



MIND SKILLZ

CURRICULUM

04 Coping Skills

In this practice, players work as a team to keep the “Healthy Mind” ball in the air. As “challenge” balls are introduced, the team works together to find ways to manage challenges, facilitating a discussion on stress, coping skills, and mental well-being.

Goals: by the end of the practice, team members should be able to...

- Describe at least two ways negative stress impacts the mind and body.
- Understand that some stress is normal, but too much for too long makes it hard to keep a healthy mind.
- Define coping skills in their own words.
- Identify at least two coping strategies or skills to help deal with stress.

Materials

- 9 tennis balls (or any type of small, soft ball):
- Tape (with one side for writing labels)
- Markers
- Football (or a larger ball) labeled “Healthy Mind”

Preparation

- Ask players before the practice for common challenges or situations they face that cause stress. Consider writing their answers directly on the balls.
- Come up with a few variations of your own to make the game engaging.

Schedule

- Warm Up (10 min)
- Juggling my life (30 min)
- Coach’s Story (10 min)

- Cool Down (10 min)

Warm-Up (10 min)

1 | Energizer

- Lead an active energizer, such as a game, dance, song, stretch, or run.
- Lead a calming energizer, such as Take 5, Team Wave, or Secret Power.

2 | Check-in

- Lead group check-in
- Recap
 - ✓ What did we learn last practice?
 - ✓ Did you use anything we learned? What happened? How did it feel?

3 | Take a Stand

◆ Adults are more stressed than young people

- ✓ Why or why not?

Juggling My Life (30 min)

Coach's Tip: Juggling My Life works best with 20 players or fewer. For bigger groups, run Juggling My Life with 2 smaller groups or just do one group at a time.

1 | Introduce Healthy Mind

- Explain that this game is about how we react to different life experiences and events.
- Introduce the Healthy Mind ball:
 - ✚ **This ball is going to represent a healthy, happy mind. How would you describe a healthy mind?**
 - Feeling good, joy, good mood, positive thoughts, feel good about myself, calm
- Ask players:
 - ✚ **Tell us about some things you do to maintain a healthy mind.**
 - Learning, playing, spending time with friends, doing things we enjoy, listening to music, and caring for others.

2 | Establish the Passing Order with Healthy Mind

- Explain and demonstrate the rules of the game:
 - ✚ **The game's purpose is to keep the Health Mind up in the air by juggling as a team.**
 - ✚ **We're going to imagine that we are supporting each other in maintaining a healthy mind.**
 - ✚ **Softly throw the Healthy Mind ball underhand to someone across the circle (not next to you). Say that person's name before you throw the ball.**
 - ✚ **You will throw the ball to the same person every time. Remember to whom you throw the ball and who throws the ball to you.**
 - ✚ **If you drop the ball, pick it up and continue playing.**
 - ✚ **If the person you throw the ball to drops a ball, wait for them to pick it up and throw it before you throw another ball to them.**
- Guide the players to set up the order:
 - ✚ **Everyone put your hands up.**
 - ✚ **When someone says your name and throws you the ball, catch the ball, call out someone else's name, and throw the ball to them across the circle.**
 - ✚ **Remember to throw the ball to the same person each time.**

- ✚ **Put your hands down after you throw the ball.**
- ✚ **Only throw the ball to someone who still has her hands up.**
- ✚ **Everyone should catch the ball only once.**
- ✚ **The last person to get the ball throws it to me.**
- After setting up the order, instruct the players to use their right hand to point at the person they throw the ball to and their left hand to point at the person they receive the ball from.
- Play with the Healthy Mind ball until players feel comfortable.

3 | Introduce Stress

- Ask the players the following questions:
 - ✚ **What is STRESS? Can anyone describe stress for us?**
 - Stress is our response to pressure or threat.
 - Stress is when we are worried or uncomfortable about something.
 - Stress is a normal part of life, but too much stress or feeling stressed for too long is harmful.
 - ✚ **When you think of stress, which feelings come to mind?**
 - Frustrated, angry, upset, sad, overwhelmed, nervous
 - ✚ **Can you give me some examples of experiences or situations that cause you stress?**
 - Exams, problems at home, feeling unsafe, being treated poorly by peers or teachers, being talked down to by others, fighting, bullying, etc.
- On a piece of tape, write down 6 of their responses on tennis balls
- Make sure everyone knows what labels are on the balls

4 | Add “Stressors” to the game

- Explain to the players:
 - ✚ **As we know, we all face stress in life.**
 - ✚ **We will now play, adding some of the balls with different things in our lives that cause stress.**

✦ **When the Healthy Mind ball is dropped, explain that this represents no longer being able to cope with life's stresses.**

- Play a round of the game introducing 3 of the balls you identified earlier and try to select the mildest stressors first.

