

**SAUGEEEN
MAITLAND
SPORT
PSYCHOLOGY**

PLAYERS EDITION

INSTALLMENT TWO

Enhancing Team Cohesiveness

All teams have similarities but no two teams are exactly the same. Your league is composed of other teams just like yours: 15-17 year old girls who play hockey striving towards the same goal: winning. But at the same time every team is unique. Your team is exceptional because of the players that are part of it and the coaches that help you. Therefore, the team dynamics will be different in your team compared to other teams, which is what will be discussed in this section.

Team effectiveness refers to the ability of your team to achieve the team goals that you set out to accomplish (win a certain amount of games in the season, win a tournament, etc.). Through skill and experience everyone on the team assumes a particular role. This can be assumed places, not necessarily appointed positions. Every role, no matter how big or small you think it is, is important to the team's dynamic.

- Everyone must follow certain rules. Some might be prescribed by your coaches (like getting to practice on time) or perhaps more assumed/social norms (like working hard at practice, since you play as you practice).



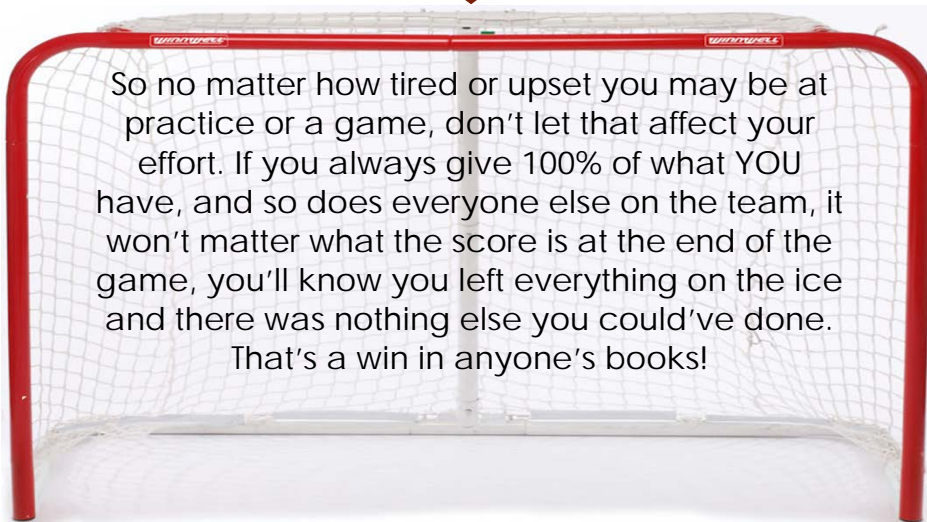


Social Loafing

Refers to a team member not putting forth a full effort to achieve a goal when they work in a group, compared to when they work alone. You might think that your teammates will make up for your slack, or that your lack of effort will go unnoticed. Your team will only succeed when everyone is all-in and giving 100%. As a team, you're only as strong as your weakest player. If you're not giving your best, that rubs off on others and influences the whole team, allowing other team members to believe that it is also okay to not give 100% effort.



So no matter how tired or upset you may be at practice or a game, don't let that affect your effort. If you always give 100% of what YOU have, and so does everyone else on the team, it won't matter what the score is at the end of the game, you'll know you left everything on the ice and there was nothing else you could've done. That's a win in anyone's books!



Self-Confidence

Self-confidence in sport arises from believing in your own abilities, and eliminating the fear of losing. Having self-confidence enables you to play at your best. We all have those days where we feel a heightened sense of confidence in our abilities, but there are also days where our confidence is extremely low to the point that negative thoughts start to formulate in our head and affect performance. It is important to understand how to create self-confidence within ourselves in order to maximize the amount of “good” days and minimize the amount of “bad” days.

There are several things an athlete must do in order to increase their self-confidence:

1. **HARD WORK** – You must put in the effort to train as hard as possible to build your base. During a game, you want to feel prepared, and feel like you’ve trained hard enough to have the skill and fitness to accomplish what you want. If you are training as hard, or harder, than your teammates or opponents, you have earned the right to feel confident.

2. **REMINDE YOURSELF THAT YOU’VE PUT IN THE WORK** – Before a game, make sure you remind yourself that the effort you put into your training was good enough. By doing this, you’ll realize that there is no excuse for you not to be confident in your abilities.

3. **CONFIDENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ABILITY** – Obviously it is important to have enough skill and ability to be competitive, but without confidence, your skill level is almost irrelevant. If you ever feel that your opponent has a greater level of skill than you, do not let it affect your confidence. The athlete/team who wins isn’t always the one with the most skill, it is the one with the greater sense of belief in their ability.

