

MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

Sport anxiety is not preventable, but it should be manageable. It's up to parents and coaches to communicate and behave in a way that reduces anxiety around sport performance and reinforces the positive benefits of sport. Use this checklist to help keep your athlete's sport anxiety under control.

Reduce Anxiety

Use language and behavior that emphasize the social and physical benefits of playing sports, not the scholarships or tournament wins. For example, make your first question after a game, "What was your favorite part of the game?" rather than, "What did you do wrong today?"

Avoid Failure Avoidance

Falling into failure avoidance means that your athletes will avoid taking risks that could end in failure. But if they don't take risks, they're not going to improve or excel because they are just trying to "not mess up." To avoid this mentality, explain early in the season that the goal for the team isn't to win every game, or sink every shot, but to try new techniques, take risks, and make mistakes. Praise attempts, including the ones that fail, to create a culture where students can feel safe pushing their limits in sport.

Create a Team Culture That Doesn't Allow for Bullying or the Idea that Winning is Everything.

Anxiety isn't always about winning and losing. Sometimes, athletes fear the social backlash from teammates if they miss a shot or don't act a certain way. Team dynamics are extremely important and must be nurtured to have a successful team.



Teach Mental Strategies Early and Often

Visualization and other mental techniques have been shown to improve performance. Start early in the season with a discussion of mental techniques and make practical recommendations. For example, walk athletes through visualizations exercises that they can do before games, have everyone download a free guided-meditation app, and discuss what success looks like for this team, this year.

Listen to Your Athletes

There comes a point where the anxiety produced by a sport outweighs the benefits of playing. If your athlete isn't deriving any pleasure from playing, it may be time to consider a new sport rather than pushing through.

You can read the original article [here](#).

And, check out all of TrueSport's Mental Wellness resources at [TrueSport.org/Mental-Wellness](https://www.truesport.org/Mental-Wellness).



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