



How can Mindfulness Help Special Olympics Coaches and Athletes?

What is Mindfulness?

People often think of mindfulness as sitting absolutely still in meditation but mindfulness is much more than that. Mindfulness is actually about being right here, right now, and about being aware of ourselves and our surroundings. Mindfulness skills are extremely useful for athletes and coaches.

What is this Snapshot about?

Mindfulness is about increasing our awareness of things inside of us, as well as outside of us. All of us get distracted. Mindfulness is a set of tools that help us focus and be less distracted— whether in our sport, our self-care or our relationships.

Heightening our awareness with mindfulness could include:

Noticing things *inside*- like thoughts, or physical sensations or emotion and feelings.

Noticing things *outside* like sights, sounds, and smells, and even other people.

[Research](#) shows that mindfulness is good for our health, and can even help to improve our immune systems. Here are some ways that coaches can benefit from mindfulness and help bring it to athletes.



Mindfulness for Athletes

A [research study](#) led out of University of Calgary, together with the CAMH Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre and Special Olympics Canada wanted to see if a virtual mindfulness course adapted for Special Olympics Canada Athletes would help them during the pandemic. They held groups for 73 people (44 athletes and 29 caregivers) between 2021-2023, and found that mindfulness benefited people and improved mental health.

5 Tips to Bring Mindfulness to Coaching

1. Practice and Model Mindfulness

The more coaches embody mindfulness practice themselves, the more those around them will benefit from a calm presence. Try building a daily practice in ways that work for you. Even 10 minutes every day is helpful. Some examples of practices that are part of the 6-week mindfulness curriculum for athletes that can be worked into your day are:

- [Lotus Breath](#)
- [Deep Mindful Breathing](#)
- [Compassion Pause](#)

2. Highlight Professional Athlete Mindfulness Role Models!

In our groups we discussed famous athletes who have used mindfulness to be successful in sports. Here are examples that can inspire us:

Serena Williams

[Serena Williams](#) practices silent meditation by observing her thoughts and reaching a state of stillness. She also engages in open-eye meditation, maintaining a steady gaze and full attention. These techniques help her release distractions and re-center herself, allowing her to stay focused during intense moments in the game.

Kobe Bryant

[Kobe Bryant](#) described mindfulness meditation as "push-ups for the mind." He practiced it for 10 minutes each morning and said it transformed his game. Kobe's secret weapon was mindfulness.

George Mumford

Here is a [short video](#) featuring mindfulness sports coach George Mumford speaking about his work helping athletes with mindfulness.

3. Individualize Mindfulness for Athletes

Help each athlete find that moment when mindfulness can be most beneficial for them. It may be a brief moment to take a focused breath before shooting a basketball, releasing a bowling ball, or pausing before getting in the water at a swim meet. It may be relaxing before a game to get into the zone, or getting focused to manage distractions during a game. [Strong Minds](#) has tools (bottom of the website), that you can use for these different moments.

4. Use the Special Olympics Oath as a Mindfulness Tool

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave at the attempt"

Give athletes a moment to reflect on what this means to them. Ask athletes to close their eyes, take three deep breaths, and listen closely, paying attention to how they feel inside when they hear the Athletes Oath. Give one of the athletes a chance to read the oath aloud. Have others share what it feels like to think about this.

5. Use Kindness and Compassion Practices to Feel Connected to a Larger Community

In our mindfulness groups for Special Olympics athletes, we learned that compassion and connection to each other is an important tool. Practice the kindness tool and feel your connection with others in your community: athletes, coaches and family. Here is a guided meditation video using the compassion practice: [SIP of Compassion](#)

Other Mindfulness Tools

- [Just three breaths](#)
- [Mindfulness for all](#)

Additional Resources

[My Strong Mind](#) is a tool developed for Special Olympics athletes to help them know what is normal for them. The [IDD Family Matters Toolkit](#) has many tools to help families support their family member with a disability.

About the Team

This coach's corner was written by Sue Hutton. This project was led by Dr. Avra Selick from CAMH, together with Special Olympics Canada athletes, caregivers, coaches, researchers and community partners from across the country.

About H-CARDD

[Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities \(H-CARDD\)](#) is a research program that aims to enhance the overall health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities through improved health care policy and services.

H-CARDD research is conducted by dedicated teams of scientists, policymakers, health care providers, people with disabilities and families working collaboratively.

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