



Professional Ballet Program

Mental Performance Info Packet

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1. Introduction to Mental Skills Training / Sport Psychology

What is **Mental Skills Training / Sport Psychology**?

Mental Skills Training / Sport Psychology is a discipline that studies how psychological factors influence sports, athletic performance, exercise, and physical activity. It aims to help athletes and performers, including dancers, improve their mental and emotional well-being to enhance their performance and enjoyment.

Why is **Mental Skills Training / Sport Psychology** Important for Dancers?

Dance combines physical exertion with artistic expression, requiring both physical prowess and mental agility. **Mental Skills Training / Sport Psychology** provides tools to:

- Enhance performance by improving mental skills.
 - Increase motivation and adherence to training.
 - Foster a positive and resilient mindset.
 - Manage stress and anxiety related to performances and competitions.
 - Promote overall mental and emotional health.
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2. The Importance of Mental Training in Dance

Mental Training Techniques

- **Visualization and Imagery:** Mentally rehearsing dance routines to improve performance.
- **Goal Setting:** Creating specific, measurable, and achievable objectives.
- **Self-Talk:** Using positive affirmations to build confidence.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Practices like deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to reduce stress.
- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Enhancing present-moment awareness and focus.

Benefits of Mental Training

- Improved performance through better focus and confidence.
- Greater enjoyment and satisfaction in dancing.
- Enhanced ability to cope with pressure and setbacks.
- Better injury recovery and prevention through mental resilience.

Activity: Importance of Mental Training

1. List five mental training techniques used in sport psychology.
 2. Describe one benefit of mental training for dancers.
 3. Identify a mental training technique you would like to try and explain why.
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3. Goal Setting and Motivation

SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This framework helps in setting clear and attainable goals, ensuring a higher chance of success.

Components of SMART Goals

1. **Specific**

- **Definition:** Clearly define the goal. It should be detailed and unambiguous.
- **Example:** "I want to improve my grand jeté."

2. **Measurable**

- **Definition:** Establish criteria for measuring progress toward the goal. This helps in tracking progress and staying motivated.
- **Example:** "I will measure my improvement by being able to jump six inches higher and achieve a full split in the air."

3. **Achievable**

- **Definition:** Set a goal that is realistic and attainable, considering your current abilities and resources.
- **Example:** "I will take extra stretching classes and practice my jumps three times a week."

4. **Relevant**

- **Definition:** Ensure the goal is relevant and aligned with your broader objectives and values.
- **Example:** "Improving my grand jeté will enhance my overall performance in ballet and help me prepare for upcoming competitions."

5. **Time-bound**

- **Definition:** Set a specific timeframe to achieve the goal. This creates a sense of urgency and helps in prioritizing tasks.
- **Example:** "I aim to achieve this improvement within the next three months."

WOOP is an acronym for Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan. It is a goal-setting framework developed by Gabriele Oettingen, a psychologist at New York University and the University of Hamburg. This method combines positive thinking with realistic planning, helping individuals achieve their goals by identifying potential obstacles and creating actionable plans to overcome them.

Components of WOOP

1. **Wish**

- **Definition:** The first step involves identifying a meaningful and challenging goal you want to achieve.
- **Example:** "I wish to improve my turnout in ballet."

2. **Outcome**

- **Definition:** Visualize the best possible outcome of achieving your wish. Focus on the positive feelings and benefits you will experience.
- **Example:** "The outcome will be a more elegant performance and greater satisfaction with my dancing."

3. **Obstacle**

- **Definition:** Identify the internal obstacles that might prevent you from achieving your wish. These could be habits, beliefs, or emotions that hinder your progress.
- **Example:** "A potential obstacle is my tendency to get frustrated and give up when I don't see immediate improvement."

4. Plan

- **Definition:** Create an if-then plan to overcome the obstacles identified. This plan should outline specific actions you will take when you encounter these obstacles.
- **Example:** "If I start feeling frustrated, then I will take a deep breath, remind myself that improvement takes time, and focus on one small aspect of my turnout to work on."

