comes First

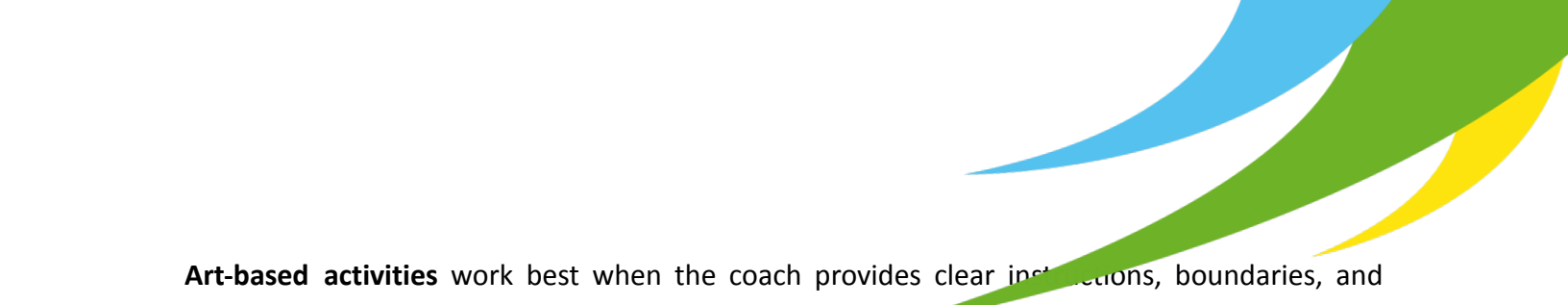
Teamwork is central in team sports, but it also matters in individual sports. Even in solo disciplines, athletes are part of a team made up of coaches, teammates, and the club.

In youth teams, problems like exclusion, unfairness, or bullying often show up through team dynamics. Whether a young person feels welcome, confident, or safe depends largely on how the team functions.

When a team feels like “we” instead of just “me”, has shared rules and values, and looks out for one another, it becomes much easier to deal with conflicts and create a positive environment.

How Art-Based Activities Help Teams?

Art-based activities help teams **bond** without putting pressure on performance. Simple examples include moving or warming up to a shared rhythm, group coordination games, short improvisation or role-switching exercises, creating a team symbol, image, or a story together. These kinds of activities **build trust**, help athletes notice and respect each other, allow individuals to express themselves, and strengthen the feeling of belonging. Young athletes feel seen not just as performers, but as people.



Art-based activities work best when the coach provides clear instructions, boundaries, and purpose. Creativity should happen within a safe and structured environment so athletes feel free to explore while staying focused and respectful.

What Is Flow and Why does it Matter?

Flow happens when:

goals are clear + feedback is quick → tasks feel meaningful and enjoyable

Flow helps athletes:

- learn faster
- build confidence
- handle challenges
- enjoy training more

Team Flow happens When the Whole Group Clicks

Flow can also happen at team level. Teams that experience this together tend to be more resilient, supportive, and better at handling pressure and setbacks.

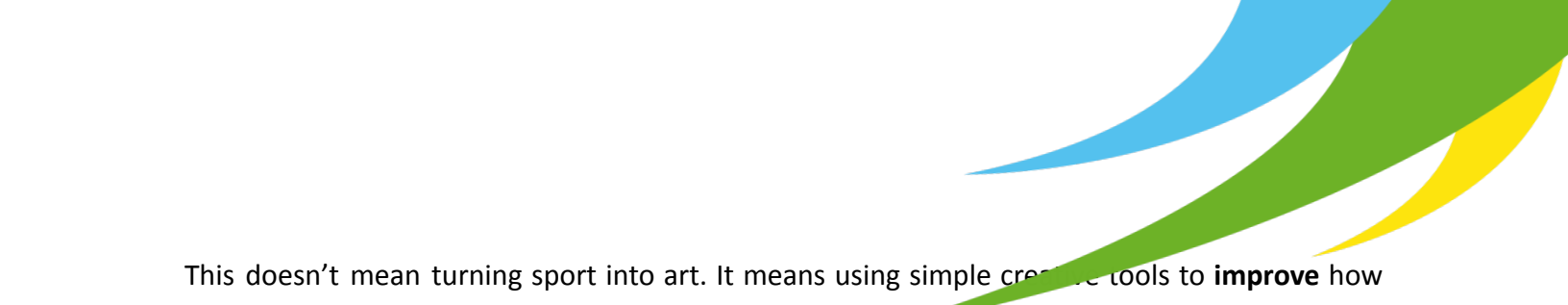
Team flow is **when**:

- everyone is fully engaged,
- players trust each other,
- actions start to sync naturally,
- the team feels strong and united.

The coach helps the team achieve flow by ensuring everyone shares and understands the goals, knows their role, and trusts one another. They also provide enough structure and guidance so the team can work together in flow toward a clear, common purpose.

Why This Matters for Coaches

By mixing creativity into training, coaches can strengthen team spirit, support inclusion, reduce tensions and conflicts, help athletes stay motivated and focused.



This doesn't mean turning sport into art. It means using simple creative tools to **improve** how athletes feel, connect, and learn. When training includes room for creativity, sport becomes **more than performance**, it becomes a place where young people grow, belong, and enjoy being part of a team.

To SUM UP!

Creativity and teamwork build better learning and stronger team spirit. When athletes feel safe, connected, and engaged, they learn more, enjoy training more, and perform better.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Teamwork creates belonging and trust
- ✓ Art-based activities strengthen connection
- ✓ Flow improves focus and enjoyment
- ✓ Team flow grows through shared goals and clear roles

Coach Reminder!

→ Use one creative teamwork activity in each session.

How to Use This in Training?

1. Warm-up

- Start with *Cohesion exercise*
- Use *Mirror of Mine with or without a twist*

2. Main Activity

- Try out *Crossing the River*

3. Reflection

- Have a group conversation in a circle, ask: *“When did the team feel most connected today?”* or *“When did you feel ‘in the zone’?”*



JOY of Using Art-Based Methods

Coaching children and young athletes from an art pedagogical point of view means seeing sport as more than training skills or winning competitions. Sport becomes a **creative learning process**, where movement is a way to explore, express, and grow. Just like in art, the focus is not only on the final performance, but on the experience, the learning, and the meaning behind it. In this approach, the coach is not just an instructor. The coach is a guide, and sport becomes a space where young people develop as whole individuals.

Why Do We Coach the JOY?

From an art pedagogical perspective, the purpose of youth sport is to support the development of the whole child. This includes physical skills, but also emotional, social, and creative growth. Coaching aims to create joy and curiosity, helping children stay motivated from within rather than playing only for results or rewards. Movement is treated as a form of self-expression, where athletes learn confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency. The goal is long-term engagement and a healthy relationship with sport, rather than early specialization or short-term success. Sport, in this sense, is a creative practice, not just performance optimization.

How Do We See the Athlete in JOY?

Young athletes are active learners and creators. They learn through play, exploration, and reflection. Each athlete brings unique strengths, ideas, and experiences.

The Role of the Coach in JOY

The coach's role shifts from being only an authority to being both a leader and facilitator. The coach still sets structure, boundaries, and safety expectations, while creating space for athletes to explore, make decisions, and contribute ideas. Instead of directing every action, the coach designs learning environments that invite discovery and growth. A coach listens, supports emotional and social development, and values athlete input. Questions are just as important as instructions. Through this dialogue, learning becomes shared rather than imposed.



