

The No Fear Revolution

A New Way of Looking at An Old Beast.

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It's a coach's biggest nightmare. One day she or he can do the skill, the next day they can't. Or, your athlete does it perfectly with spot, in the pit, or onto mats. But when they attempt to do it by themselves, all you get is BALKING!

Fear. You hate it. It can be paralyzing. It can make even the most patient coach want to check him or herself into the psych ward. This article will help you look at fear in a totally new way. A way so different, so revolutionary, you may just want to write me a thank you note. So...

Are you ready to revolutionize the way you are looking at fear?

You work all day in the gym on body positions. You do drill after drill to be sure that their bodies are in perfect alignment. You talk at length to each of your athletes of the importance of keeping a tight body. You know full well that gymnastics without alignment is like trying to fit back into a leotard when you're 37 years old. Not pretty.

But what about the mind? The mind is a thought factory, creating thought after thought after thought. A mind out of control is the same as a body out of control; all over the place, and mostly in places where it doesn't belong. Loose mind

creates fear, frustration, doubt, and negativity. The opposite is also true. Tight mind creates fearlessness, positivity, confidence, and focus. So it's simple, just as you teach athletes how to tighten their bodies through correction and drills, do the same with the mind. Teach athletes how to tighten their minds through mental corrections and drills. Change the way you think about fear by simply seeing it as loose mind.

Fear is simply "loose mind".

You correct loose body all the time. You would never let an athlete go for more than one turn with bent knees or a loose core. So why is it different for the mind? Begin to correct loose mind just as you would any body position. Correct it non-emotionally. Whenever you see fear, frustration or over-thinking, simply draw your athlete's attention to loose mind with a simple comment. Say something like, "your mind seems loose, what are you thinking?", or "I see fear is creeping in, just focus on the correction over and over." Teach your athletes to identify loose mind in themselves. Without awareness, making a correction is virtually impossible. Teach them to listen to what they are saying to themselves in their heads. Then, teach them to "lock it down" by either saying cue words, corrections, or positive self statements.

Remember, when the mind is loose, negative thoughts have a free for all. They take any opportunity to sneak in and create fear. So how can you keep the mind tight? How can you "lock it down"? The following is a list of drills you can do to help athletes anchor the mind. "Anchoring" keeps the mind tight, in proper alignment, so that negative thoughts cannot enter leading to fear and doubt.

Anchors for loose minds

Mental Choreography

The mind is simply another part of the body. In sport, you spend countless hours training your body for proper position, alignment, and technique. The mind must also remain in proper alignment in order to achieve success. One of the most important skills for any gymnast is the ability to pull one's mind back into proper position when it goes off course. Mental choreography is the blinders for the mind. It keeps the mind tight and provides a resting place when it goes off course. We know that the biggest cause of poor performance is out of control thinking. Keeping the monkey-mind occupied and "out of trouble" is key. Using mental choreography enables the mind to stay focused, centered, and on track.

Mental Choreography words are verbal cues, words used to keep the mind tight during performance. These words are used before, during, and after performance, not only during difficult areas of routines, but presentation areas as well. When these words are done during every routine, or skill, the words serve as a resting place for the mind. This is the secret gift of mental choreography. Once it becomes second nature and automatic, it will carry you through routines during the difficult or trying times. The words will allow the mind to become "non-thinking," thus in the zone. The zone is the ultimate "tight mind."

There are three types of MC thoughts to give an athlete as mental cues when he or she is afraid:

Technical Statements: Statements or corrections (“lift”, “tight”, “shoulders square”)

Energy Statements: Statements that bring energy up or down (“go!”, “push here!”, and “relax” “breathe”)

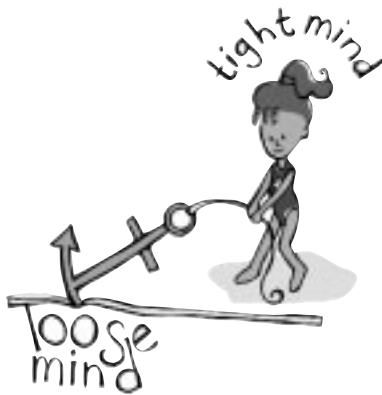
Confidence Statements: Statements that encourage and build trust (i.e. “I can do it”, “I’ve done it before”)

Have your athletes focus on these cue words to lock down the mind and keep it tight.

Anchor phrases

Anchor phrases are any phrases or series of actions that help tighten the mind.

The mind must be anchored strong and steady in order to stay on course in the turbulence of negative thinking. Just as a gymnast pulls their body back to proper position to make a technical correction, they can pull their mind back the same way by using an anchor.



An anchor is a series of thoughts or actions that will pull your mind back to perfect mental position. An anchor is a series of strong “come-backs” to those negative thoughts keeping an athlete in fear and doubt. Anchors help your athletes return to focus, fearlessness, and doubtlessness. Examples of strong anchors include: “breathe, stay on course, I can do this”, “breathe, tight mind, don’t go there”, or “relax, keep it cool, it’s no big deal.” Each anchor statement should include breathing and positive self-talk. The anchor should break the downward spiral of frustration, fear, or nervousness, and get your athletes mind back on course. Whenever you notice loose mind, help your athletes pull it back by telling them to “go get a drink, and use their anchor”, or “do some drills and use your mental anchor”, or simply, “anchor your mind”.

The Confidence Bank

For most athletes, fear is simply a deficit in confidence. Look at the mind as a confidence bank. When positive deposits go up, the mind feels an abundance of confidence. When there is a deficit in the confidence account, the mind feels fear and worry. Help your athletes have a wealth of confidence by building up their accounts. An account is built by success. Even successful drills can make the bank overflow. See fear

as a lack of confidence. Even if the athlete has done the skill hundreds of times, if they are fearful, then they are lacking in confidence. Remember, fear isn’t always rational. As you see fearful behavior, especially balking, help the athlete have success by going back to the last successful drill. Build up the bank again before pushing them to do the skill. It’s important to note that the mind seems to focus on failures more than successes. A gymnast can successfully perform a skill over and over again, just to have all of that shattered by a scary stop in the middle of it.

Watch your Language!

Your language is essential in creating the atmosphere in your gym. Are you creating an atmosphere of fear, or one of confidence? What we put energy into grows bigger. Putting energy into fear, even overcoming it, fuels the fear beast. Use language with your athletes that changes the way they view fear in themselves and their teammates. The following are some phrases to use in order to build confidence and take the focus off of fear.

It’s ok, we just need to build up your confidence.

Tight mind, I can see your fear beast coming up.

Go back and do some drills. Let’s build up your bank.

Check your thoughts. You may have some loose mind.

Anchor your mind. Focus on the correction and put it on automatic.

Don’t think about anything but this correction. Say it over and over again in your mind.

Walk through the skill saying your key words.

Your mind is getting you into trouble. Focus on this correction.

Remember, look at fear as simply loose mind. It can be corrected, there are drills for it. Correct loose mind quickly and easily before you lose yours! ■



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