

Take a Breath: Mindfulness and Meditation in Athletics

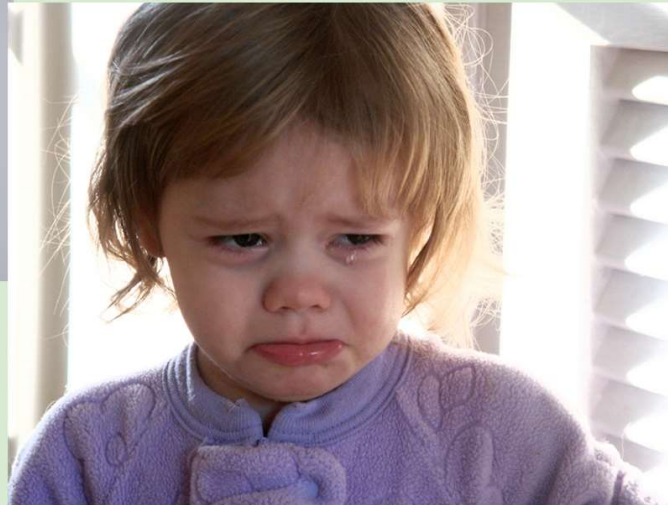


Disclosure

I, Cynthia O'Connell, owner of Mindfulness Connection, have no financial affiliations or disclosures.

How are you feeling?

The 3 Minute Centering



GROUNDED POSITION

I teach every student and adult this tool.

When can you use it?

To find focus, before a test,
for a reset, after a mistake, waiting,
when I am losing it.



BREATHING is your Superpower

Breathe in and out through the nose. Blood pressure increases on the inhale, exhale lowers it.

Three breaths can slow your heart rate and create calm.

*If you do a lot of talking during your day, you are mouth breathing and probably exhausted.

*Use the sound of the bell to remind you and student athletes to focus on taking even one diaphragmatic breath!



SMILING

Smiling is uplifting, kids smile 200 – 400 times a day. How many times do you think adults smile? First place we hold tension is the jaw. Sticking your tongue out also releases it.

Research shows us that simply smiling for twenty seconds triggers positive emotions. Smiling stimulates neuropeptides that work toward fighting off stress and unleashes the feel-good cocktail of serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins. Smiling is your secret weapon.

Hutchinson, *Endure*

SELF COMPASSION

By saying “thank you” to yourself it is the secret to resilience, strength in the face of failure, the ability to learn from mistakes and bounce back with greater enthusiasm. Research tells us that self-compassion is a far better alternative than self-criticism.



GRATITUDE

A gratitude practice in positive psychology research, is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

“Expressing gratitude is considered the forgotten factor in happiness research”, says Robert Emmons, the foremost expert on gratitude. His research shows that gratitude produces measurable results in the body, in the mind, and in the social world. It improves physical health. A routine gratitude practice in which you write down those things for which you’re thankful has exponential benefits in terms of health, relationships, and overall resilience.

ACTS of GENEROSITY

Something you do for someone else, without outcome.

Good for the body

Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem, empathy and compassion, and improve mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a stress hormone, which directly impacts stress levels. People who give of themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer. Kindness can increase your sense of connectivity with others, which can directly impact loneliness, improve low mood and enhance relationships in general. It also can be contagious. Looking for ways to show kindness can give you a focus activity, especially if you tend to be anxious or stressed in some social situations.

Good for the mind

Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain. Being kind boosts serotonin and dopamine, which are neurotransmitters in the brain that give you feelings of satisfaction and well-being and cause the pleasure/reward centers in your brain to light up. Endorphins, which are your body's natural pain killer, also can be released.

INTENTION

Beginner's Mind

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s, there are few”.

Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*

“You can redirect the electricity in your brain instead of just letting it flow.” Loretta Graziano Breuning, Ph.D., a professor emerita of management at California State University East Bay, is the author of *Habits of a Happy Brain*.

Today is Experiential, always a practice, never for perfection.