- Ask players:

✦ **Was it easy to keep the Healthy Mind ball up when we added these balls? Why or why not?**

- Play the game again, adding more stressors, and let the group play for a round or two.

✦ **What happened in this round? What can happen if we face too much stress in our lives and can't deal with it?**

- It made the game more difficult, and we dropped the Healthy Mind ball.

6 // Introduce coping skills to deal with stress

- Ask the players:

✦ **Have you ever experienced too much stress in your life?**

✦ **How would you describe how it felt? What were some of the consequences?**

- Too much constant stress makes it very hard to maintain a healthy mind.
- When you face stress, it can affect your thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

✦ **Can you think of some consequences to our minds and bodies of too much stress?**

- Inability to concentrate or complete tasks, get sick more often with colds, body aches, Headaches, Irritability, Trouble falling, sleeping, or staying awake, Changes in appetite, and more angry or anxious than usual.

✦ **Name some ways we can cope with stress?**

- Talk to someone we trust about the things that are causing us stress, and try to avoid situations that cause stress.
- Do things that help us relax our minds or bodies. Take 5, sing, dance, play, and take deep breaths.
- Make a list of what we must do and decide on the priorities. Stop doing things we do not have to, which adds to the stress.

✦ **Can you think of specific things you could do to cope with the situations that caused stress in our game?**

- E.g., If exams are stressful, create a study schedule to help prepare; take breaks and use deep breathing to calm down; ask for study help from peers.

Coach's Tip: You may be able to talk about common 'unhealthy' coping strategies, such as using drugs and alcohol. An unhealthy coping skill might help us feel better in the moment, but it also has harmful consequences.

- Allow players a few minutes to discuss.
- Tell participants:
 - ✦ **Now I will remove some of the stressor balls, representing us using some coping skills we talked about to reduce our stress.**
- Remove most or all the 'stressor' tennis balls and play again for a few rounds. The group should have an easier time keeping the "Healthy Mind" ball up.
- Finish the game and ask:
 - ✦ **What happened this time we played? What was it like to keep up the Healthy Mind? Why?**
 - Because we used our coping skills to help us deal with stress.

KEY MESSAGES

STRESS IS A NORMAL PART OF LIFE, BUT TOO MUCH STRESS HARMS OUR BODIES AND MINDS.

WE CAN DEVELOP SKILLS TO GET BETTER AT DEALING WITH STRESS.

Coach's Story (10 min)

- Ask players to get comfortable so they can listen to your Coach's Story.
- Explain that you will be sharing a story about ways you like to calm down, relax, and feel better when facing difficult situations, thoughts, and feelings.
- Use the questions that follow to create your Coach's Story.

What is something in your life that is difficult and stressful? How does it affect you?

What types of activities help you deal with these situations? When do you use techniques like Take 5?

How do these relaxation techniques help you? How do they affect you and the people around you?

Discussion:

- Ask players to reflect on the story you just shared with them and share their thoughts.
 - ✓ **What did you think of the story I shared? How did it make you feel?**
 - ✓ **What does the word “cope” mean to you?**
 - To be able to deal with something effectively
 - ✓ **What does the word “resilience” mean to you?**
 - The ability to be able to recover from difficulties
 - To be able to “bounce back.”

Coach’s Tip: Bouncing an inflated and deflated ball and using a pump to “pump up” the ball is an excellent way for participants to visualise how coping skills can help them become more resilient and bounce back.

KEY MESSAGES

COPING SKILLS ARE HEALTHY WAYS TO DEAL WITH
DIFFICULT AND STRESSFUL SITUATIONS.

COPING SKILLS ARE THINGS YOU CAN LEARN AND PRACTICE AND GET BETTER AT.

WE CAN BECOME MORE RESILIENT AND GET BETTER AT BOUNCING BACK FROM DIFFICULTIES BY USING COPING SKILLS.

Cool Down (10 min)

1 | Feel-Think-Do discussion

- ✓ **Feel:** How did today's practice make you feel?
- ✓ **Think:** What did the activity make you think about or question?
- ✓ **Do:** How will you use what you learned today?

2 | Attendance Register

- Take attendance and remind team members of the date and time of the next session

3 | Winning Word

Winning Word:

Coping Skills

✓ How would you describe coping skills?

- In MindSKILLZ, coping skills are about building healthy ways to deal with difficult and stressful situations. Coping skills are things you can learn and practice and get better at. We can become more resilient and get better at bouncing back from difficulties by using coping skills.

4 | Team Cheer

- Ask players to cheer the Winning Word: Coping Skills together as a team.

5 | Extra Time

- Before players leave, let them know you will stay for an extra 10 minutes to speak 1 on 1 with anyone.

SAMPLE