

Study Guide #9

Learning to Focus

Parent & Child Study Guides to Watching a Sports Event

*Association for the Advancement
of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP)*

Watching a sports event can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Within the sporting arena we see both good and poor examples of such topics as: setting and working towards goals, focusing attention, managing emotions, handling disappointment, relating to others, dealing with nervousness, etc.

In order to maximize this learning opportunity, AAASP has developed a series of study guides for parents and children to use while watching a sports event, either in person or on television. Each guide is brief and focused around a limited topic. It suggests certain observations and presents several questions for the parent and child to discuss. The study guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

We hope that these guides will promote a healthy dialogue between parents and their children about various issues that athletes face during sporting events, as well as in preparation for competition. Your child doesn't necessarily need to be an athlete to benefit from these discussions, since children experience most of these issues in daily life, such as in school. We hope that this information is helpful to you in promoting healthy ideas about sport, exercise, and human performance in general.

Discussion questions: Learning to Focus

While you watch a sports event:

1. While watching a specific sports event, describe what you think an athlete is focusing on (paying attention to) at the start of the event? during the event?
2. Some people think that they can tell if an athlete is focused by looking at his or her face. Do you think you can tell? If so, what part of the face would you observe?
2. How about you? What are some things you focus on best? Have you noticed that the more you work at something and the better you get at it, the better you can focus?
3. Have you noticed that it is easier to focus on things you like to do? What happens to your focus when you get tired or things go wrong?
4. Even the greatest athletes lose focus sometimes. As you watch a sports event, see if you notice when athletes lose focus. Try to figure out why.
5. Does feeling a lot of pressure to perform well cause some athletes to lose focus? How about worrying? What kinds of things might an athlete worry about? What are the kinds of things you worry about?
6. Can you explain the difference between worrying and trying to figure out what to do if things don't go well?
7. There is also refocusing. This means getting your mind back on track after you get distracted. Watch for athletes who seem to lose their focus but then successfully refocus and perform

well (e.g., a skater who falls but does well the rest of the performance). Can you think of a time this has happened to you?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes are very focused. During competition they pay attention at all times. They also can refocus quickly if they get distracted. All athletes can learn to do this with practice. The more you do it, the better you do it. Also, the more you believe in yourself, the easier it is to focus. Worry is the most common enemy of focus. It usually starts out as an attempt to solve a problem, but worry can quickly become a problem in itself. It is like thinking in a circle. Worrying is having the same negative thoughts again and again. Everybody worries to some degree. When it happens --- tell yourself STOP! Then, take a deep breath and think about your sport. Think about what you do well. Think about how much fun it can be.

As a competitive athlete, you may feel pressure to perform well. Sometimes we want to do well for our teammates, coaches, and parents. Try not to think about that. STOP! Instead, think about what you do well. This will help you stay excited about competing and will help you focus on the task at hand. Sometimes it helps to make a list things that can cause you to lose focus. Then make a second list of ways to avoid being distracted or that can help you refocus. For example, if a basketball player gets distracted by people in the stands, she can remind herself to look at the ball. By having a list of ways to refocus, you will be ready to use those strategies when you need them during a competition. Elite athletes have very specific plans for coping with distractions, which allow them to stay focused and perform well. Always remember, the more fun you have, the better you focus - the better you focus, the more fun you have!

AAASP encourages parents to do their part in creating a supportive youth sport environment so their child will develop a life long interest in physical activity and playing sports. By teaching the fundamentals, you can help your child develop a winning attitude, not only in sports but also throughout his or her life.

About AAASP

Founded in 1986, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) promotes the ethical practice, science and advocacy of the psychology of sport, exercise and health. AAASP is the premier international, multidisciplinary sport and exercise psychology organization, and is the only professional organization in North America that offers certification to qualified professionals who practice sport, exercise, and health psychology. For more information on this and other topics, or to find a certified sport psychology consultant in your area, visit <http://www.aaasponline.org>.

Prepared by Dr. John Heil who is Chair of Sports Medicine & Science for US Fencing. He is with Lewis-Gale Clinic's Department of Psychological Medicine and serves on AAASP's Organizational Outreach Committee.

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