For example:

→ *What were you trying to express with that movement?*

→ *What did you notice or feel during that exercise?*

How learning happens in JOY practice?

JOY practice includes:

- playful and exploratory training
- open-ended games instead of only rigid drills
- clear goals and safety rules
- creativity and improvisation
- reflection after activities → *For example:*
 - *What surprised you today?*
 - *What worked for you and why?*

Assessment and Feedback in JOY

Progress is not measured only by wins, losses, or statistics. Instead, attention is given to effort, engagement, creativity, decision-making, and personal development over time. Feedback is descriptive and encouraging. It focuses on the process rather than judging results and invites athletes to reflect on their own learning.

For example:

→ *I noticed how you tried several solutions under pressure, that shows strong problem-solving.*



Rethinking Competition with JOY

Competition is seen as a learning and performance space, not a judgment of an athlete's value. It offers opportunities for expression, collaboration, and growth. Winning and losing matter less than what athletes learn from the experience. Post-game reflection is more important than the score itself.

Long-Term Development with JOY

This JOY approach helps reduce burnout and dropout while building stronger motivation and ownership. Athletes become more adaptable, thoughtful, and emotionally balanced. Most importantly, they develop a healthier, more meaningful relationship with sport. As in arts education, depth, joy, and understanding matter more than early mastery.

To SUM UP!

Coaching youth sport from an art pedagogical perspective means treating sport as creative, expressive, and reflective practice, one that develops the whole person, not just athletic performance.

Sport can be a creative and meaningful learning process.

When athletes are given space to explore, reflect, and express themselves within a safe structure, they develop skills, confidence, and ownership.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Athletes learn through play, exploration, and reflection
- ✓ The coach is both a leader and a facilitator
- ✓ Creativity grows within clear goals and boundaries
- ✓ Feedback should focus on effort, learning, and problem-solving
- ✓ Reflection helps deepen learning



Coach reminder!

→ Ask more questions and give athletes more chances to make decisions.

How to Use This in Training?

1. Warm-up

→ Begin with *Cohesion Exercise with a twist: Statue Exercise*

2. Main Activity

→ Try out *What Unites Us*

→ And *Line Exercise*

3. Reflection

→ Have a group conversation in a circle, ask: “*What surprised you today?*” or “*What new idea worked well?*”



Positive Psychology and Coach-Athlete Relationship

Positive psychology offers a helpful framework for understanding how sport can support young people’s well-being and development. In the context of youth sport, it highlights the importance of the coach–athlete relationship, emotional safety, and a supportive learning environment. This text explores how coaches can use positive psychology principles to help young athletes feel valued, motivated, and included.

Positive Psychology in Youth Sport Coaching

Positive psychology is about helping people function well and develop their strengths. In youth sport, it means looking beyond results and performance and paying attention to how young athletes feel, learn, belong, and grow through sport. Instead of asking only, “*How do we fix problems?*”, positive psychology also asks “*What helps young athletes enjoy sport, stay motivated, and develop in a healthy way?*” This makes it especially useful for coaches working with children and young people.

Why Positive Psychology Matters for Coaches?

Children should not be valued only for talent, results, or future potential. They are developing people with emotional, social, and psychological needs, not just athletes to be trained.

From a positive psychology perspective, good coaching:

- supports enjoyment and motivation,
- creates a sense of belonging,
- builds confidence and coping skills,
- helps young people handle both success and disappointment.

Struggle, mistakes, nerves, and frustration are normal parts of sport. Positive psychology does not mean removing these experiences. It means helping children deal with them in supportive and constructive ways.

What Positive Psychology Is and Is Not?

Positive psychology is not:

- ✗ pretending everything is fine
- ✗ ignoring negative emotions
- ✗ removing challenges

Positive psychology is:

- ✓ supporting athletes through challenges
- ✓ helping them build strengths
- ✓ creating healthy environments

Flourishing in Youth Sport

A key idea in positive psychology is flourishing. Flourishing does not mean constant happiness or winning all the time. In youth sports, children can flourish even if they feel nervous before games, make mistakes, lose matches, or experience frustration.

Flourishing means that, over time, children feel safe and respected, are engaged in learning, have positive relationships, feel capable and included, and experience sport as meaningful.

This shifts the coach's focus from only "How did we perform?" to "Who felt included today?" "Who felt supported?" and "Who struggled, and did they still feel valued?"

The Coach's Role

Coaches play a key role in shaping motivation, emotional climate, relationships, inclusion, and how children understand success and failure. Positive psychology helps coaches notice whether children are only being trained, or truly being supported to grow, belong, and function well. In youth sports, that difference is crucial.



The PERMA Model – A Simple Tool for Coaches

A practical way to think about well-being is the PERMA model, which includes five elements.

- P – Positive Emotion: create enjoyment and encouragement
- E – Engagement: match challenge to skill
- R – Relationships: build trust and belonging
- M – Meaning: help athletes feel purpose
- A – Accomplishment: celebrate progress and effort

What Positive Psychology Means in Daily Coaching

Positive psychology becomes useful when it shapes daily coaching behavior. Simply taking part in sport does not automatically lead to confidence or resilience. These outcomes depend largely on the quality of the coaching environment. A supportive environment does not mean a lack of discipline or expectations. Children benefit when training is both emotionally safe and clearly structured, with routines, rules, and consistent guidance.

In practice, this means

- creating safe and welcoming training environments,
- adapting tasks so everyone can participate meaningfully,
- listening to athletes and taking their perspective seriously,
- recognizing effort and progress, not only results,
- using reflection to help children learn from experiences.

To SUM UP!

Positive psychology helps young athletes grow, belong, and stay motivated.

A supportive and structured environment helps children build confidence, resilience, and enjoyment in sport.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Positive psychology is about strengths and well-being, not “being positive” all the time
- ✓ Emotional safety and belonging matter for learning
- ✓ PERMA helps coaches support well-being
- ✓ Effort, progress, and teamwork should be recognized
- ✓ Challenges are normal, but children need support through them

Coach reminder!

→ Notice and name effort, progress, and positive behavior every session.

How to Use This in Training?

1. Warm-up

→ Start with *Three Things About*

2. Main Activity

→ Adapt one drill so that everyone can succeed at their own level.

→ Give effort-based feedback during practice: “Great persistence,” “Good teamwork,” etc.

→ Build in a short partner encouragement task where teammates support each other.

→ Try out *Viewing Exercise*

3. Reflection

→ Have a group conversation in a circle, ask: “Who helped you today?” or “What are you proud of today?”



The Coach–Athlete Relationship in Sport

The coach–athlete relationship is one of the most powerful influences in sport. It shapes not only performance, but also motivation, confidence, learning, and well-being. Especially in youth sport, how athletes are treated, listened to, and supported can affect whether sport becomes a source of growth and enjoyment or of pressure and withdrawal. From a positive psychology perspective, strong relationships are not a “soft extra,” but a key foundation for both development and long-term success. The best results grow from strong relationships. Athletes perform better when they feel trusted, supported, and understood.

Why does the Coach–Athlete Relationship Matter?

One of the strongest factors in an athlete’s well-being and development is the quality of their relationships. In sport, there are many important relationships with teammates, parents, fans, but the coach–athlete relationship is central.

From a positive psychology point of view, well-being is not just about results or success. It is also about feeling supported, feeling understood, and having trust and meaning in what you do. For coaches, this means that *how* you work with athletes matters just as much as *what* you train.

