

## How can I help my child manage stress and anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of nervousness and unease and can range in severity. Sport can often trigger anxiety when children are placed in a situation they find demanding, stressful, and uncertain (i.e., first competition in a new age group, a match they perceive as particularly important, or taking a penalty kick). However, it is important to understand that all athletes will experience some anxiety because it is part of the exciting and challenging experience of competing in sport.

### What are the signs and symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety can affect your child both mentally and physically, and this can also influence their behaviour. Some of the symptoms to look out for are below:

- Mental (or cognitive) symptoms can include worry, concern, difficulty concentrating and irritability. Looking distracted or being more quiet than normal can be one sign.
- Physical (or somatic) symptoms can include clammy hands, increased heart rate, butterflies in the stomach, increased muscle tension, needing to urinate frequently, sweating, feeling sick, and difficulty sleeping.
- Consistently performing or executing technical skills and decision making better in non-competitive than competitive situations is also a sign that excessive worry might be negatively affecting performance.

### Strategies to manage anxiety: Training the butterflies to fly in formation



- Acknowledge your child's concerns and help them to share and discuss whatever they are anxious about.
- Explain that all athletes experience anxiety and encourage your child to view anxiety as something that shows they care, and that it is the body's way of helping them get ready for competition.
- Introduce them to some basic strategies that might help them to accept or manage their symptoms. This could include some simple breathing and mindfulness techniques, or other forms of relaxation.
- Encourage them to take 5 minutes to fully mentally prepare by imagining themselves performing calmly and confidently in the competition or match.

Based on:

Hanton, S., & Jones, G. (1999). The effects of a multimodal intervention program on performers II: Training the butterflies to fly in formation. *The Sport Psychologist*, 13 (1), 22-41.