Tips for Staying Motivated in Dance

- **Set Clear Goals:** Establish both short-term and long-term goals to give your practice direction and purpose.
- **Intrinsic Motivation:** Focus on the internal rewards of dancing, like personal satisfaction and enjoyment. The joy of mastering a new move or the thrill of self-expression can be powerful motivators.
- **Extrinsic Motivation:** Recognize external rewards, such as praise, awards, or competition results. These can provide additional incentives to stay committed and strive for improvement.
- **Tracking Progress:** Keep a journal to record achievements and reflect on growth. Documenting your progress can help you see how far you've come and identify areas for improvement.
- **Peer Support:** Engage with fellow dancers for encouragement and accountability. Practicing with others can provide motivation, share tips, and create a sense of community.
- **Celebrate Successes:** Take time to acknowledge and celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small. Recognizing your progress helps build confidence and motivation.
- **Stay Inspired:** Watch performances, attend workshops, or follow dancers who inspire you. Exposure to new styles and techniques can reignite your passion and creativity.
- **Balanced Routine:** Ensure your practice schedule is balanced to avoid burnout. Incorporate rest and recovery periods to maintain enthusiasm and physical well-being.
- **Positive Mindset:** Maintain a positive attitude towards learning and improvement. Embrace challenges as opportunities to grow rather than obstacles.
- **Professional Guidance:** Seek feedback from instructors or mentors to gain insights and enhance your skills. Professional guidance can help you stay on track and reach your goals efficiently.

Activity: Goal Setting and Motivation

1. Write down a SMART goal related to your dance practice.
 2. Identify three sources of intrinsic motivation for you.
 3. List two ways to maintain your motivation when facing challenges.
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4. Visualization and Imagery

What is Visualization?

Visualization involves creating a mental image of a desired outcome or performance. It helps dancers practice mentally, enhancing their physical execution of movements. By mentally rehearsing, dancers can perfect their technique, improve timing, and emotionally connect with their performance, all without the physical strain.

How to Practice Visualization

- **Find a Quiet Space:** Ensure a distraction-free environment to concentrate fully.
- **Close Your Eyes and Breathe Deeply:** Focus on your breath to relax, which helps in creating a clear mental space.
- **Create a Detailed Image:** Visualize the entire performance, including movements, music, and emotions. Pay attention to every detail, from the way you hold your posture to the expressions on your face.
- **Engage All Senses:** Imagine the sights, sounds, and feelings associated with the performance. Feel the floor beneath your feet, hear the music, see the audience, and sense your muscles working.
- **Break it Down:** If the full performance is overwhelming, break it down into smaller sections. Visualize each part separately before piecing them together.
- **Repeat Regularly:** Consistent practice is key. Make visualization a part of your daily routine.

Benefits of Visualization

- **Enhances Muscle Memory and Coordination:** Regular mental practice strengthens neural pathways, improving the precision and fluidity of your movements.
- **Reduces Anxiety:** Familiarizing the mind with the performance reduces stage fright and anxiety, making you feel more prepared and at ease.
- **Boosts Confidence:** Mentally rehearsing successful outcomes builds confidence, ensuring you perform with assurance.
- **Increases Focus and Concentration:** Visualization helps in sharpening your focus, making it easier to concentrate during the actual performance.
- **Improves Performance Quality:** By mentally addressing potential challenges and perfecting techniques, the quality of the physical performance improves.
- **Saves Physical Energy:** Visualization allows you to practice without the physical strain, preserving your energy for actual rehearsals and performances.
- **Enhances Creativity:** Visualizing different scenarios and outcomes can inspire creative solutions and new interpretations of your performance.

Activity: Visualization and Imagery

1. Describe a specific dance routine you want to visualize.
2. Close your eyes and spend five minutes visualizing this routine. Write down the details of your visualization experience.

3. Reflect on how visualization made you feel. Did it increase your confidence or reduce any anxiety?

5. Managing Performance Anxiety

Understanding Performance Anxiety

Understanding Performance Anxiety Performance anxiety, often referred to as stage fright, manifests as nervousness, fear, or worry before or during a performance. It can affect anyone, regardless of their level of experience or expertise, and can occur in various situations such as public speaking, sports, music, theater, or even social events. Symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, sweating, shaking, dry mouth, nausea, and negative thoughts. The intensity of these symptoms can vary, sometimes leading to avoidance of performance situations altogether.