COMMON GOAL

No matter our differences we always think in terms of what is best for the student, their mental and physical health. The “Greater Good”.



How are you feeling? Thoughts lead to feelings.

“There is no good or bad only thinking makes it so”.

Check in with athletes, ask them how they are feeling.

Teach the athlete to say: “I am feeling frustrated vs. I’m frustrated.

Impermanent, feelings change

Become a spectator to your thoughts

Research shows that students who are more **resilient** are more academically successful. Resilient students bounce back quicker, are mindful of their thinking, understand their beliefs, and importantly are able to challenge their beliefs and thoughts to create more positive outcomes.

How can athletic trainers better treat their athletes' total well being through the use of mindfulness and meditation?

Today we will examine the following:

1. Recognize the value of mindfulness and its application in wellness and athletics.
2. Practice a variety of mind/body techniques that support athletes and coaches well-being
3. Expand the skills of stress management in the athletic trainer through guided practice.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

“Mindfulness is paying attention, in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” Dr. Jon Kabot-Zinn 2003

“True freedom means taking responsibility for your life, your choices, your reactions and your energy.” George Mumford. Lakers, Bulls, Knicks

Colleges, Organizations Who does this?

Visualization: McKensie Milton Florida State 11/18 came back and played.

Meditation: JJ McCarthy quarterback Michigan, says the foundation to his success of being a human first and a football player second is his practice.

Meditation: Aaron Judge: the Calm app. “It helps me clear my head”.



Breathing always should be considered in the pillars of high quality performance.

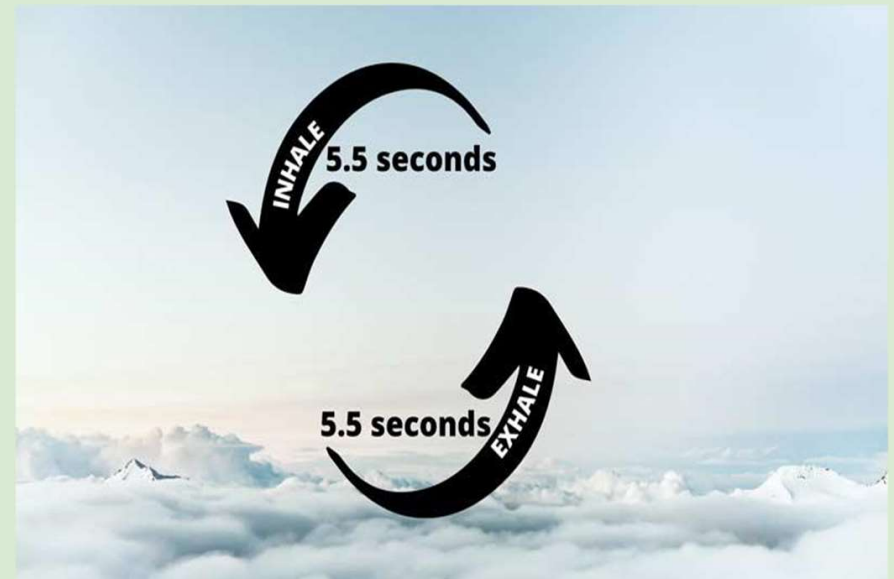
All day 5.5 per minute

Take less breaths

**Always through the nose-
noses are for breathing,
mouths are for eating and
talking.**

How do babies breath?

Get the breath to be quiet



Breathwork

Slow down breathing before and after practice. 4 inhale, 6-8 exhale. The more you practice, the more you can call upon it when you are in fight, flight or freeze or need to reset. Start with 10 breaths, build to 2 minutes.

Belly breathing emphasis on the diaphragm, allowing rib expansion, with nasal breathing. Calms body and mind before a stressful event like a hard workout, tryout, game or test.