Coach–Athlete Relationship: A Partnership, not a Hierarchy

The coach–athlete relationship is more than simply giving instructions and expecting obedience. While the coach leads and makes important decisions, the strongest relationships are built on mutual respect, communication, and shared responsibility.

It is best understood as a partnership between two people who influence each other over time. Sport psychologist *Sophia Jowett* describes this relationship as a strong two-person partnership where both coach and athlete contribute to performance, development, and the quality of the relationship itself. If either the coach or the athlete carries the whole relationship alone, its quality suffers. The best relationships are coach–athlete-centered, where both sides are engaged and responsible.

Four Types of Coach–Athlete Relationships

Jowett’s work shows that relationships in sport can be understood on **two** basic dimensions:

1. Support and care: how strong the relationship is
2. Performance outcomes: results and success

This creates **four** common relationship types:

Supportive + Successful → ideal

Supportive + Not Yet Successful → healthy for development

Successful + Not Supportive → risky long-term

Not Supportive + Not Successful → harmful

Jowett’s 3 + 1 C Model

To understand *how* to build strong coach–athlete relationships, Jowett introduced the **3 + 1 C** model.

Closeness = trust and respect

Commitment = staying engaged over time

Complementarity = working well together

Co-orientation = shared understanding

What Strong Coach–athlete Relationship Means for Coaches

In youth sport especially, success should never come at the cost of well-being. Athletes develop best when performance goals are balanced with genuine care and support. Good coaching is not only about tactics and drills. It is also about how you guide, challenge, and support young people as individuals.

A strong coach–athlete relationship includes

- supports motivation,
- improves learning,
- increases satisfaction,
- protects well-being,
- and supports performance in the long run.

To SUM UP!

Strong coach–athlete relationships support both well-being and performance. Athletes perform and develop best when they feel trusted, respected, and understood.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Relationships are central to motivation and confidence
- ✓ Good coaching balances leadership with partnership
- ✓ Trust and communication improve learning and performance
- ✓ The 3+1 C model helps build strong relationships
- ✓ Success should never come at the cost of well-being

Coach reminder!

→ Make time to connect with each athlete every session.

How to Use This in Training?

1. Warm-up

→ Check in with each athlete briefly: eye contact, greeting, or one simple question.

2. Main Activity

→ Set shared goals for the session together.

→ Use one activity where athletes make decisions without coach instruction.

→ Practice giving clear, respectful, specific feedback.

3. Reflection

→ Have a group conversation in a circle, ask: *“Did you feel supported today?”* or *“What can we improve together next session?”*



Motivation and Feedback in JOY

Motivation is one of the most important factors in sport. It is what makes an athlete get up early, train when they are tired, and make an effort even when the results have not yet appeared. But after all, what motivates athletes? And how do coaches contribute to this process?

What Motivates Athletes?

Personal Goals and Passion for the Sport

Many athletes are driven by a genuine passion for the sport.

They enjoy the challenge, the competition, and the feeling of personal achievement. The passion keeps them focused even when training becomes intense.

Overcoming Challenges and Constant Improvement

The pursuit of evolution is one of the biggest fuels. Breaking personal times, records, or limits gives the athlete a feeling of progress and accomplishment that generates daily motivation.

Recognition and Results

Seeing the effort reflected in victories, medals, call-ups, or simple praise creates a very strong emotional reinforcement. Even small achievements have a positive impact on motivation.

Team Spirit and Camaraderie

For many, motivation comes from the group: they train so as not to let their colleagues down, to be an active part of something bigger, and to feel the team's support.

Dreams and Future Ambitions

Participating in important competitions, becoming a professional, earning scholarships, traveling, or representing the country are dreams that fuel daily effort.



What Coaches Do to Motivate Athletes?

Create Clear and Achievable Goals

An effective coach helps the athlete define realistic, specific, and progressive goals. Well-defined goals provide direction, purpose, and focus.

Provide Constant Feedback

Positive feedback reinforces good performance; corrective feedback guides improvement. Motivational coaches balance praise with practical instructions, making the athlete feel capable of evolving.

Build Confidence and Self-Esteem

Believing in the athlete is one of the most powerful forms of motivation. When the coach demonstrates confidence, the athlete gains the courage to take risks and overcome limits.

Create a Positive and Inspiring Training Environment

A climate of respect, unity, and discipline increases motivation. Coaches who lead by example and have good communication make athletes want to give their best.

Value Effort, Not Just the Result

Motivational coaches recognize the daily work, regardless of the final performance. This teaches discipline, resilience, and keeps the athlete motivated even during difficult phases.

Encourage Athlete Autonomy

True motivation arises when the athlete feels they have a voice and responsibility. Effective coaches involve athletes in decisions, plans, and strategies.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Motivation in sport is the result of several factors:

- ✓ personal passions
- ✓ clear goals
- ✓ a positive environment
- ✓ a relationship of trust between the athlete and the coach

Coach reminder!


→ When the athlete believes in themselves and feels that the coach believes in them, motivation transforms into strength, discipline, and the will to win.

Constructive Feedback supporting learning and confidence

In JOY, feedback is seen as everyday interaction that helps athletes learn, handle emotions, and feel that they belong. Feedback influences not only performance in the moment, but also how young athletes see themselves and their place in the sporting environment.

Constructive feedback helps athletes separate what happened from who they are. When mistakes are treated as part of learning rather than reflections of personal value, athletes are more willing to try, take responsibility, and stay engaged under pressure. In emotionally demanding situations, feedback can either stabilise or undermine an athlete's sense of safety.

Coaches may approach feedback in different ways depending on context and personal style. What matters most is maintaining a joy-first climate: recognising effort, keeping guidance clear and manageable, and supporting athletes as developing individuals. As one possible example of how feedback can be structured intentionally in JOY settings, an optional micro-course on constructive feedback is provided in the appendix.



Feedback shapes more than technique: it also shapes self-confidence, resilience, and belonging.

- Separate the person from the action: correct the behaviour, not the athlete's value.
- Start feedback by recognising effort or intention before offering guidance.
- Keep adjustments simple and specific – one clear focus at a time.
- Use questions to support athletes' agency (e.g. *“What were you trying to do there?”*).
- Pay attention to timing and tone, especially in high-pressure moments.

! Feedback can support emotional regulation by slowing situations down and naming what is happening.

! A trusting and inclusive group climate makes feedback easier to receive and use.

! There is no single right way to give feedback – adapt language and approach to the situation and the athlete.

! *The micro-course in the appendix offers **one concrete example** of how feedback can be structured intentionally in JOY settings.*

How to Use This in Training?

Try this: Reflect before correcting

(Supports agency, confidence, and psychological safety)

Before giving technical feedback, invite the athlete to reflect on their intention or experience.

- *“What were you trying to do there?”*
- *“What did you notice in that moment?”*


Try this: Slow down feedback in high-pressure moments

(Supports emotional regulation and resilience)

In emotionally charged situations, pause before correcting performance.

- *“Let's take a breath first.”*
- *“Where is your energy right now?”*

Once the situation has settled, give brief and focused feedback.



VIP - Model

Peer Support in Sports

The VIP -model is designed to help coaches create a team environment where **every young athlete feels welcome, supported, and connected**. It introduces a rotating peer-support role that strengthens team culture and bridges communication between athletes and coaches.