Causes of Performance Anxiety

- **Fear of Judgement:** Concern about being evaluated by others and the potential for negative feedback.
- **Perfectionism:** Unrealistic standards and the pressure to perform flawlessly can create significant stress.
- **Lack of Experience:** Inexperience or unfamiliarity with the performance environment can heighten anxiety.
- **Past Negative Experiences:** Previous failures or embarrassing moments can contribute to future anxiety.
- **High Stakes:** The greater the perceived importance of the performance, the higher the anxiety levels.

Impact on Performance

Performance anxiety can lead to both physical and psychological impacts, affecting overall performance quality:

- **Cognitive Impairment:** Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, or thinking clearly.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Trembling, sweating, increased heart rate, and shortness of breath can interfere with performance.
- **Behavioral Changes:** Avoidance of performance situations, procrastination, or engaging in safety behaviors that limit exposure to anxiety-provoking scenarios.
- **Emotional Distress:** Feelings of shame, embarrassment, or disappointment can affect self-esteem and motivation.

Recognizing Performance Anxiety

Understanding and recognizing the signs of performance anxiety is the first step toward managing it. Common indicators include:

- **Pre-Performance Worry:** Excessive worrying about the upcoming performance days or weeks in advance.
- **Self-Doubt:** Persistent negative thoughts about one's abilities or potential outcomes.
- **Physical Discomfort:** Noticeable physical symptoms that arise specifically in performance-related contexts.
- **Avoidance:** Avoiding opportunities to perform or practice due to fear of failure or negative evaluation.

Long-Term Strategies for Managing Performance Anxiety

In addition to immediate techniques, long-term strategies can help reduce the overall impact of performance anxiety:

- **Cognitive Strategies:** Working with a CMPC to change negative thought patterns and develop coping strategies.
- **Gradual Exposure:** Gradually exposing oneself to performance situations to build confidence and reduce fear over time.
- **Skill Enhancement:** Improving performance-related skills through consistent practice and training to build confidence.
- **Resilience Building:** Developing resilience through stress management techniques and building a strong support network.

Activity: Managing Performance Anxiety

1. List three physical symptoms you experience when you feel anxious.
 2. Write down a positive affirmation you can use before performances.
 3. Create a simple pre-performance routine to help manage anxiety.
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6. Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

Confidence can be defined as a belief in one's ability to succeed or perform effectively in various situations. It involves trust in oneself and one's judgment, skills, and capabilities. Confidence is often displayed through assertiveness, composure, and a positive attitude.

Self-esteem refers to a person's overall subjective sense of their own worth or value. It encompasses how much a person appreciates and likes themselves, as well as their perception of their abilities and qualities. Self-esteem is influenced by both internal factors (such as self-perception and self-acceptance) and external factors (such as social interactions and feedback from others).

In essence, confidence relates more to specific abilities and behaviors, such as speaking in public or tackling challenges, while self-esteem is a broader evaluation of one's overall worth and value as a person. Both confidence and self-esteem are interconnected and can influence each other positively when nurtured and developed.

Building confidence and self-esteem is a journey that involves both mindset shifts and actionable steps. Here are some effective strategies to help enhance confidence and self-esteem:

1. Identify and Challenge Limiting Beliefs:

- Start by becoming aware of negative self-talk and limiting beliefs. These are often ingrained thoughts that hold you back. Challenge them by questioning their validity and replacing them with more empowering beliefs.

2. Set Realistic Goals and Achieve Them:

- Break down larger goals into smaller, manageable tasks. Achieving these tasks builds a sense of accomplishment and reinforces your belief in your abilities.

3. Celebrate Your Successes:

- Acknowledge and celebrate even small achievements. This helps to reinforce positive feelings about yourself and your capabilities.

4. Practice Self-Compassion:

- Treat yourself with kindness and understanding, especially when facing setbacks or failures. Practice self-compassionate thinking rather than self-criticism.

5. Develop a Growth Mindset:

- Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth rather than seeing them as threats. Learn from mistakes and setbacks, viewing them as part of the learning process.

6. Improve Your Physical Health:

- Regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep contribute to a positive self-image and overall well-being, which in turn boosts confidence.

