

Some ways to get back into the Zone (or flow)



This example uses shooting and the shoulder pass but can be used on any skill

Please note: we are assuming you already have or know good technique, that is, your shot or shoulder pass is biomechanically and technically correct.

Please note: The use of 3 big breaths right down into your stomach is the oldest and perhaps easiest ways to settle yourself – Make the out breath longer than the in breath. See handout.

1. **A physical routine** and a set of words that help you get back into flow
Eg a shooter might say “Knees, elbow, dead duck” to remind them to use their knees, make sure their elbow is pointing to the post and remember to follow through on their shot. A player doing a shoulder pass may say “up strong, high arm, follow through” to remind them to stand up strong through their torso, get their arm up for a high release and push through the ball for a strong pass”.

When practising, practice being “consciously competent” and use your routine or cue words. When you are in “flow” you will be “in the moment” and will not necessarily be consciously aware, which is fine. However, during practice and when your skill goes off in a game this is one way of you helping yourself to get back into “flow” or “back in the zone”

2. **An affirmation.** An affirmation is a short, positive, powerful statement that you repeat on a regular basis. When you are on court and you notice you are flat or being down on yourself or your negative voice/inner critic is being loud and mean. Say your positive affirmation, inside to you yourself. For example: “I am an awesome shooter” (general). “I execute shoulder passes with strength and accuracy” (specific). Remember no one hears this statement except you so be bold and strong and believe in yourself (See handout on writing an affirmation).
3. **Be mindful.** Mindfulness is awareness of present experience with acknowledgment and with no judgement and a gentle presence. For example: “Oh, I am noticing I am being down on myself” or “I am aware, of “something in me” that is eg: nervous, negative, worried, unhappy” and then go back to your skill.
4. **Thought stopping.** When you notice you are being down on yourself/negative. Say something like: “I hear you, that something in me, that is being negative/criticising, go away and come back when you have something new to say”.
5. **Disputing your negative thoughts.** I hear you, but I know I can be good and the coach does and my mum/dad does and the evidence is “I just performed an accurate shot or shoulder pass just then, last quarter, last game”.

6. **Clearing a space.** (See separate handout). Before a game (or an exam or presentation) clear a space. Do a brief body scan. Bring your awareness to the inside and bring to mind anything that is bothering you. One by one imagine putting those worries on the outside. Perhaps wrap them up and place them outside of yourself at the distance that feels right for you, eg that may be in your lap, at your feet, in the corner of the room or outside the room, on an island in the middle of a big ocean.

7. **Get bigger than what is bothering you.** (Focusing -see separate handout). Next time you know “something is bothering you” try this: “I am sensing something in me that is eg nervous or negative or flat or jangly, I am saying Hello to it – HELLO, I am keeping it company in a caring way. I am placing a gentle hand on the place where I am feeling/sensing it (your hand will know where to go). And say “no wonder” eg this is an important game or I want to play well, present well, do well in this exam” and just wait a moment or 2 (about 30 seconds). Most people will have a shift, a release, or sigh or softening. This is what allowing, acknowledging and being with your “something’s” can do for you. It is not always that easy, but it is truly that simple.

You can also learn and do a Guided visualisation and concentrative meditation and mindfulness as ways for you to relax yourself. These take about 12 to 20 minutes.

8. **Guided visualisations and anchoring** (See separate hand out)

9. **Mindfulness.** (See separate hand out) You can also download a free app called ‘insight timer’ which has lots and lots of guided meditations or visit my website

10. **Concentrative meditation** (See separate handout)

If you have any questions or want any extra help please let me know.

Leonie Stewart-Weeks
0438 412 667
leoniestewartweeks@gmail.com
www.hopeandpossibility.com.au
www.morethanmindfulness.com.au

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