

EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN BASKETBALL

Quick guide for junior athletes

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT EMOTIONS IN SPORT

Myth: If I experience or show emotion, it means I am weak.

Fact: Emotions are normal responses to stress, challenge, excitement or motivation.

Myth: If I feel anxious before an important event (e.g., trials, selection), it means I am not capable, or not ready, or that I will mess up.

Fact: Anxiety is a normal response to events that are 1. Important to you 2. Pose a challenge 3. Uncertain outcomes. Events such as trials and competitions often involve all three of these things!



Myth: If I become really confident, then I can eliminate anxiety completely.

Fact: Even the most confident pro athletes feel nerves before important events. We need the system that triggers our anxiety to perform well. Good athletes accept that anxiety is a part of sport, and know how to USE it to help their performance.



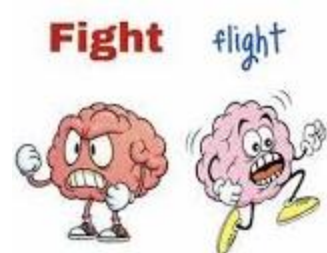
ANXIETY = ACTIVATION

Did you know anxiety and excitement feel very similar in the body? Both are your brain and body switching on – faster breathing, quicker heartbeat and more energy.

The difference is how our brain interprets it: in some situations, we label it as 'anxiety', while in others we label it as 'excitement'. Anxiety is ACTIVATION, and is necessary for action.

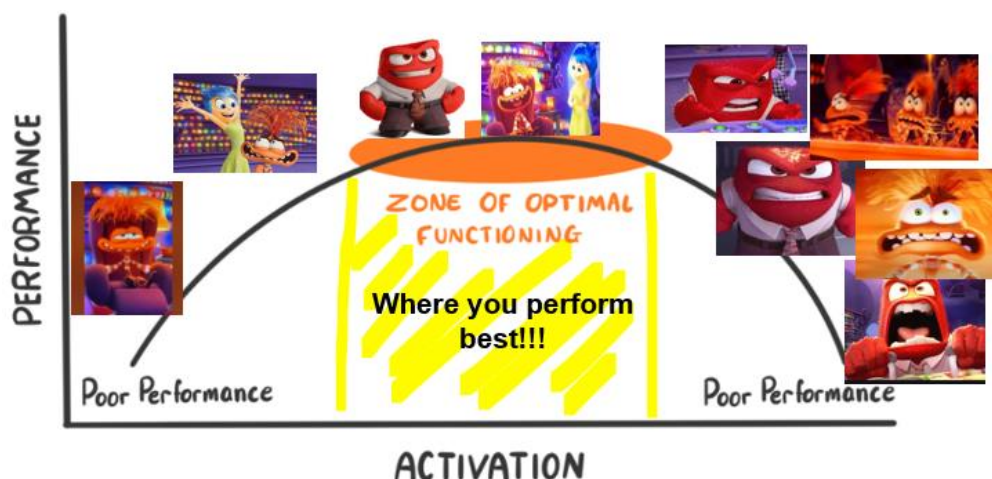
Our fight-or-flight system

Our fight-or-flight system is the body's built-in alarm. When activated, it stimulates the physical and psychological responses that can help us take action. It speeds up heart rate, sharpens focus, and releases hormones that prepare our muscles for action; all the things we need to make good decisions in a fast-paced sport and perform well under pressure.



ZONE OF OPTIMAL ACTIVATION

The graph below shows that we need certain levels of activation to face challenges and perform well (middle part of the graph).



Too little activation (left end of the graph) can be just as bad as too much activation (right end of the graph) for performance. If you feel too calm, you are unable to react quickly. If you are too anxious, you can become careless, miss important cues, and make rushed decisions.

Feeling anxious means that your body is switched on. The goal is not to avoid these sensations, but manage them so you can stay in the optimal zone.

HOW DO I CALM DOWN WHEN IM TOO ACTIVATED?

1. Name it to tame it

- Recognise the signs that you are 'too activated'. For some athletes, this might look like clenched fists, rushing plays, missing shots or not hearing coaching cues.
- Once you know the signs, label it; 'I'm anxious/over-hyped'. Identifying what you are feeling is the first step to doing something about it.
- Move to step 2 to bring yourself back into the optimal zone (see no. 2!).

2. Exhale out the stress

- Breathe in through your nose for 3 seconds, deep into your belly. Imagine filling a basketball from the bottom up – your belly should rise before your chest.
- Breathe out through your mouth SLOWLY for 5-6 seconds (longer than you breathed in).
- Imagine you are slowly letting the air out of a basketball.
- Don't breathe into your chest – as this keeps your body tense.
- Repeat for 3-5 breaths. Treat each exhale like your reset button.

3. Remind yourself of the following:

- It is a privilege to be able to play basketball; nerves mean you care about the game.
- Being nervous doesn't mean that you are weak or incapable; it means the moment matters to you.
- Trust your preparation. You have spent hours training your skills and shots = you deserve to showcase what you have been training for.
- Challenges are opportunities to practice performing under pressure. Managing nerves and performing at your best even under stress is a skill that grows only by putting yourself through tough situations.
- Focus on what you can control: your effort, attitude, and how you respond to your nerves.

Practical tip: A mantra you can repeat to remind yourself of the above: **'I'm ready. I have trained for this. Nerves are energy I can use'.**