7. Expand Your Comfort Zone:

- Step outside your comfort zone regularly by trying new things or taking on challenges. Each small success will increase your confidence to tackle bigger challenges.

8. Practice Assertiveness:

- Learn to communicate your thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and respectfully. Assertiveness helps you feel more in control and respected by others.

9. Surround Yourself with Supportive People:

- Seek out relationships with people who uplift and encourage you. Limit time with those who undermine your self-esteem or fuel self-doubt.

10. Continuously Learn and Grow:

- Invest in learning new skills or hobbies that interest you. Building competence in different areas boosts confidence in your abilities.

11. Focus on Personal Values:

- Clarify your core values and live in alignment with them. Knowing who you are and what you stand for enhances self-assurance.

12. Seek Professional Help if Needed:

- If low self-esteem significantly impacts your daily life, consider speaking with a therapist or counselor. They can provide strategies tailored to your specific needs.

Building confidence and self-esteem is a gradual process that involves self-awareness, self-acceptance, and consistent effort. By adopting these strategies and incorporating them into your daily life, you can cultivate a stronger sense of confidence and a healthier self-esteem over time.

Activity: Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

1. Write down three positive affirmations you can say to yourself daily.
 2. Reflect on a recent success in your dance practice. Describe how it made you feel.
 3. Identify a strength you have as a dancer and explain how it contributes to your overall performance.
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7. Enhancing Focus and Concentration

Focus is the ability to direct mental effort towards a particular task or objective, often involving the exclusion of irrelevant stimuli or distractions. It involves sustained attention and mental clarity to achieve a specific goal.

Concentration refers to the mental effort and attention given to a task or activity over a period of time. It involves the ability to maintain focus and avoid distractions, allowing for efficient and effective completion of tasks.

Techniques for Improving Focus

Mindfulness Meditation: Practice mindfulness to stay present and focused.

Task Prioritization: Break down routines into smaller tasks and focus on one at a time.

Eliminate Distractions: Create a practice environment free from distractions.

Visualization: Visualize yourself successfully completing tasks to enhance motivation and maintain focus.

Time Blocking: Allocate specific time slots for tasks, minimizing multitasking and enhancing concentration on one task at a time.

Physical Exercise: Regular physical activity can improve cognitive function and help sustain focus over extended periods.

Mindful Breaks: Take short breaks to rejuvenate and reset your mind, enhancing overall concentration levels.

Goal Setting: Set clear, achievable goals to provide direction and purpose, which can aid in maintaining focus and motivation.

Maintaining Concentration During Performance

Centering Technique: Focus on a physical sensation, like your breathing, to ground yourself.

Cues: Use mental or physical cues (like a deep breath) to refocus.

Activity: Enhancing Focus and Concentration

1. Practice a five-minute mindfulness meditation. Write down how it felt and any challenges you faced.
 2. List three potential distractions during your dance practice and how you can eliminate them.
 3. Identify a physical or mental cue you can use to regain focus during a performance.
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8. Coping with Injuries and Setbacks

Mental Strategies for Injury Recovery

1. Stay Positive

- **Focus on Progress:** Emphasize the activities you can engage in rather than those restricted by your injury. Celebrate small milestones in your recovery journey.
- **Gratitude:** Cultivate gratitude for the aspects of your body that are still functioning well and for the support you receive from others.

2. Set New Goals

- **Short-term Objectives:** Modify your goals to align with your current capabilities and focus on achievable short-term objectives. This could include improving flexibility, maintaining fitness within safe limits, or exploring different aspects of dance theory or choreography.
- **Long-term Adjustments:** Adjust your long-term aspirations to accommodate the additional time needed for recovery. This might involve extending timelines for performances or competitions while prioritizing your health.

3. Visualize Healing

- **Guided Imagery:** Incorporate visualization techniques into your daily routine. Imagine the healing process in detail, envisioning your body strengthening and regaining full mobility. Visualizing yourself dancing again can help maintain motivation and belief in your recovery.

Dealing with Setbacks

1. Accept and Adapt

- **Acknowledge Reality:** Recognize setbacks as part of the recovery process. Accepting setbacks doesn't mean giving up but rather adjusting your approach and expectations.
- **Modify Plans:** Revise your rehabilitation plan with input from healthcare professionals. Adjust training intensity or techniques to avoid exacerbating the injury while continuing to make progress.