Books:

McKeown, Patrick. *The Oxygen Advantage*

Nestor, James. *Breath: The new science of a lost art*

Dr. Jandial, Rahul. *Life on a Knife's Edge*

Dr. Amishi, Jha. *Peak Mind*

George Mumford, *The Mindful Athlete*

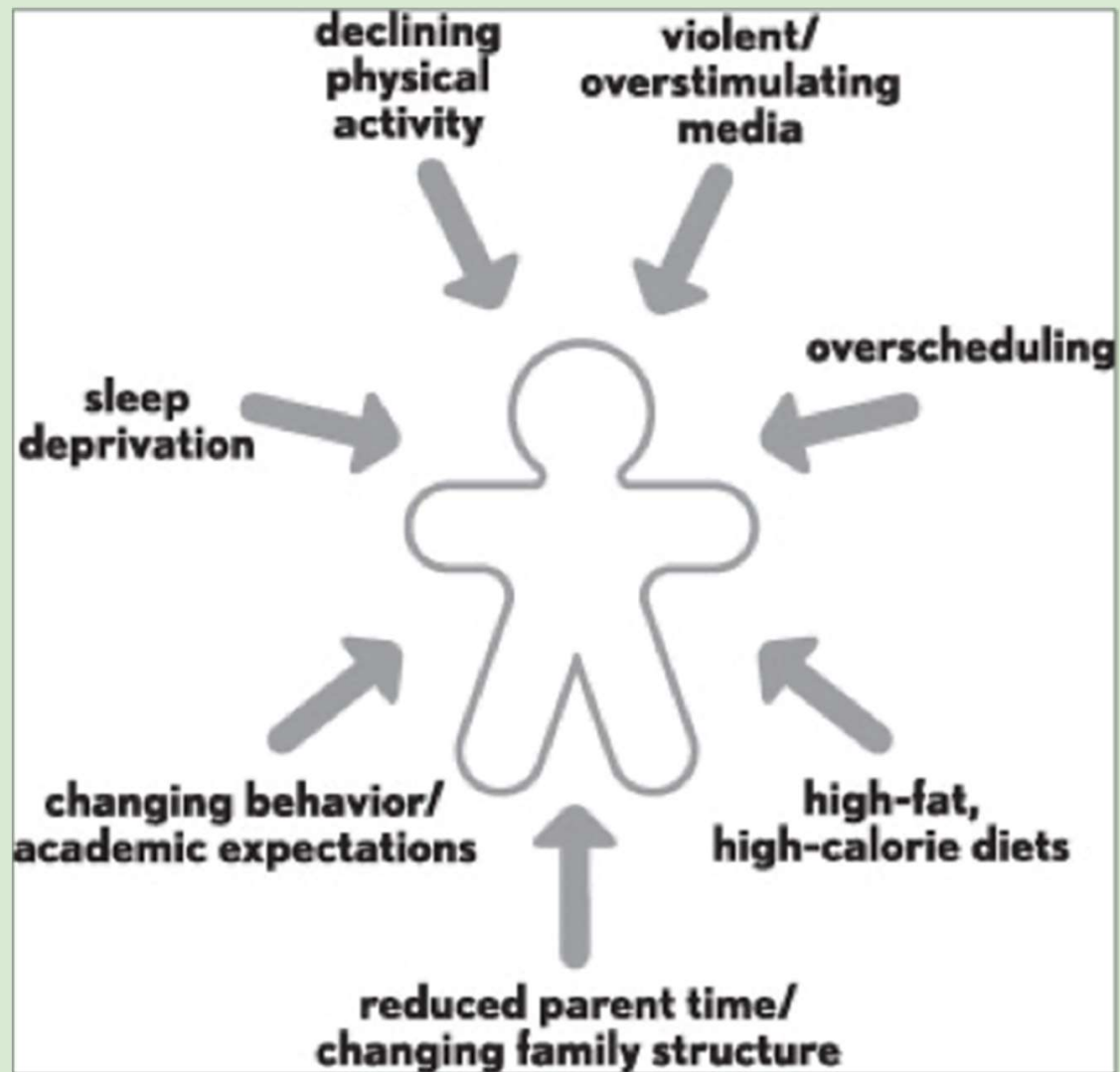
Teach students through these techniques: *Breathing, Moving, Sitting still, Paying Attention, Using your Senses, Grateful Flow, Visualization, Change the thought process to stay present and learn emotional self-regulation.* Learning to stay present, in practice, in competition AND IN LIFE.