4. **DO NOT FOCUS ON THINGS OUTSIDE OF YOUR CONTROL** – These consist of things such as the referee’s decisions, previous results against a particular team, or even the overall result of the current game. It is important that you do not let these thoughts distract you or affect your confidence. Focus only on what YOU can do, and forget about everything else.

5. **LOG YOUR VICTORIES** –
Keeping track of victories is a good way to uplift and maintain your confidence level. These victories can be small or large, such as beating a personal best during training, or playing exceptionally well during competition.

6. **FORGET ABOUT MISTAKES** –
One of the biggest confidence killers is making a mistake, and dwelling on it to the point where it frequently affects your performance. Everyone makes mistakes, but the people who learn from them and move on are the ones who gain confidence.

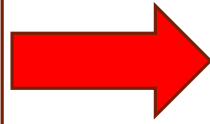
Self-Confidence isn't something that is just felt, it is a series of thoughts that combine to create overall confidence. Once you gather your sources of confidence, you need only recall them and you will feel mentally strong and confident in your abilities.

trust yourself



Injury Rehabilitation and Prevention

Injuries are a traumatic and unfortunate experience for any athlete, but they take an even greater toll on high level athletes because they have invested so much time and effort to achieve their high level of excellence. Injuries are a natural part of any sport that range from mild to severe at all levels of competition.



Injuries can negatively affect:

- Performance
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Self-esteem
- Team/coach relationships
- Motivation

... as well as many other things

Severe injuries may even result in an early end to the season or end of your career. Even though an injury may seem to be 'healed', there are others ways it could affect you long term:

Loss of confidence due to the injury

Anxiety about re-injuring yourself

Decline of conditioning

Loss of physical performance and fine motor skills due to being out of the game so long

For all of these reasons, it is important to identify when you have a serious injury and take the proper steps when returning from an injury.

The first and most critical aspect of addressing sport injuries is identifying the difference between being 'hurt' and being 'injured'. If you go down to block a shot and take the puck somewhere without any protection, it will hurt. With the exception of rare situations you most likely will not sustain an 'injury' from blocking a shot, just a bruise and some swelling. Being able to cope with pain and stay in the game when you are hurt is something that is praised by all teammates and coaches.

Being injured is much different; you don't want to mess around with injuries by trying to "tough it out". Some examples of injuries would include conditions such as:

- Numbness or tingling in extremities after an awkward collision
- 'Seeing stars', feeling nauseous or feeling 'out of it' after a head contact
 - When you are in severe pain that is unbearable
 - Something doesn't feel 'right'

These are all signs that you should remove yourself from the game immediately and speak with your team trainer.

Most athletes have a good sense of their own health and wellbeing and it is usually easy to distinguish between a little stinger from a blocked shot and a broken arm from a vicious slash. That being said, if you are ever unsure about your physical health do not hesitate to speak to your team trainer. Even if your trainer isn't able to make a full diagnosis, they will know if you should return to the game or not and when in doubt, your trainer will remove you from the game for health and safety reasons.

REMEMBER: Nobody wants to leave a game because of an injury, especially in the playoffs or finals of a tournament. You need to be honest with your trainer and yourself because your health and safety should always be your number one priority.

If you have sustained an injury it is essential to get a proper diagnosis from a doctor as well as some kind of injury specific treatment plan to help you recover and return to play as fast as possible.

IT IS **ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL** to listen to the doctor and do exactly what they say. The main reason injuries take so long to heal and/or keep returning is because young athletes don't follow their doctor's guidelines.

After a period of rest, you should be slowly adding more stress and movement to the injured body part as you progress through the healing process. This allows the body to heal properly since you aren't putting full loads on it, but it also helps you keep movement in the body part and helps you work towards full range of motion by pushing yourself to the pain threshold. **You must always stop before pain gets above 3 on a 1-10 pain scale.**

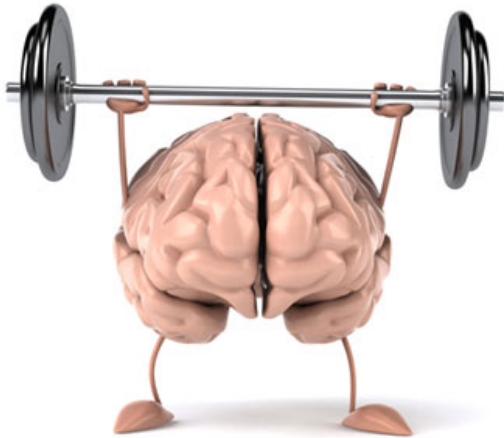
It is recommended to set goals with your doctor or physiotherapist to help motivate you; specifically short term goals can assist slow progress on a daily or weekly basis.