2. Seek Support

- **Peer Encouragement:** Connect with fellow dancers who have experienced similar challenges. Sharing experiences and encouragement can provide valuable emotional support.
- **Professional Guidance:** Consult with mentors, coaches, or a sport psychologist who specialize in injury rehabilitation. They can offer tailored advice and strategies to

navigate the psychological aspects of recovery.

3. Learn from Experience

- **Reflective Practice:** View setbacks as opportunities for personal growth and learning. Analyze the factors contributing to the setback, such as overtraining or improper technique, to prevent similar issues in the future.
- **Resilience Building:** Develop resilience by adapting to challenges and setbacks. Use these experiences to strengthen your mental fortitude and enhance your overall performance mindset.

By integrating these mental strategies into your recovery process and learning to effectively manage setbacks, you can cultivate a resilient mindset that supports both your physical rehabilitation and long-term dance goals.

Worksheet: Coping with Injuries and Setbacks

1. Describe a recent setback and how it affected you.
 2. List two positive actions you can take to cope with this setback.
 3. Write down a new goal that accommodates your current situation and supports your recovery or progress.
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9. Developing a Positive Mindset

Cultivating Positivity

Gratitude Practice

Embrace a gratitude journal as a daily practice to deeply appreciate the positive aspects of your life, both big and small. By accepting the present moment and acknowledging what you're grateful for, you cultivate a sense of contentment and fulfillment. This practice encourages you to embrace life as it is, fostering a mindset of abundance and appreciation.

Positive Reframing

Approach challenges with an acceptance mindset, viewing them as opportunities for growth and learning. Accept that difficulties are natural parts of life and see them as catalysts for personal development. By reframing challenges positively, you cultivate resilience and inner strength, accepting both the ups and downs of life's journey.

Surround Yourself with Positivity

Surround yourself with people who radiate positivity and acceptance. Seek out relationships that support your growth and well-being, where acceptance of each other's strengths and imperfections is paramount. Engaging with a positive community reinforces acceptance of yourself and others, nurturing a supportive environment where you can thrive.

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Identify Negative Patterns

Practice self-acceptance by acknowledging and understanding your negative thinking patterns without judgment. Recognize when negative thoughts arise and accept them as fleeting mental experiences rather than absolute truths. This awareness allows you to respond with compassion and kindness towards yourself.

Replace Negativity

Challenge negative thoughts with a mindset of acceptance and compassion. Instead of fighting against negative thoughts, accept their presence and gently redirect your focus towards more balanced perspectives. For example, accept the uncertainty of challenges and see them as opportunities for growth rather than sources of fear or frustration.

Practice Affirmations

Use affirmations rooted in acceptance to nurture a positive mindset. Affirm your worthiness and capability to overcome challenges with self-compassion and acceptance. For instance, affirm, "I accept myself completely, flaws and all," or "I embrace the journey of growth and learning." These affirmations promote self-acceptance and reinforce positive beliefs about yourself.

Integrating These Practices

Integrate these practices with an acceptance approach by:

- **Mindfulness:** Cultivate mindfulness to observe thoughts and emotions with acceptance and non-judgment.
- **Self-Compassion:** Practice self-compassion by treating yourself with kindness and understanding, especially during challenging times.
- **Gratitude:** Embrace gratitude as a way to accept and appreciate the present moment, fostering a positive outlook on life.

By cultivating positivity and overcoming negative thoughts with an acceptance approach, you nurture a resilient mindset grounded in self-acceptance and compassion. Embrace life's complexities with grace and openness, fostering inner peace and growth along your journey.

Worksheet: Developing a Positive Mindset

1. Write down three things you are grateful for today.
 2. Identify a recent negative thought and reframe it into a positive perspective.
 3. List two affirmations you can use to cultivate a positive mindset.
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Mental training is a vital component of a dancer's overall training regimen. By incorporating sport psychology techniques, CPYB dancers can enhance their performance, manage stress, and achieve their goals with greater confidence and resilience. Remember, your mind is as important as your body in the pursuit of dance excellence.