



Get the most out of your skating even when you're not skating 10 MENTAL FITNESS STRATEGIES

Caroline Silby, Ph.D., is a nationally recognized expert on the development of young athletes. A former Team USA figure skater, Dr. Silby has worked with Olympic, World and numerous U.S. champions. U.S. Figure Skating asked Dr. Silby to share some of her mental fitness strategies to help athletes who aren't able to be on the ice during the coronavirus pandemic.

CAROLINE SILBY, PH.D.

With so many rinks and skating programs closed, we're all in an unfamiliar situation. Athletes and coaches may find themselves wishing they could train and challenge themselves in the sport they love. The good news is you can gear up now and start challenging your mind to be ready for your return to the ice! Here are 10 strategies to get you started.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness can be used to train yourself to be open to the moment so you can clearly see what's in front of you, which helps paves the way for solid decision-making. It's a way to perceive and observe instead of judging one's feelings and experiences. Mindfulness can have a positive impact upon heart rate, depression and anxiety. There is even some indication that it can strengthen attention control and increase positive affect.

Download one of these apps and challenge yourself to practice a minimum of 12 minutes per day. Consistency is the key!

- Insight Timer
- Calm
- Headspace

BREATHING

Breathing is effective for creating a calm mind, which pairs well with an explosive athletic body! While there are several recommended types of breathing strategies, let's focus on Paced Breathing -- inhaling and exhaling at a pre-determined rate but a rate that works for you. Be sure your exhale is longer than your inhale. For example, inhale for a count of 2-4 seconds and exhale for a count of 4-6 seconds.

Coordinate your breathing rate with counting, lights, sounds, or metronome-like device. Start with 10 minutes per day and gradually challenge yourself until you can do 15 - 20 minutes

- Breathe2Relax app

GET PRESENT

Try taking a simple activity that you do often - like washing your hands! -- and take 3 minutes to truly experience the process. Focus on the water's temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms and the backs of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand? Use warm water first, then cold. Next, try cold water, then warm. Does it feel different to switch from cold to warm water versus warm to cold?

SPEND A 3-MINUTE CONNECT WITH:

- Good meal
- Petting your dog or cat
- Nice conversation
- Beautiful outdoor day
- Warm bath/shower
- Completed homework assignments
- Relaxing evening

GROUNDING

Grounding is a set of strategies that allows you to put some space between distressing thoughts or intense feelings to anchor yourself in the present moment. Here are two strategies:

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

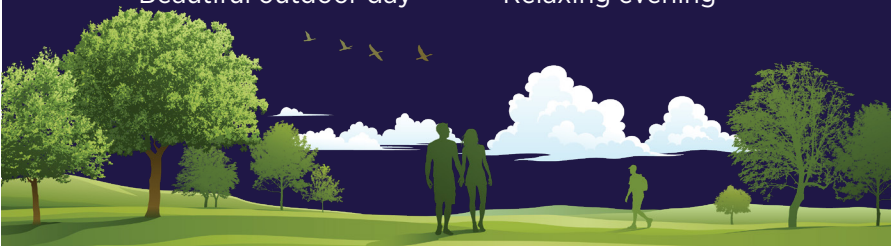
- Notice 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell and 1 good thing about yourself.

Sit & Breathe

- Sit in a chair with your feet on the ground. Really feel where the chair supports you.

- Inhale slowly while mentally counting to 5. Then, exhale completely to a count of 5. Repeat 5 times.

- Notice what you see around you and follow this by the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise.



YOGA

Many skaters know the benefits of yoga, from a mind, body and spirit aspect. Open posing like backbends and chest-opening positions have been associated with positive mood states. There are plenty of yoga videos on YouTube. Find one that feels right for you.



KEEP THE MOOD LIGHT

With the rink closed, you likely have some free time.

- Be creative – paint, draw, listen to music, create videos, bake, write, read, learn a new language, teach your dog a new trick!
- Create a vision board with pictures and statements that make you feel happy or start collecting quotes, motivational statements that could guide you during difficult days in the future.



CONCENTRATION GRIDS

Has your coach ever told you to stay focused or your teacher asking you to concentrate? Concentration grids help you learn to focus and sustain attention. Start doing one or two grids each day to work on mental focus. Smaller grids are targeted to challenge your dexterity and quickness while larger grids require sustained attention.

- www.concentrationgrids.com

IMAGERY

If you have choreographed programs, practice them in your mind's eye while listening to the music. Try raising your heart rate on an exercise bike or other exercise equipment and then picture your program, specific jump or spin elements in your mind's eye. Put your skates on and walk through your programs!

ABCs

This activity defines how you want to approach your skating (or any activity). This is a "Way TO BE" that you can follow and incorporate into your daily training. Start now.

- Identify one thing you can ACCEPT about yourself and/or your skating, school, etc.
I ACCEPT that I will make mistakes
- Identify one thing you BELIEVE IN about yourself and/or your skating, school, etc.
I BELIEVE in my ability to learn from my mistakes
- Identify one thing you CHALLENGE yourself to do.
I CHALLENGE myself to leave the jump for 5 minutes when I become unproductive; I CHALLENGE myself to breathe in each section of the program; I CHALLENGE myself to do my stretching exercises.

IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Everyday for the next three weeks, identify one accomplishment. Then, determine one action you took – be it mental or physical -- that contributed to the positive result.

- Accomplishment example: I showed patience toward my sibling
- Action example: I took a deep breath and counted to 5 before I reacted