The VIP model is a practical coaching tool within the JOY in Sports framework. It is informed by research on **peer relationships, motivational climate, and shared leadership in youth sport**.

VIPs support team connection, communication, and inclusion — areas that current research shows are central for keeping young athletes motivated, confident, and engaged in sport.

The VIP Model is an easy way for coaches to strengthen team culture, support young athletes, and create a positive training environment. A VIP is a rotating peer-support role that helps teammates feel welcome, confident, and connected.

Why does the VIP model work?

→ **Support from teammates is a key part of youth sport**


Recent research suggests that meaningful peer connections are important for motivation, enjoyment, belonging, and staying engaged in sport. Team environments that encourage these relationships support healthier development and reduce drop-out.

→ **Shared leadership strengthens the team**

Leadership in youth sport does not need to be limited to a single captain. Studies on athlete leadership show that shared and rotating roles can improve communication, strengthen team cohesion, and help more athletes feel valued and involved.

→ **Communication and trust support engagement**

Open, trust-based communication is increasingly important in youth sport environments. Peer roles such as VIPs can help clarify information, check in with teammates, and support everyday



interaction within the team. This strengthens both peer relationships and coach–athlete communication.

→ **Peer mentoring boosts confidence and integration.**

Research on youth development and athlete leadership suggests that structured peer support helps young athletes feel safer, more confident, and more included. It also supports the integration of new players and strengthens the overall team environment. The VIP role brings these benefits directly into team practices.

What VIPs actually Do?

The role is simple and child-friendly. VIPs focus on:

- **Social support:** welcoming new players and helping everyone feel included
- **Motivational support:** encouraging effort and normalising mistakes
- **Task support:** helping teammates understand drills and routines
- **Communication bridge:** clarifying information and supporting two-way communication
-

What does this mean for coaches?

VIPs help you:

- + Build a more positive and inclusive culture
- + Support relationships between athletes
- + Create smoother training sessions with fewer misunderstandings
- + Support newcomer integration
- + Strengthen communication and trust within the team

Implementing VIPs takes only a few minutes per week, but the impact on team atmosphere, athlete confidence, and coach–athlete relationships can be significant over time.

Please find out how the VIP Model has been applied in TuTo:



→ [Practical Example of the VIP Model: TuTo's Captain School - Joy in sports](#)

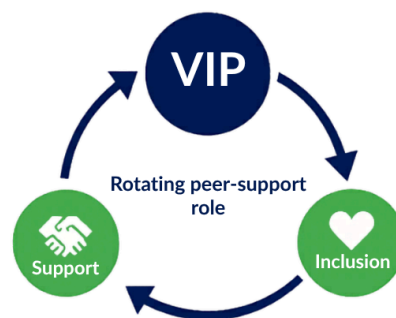
Read more here:



→ [Forum theater article](#)

VIP MODEL PEER SUPPORT IN TEAMS

A simple way to strengthen connection,
communication, and inclusion



VIPs help by:

- Welcoming and including others
- Encouraging and supporting teammates
- Helping with tasks and routines

For coaches:

- Stronger team culture
- Smoother training sessions

Why it works:

- Strong peer relationships
- Shared leadership
- Better communication
- More confidence and belonging



Resilience Skills and Mental Wellbeing in Young Athletes and Coaches

Why Resilience Matters in Youth Sport? - Athlete Perspective

In youth sport, resilience is not about being “mentally tough” or hiding emotions. It is about a young athlete’s **ability to adapt to pressure, mistakes, and challenging situations while staying engaged and motivated in sport.**

Competitive sport naturally includes situations that challenge young athletes: important matches, fear of failure, expectations from others, or making mistakes in front of teammates. These situations can feel uncomfortable, but they are also an important part of learning and development.

Resilient athletes are not those who feel no anxiety. Rather, they are athletes who can **recognise stress reactions, accept them as normal, and recover or refocus more easily.** Feeling nervous before competition often means that the situation matters and the athlete is prepared to perform.

Research suggests that young athletes with stronger resilience resources tend to experience competitive anxiety as **more manageable.** They are better able to stay confident, regulate physical tension, and continue focusing on what they can control, even when pressure is present.

This means that anxiety itself is not the problem. Anxiety becomes challenging mainly when an athlete does not yet have the skills to understand or regulate it. With support, young athletes **can learn** that physical signs such as a faster heartbeat or muscle tension are not dangerous, but signals of readiness.

For coaches, **supporting resilience** means creating an environment where emotions are accepted, mistakes are normalised, and pressure is discussed openly. When athletes feel safe to experience and talk about stress, they are more likely to develop confidence, self-regulation skills, and long-term enjoyment in sport.

Resilience development is therefore not about removing challenges from sport, but about helping young athletes meet challenges with growing confidence and awareness.





How Do All JOY Activity Categories Support Resilience?

Resilience in youth sport is built through many different experiences, not through one type of exercise alone. The JOY activity categories shown above all contribute to resilience in complementary ways.

Introductory, trust-building, team-building, communication, and inclusion activities create safety, belonging, acceptance, and confidence within the group. These experiences form the foundation for resilience and help athletes cope with pressure, learn from mistakes, and stay engaged in challenging situations.

The Resilience activity category focuses more directly on specific skills, such as recognising stress reactions, regulating the nervous system, practicing positive and supportive self-talk and mental imagery training. These activities build on the foundations created by all other JOY categories.

In practice, resilience is strengthened both indirectly and directly: through everyday experiences of connection and trust, and through targeted activities that support regulation and recovery.

To SUM UP!

Activities that create safety, trust, connection, communication, and inclusion already strengthen resilience. When athletes feel accepted and supported, they cope better with pressure and setbacks. Different JOY activities can support resilience in different ways, depending on how they are framed and when they are used. Rather than separating resilience from training, it can be woven into all JOY activities, with some exercises offering a more focused opportunity for regulation and recovery.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **Resilience** is built every day, not only in stressful or competitive situations.
- ✓ The **Resilience** activity category can be used more intentionally to support:
 - nervous system regulation
 - recognising stress reactions
 - positive and supportive self-talk

Coach reminder!

→ Choose activities based on the needs of the group or individual athletes at that moment.



Coach Perspective: JOY E-Portfolio for Coaches

“The Moment That Changes Coaching”

In almost every training session, there is a moment that often goes unnoticed. It isn't written in the session plan or captured in statistics. It appears when a young person hesitates, after a missed pass, a comment from a peer, or a quiet moment of doubt about whether to try again or withdraw. In that instant, something deeper than sport is at stake: confidence, belonging, and self-worth.


Coaches step onto the field ready to teach skills and guide activities, but quickly they learn that coaching is fundamentally about people. Emotions shift suddenly, small moments have big effects, and even the most carefully planned session can unfold unpredictably. Coaching is shaped less by certainty than by constant uncertainty, most of it invisible.

E-Portfolio as a Tool for Self-reflection

The COACH-JOY e-portfolio is built on a simple idea: experience alone is not enough. Learning happens when coaches return to their experiences, reflect on them, and begin to notice patterns over time. What initially feel like isolated moments start to connect, opening space for more intentional choices.

Through reflection, coaches may begin to notice for example:

- how different types of feedback are received in similar situations
- when athletes engage actively and when they withdraw
- what seems to build trust within the group, and what weakens it
- how their own responses influence the atmosphere of a session



This reflection is vital when thinking about resilience. Resilience doesn't grow from pressure; it grows in environments where young people feel safe to try, fail, and try again. Coaches create these conditions moment by moment through their responses, their presence, and the sense of belonging they nurture.