Activating the para-sympathetic nervous system, deactivating the sympathetic, Neck pull down, Lower body.

All day long external stimulation; people, places, things, and technology.

Restorative sleep. The difference between having an excellent practice, being less reactive and less prone to injury.

Studies show teens sleeping less than 8 hours a night are almost at double risk of injury. Dr. Jennifer King pediatric sports medicine doctor, Hawaii





Getting to Know and Love Your Brain

There are three big helpers in your brain. One helps you make smart choices. One helps protect you from danger. And one saves your favorite memories and your ABCs. Can you name the three helpers?

Prefrontal Cortex

(pree-FRUN-tuh KOR-teks)

I'm prefrontal cortex—PFC, for short. I help you solve math problems and get to know your favorite book and TV characters. Give me time to work, and I can help you make friends, or make the best decision in a tough situation.

Amygdala

(uh-MIG-duh-luh)

I'm amygdala and I'm here to keep you safe! I react FAST. If there's serious danger, I'll help you run, freeze, or fight back.


Hippocampus

(ih-puh-KAM-puhs)

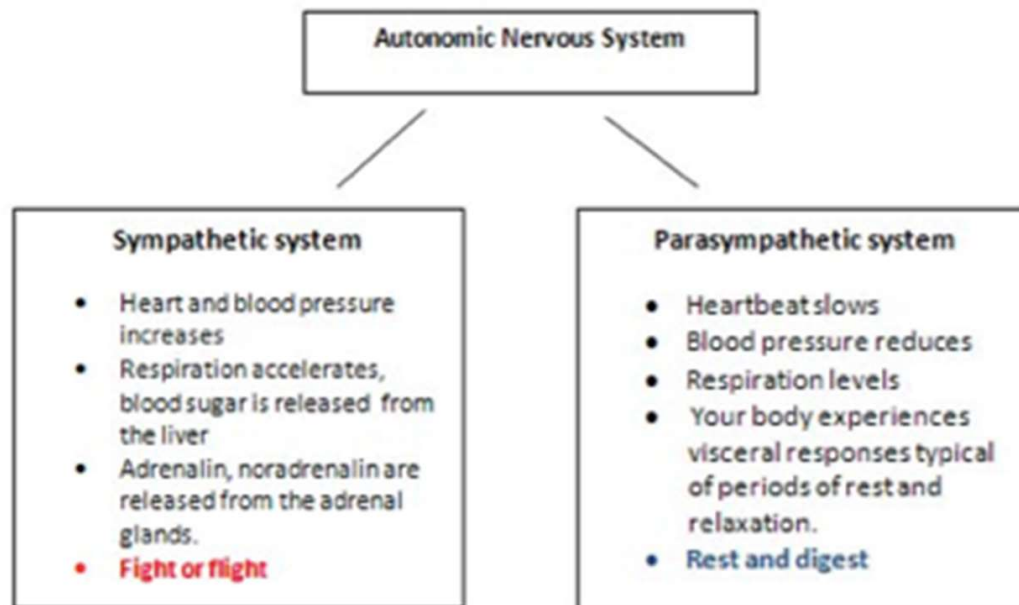
I'm hippocampus and I'm like a scrapbook in your brain! I save everything important that you want to remember—from your ABC's to the names of all the people in your family. When something happens to make you smile, I'll save that as a happy memory!

Breathing to the rescue!

Breathe deep into your belly to stay calm and help your PFC think clearly.

 SCHOLASTIC

Impact on the Nervous System



ACTIVITY: Strengths

Change your mindset to present moment awareness. Consider that there have never been certain times, that none of us know exactly what will happen tomorrow, in the next hour or in the next minute. But what we always have are our strengths. If you could write down three of your personal strengths. The first three that come to your mind. These will guide us on the path to becoming a better version of ourselves. Maybe even look at them daily for 3 weeks, the time it takes to create a habit, in this case of acting from your strengths. This process will reinforce that your decisions are made from your core strengths. You will start to believe them and act from them.

