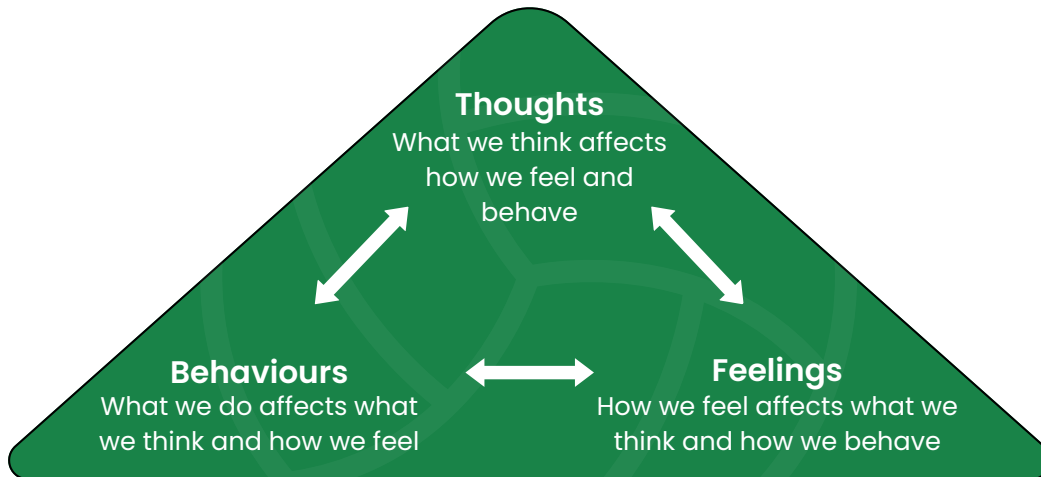


What is anxiety?

A guide for coaches, families and volunteers of the Newcastle Netball community.



The anxiety triangle helps us understand how our thoughts, feelings and behaviours interplay when it comes to anxiety.

Thoughts...

Are what we think about, like worrying about how well we're doing or fearing what might happen.

Feelings...

Are what we feel in response to nervous thoughts that can play out in physical ways such as butterflies, nausea, sweaty palms, racing heart or headaches.

Behaviours...

Are what we do in response to our anxious thoughts and feelings, like avoiding situations and restlessness.

Thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all connected and affect each other.

Negative thoughts can lead to anxious feelings, and those feelings can lead to behaviours that are unhelpful to the situation. Understanding this connection can be useful for coaches and families to help break the cycle of anxiety in players and implement helpful strategies outlined in the accompanying fact sheets.

How to identify and respond to anxiety

Look out for these signs of anxiety in your players.

Unhelpful thoughts

"I always mess up during games."

"Everyone is watching and judging me when I make mistakes."

"If we lose, it's all my fault."

"I'm not good enough for this rep team. If I'm not perfect, they won't accept me."

"I can't handle the pressure, I'll embarrass myself."

Unhelpful feelings

Very high nervousness before and during games.

Overwhelming self-doubt and fear of judgment.

Intense disappointment or sadness after making a mistake.

Constant worry about letting the team down.

Feeling the need to be perfect and fearing failure.

Unhelpful behaviours

Avoiding challenging plays or situations to prevent mistakes.

Asking to be subbed off early.

Avoiding training sessions or social events.

Aggression towards players and referees.

Excessive requests for toilet and drink breaks.

The best way to respond to anxiety is not to avoid the thing you are scared of. However, we must approach the situation with the player carefully. If we respond too strongly or not at all, both approaches may inadvertently encourage anxiety by acknowledging its impact on our players.

The aim is to keep anxiety within a manageable range for a player's wellbeing. So when you recognise those unhelpful signs, it's time to share some helpful, supportive strategies with the player - or even the whole team.

Remember - one of these signs or a single instance does not mean there is a problem. After all, some anxiety is natural. It is more important to look for repeat instances or increased severity.

Here are some helpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours to encourage in your players.

Helpful thoughts

"I can learn from mistakes and improve."

"I contribute positively to my team, even if I make a few mistakes."

"It's okay to feel nervous. it means I care about doing well."

"I'll focus on giving my best effort rather than aiming for perfection."

"I can handle challenges and setbacks; they make me stronger."

Helpful feelings

Confidence in abilities and skills.

Excitement and enthusiasm about playing the game.

Positive anticipation before games.

Determination to bounce back after making mistakes.

Joy and fulfilment in the process of playing and improving.

Helpful behaviours

Embracing challenges and trying new plays.