Feedback plays a crucial role here. Every piece of feedback influences how a young person interprets their effort. It can support growth or quietly diminish confidence. Yet feedback is rarely examined deeply. The e-portfolio helps make its impact visible, turning feedback from mere correction into an act of care.

As awareness grows, coaching shifts from reactive to intentional. Sessions become part of a larger developmental journey. Patterns emerge, insights accumulate, and choices gain purpose.

At the same time, coaching is never a solo process. Teams develop through relationships, connection strengthens resilience, and belonging is built collectively. The e-portfolio reflects this shared growth, capturing moments of support and inclusion that shape how the group functions and feels.

For many coaches, this reflective practice may feel new. It asks for time, honesty, and a willingness to look closely—but not for perfection. Only for the habit of pausing to ask: *What really happened here?*

That question can transform not only the coach's practice but also the experiences of every young person on the field. Long after drills and scores fade, what remains is how they came to see themselves: capable or incapable, included or excluded, confident or uncertain.

The COACH-JOY e-portfolio is a companion in this work. It supports coaches in noticing everyday situations more clearly, reflecting on their choices, and understanding how feedback, trust, and inclusion shape young athletes' experiences over time. Rather than aiming for perfection, it encourages the simple habit of pausing, reflecting, and learning from practice.

Please find out how to make an e-portfolio:



→ [Link to the instructions \(to be added\)](#)

→ **Further Learning on Mental Well-being in Youth Sport:**

“Mental Well-being for Young Athletes” (Mieli ry.)

Supporting resilience in youth sport also means paying attention to young athletes’ overall mental well-being. While this JOY Educational Pack -material focuses on everyday coaching practices that support confidence, regulation, and a safe group climate, some topics benefit from deeper and more specialised learning.

For coaches who wish to strengthen their understanding of mental well-being in youth sport, we recommend the “Mental Well-being for Young Athletes” -online course by “MIELI Mental Health Finland”. The course provides practical, evidence-based guidance on supporting young athletes’ mental well-being and complements the JOY approach well.

The course can be used independently or alongside this material to deepen coaches’ knowledge and confidence in addressing mental well-being in sport.

You find the course here: [Mental Well-being for Young Athletes](#)



Factors to Prevent Drop Out in Youth Sports

Supporting Participation and Preventing Drop-Out

Young athletes are more likely to stay in sport when the overall experience supports them — not only in performance, but also in relationships, environment, and opportunities.

Research highlights that factors such as belonging, appropriate challenge, support from others, and accessible environments all play an important role in long-term participation.

The areas below bring together these key factors and offer practical perspectives for supporting young athletes to stay engaged, develop, and enjoy sport over time.

Autonomy

Every youngster should experience a certain freedom of choice in his/her actions, thinking, and feeling related to his/her sports practice. Every youngster can take initiative and should experience their behaviour as self-organized.

Perceived competence / self-efficacy

Every youngster should feel confident about their ability to achieve a challenging sports-related task or predefined goal. Every youngster should believe that he/she is capable of performing a specific task or managing a challenging situation.

Relatedness

Every youngster should feel like he/she are part of the team/club.
Every youngster should experience a sense of warmth, affection, acceptance and security about themselves, about being with others, and about being part of the team/club.



Learning climate

Every youngster should receive positive reinforcement from significant others (i.e. coaches, peers, parents) when he/she works hard and they should help others to learn through cooperation. It should be recognised that every person's contribution is important for the club.

Time/Goal Balance

Every youngster should manage their time, where possible, to allow for sports participation. Every club should organize activities at suitable, flexible and accessible times for youngsters to be able to participate. Clubs should balance time commitment required with youngsters' participation level (i.e. recreational, advanced or elite) and should be mindful of the time youngsters need to give to other aspects of their lives (e.g. education).

Cost

Every youngster should be able to afford the cost of staying involved in sport. Every club should actively try to keep the cost of participating low for youngsters in order to avoid financial barriers to participation. Every club should discuss opportunities for individuals facing financial barriers (e.g. membership in exchange for voluntary tasks at the sports club).

Expectancies

Every youngster should understand what to expect when participating in a sports club. These expectations should cover the physical, social and mental aspects of participation. Every club should understand how youngsters' expectations relating to participation differ depending on age, sex, culture and socio-economic status, and where possible cater for these variations in expectations and needs.

Values

Every youngster should value the importance and usefulness of sport participation for him/herself. Every club should value the importance of sport participation for youngsters and where possible should promote these values.



Coach-Athlete Relationship

Every youngster and coach should have an effective and positive relationship, which includes empathetic understanding, honesty, support, cooperation and respect.

Peer-Involvement in Sport

Every youngster should be encouraged by other players and NOT be teased or made feel nervous in a negative sense when partaking in sport. Every club should provide opportunities for youngsters to interact and make friends and encourage youngsters to do so. This should be done formally (organised, planned, evaluated) and informally (unplanned).

Parental Autonomy Support

Every parent/guardian should encourage his/her youngster to participate in sport. Every parent/guardian should provide support (e.g. transport, equipment, doing activity with them, encouragement etc.), when possible, to their youngster to take part in sport. Every club should support parents/guardians to do so, especially with respect to youngsters who are more likely to drop out of sport (i.e. vulnerable groups).

Prevention Policy

Every club should have an anti-dropout policy that creates awareness of the factors associated with dropout and that actively strives to prevent dropout. Every club should be encouraged to use the health potential of their particular sport 6 . Every youngster should be an ambassador for participation and continued engagement in sport and physical activity.

Accessibility

Every youngster should be able to access the sports facilities safely and conveniently. Every club should make its facilities access as safe and convenient as possible for youngsters and their families.



Type of sport offer

Every youngster should have the possibility to participate in sports activities they enjoy and should be able to participate at the level they are most comfortable (e.g. competitive, recreational etc.). Every club should provide different opportunities for

youngsters, where possible, and policies that create opportunities for youngsters with regard to level of participation, variation of training and organisation of competitions should be encouraged. To cater for a broad range of activities and meet the needs of families, every club should provide a wide range of sport activities if possible (i.e. multisport club).

This section is inspired by the work of Murphy et al. (2018), which you can find and download here: [Factors and actions to prevent dropout in youth sport: results of a rapid review and expert opinions.](#)



Additional Ways to Make JOY visible

Perceived Competence and Self-efficacy in Youth Sport

Experiences of competence in sport during childhood and adolescence play a key role in motivation and the development of an active lifestyle later in life. Perceived competence refers to how young people experience their own skills and abilities in sport, as well as their confidence in handling sport-related tasks and challenges.

Feeling competent strengthens intrinsic motivation, which is a key factor behind enjoyment and long-term engagement in sport. Motivation, in turn, influences behaviour and participation, and is shaped by personal attitudes, perceived abilities, and expectations from others.

Parents and coaches play an important role in supporting the development of perceived competence. It is important to reflect on why a child participates in sport, who the activity is for, and what the goals are. Providing encouraging feedback and creating a supportive environment helps build both motivation and self-efficacy.

Experiences of competence begin to develop in childhood and are strongly shaped during adolescence. A sense of competence can be supported through clear structures, realistic expectations, encouragement, and timely positive feedback. These factors also contribute to the development of self-concept.

