

Lesson Three – The Performance Anxiety Game Plan

“Way before I was in the NBA or even in college, my self-worth was all about performing. I was what I did, which I think a lot of people can relate to, whether they’re a chef or a lawyer or a nurse or whatever the profession. I just happened to play basketball.

When I wasn’t performing, I didn’t feel like I was succeeding as a person.

– Kevin Love



CREATIVE ACTIVITY – PERFORMANCE ANXIETY GAME PLAN

Lesson Intention:

As student-athletes and coaches, it can often feel like there are several areas that we need to excel in – on the field/court, in the classroom, in our social lives, as a family member, etc. It feels like our performance holds a lot of weight – especially on the field and in the classroom. If we aren’t playing well, it’s hard to focus on schoolwork; if we aren’t performing well in school, our eligibility to play can be threatened.

Whether we have a big game coming up, are in a slump, or are not doing well in a class, it can heighten the pressure that we put on ourselves to excel and perform. These stressors can contribute to performance anxiety which can manifest physically, cognitively, and emotionally. This can result in reduced confidence, impaired performance and avoidance of high-pressure situations.

However, all of these feelings are normal, and most (if not all) of us will experience performance anxiety in some capacity during our career. In this lesson, we will learn evidence-based techniques to support us when we are feeling anxiety around competition. This will also help us to ease anxiety in our everyday lives off the court or field.

Learning Goals:

- Learn evidence-based techniques to support student-athletes when they are feeling anxious.
- Create a visual aid highlighting the tools that student-athletes can use to ease their anxiety before and during high-pressure situations.

Materials for Lesson:

- Paper (or printed activity handout)
- Writing Utensils
- Featured Videos (choose one expert video & play the breathing exercise video)
 - Dr. Brook Choulet, M.D. OR Dr. Derek Anderson, Psy.D.
 - Hannah Luedke (breathing exercise video)
- Additional Videos
- Lesson PowerPoint
- "Performance Anxiety Game Plan" Activity Handout
- Creative Activity Examples

Prior to Teaching the Lesson:

1. Choose the expert video (descriptions below) that you feel will resonate the most with your athletes.
2. Choose the guest artist video(s) that you feel will resonate the most with your athletes.
3. Create your own "Performance Anxiety Game Plan" that you will share with your athletes.
4. Have 8x11 paper and pens/markers or personal electronic devices (i.e. phones, laptops, tablets, and Chromebooks) available for the creative activity.
5. Have a list of campus mental health resources and support that you can share with students afterward.

Featured Videos – Choose one:

1. [Dr. Brook Choulet](#) describes the physical, cognitive, and emotional ways that performance anxiety can manifest and shares tools on managing anxiety.
2. [Dr. Derek Anderson](#) describes several key ideas about what performance anxiety is, how it can show up, and how to manage these feelings when they arise.

Breathing Exercise Video:

1. Introduce the video from [Hannah Luedke](#), who will teach the importance of breath in performance anxiety management and will lead athletes through two breathing exercises to be utilized before and during competition.

Additional Videos:

1. [Victoria Garrick Browne](#) (former collegiate volleyball) shares about the pressure and anxiety she experienced when she became a Division 1 athlete and explains the way seeking therapy helped her navigate fear, doubt, and depression.
2. [Quade](#) (high school water polo), who identifies as a neurodivergent student-athlete, shares how he manages in-game stress and performance anxiety including using tools such as breathwork, self-talk, acknowledgment, and resetting.
3. [Alex](#) (high school soccer and track) speaks about how he has high expectations that he feels he has to live up to that cause him stress in games and how he started implementing tactics to manage and prevent anxiety attacks.
4. [Sasha](#) (high school lacrosse and swim) shares how her performance anxiety began in the 7th grade and led to having intrusive thoughts and anxiety during practices and games, and even while coaching and reffing. She found tools that have helped such as reminding herself why she plays her sport and shifting her perspective on 'worst case scenarios.'

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 3 PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

- As discussed in the coach/educator training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

**Slide 2*

- The coach/educator explains the cause of performance anxiety, the way anxiety can present in the mind and body, and tools that can help manage and reduce performance related anxiety.

Example of What You Could Say:

"As athletes, you often experience a lot of pressure to perform well on the field/court, in the classroom, and within your personal lives. The pressure can build up when it's an especially important game. If you aren't playing well, it's hard to focus on schoolwork; if you aren't performing well in school, you may feel like your eligibility to play can be threatened. However, all of these feelings are normal, and most (if not all) athletes will experience performance anxiety in some capacity during their career. Today, we're going to discuss how these feelings may show up and how to regulate them when they do."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introduce & Play the Featured Video:

**Slide 3*

- Introduce the expert video from either Dr. Brook Choulet or Dr. Derek Anderson who will describe what performance anxiety is, how it can present in the mind and body, and tools that can help regulate performance-related anxiety.

Example of What You Could Say:

"We are going to watch a video from a sports psychologist who shares more information about performance anxiety and tools on how to manage it."

Reflect on the Featured Video & Play the Breathing Exercise Video:

- Connect expert video to breathing exercise video from a Performance Coach that will teach a breathing technique for pre-game and during competition.

