The Steps to Imaging

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The success of any mental training program depends on the efficacy of its techniques (psychological skills training). Many of these techniques have been found to be successful when given adequate time for mastery, direction for implementation, and sport-specific adaptation. Some of these skills include: imaging, positive self-statements, progressive relaxation, meditation, attentional focusing, goal setting strategies, image-based reconstruction, induced affect training, and others.

As suggested by Jennifer Johnson's article, imaging is a widely used skill with many applications. The following image-based anxiety control technique can, with practice, help the athlete to:

- **Identify** the onset of anxiety.
- **Confront** the situation before it gets out of control.
- **Cope** with the high level of emotion caused by anxiety by using a situation specific coping technique.
- **Reinforce** success.

**Step 1**

As in all image-based techniques you must first relax. Use any one of a number of relaxation skills - muscular, meditative, self-talk.

**Step 2**

Imagine yourself in a problematic pre-competitive situation. Become the image by focusing internally utilizing all of your senses.

**Step 3**

Create as much nervousness, anxiety, and/or fear as possible. Imagine the situation as vividly as possible. Note the day, time, location, weather, etc. “Tune-in” on that particular situation.

**Step 4**

When you’ve recreated the maximum level of nervousness and/or anxiety then “turn-off” the image by using one of these methods.

1. Turn-off by taking deep, slow breaths while counting backwards from five down to one - one breath per count. Concentrate and focus on your breathing and the numbers. RELAX.
2. Turn-off by using constructive self-statements. Counter the negative by invoking a positive image. COUNTERING.
3. Turn-off by using a combination of the above. RELAX AND COUNTER.

Once you have practiced this skill a number of times, begin to use it in real stress situations - school, traffic, work, personal situations. Evaluate your success with this technique by subjectively rating how quickly your anxiety subsides.

**Step 5**

Then use this skill in actual pre-competitive situations.

Anxiety is the product of destructive mental images. These images get out of control during times of high stress, and ultimately they diminish your performance. You can control these images by training your mind to focus elsewhere during these periods of stress, and in doing so you will alleviate anxiety and enhance your performance.