Key influences on self-concept include feedback, peer acceptance, and experiences of success in sport. Creating an environment that strengthens competence and supports development in an age-appropriate way is essential for young athletes' well-being and continued participation.

Supporting confidence, belonging, and motivation through everyday interactions

Parents Perspective - Parents' Role in JOY

Parents play a key role in shaping the atmosphere around young athletes. The way adults act on the sidelines, in conversations, and at home has a strong impact on how children experience sport.

In the JOY approach, parents are seen as part of the team environment. Their encouragement, presence, and everyday actions can strengthen confidence, belonging, and enjoyment in sport. The guidelines below are designed to support parents in creating a positive, safe, and encouraging environment. They offer simple ways to support children's motivation, well-being, and long-term engagement in sport — both in moments of success and challenge.

→ [Download Parents' Perspective document HERE](#)

The JOY Card – A Way to Make Positivity Visible

The JOY Card is a simple tool that helps coaches, clubs, and event organisers highlight the kind of behaviour that makes youth sport meaningful and enjoyable.

The idea is easy: *notice and recognise actions that build a positive atmosphere.*

JOY Card Values

Encouragement

→ noticing effort and supporting others in a positive way

Belonging

→ making everyone feel included and valued

Respect


→ treating others fairly in both success and failure

Positive interaction

→ contributing to a safe and supportive atmosphere

Shared responsibility

→ understanding that everyone shapes the sport environment



The JOY Card works a bit like a Fair Play card, but it focuses on the whole sports environment, not just athletes. It can be given to anyone involved in sport, such as a parent, coach, player, or volunteer who contributes to a supportive and encouraging atmosphere.

How to use it?

A JOY Card can be used during or after games, tournaments, or training sessions. It can be given to someone who:

- encourages others in a positive way
- helps create a sense of belonging
- supports fair and respectful interaction
- brings energy and joy to the situation

There are no strict rules for using the card. Each team or club can decide what fits their context best. Some may use it at every event, while others use it when a meaningful moment stands out.

The purpose of the JOY Card is to make positive actions visible. When these behaviours are recognised and valued, they become part of the team culture.

→ [Download JOY card HERE](#)



#JoyCard
#JoyInSports

Congratulations!

Joy card is awarded to a person who:
→ brings joy to children's sports
→ encourages others and maintains a positive attitude
→ fully embraces the game through joy

Thank you for bringing
a joyful atmosphere!

JOY Alphabet - Inclusion in Everyday Practice

The JOY Alphabet is a simple way to highlight the small actions that build inclusion and belonging in sport.

Each “letter” represents a behaviour, attitude, or way of interacting that helps create a safe, positive, and welcoming environment for everyone. Together, they remind us that inclusion is not one big action, but many small choices made every day.

The JOY Alphabet can be used as a reflection tool, a discussion starter, or a shared reminder of what inclusive behaviour looks like in practice.

→ [Download JOY Alphabet HERE](#)



JOY Exercises

The visual below shows how JOY exercises are grouped by purpose. Coaches can choose exercises based on what the group needs at that moment.

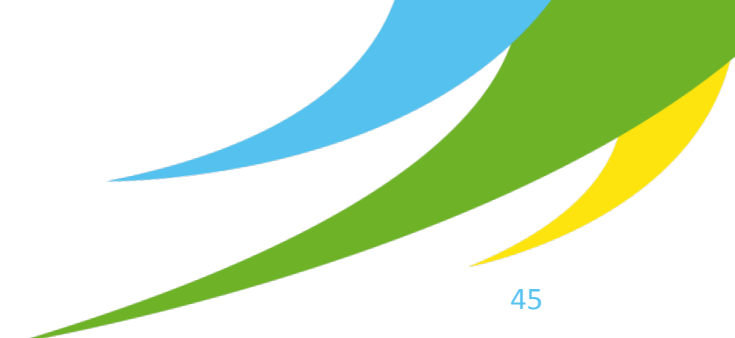
JOY IN SPORTS Exercise Map

Introductory exercises Creating safety & starting sessions	 Introductory
Trust-building exercises Strengthening relationships	 Trust-Building
Team-building exercises Co-operation & group cohesion	 Team Building
Communication exercises Expressing & listening	 Communication
Inclusion exercises Belonging & equality	 Inclusion
Resilience exercises Regulation, self-talk & recovery	 Resilience

Short videos and instructions for many JOY exercises are available on **Instagram**

[→ Check It Out Here](#) 

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Introductory Exercises

Introductory exercises are important because they help create a welcoming and safe atmosphere, build trust, and encourage early participation. They foster connection, improve communication, and set a positive tone for the group. These activities also help facilitators understand group dynamics and smoothly transition participants into the main work.

Cohesion Exercise

→ **Goal: The group learns to work together while also learning things about each other.**


 5-15 min


https://youtube.com/shorts/DJosi26fh_Q?feature=share

The group is walking in the room. Everyone tries to stop and start moving at the same time. Look into the eyes of passersby. Greet passersby. Stop at every new pair, where you answer the question given by the teacher. The questions can be for example: Favorite food? Favorite animal? Favorite day of the week? Or what time did you wake up today? What hobbies do you have? Who is in your family?

Web of Friendship

→ **Goal: To get to know each other in a creative way. It is also a valid memory exercise and a fun way to learn names.**

 10-20 min

 A ball of yarn or a small ball (for a more difficult version).


The players sit together in a circle. The one running the exercise holds a ball of yarn in their hands. They will then tell their name and one fact about them. They will then pass the ball of yarn to someone else in the ring – however they will hold on to the thread. The new person then repeats this process. This will continue until each of the players have told their names and are holding a thread in their hands. This will create a web of yarn in the middle of the ring. The web must now be disentangled by doing the previous process in reverse: the last player tells the name and one fact about the previous player and passes the ball of yarn to them. This will continue until the web has been disentangled. For extra difficulty: this can be played with a regular small ball. In this version players can't rely on following the thread. Instead, they must remember themselves for whom they threw the ball.

Trust-building Exercises

Trust-building exercises strengthen relationships by promoting openness, reliability, and mutual support within the group. They encourage honest communication, reduce barriers, and help members feel safe relying on one another. By fostering cooperation and understanding, these activities create a solid foundation for effective teamwork and deeper group cohesion.

Cohesion Exercise With a Twist

→ ***Goal: The group learns to work together while also learning to trust each other.***


 5-15 min

The group walks freely around the room. Everyone tries to start and stop moving at the same time. Make eye contact with people you pass and greet them. If one person stops, the whole group stops. Next, add a simple task each time the group stops, such as clapping once together at the same time. Other options include jumping or squatting. No talking or extra communication is allowed.



Blind Folded Maze

→ **Goal:** *The group learns to take care of one and the one learns to trust the group. Both are needed to get the exercise.*

 5-15 min, depending how many will be guided in the maze

One student wears a blindfold. Their teammates guide them through a maze using only their voices. Set up a simple maze with cones or markers. Place the blindfolded student at the start. The rest of the team stands outside the maze and gives clear verbal instructions, such as “take two steps forward” or “turn left.” The blindfolded student follows the instructions to reach the end. No touching or gestures are allowed—only spoken directions. The goal is to move safely and accurately through the maze.





Team Building Exercises

Team-building exercises enhance collaboration by improving communication, problem-solving, and coordination among group members. They help individuals understand each other's strengths, build mutual respect, and develop a sense of shared purpose. These activities strengthen group cohesion and boost overall effectiveness and morale.