ACTIVITY: Where do you get your Strength from?

From my perspective, resiliency also includes the ability to meet the present moment with clarity and flexibility, and a willingness to change.

Movement Break

Examples of Strength

- Adventurous
- Artistic
- Athletic
- Authentic
- Balanced
- Caring
- Confident
- Considerate
- Courageous
- Creative
- Compassionate
- Curious
- Dedicated
- Disciplined
- Detailed
- Determined
- Educated
- Empathetic
- Enthusiastic
- Entertaining
- Flexible
- Generous
- Grateful
- Honest
- Ingenious
- Intelligent
- Inspirational
- Kind
- Knowledgeable
- Leading
- Logical
- Motivated
- Optimistic
- Outgoing
- Original
- Open-minded
- Organized
- Patient
- Peaceful
- Persistent
- Resourceful
- Responsible
- Self-assured
- Self-controlled
- Strategic
- Team-oriented
- Thoughtful
- Trustworthy
- Visionary
- Warm
- Welcoming
- Wise

Neuroplasticity

It refers to the physiological changes in the brain that happen as the result of our interactions with our environment. From the time the brain begins to develop in utero until the day we die, the connections among the cells in our brains reorganize in response to our changing needs. This dynamic process allows us to learn from and adapt to different experiences”

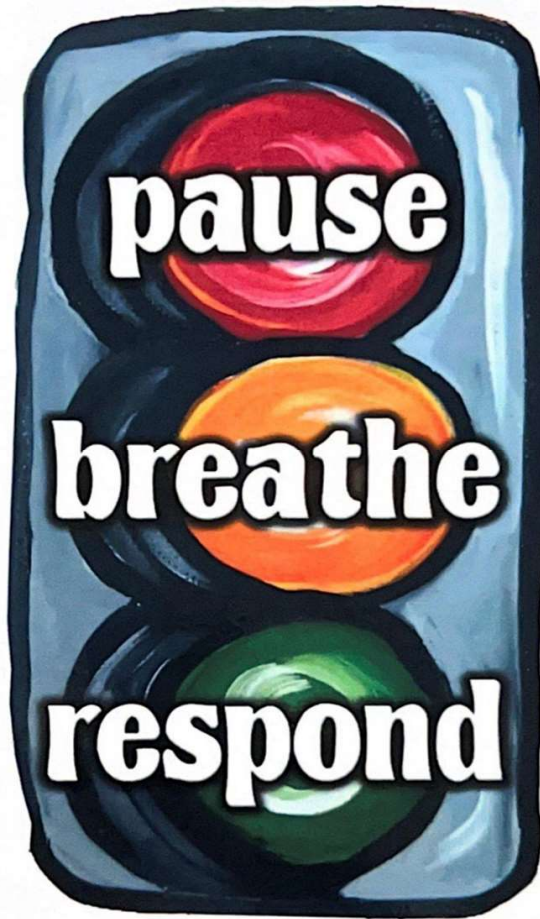
Celeste Campbell (n.d.).What is Neuroplasticity? [www. Brainline.org](http://www.Brainline.org),2009

Train the mind the way you do your body. Slow things down, to make better choices.

Retrain your brain. Sprinkle Mindfulness throughout your day. 3 by 3 method

The Big 3 you have control over:

1. Your Smile, the secret weapon
2. Your Breath, the superpower
3. Your Grateful flow, the magic trick



Mindfulness

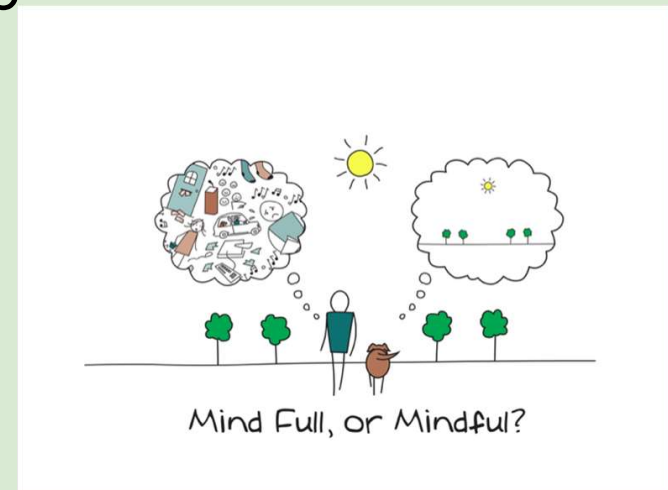
Multitasking vs Monotasking

Autopilot vs Present Moment Awareness

Ruminating about the past and worrying about the future

Mental Time Travel

Perceived threats and real ones



Activity: Impulse Control

7 Practices to support Students

From Eric Jensen , *Teaching with Poverty In Mind* says “ The brain that is susceptible to adverse environmental effects is equally susceptible to Positive enriching ones.”

1. Take a deep breath and shift your frame of reference for students. Ask “What happened to this student? “You don’t have to know what the trauma is to understand, support and encourage a child. *WAIT Why am I talking?*
1. Create awareness by understanding the trauma response. Typical reactions to trauma are hypervigilance, fear, shame, and guilt. Their corresponding behavior maybe defiant, manipulative or avoidant, not purposefully but adaptive and functional so they get what they need. *Don’t take them personally!*
1. Practice self-awareness by knowing your own triggers and how to self-regulate. You can help a child regulate their bodies when you regulate yours. When you the adult is calm regulated and using their pre-frontal cortex, students can co-regulate with that adult. Activating their prefrontal cortex. The child learns from the adult’s example. *Breath*

4. Build relationships with students not based on academics. Find out what they like to do, their favorite singer, let them know you care about them as a person. *See Hear Validate*
5. Teach students about their brains. Fight, flight, freeze, the amygdala, pre-frontal cortex and how to self-regulate. *PBR Pause, Breath, Respond*
6. Create a space for calming down. This is a place to calm down, it does not have to be a physical site. It is a tool to help students, identify when they need a moment. *Meet students where they are.*
7. Pay attention, notice and recognize when student-athletes are successful, recover from a mistake, act without anger. It is essential to recognize when athletes are able to make a positive change, no matter how small. *Be the person to recognize favorable behavior changes.*

Recent article in Asbury Park Press, [Ukraine War through a Child's Eyes](#).

Dr. James Gordon, psychiatrist author of "Transforming Trauma: The Path to Hope and Healing, founder of The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, professor at Georgetown School of Medicine discusses how he is working with the children of the Ukraine and teaching them self-care techniques for their PTSD.

Breathing to quiet the fight /flight mode, moving to "reset" the body, shaking or dancing, then pausing for two minutes of paused relaxed awareness.

He says, "in a world where children have so little power, controlling how the body feels and reacts is affirming".

Doesn't it make sense to teach this lifelong skill to our student-athletes, our coaches, teachers, and families?



You and self-care

What is your morning routine?
Evening routine?



Establish a morning routine

(6 minutes or more)

Minute 1-2 – Still in bed, doing 10 diaphragmatic breaths reduces anxiety, meditation

Minute 3– Body scan, connect mind/body, the psyche/soma

Minute 4– Think about what you are grateful for, 3 things, start the Grateful flow, write in a journal.

Minute 5-6 – Move, stretch, swing your arms, shake, march in place

Set an intention for your day

Establish an Evening routine

(6 minutes or more)

Minute 1- Write in a journal what went well today.

Minute 2 -3 – Lying in bed do a progressive relaxation

Minute 4-6 – 4 square breathing or Navy Seal breathing



Presentation by:

Cynthia O'Connell

cynthia@mindfulnessconnection.com 

mindfulnessconnection.com 

(908) 692-2758 



Designed by:

Marney MacCarrick

732-539-2624

sunrisesocialva@gmail.com