Having a progressive 'step by step' recovery system to follow makes it easy to track your progress and see how fast you are recovering. As you progress through your injury rehab you should always be able to handle more weight and stress. If you ever start losing progress and it hurts more than it did the day/week prior, you should take a few days of complete rest and slow down your recovery program.

Once you have recovered to the point when you are able to get back on the ice, stick with progressions, slowly working towards a game. Ensure you have permission from both your trainer and doctor before returning to play. Ideally at the very minimum you should have 2 full length practices without any symptoms before returning to games (this depends heavily on the type of injury).

Depending on the severity of your injury, one major key to helping your body recover is remaining physically active and exercising the body parts that you can. When you exercise your body releases chemicals that help your whole body repair and recover. Sitting on the couch for 2 months just because you can't play hockey would be the worst thing you could do to yourself mentally and physically.

It is also recommended to use mental techniques such as imagery and visualization to "keep your head in the game" during the healing process.



While you are sidelined with an injury it is also important to stay in contact with your team and remember that you are still a part of the team. If possible, you should still be going to all the games, hanging out with your teammates in the room before the game and cheering them on in the crowd (or on the bench if you are allowed). This will help with the mental aspect of injuries by giving you something to look forward to and keeping you connected with your teammates.

If you aren't injured but you have an injured teammate, make sure you show them you care by staying in contact with them and asking how they are doing. Do your best to keep injured teammates involved with team activities and make sure they still feel like a part of the team. Something as simple as a text message is very quick and easy but can go a long way by making your teammate feel cared about and appreciated.

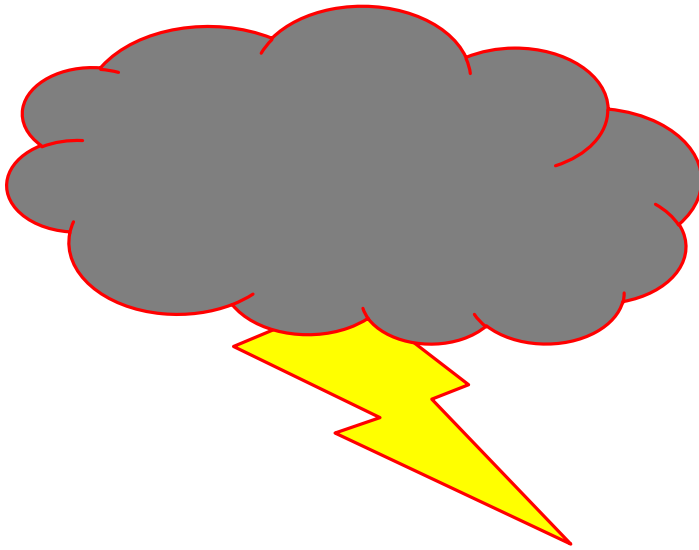
Once your injury has fully healed and you are back in the game, there are some things you can do to prevent yourself from re-injury and help prevent new injuries from occurring. Keep in mind that accidents happen and hockey is a fast and physical game so injuries are just a part of the game. On the next page are some ways to help reduce the chances of any injury happening to you.

- Get a proper dynamic warm up (always moving, never stationary) before every game **AND PRACTICE**. Never stretch cold muscles, if you are stretching you should be sweating, if you aren't sweating, you aren't warm enough to stretch and you will probably hurt yourself. Practice is no different from games, in order to prevent injury you should warm up properly before practice too.
- Protect your head at all times. Even without body checking, hockey is still a high speed contact sport and head injuries happen too easily and too often. Also make sure you have an up to date helmet that fits properly (there are many websites with helmet fitting guidelines).
- Just like your helmet, you should make sure all of your equipment fits properly. Even if you like your small old elbow pads, they may not fit you properly and when you need them to protect you, they may fail.
- Hockey players are specifically at risk for lower-back and hip flexor injuries due to the flexed (forward) posture of skating and the frequent hip hyperextension (the end part of your stride). Low-back pain and/or pulled hip flexor/groin muscles are the most common injuries. Stretching of the hip flexors along with strengthening your back and abdominal muscles will help you avoid these injuries. Ask your coaches or trainer if you need help with these.
- Wear a properly fitting mouth guard. Mouth guards don't stop concussions from happening, but they can significantly reduce the severity. They also help keep your jaw in the ideal position for receiving an impact to the head, and they prevent your teeth from getting knocked out. So wear one.
- Position yourself strategically when you are battling close to the boards. Try your best to avoid the **"DANGER ZONE"** which is anywhere within 1 meter from the boards. When you are within the danger zone purposefully cushion your body against the boards to prevent someone else from doing it for you from an angle that could cause an injury. The boards are your friend.
- Never lie about an injury. Ultimately your health is the most important thing you have. When you are 40 years old, you do not want to be dealing with an injury that you lied about when you were younger and tried to "power through".