Positive and encouraging self-talk.

Building strong team connections through communication and support.

Challenging and actively changing your thoughts by making mistakes opportunities for growth.

Maintaining a balanced perspective on both successes and setbacks.

Remember that unhelpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours are normal emotions in children and young people, so the interplay is highly likely to be experienced in conjunction with your players. Children, in particular, may overestimate fear and worry, leading to heightened anxiety, so it is important not to overreact. In doing so, you may legitimise that fear and worry.

Pay attention to language and thoughts, especially catastrophising words like 'always' and 'never' ("I always miss the shot").

If anxiety is still impacting the player after applying these suggested helpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours - perhaps it is time for more formal support.

Practical strategies to prevent, respond to and reduce anxiety

Coaches and parents have the ability to help players respond and manage their feelings. When you recognise the signs, it's time to implement supportive strategies with the player and the team.

If you see signs of unhelpful anxiety, there are things you can do. Try implementing these supportive strategies below. You may also wish to implement the strategies without seeing signs of unhelpful anxiety from a preventive rather than reactive perspective.

Learn to manage anxiety early

- Coaches can identify signs early and address anxiety (or fear and worry) in team training sessions, not during competitive matches.
- Create an open dialogue within the team about emotions and challenges.

Acknowledge and normalise feelings

- Let players know that feeling anxious is normal, and we grow and get stronger from these experiences.
- Normalise offering and seeking support within your team by encouraging team values, mateship, kindness, openness and togetherness.

Remind players about good self-care

- Eating well and staying hydrated helps your body run well and can reduce symptoms of anxiety.
- Getting enough sleep is great for mental health and wellbeing.
- High-intensity exercise such as playing netball also supports their overall state of wellbeing.

Age-appropriate language

- Encourage players to express emotions using terms they are comfortable with.
- When talking with children, use words they would use to describe their feelings. A child might not be able to articulate thoughts, feelings and behaviours but would use words like worry, fear, scared, shy, freaking out, upset tummy, hiding, running away.

Create a game plan

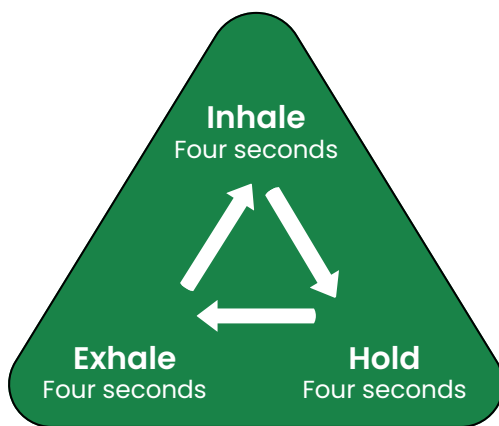
- Communicate the game plan in a simple way to all players to reduce overthinking.
- Keeping the game plan short assists in maintaining concentration during the game.
- Provide additional uncomplicated and specific instruction to individual players who may be struggling. For example, "I just want you to focus on defence. Track your opposing player as your number one priority. That's all we need."

Address avoidance

- Coaches and families can encourage players to face fears gradually.
- Within reason, it is important not to enable the avoidance of netball due to fear. This will help promote a resilient perspective on challenges.

Breathing activities

- Emphasise the importance of deep breathing to re-centre, self-regulate and reduce anxiety.
- Remind players that breathing can help them respond to and reduce anxiety. You could do this as a team during breaks and stoppages to gather breath, relax, and refocus.
- **Try the breathing triangle method.**



Stay positive

- Offer positive feedback during and after a competition.
- Reinforce what went well to promote self-esteem and counteract negative thoughts contributing to anxiety.
- Briefly provide constructive comments for improvement.

Take a stepped approach

- Implement a stepped approach, like short stints on the court or specific instructions, to build player confidence.
- Gradually expose players to more challenges, fostering a supportive environment but with incremental growth opportunities.

Offering support

- Frequency or escalating severity of signs indicate the need for help.
- A one-off event doesn't necessarily indicate a problem. Consistent patterns are more significant.
- Make sure staff and players know about chat and telephone services and organisations such as headspace that specialise in youth mental health.

By implementing these practical strategies, netball coaches, families and volunteers of the Newcastle netball community can create a supportive environment that helps young players manage anxiety effectively.

Promoting a positive mindset and providing guidance during moments of anxiety can contribute to a healthier and more enjoyable sports experience for everyone involved.

Scan the QR for more resources, including support services and information, training opportunities and the NNA mental health and wellbeing strategy.

