Breathing Exercises with Athletes

Here are some breathing exercises that you can teach athletes when they are overwhelmed and stressed.

**Square Breathing**

- When breathing, close your eyes and visualize a box.
- Inhale to the count of 4, hold your breath to the count of 4, exhale to the count of 4, and hold again to the count of 4.
- Repeat at least 3 times, and longer as needed.

**Breath Imagery**

Exhale slowly, and as you exhale, visualize your stress and frustration leaving your body. As you breathe in, visualize feelings of warmth and relaxation entering your body.

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**Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script:**

Get into a comfortable position. Begin breathing deeply, and then close your eyes. Continue to breathe deeply, releasing tension every time you exhale. Allow any tension to leave your body and any concerns about your day to leave your mind.

Now focus on the muscles of your right arm. Tense those muscles as much as you comfortably can for 5 seconds. Now release the tension and allow your right arm to relax for approximately 45 seconds. Tense the muscles of your right arm again for 5 seconds and release for 45 seconds. Notice the contrast between being tense and being relaxed. Now focus on the muscles of your left arm and tense for 5 seconds, release for 45 seconds, tense for 5 seconds and release for 45 seconds. Again, notice how it feels for those muscles to become very relaxed. Now alternate tensing and relaxing (tense (5 seconds), relax (45 seconds), tense (5 seconds), and relax (45 seconds)) as you did with your arms for the following 5 muscle groups:

- (1) face area, (2) neck, (3) torso (upper body), (4) right leg, and (5) left leg. After you have proceeded through all muscle groups, scan your body to see if any tension remains. If you notice tension anywhere, make a note of it and let it go.

Remain in this state of relaxation for several minutes, and recognize how your muscles feel to be this relaxed. Remember that you can return to this state as needed in the future. When you are ready slowly bring yourself out of the relaxed state by

- (1) moving your fingers and toes, (2) moving your arms and legs, (3) moving your head and neck, and (4) opening your eyes.