Crossing the River

→ **Goal: To strengthen teamwork through full-body, collaborative problem-solving activities.**

 10-15 min  Something to be used as platforms while crossing The River (e.g. sheets of paper, mouse pads, bottle hampers). One platform per player is needed. Platforms may be added/removed to adjust the difficulty of the exercise. Tape/yarn/cloth/anything to indicate start and finish lines.

Participants are split into teams of 3-5. Each of the teams then come up with a name and a battle cry. Once the teams have been formed, they are brought into the starting line and shown the finish line (preferably on the edge of the play area). The space between starting and finish lines is called "The River". Teams are then given platforms (see Resources needed below), one per player. Using only these platforms, each of the teams must cross The River. Players may only step on the platforms and may not touch the ground (i.e. The River). If that happens, the team must return to the starting line and start again. The first team to cross The River wins. This game may be made easier/harder by increasing/decreasing the number of platforms given. For extra difficulty, the platforms must also be brought to the finish line.

<https://youtu.be/tWyzDuCrM3M>


https://youtube.com/shorts/jnnZ_w0D7yM?feature=share

<https://youtu.be/3cvMQzS6N-A>



Toothless Animals

→ **Goal: To lighten the mood and bring joy to the group.**


 5-15 min

Players form a circle. The game master says the name of an animal to the player on their left side. This must be spoken so that the speaker's teeth are not showing. The speaker and the listener are not allowed to laugh (or smile, for extra challenge), others in the ring are allowed to do so freely. If the person speaking or listening starts to laugh, they are out of the game. This game continues until only one player remains or remaining players get fed up.

<https://youtu.be/xtnGfvMMIWk>

Cohesion Exercise with a Twist: Statue Exercise

→ **Goal: To strengthen teamwork through full-body, collaborative problem-solving activities.**

 5-15 min

The group walks freely around the room. Without speaking or signaling, everyone tries to start and stop moving at the same time. When the group stops, participants quickly form smaller groups of a given size. Each group receives a simple task to create a "statue" together, such as limiting how many hands or feet touch the floor, or forming a shape or letter with their bodies. The group holds the statue until the instructor approves, then everyone moves on.

Communication Exercises

Communication exercises help participants express themselves more clearly, listen more effectively, and understand one another better. They reduce misunderstandings, strengthen people skills, and promote an open, respectful exchange of ideas. These activities improve overall group interaction and support smoother, more productive collaboration.

Three Things About

→ **Goal: To warm up the participants' communication.**

 5 min


Description: All the players gather around in a circle. They try to find a common rhythm (e.g. by clapping hands or their thighs). Once a rhythm has been found, a following procedure follows:

In a rhythm, the whole group chants: "Three things about!" Anyone may then choose another player and say to them: "_____, three things about ___!" (i.e. "Tom, three things about summer" or "Jerry, three things about Aerosmith") The chosen player then says the first three words that come to mind. They don't need to actually be about the chosen subject, as long as the said words come as fast as possible and as unfiltered as possible. The group once again chants: "Three things about!" The previous player now chooses a new player and new subject to hear three things about. This process is repeated as long as desired. The goal is to keep a steady pace with as few gaps or pauses as possible. If the exercise feels too easy, this can be made harder by doing everything at a faster pace.



Line Exercise


→ **Goal: To reflect on one's own state of mind by embodying an opinion.**

 5-10 min

A hypothetical line runs across the room. One end of the line can be labelled "Yes" and the other "No." Participants position themselves along the line based on how they feel and what they want to answer to a given question. For example, "This week, I feel energetic.", "I like cats" or "I feel I did well in the last game".

Mirror of Mine

→ **Goal: The goal is to develop focus, coordination, and non-verbal communication by closely observing and matching another person's movements. It also builds concentration, body awareness, and trust between partners while encouraging creativity.**


 5-10 min

Athletes work in pairs, facing each other. One person leads with movements while the other copies them like a mirror. On the coach's signal, they switch roles. The coach encourages movements that build balance, focus, reaction, and creativity.



Mirror of Mine with a Twist - Move and React

→ **Goal:** *The goal is to develop focus, self-control, and body awareness by reacting quickly to visual cues. It also trains attention, timing, and movement control in a playful way.*

 5-10 min

One player is the “mirror” and stands with their back to the others. The rest move toward them, but when the mirror turns around, everyone must freeze. If someone is caught moving, they return to the start. The goal is to reach and touch the mirror without being seen.

Variations: Players can move while passing, carrying, or dribbling a ball and must freeze in control when the mirror turns. Another option is that one player secretly holds a ball, and the mirror tries to guess who has it.




Inclusion Exercises

Inclusion exercises promote a sense of belonging by ensuring all participants feel seen, heard, and valued. They help break down barriers, highlight diverse perspectives, and encourage equitable participation. These activities strengthen group cohesion, foster mutual respect, and create an environment where everyone can contribute comfortably and confidently.

Viewing Exercise

→ ***Goal: To increase equality and make every group member feel safe in the group, regardless of who they are or where they come from. Everyone gets to be seen and heard with a low threshold while still challenging themselves.***


 5-20 min, depends how many people are in the group.

All participants line up to sit/stand in a row and, one by one, they leave the line to stand in front of the others. The person standing in front of the others "to be watched" tries not to do anything extra, just stays still and focuses on breathing. The person in front of the others can, in their turn, look everyone in the eyes. It is recommended to keep your eyes open throughout the exercise. The duration can be 1-2 minutes per person being watched.



What Unites Us

→ **Goal: To increase equality and make every group member feel safe in the group, regardless of who they are or where they come from. Everyone gets to have fun while learning what they have in common.**

 10-15 min

Divide the group into smaller groups (e.g., groups of 3-5 people) Each small group is tasked with coming up with something that unites them all. Allow about a minute for this. that something can be anything. Once the groups have come up with something, their next task is to create a statue that reflects this shared element. When all groups have completed their statues, each group takes turns presenting their statue while the others watch. The watchers' task is to try to guess what the statue represents and what the unifying factor was for that particular group. The game ends when all groups have presented their statues and the unifying elements have been guessed. Statues can also start with sound and movement to help guessing.

Resilience Exercises


Resilience exercises support young athletes in managing pressure, emotions, and recovery in everyday sport situations. They help regulate the nervous system, strengthen confidence, and build self-awareness. These exercises can be used before, during, or after training and competition to support focus, coping, and recovery. Over time, they help athletes develop the skills needed to handle challenges, stay engaged, and perform with a sense of calm and control.

These exercises are flexible and can be adapted to different situations, sports, and age groups. They can be used both in groups and individually. Coaches can adjust the instructions to fit their own coaching style and the needs of their athletes, making the exercises easy to integrate into everyday practice.

Positive Self-talk

“I am strong and capable”

→ **Goal: To build self-trust. Positive self-talk boosts confidence, focus and motivation.**

 1-5 min.

Positive self-talk helps athletes direct their attention, strengthen confidence, and stay focused during performance. The way athletes speak to themselves can influence both their thoughts and actions in challenging situations. Research suggests that positive and task-focused self-talk can improve concentration, motivation, and performance, especially under pressure. Learning to use simple, supportive phrases can help athletes stay present and trust their abilities.


This exercise can be used both individually and as a group. Athletes can develop their own personal key phrases, but teams can also create shared phrases that reflect their goals, values, or way of playing together.

