

# Family Resource

## Help Your Child Manage Anxiety in Youth Sports



ages: 8-12



15-20 minutes per activity

### Skills Practiced

Self-awareness, mindfulness, stress management, and self-regulation.

### The Why

Is your child passionate about sports but also struggling with the pressures and anxieties that come with competition? You're not alone. Research shows that up to 70% of youth athletes experience anxiety related to competition, which can impact their performance, academic success, social relationships, and self-esteem. This resource provides practical activities and strategies to help children manage sports-related anxiety, fostering athletic development and personal growth.

### The How

#### Discussing Anxiety with Your Child:

Start by discussing with your child what anxiety feels like and how it can impact their life, especially in sports. Help them recognize that anxiety is a natural response to pressure, but they can manage it using appropriate tools and strategies.

#### Three Activities:

Active Muscle Engagement and Release, Mindfulness Breathing, and Five Senses

#### 1. Muscle Engagement Activity

Goal: Help your child release physical tension and practice mindfulness.

Instructions: Have your child stand tall and take a few deep breaths. Guide them through tensing different muscle groups for five seconds each, starting from the bottom and

working up:

- Tense your toes.
- Squeeze your legs.
- Tighten your stomach.
- Lift your shoulders towards your ears.

After holding the tension, ask your child to take a deep breath and release it as they exhale. Encourage them to imagine letting go of the anxiety with each breath out. Repeat this cycle two to three times, as needed.

## 2. Mindfulness Breathing Exercise

**Goal:** Teach your child to focus on their breath to calm the mind and body.

**Instructions:** Have your child sit comfortably or lie down on their back. Ask them to close their eyes and focus on their breath. Guide them through the breathing pattern:

- Inhale deeply through the nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of four.
- Exhale slowly through the mouth for a count of six.

Encourage your child to visualize their worries floating away with each exhale.

## 3. Five Senses Grounding Exercise

**Goal:** Help your child become more present and reduce anxiety by engaging their senses.

**Instructions:** Ask your child to check in with their feelings and remind them of the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Guide them through this activity, counting down from five:

- Five things they can see in the space around them.
- Four things they can feel (e.g., feet on the ground, the fabric of their clothes).
- Three things they can hear (e.g., birds chirping, a fan running).
- Two things they can smell (e.g., fresh air, a scent in the room).
- One thing they can taste (e.g., the taste of their last meal or a lingering flavor).

Repeat the exercise, prompting them to find new things to notice. Once your child is comfortable, encourage them to practice this grounding technique independently anytime they feel anxious.

## Wrap Up Discussion:

After each activity, take time to reflect on the experience with your child:

- "How did your body feel during the exercise?"
- "Did you notice any changes in how you felt after the mindfulness breathing?"
- "What positive thoughts can you use during a game or practice to help you stay calm?"

Use this conversation to discuss the importance of replacing negative self-talk with positive affirmations, such as "I am prepared," "I can handle this," or "I will do my best." These positive thoughts can help manage anxiety and boost self-confidence.

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## Take it Further

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in helping their children manage sports-related anxiety. You can support your child by:

- **Encouraging positive self-talk:** Help your child identify negative thoughts and reframe them into positive affirmations. For example, if a child feels disappointed after a game, help them focus on something positive, like their teamwork or effort.
- **Model mindfulness:** Practice mindfulness activities like yoga or meditation together to reinforce a calm mindset at home.
- **Maintaining open communication:** Create a safe, supportive space where your child feels comfortable expressing their feelings. Listen actively and validate their emotions to help them feel heard and understood.

This resource was developed in partnership with