Example of What You Could Say:

"I hope you found the expert video helpful. We are going to watch another video from a Performance Coach who will teach you a breathing technique for pre-game and during competition. This can be a tool that helps when you feel overwhelmed."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Reflect on Breathing Exercise Video / Introduce Guest Artist Video:

- Reiterate the main idea of the breathing video – that experiencing performance anxiety is normal and can be regulated. Introduce the guest artist video by noting that the guest artist provides an example of navigating their own experiences with performance anxiety.

Example of What You Could Say:

“As you can see from the video on breathing that we just watched, experiencing performance anxiety is normal, and there are tools that can help you regulate these feelings. Now, you are going to watch one more video from an athlete who shares a story from their own life and shares the way they have navigated performance anxiety in their own sport.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video:

- Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video.

Introducing the Creative Activity:

**Slide 4*

- Students will have the opportunity to create their own “Performance Anxiety Game Plan” and design their poster with the specific tools they can use to manage feelings of performance anxiety.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Let’s take a minute and think about a time in your own life when you felt performance anxiety. Was it during a big game? Or maybe it was outside of your sport when you were getting ready for a big test? What was the situation where you felt pressure to do well? I remember a time when....*(Coach/educator shares a time when they felt performance anxiety.)* Does anyone want to share a time when they felt a lot of pressure to perform well? *(Choose 1 or 2 students to share their experience if they would like.)*

I would like you to think about the tools you would use next time you are in a high pressure situation. I want to share my Performance Anxiety Game Plan with you all *(Coach/educator shares their game plan aloud with the group.)*

Now, you are going to make your own 'Performance Anxiety Game Plan' and design a poster with the specific tools you will use to manage feelings of performance anxiety. This slide shows a few of the techniques/tools you could include.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

- Create a mantra or affirmation that you can say before every game, or when anxious feelings arise (*stepping into the "batter's box", taking a free throw, etc.*)

GUIDED MEDITATION

- Choose a time when you will listen to a guided meditation (*the night before competition, the morning of game day, pre-game in the locker room, etc.*)
- Students can find guided meditations in the supplemental link section of this lesson.

BREATHING ROUTINE

- Decide the breathing exercise that you will use and when you plan to use it. Be specific. Practice it ahead of time.

VISUALIZATION

- **Grounding exercise:** Have an image in your mind that helps to calm and ground you – picture yourself in a place that makes you feel peaceful. Imagine yourself there and think about the sights and sounds and smells around you.
- **Pre-game Visualization:** Close your eyes and envision yourself being successful in your upcoming competition. Run through different plays and scenarios. What other tools/mental strategies can you draw on to include in your "game plan"? Do you listen to a specific playlist? Maybe you get a pep talk from a parent? Do you have any pre-game rituals or superstitions?

Use the paper provided or your electronic device to create your "game plan" including a few tools that work for you. This could be part of your pre-game routine or maybe your game plan for when these feelings arise in the middle of competition. We will now take 10-15 minutes to do this."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity: Performance Anxiety Game Plan

- Students spend approximately 10-15 minutes creating their own game plan and designing their poster with the tools they can use to manage feelings of performance anxiety.
- Students can use markers and colored pencils and design their poster on a sheet of paper that you provide for them OR they can design their poster on a computer using Canva.com or as a slide on PowerPoint.

Lesson Closure:

- Invite students to share their game plans and reflections.

Example of What You Could Say:

""I am excited to see your game plans! Would anyone like to share their game plan?"

Additional questions to prompt the conversation:

- Did you have a favorite of the strategies that we discussed today?
- Did anyone include a new tool that we haven't talked about yet today?

Thank you for sharing with us. Remember that these are tools we want you to utilize in your routines."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Share Resources:

**Slide 5*

- Display the Kevin Love Fund Resource Page on PowerPoint.
- Share local/campus resources.
- Encourage students to reach out for help if needed.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Remember that the purpose of this lesson is to recognize that it is okay to reach out for help when you need it. If you or someone you know is in crisis or in need of immediate support, remember that you can call 988 or text HOME to 741741.

Here are the Kevin Love Fund resources, which you can access directly on their website at kevinlovefund.org.

And here are some additional resources from our campus that you can utilize as well.
(*Share relevant information to campus counselors/sports psychologists*)."

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. If your student-athletes enjoyed Hannah Luedtke's breathing video, [here is a link to a guided meditation](#) that many will find useful.
2. Team USA psychologist, Dr. Kweku Ramel Smith, speaks about how even [Olympic athletes battle imposter syndrome](#).
3. [Box breathing visual](#).
4. A [16-year-old student-athlete from New York, interviews Kevin Love](#) about his experiences with anxiety. Kevin talks about the pressures he felt as a high school student athlete, and how badly he just wanted to fit in. He was determined to succeed, feeling the heat from his parents, coaches, and community. Kevin admits to suffering in silence and often feeling like an imposter, but also shares that finally speaking up about his anxiety changed his life for the better.
5. In this [short video](#), Kevin Love speaks on anxiety and "what I would tell my younger self."
6. In this Men'sHealth interview, "[NBA Star Kevin Love on His Keys for Longevity and Lessons from LeBron](#)," Kevin shares how learning mindfulness has greatly improved his career. He shares how tools such as meditation and even just learning to breathe correctly have been game changers.