Description:

- Choose a word or phrase that reminds you of something essential for your development (e.g., “eyes on the target”). Tune in to the moment and how your body and mind feel.
- Identify your strengths on the field (e.g., “I am fast,” “I finish well,” “I am determined”).
- Move on to reflecting on what would help you progress in your performance. Create a phrase that supports this (e.g., “I focus on what I do,” “I give my all”).
- After forming your key phrases, visualize yourself on the field. What do you see? Close your eyes and imagine being fully prepared. Picture the perfect performance you wish to achieve. Repeat your phrases as needed.

Mental Imagery Training

→ **Goal: To build self-trust**

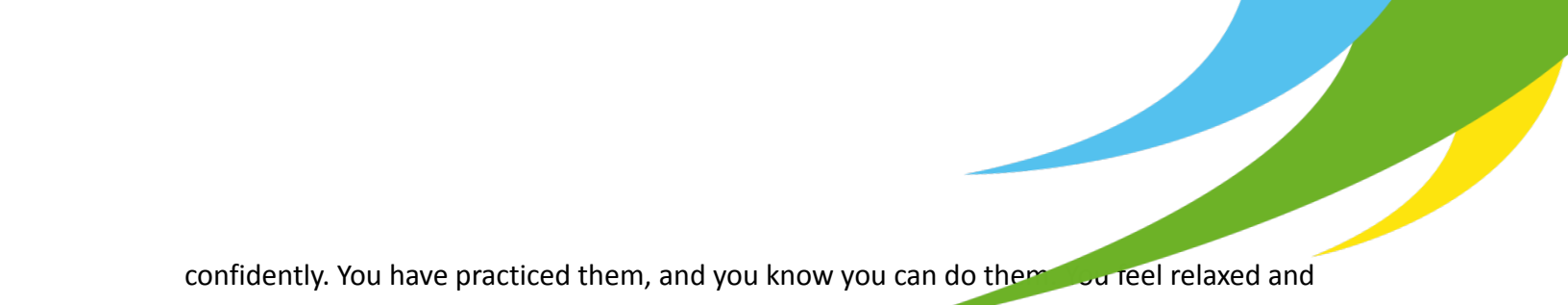
 1-10min

Visualization activates the same brain areas as physical practice — which is why mental imagery is just as meaningful as physical training. Top football players such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, and Erling Haaland include meditation and visualization in their pre-match routines.

The exercises are pre-scripted, but you can modify them to better suit your needs. The purpose of the exercises before performance is to help athletes transition to the required state of alertness.

One example of a script:


Sit or lie down in a relaxed, comfortable position. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself in a competition. See yourself preparing for the performance with focus and calmness. Imagine yourself performing excellently in the competition. See yourself executing movements



confidently. You have practiced them, and you know you can do them. You feel relaxed and self-assured. You are in a flow state. Imagine a supportive audience around you, cheering for your performance. Imagine yourself after a successful performance. You feel joy, satisfaction, and excitement for what's ahead. Let this feeling fill your body. You know you have done your best. Take a few deep breaths and slowly return to the present moment. Open your eyes and feel calm, focused, and ready for the competition.

Body Tapping Exercise


→ ***Goal: To tap through the entire body to increase body awareness and elevate alertness***

 1-2min

The exercise can be performed to the rhythm of an energizing song, such as a team's motivational music. Start tapping from top to bottom: tap your head, shoulders, arms, stomach, glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, knees, calves, shins, and feet. After tapping the whole body, repeat the process from bottom to top. This can be repeated about five times.

Box Breathing

→ **Goal: calm down and reduce negative stress by regulating the nervous system (note: can be used to reduce competitive anxious)**

 1-2min

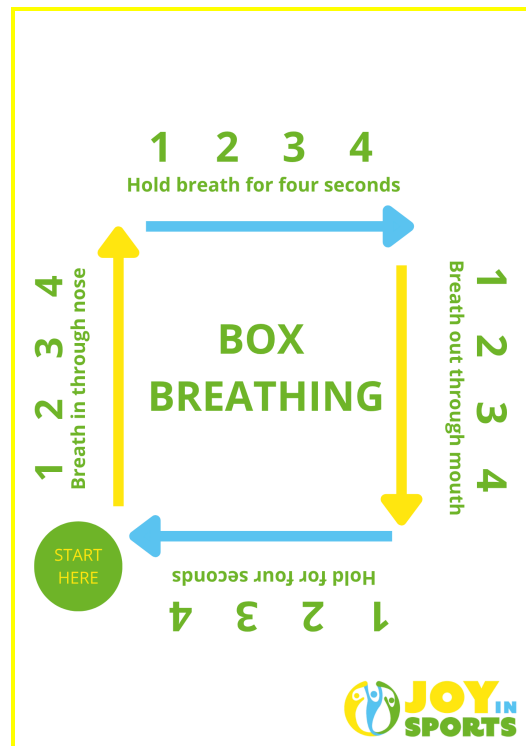
Exercise can be done both before and after performance. Before performance, it helps orient towards the upcoming task. After performance, it promotes relaxation and recovery.

Slow your breathing and follow the rhythm:

Inhale for 4 seconds - Hold your breath for 4 seconds

Exhale for 4 seconds - Hold your breath for 4 seconds


Repeat 5–10 times





Mindful Breathing

→ **Goal: calm down and reduce negative stress by regulating the nervous system (note: can be used to reduce competitive anxious)**

 1-5min

Breathing exercises can be done both before and after performance. Before performance, it helps orient towards the upcoming task. After performance, it promotes relaxation and recovery. Diaphragmatic breathing is a skill that helps you focus your thoughts and calm both the mind and body. Like any skill, using breathing as a calming tool requires practice. Try the exercise first in a quiet environment, so that you can use it more easily in competitive situations.


One example:

1. Pause and notice your feelings of tension or nervousness. Do not step away from the situation, but give yourself a moment to calm down.
2. Place one hand on your diaphragm. The correct spot is in the middle of your chest, just below the ribcage. Let your hand move with your breathing.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth. Count to four as you inhale and let your stomach rise. Then count to four as you exhale and let your stomach fall slowly. Continue breathing calmly at a pace that feels comfortable for you.
4. Focus only on your breathing. If thoughts related to your nervousness return, gently bring your attention back to your breath — notice how the air flows in through your nose and out through your mouth.
5. Then bring your attention back to what you were doing and continue. It is okay if some feelings of nervousness are still present in your body. Focus on the upcoming moment or game and trust your abilities. You are capable.



Tension-relaxation Exercise

→ **Goal: Relax both the mind and body and also recognize areas of tension**

 5-10min (depending on how long the script is)

An example of a short script:

1. Sit or lie down. Close your eyes if you want. Focus on your breathing and try to slow it down.
2. Start by tensing your feet and toes tightly for a few seconds, then relax. Move to the calves and repeat.
3. Move to the thighs — press them together for a few seconds, then relax. Draw your navel toward your spine for a few seconds, then release. Remember to breathe.
4. Pull your shoulder blades together tightly, hold briefly, then relax. Fill your lungs, hold for a few seconds, then exhale slowly.
5. Move to your arms. Lift your shoulders toward your ears and release. Make fists, squeeze tightly, then relax. Smile widely and relax. Gently clench your teeth for a moment, then release.
6. Take a few deep breaths, stretch lightly, and open your eyes.

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JOY Happens When Movement Meets Creativity

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