Having an understanding of these tips can help build your confidence for preventing and healing from injuries in the future. Injuries will always be part of a physical sport like hockey, incorporating some of the many available mental techniques (discussed later) can speed up your recovery and get you back into the game faster. Keeping in close contact with your team will definitely help with the transition back into play, and keeping up with the team plays and mentally rehearsing them will make a huge difference when returning from your injury.

Management of Competitive Stress

One of the most common issues among athletes is stress management due to the internal and external demands within a sporting environment. To combat this pressure, many elite athletes will need to develop stress management skills in order to achieve their optimal performance mental state. The aim of practicing these skills is to manage an athlete's response to pressure situations and cope with anxiety.



Things that could potentially affect your mental state and thus your performance:

- Level of competition
- Team relationships (i.e. player to player, player to coach)
- Financial matters
- Traumatic experiences
- Family issues
- Weather/ environment
- Etc.

It is important to see mental and physical anxiety as separate, especially when managing the symptoms:

MENTAL STRESS

- Worrying
- Negative thinking
- Negative expectations

PHYSICAL STRESS

- Muscular tension/ Unable to feel "loose"
- Butterflies in stomach
 - fast heartbeat
 - Excessive sweating

At the same time, it is necessary to know your optimal mental and physical state as well as when it is too low or too high.

KNOW THRESHOLD - at what point are you too relaxed? Too excited and fumbling the puck?
If mental state is **TOO LOW**, using relaxation techniques could cause grogginess and fatigue
If mental state is **TOO HIGH**, you could become overwhelmed and be unable to recover

Practice is a perfect time to discover and experiment levels of arousal

If you are at a level of physical state too low or too high, you could cause serious injury
Each individual will have a personal level of physical and mental state and ways of achieving this state (one could have a greater effect on your performance)

REMEMBER

It is important to exercise mental preparation as you would practice for games or tournaments. Mental preparation should be incorporated into your daily sporting routine. It is necessary to build this routine and experiment with what works and does not work.

PREVENTING STRESS

- Make sure you are prepared mentally and physically
- Most common forms of stress are unexpected situations

Also helpful

sleep well
proper diet
listening to music
talking about it with a teammate, coach or parent
talk yourself through it

MANAGING STRESS

Consult the Mental Preparation section to test out the techniques to form a routine to help you prevent and when you feel the onset of stress symptoms
Any of the techniques can be used to energize or relax to get you to your optimal physical and mental states

How to increase Mental Toughness

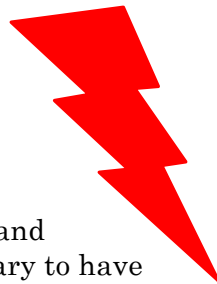
Is your head preventing you from your best performance?
Do you suffer from slumps, choking, psych outs, lack of confidence,
negativity?

Increasing mental toughness can help you

- stay relaxed under pressure
- rebound quickly from mistakes
- manage negative thinking
- increase motivation
- develop self-confidence
- and much more

**Like training your physical body, it is necessary to
make the effort to train your mind**

This takes time and will not happen overnight, it must be practiced daily, so it is encouraged to work techniques into your sporting routine. **Mental toughness can be gained and lost**, so even when the techniques are practiced and working, it is necessary to continue to use them.



ACTIVITY

Keep a journal with a list of the situations where you were feeling anxious, nervous, stressed, etc. and make sure to include WHAT you were feeling so to help you recognize in the future!

FOR EXAMPLE

Before the final period of a tied game I was scared to mess up. My hands were sweaty in my gloves, my stomach was in knots and I couldn't concentrate on the puck so I couldn't catch a pass!

In order to regulate stress, anxiety and arousal/excitedness, it is necessary to have an accurate way of actively knowing how excited you are at different times.

This could be PHYSICAL (heartbeat, blood pressure, skin temperature, etc.) or MENTAL (what are you thinking, what are you feeling).

Physical can be measurable (i.e. heartbeats or breaths per minute) while mental is a scale (ie I feel more anxious than excited).

