

How can I help my child focus?

Focus refers to an individual's ability to concentrate on the right things at the right time. It is important for children to be able to learn how to direct their mental attention to what is most important for their performance in any given situation.

The key principles of concentration

1. Concentration requires mental effort
2. You can only focus on one thought at a time
3. Athletes are focused when they concentrate on actions that are specific, relevant, and under their own control
4. Athletes lose concentration when they focus on irrelevant or factors that are out of their control
5. Anxiety disrupts concentration



What should my child be focusing on and when?

As your child will only be able to focus on one thought at a time, they will need to be able to mentally shift from non-sport relevant thoughts (e.g., schoolwork) to sport specific thoughts in the lead up to training and competition. This will require them to compartmentalise (i.e., box off different thoughts) and exert mental effort on what they need to do in order to be able to perform well. Similarly, during performance, your child will need to be able to redirect their focus from irrelevant thoughts as well as internal (e.g., worries) and external distractions (e.g., crowds) to maintain their concentration on specific/relevant actions.

How can I help my child focus before and during competitions?

- Supporting them with their time management and planning around school and sport.
- Ensuring they go through a comprehensive warm up routine to get their mind (and body) ready to perform in sport.
- In the absence of a coach you can also direct their attention to what they have been working on in training prior to performance (i.e., help them to recall their goals).
- Encourage your child to remain in the present when performing and avoid time travelling (i.e., thinking about past events or the future).
- Help your child to focus away from distractions and onto relevant performance cues through the use of basic routines (e.g., a breathing ritual that builds a sense of physical presence) and/or simple self-instructional cues or trigger words (i.e. "watch the ball", "swing smoothly")