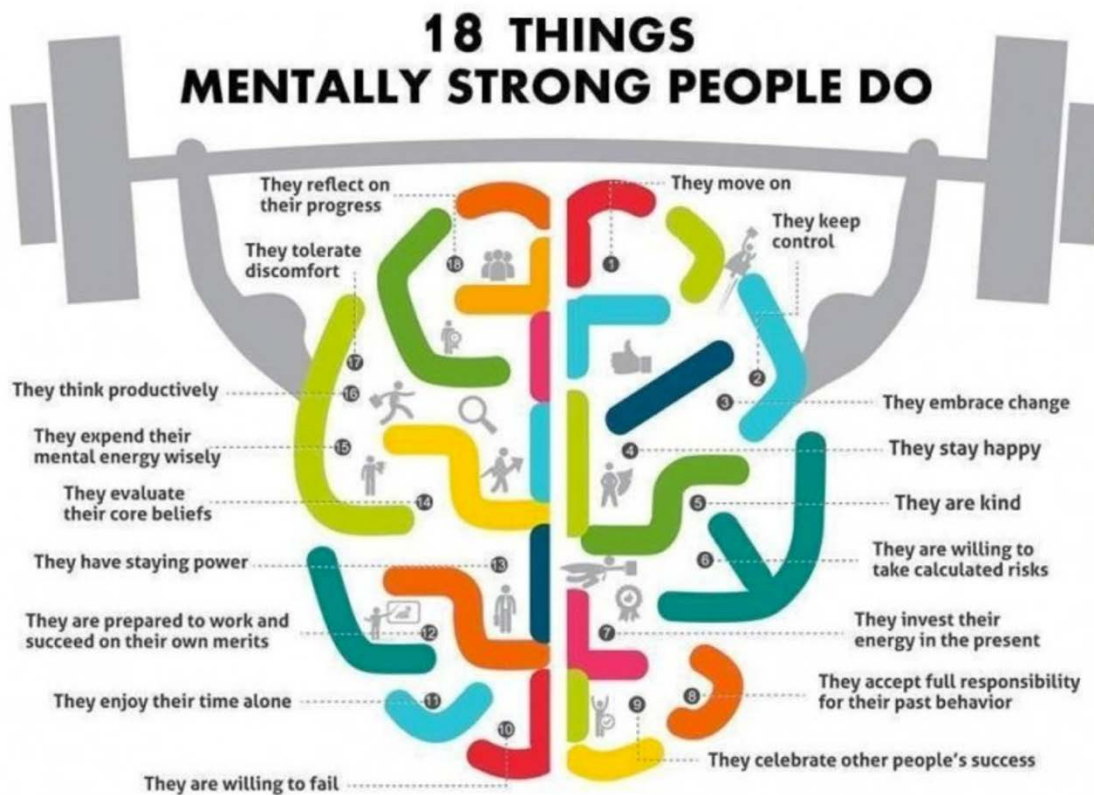
Important to know and recognize when your levels are too high (overwhelmed) and too low (too relaxed) in order to know when you should actively do something to change it.

KNOWING HOW MENTALLY TOUGH YOU ARE

Symptoms of anxiety are a natural process of competitive sport and can be used to your advantage if properly trained. As an athlete, your motivation, attitude and personal belief will affect your mental toughness in a situation. Mentally tough athletes take control of their training and their environment. These athletes also maintain a high motivation with long term goals

There is no step by step process to becoming mentally tough as each individual will want to develop different aspects, but practicing mental techniques can help improve these specific features.

- Common features of athletes that are mentally tough are: persistently motivated, hard workers, dedicated, sportsmanlike, resilient, confident, and constantly looking for ways to improve



Retrieved from: <http://examinedexistence.com/18-things-mentally-strong-people-do/>

WHERE ARE YOU?

You can use this list to check off what mental features you excel at and what mental features you need to work on! There are 2 empty rows for you to include other PERSONAL aspects you want to include:

	You don't dwell on mistakes or past failures
	Maintain control of your training and skill development
	Embrace change
	Sportsmanlike, confident, happy and kind
	Dedicated to improvement
	Willing to take calculated risks
	You invest your energy in the present
	Accept full responsibility for your past behaviour
	Celebrate other people's success
	You are willing to fail
	Enjoy alone time
	Prepared to work and succeed on your own effort
	Persistent and resilient (able to bounce back to normal after being stressed)
	Evaluate your core beliefs
	Expand your mental energy wisely
	Think productively
	Tolerate discomfort
	Reflect on progress

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