

*All-in Foundation*

# EXERCISES FOR YOUTH PLAYERS

*Series 8 - 12 years*

*From the All-in Sports programme*

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for more information



# PREFACE

## WHAT WILL THIS GUIDE OFFER YOU?

This practical guide is filled with over 30 different exercises that contribute to the development of inclusive practices and prosocial behaviour for youth players between the ages of 8 to 12.

All exercises within this guide have been developed and/or tested by us and other professionals with extensive experience within the fields of youth coaching, pedagogy, behavioural science, social psychology, or education. All-in has taken the utmost care to collect, test or further develop all of them.

This guide is meant to be a practical source and a means of inspiration for youth coaches and youth trainers who would like to contribute to the emotional development of their players and are looking for ways to contribute to a socially safe environment at their sports club.

If you come across an exercise missing the appropriate source or if you have created an exercise yourself which you would like to share with the community, please drop us a note via:

[exercises@all-in.foundation](mailto:exercises@all-in.foundation)



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*Team cohesion*

# The golden rule



This exercise is perfect for the start of the season, we would recommend using it in one of the first weeks of practice. Through this exercise, youth players will learn to determine their teams' rules. The exercise will also help them feel comfortable to address teammates on their behavior during practice or games. By making sure the norms within the teams are very concrete, players will better remember the rules and will have a better understanding of what is expected of them.

**Goal:** Defining social norms as a team  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** A whiteboard and a marker

# Exercise: The golden rule

## Explanation:

Ask your players to form a circle (sitting down is fine). Then ask them if they have ever heard of the golden rule:  
*Treat others like you would like to be treated yourself.*

If a player knows this proverb, ask them if they would like to explain its meaning to the rest of the team. Complement their explanation if and where needed. Then talk about the importance of feeling safe and appreciated in a team.

The golden rule is kind and polite but ignores the differences in what we like or prefer. What feels good and what doesn't isn't always the same for everyone and because of those differences, it is valuable to agree on how we as a team, interact with each other.

Ask your players what kind of actions they appreciate in others. By framing the question in a positive manner, you put the focus on positive and desirable behaviour. This will influence the team climate positively and stimulates the occurrence of social behaviour.

*"I really like it when someone tells me that I am doing a good job."*

After each example given, ask the players how this would look in practice. How could they use the example?: *"I like it when people compliment me after I've done something well, so I will give others a compliment if I see them doing something well too".*

*"Jamie likes it when others are listening to his ideas, so I hear him out and listen when he wants to share his thoughts with me".* What are behaviours that everyone finds most important?

Write down all of the examples and translate them into 5 to 10 team agreements. Keep going until the players all feel that the most important agreements have been written down.

Tell the team you are proud of them for coming up with the team agreements and ask if everyone is happy with them.



## Optional:

*This is also a good time to introduce or repeat some of the clubs' rules, for example by guiding the players towards stating them: "I appreciate it when others treat me kindly, like a friend" or by asking questions like "I feel good when someone shows me that they care about how I feel, how do you feel about that?". This way, players still formulate these examples themselves, thus creating extra social support for the club rules and guidelines.*

In conclusion, you can emphasise the most important agreements and discuss what will happen if someone does not honour the team agreements. It is important to stretch that the agreement will be honoured by everyone, including coaches, parents, other caregivers, and trainers.

We strongly advise coaches and trainers to write the agreements down and to mail them to all parents and caregivers. This will enable parents and caregivers to support specific behaviours and also creates a very clear picture of what consequences undesirable behaviour will have for their child.

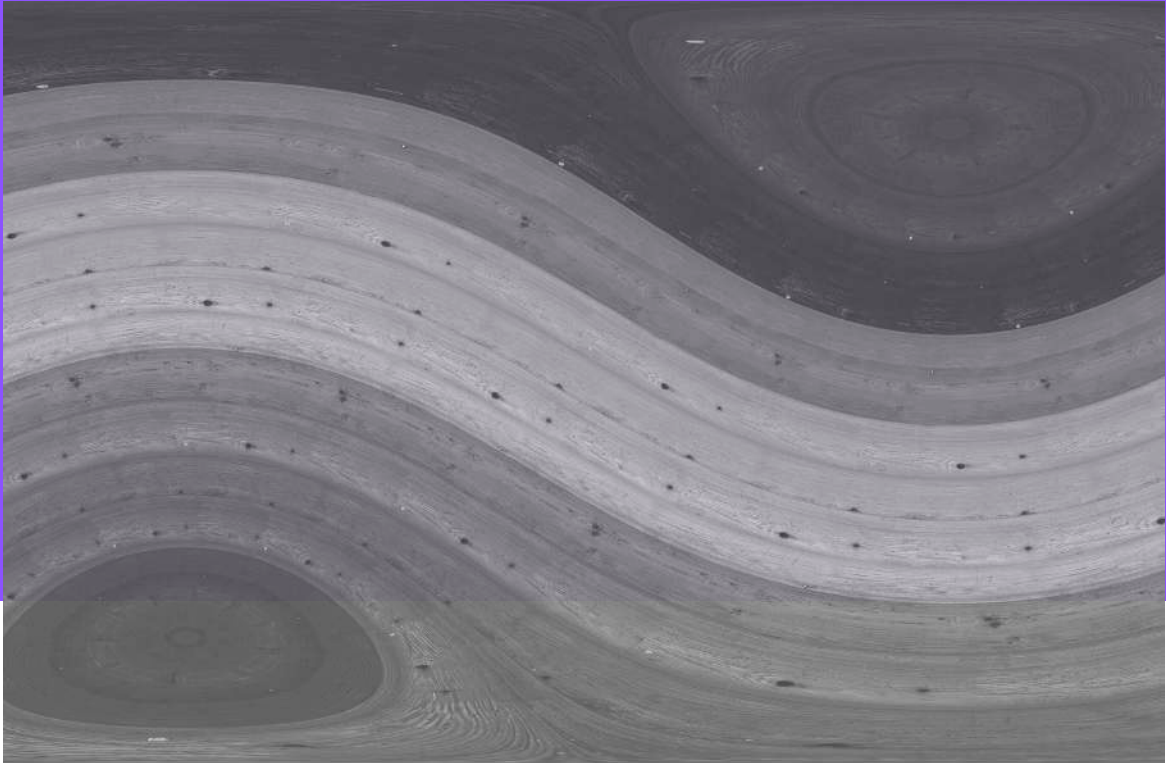
Begin the first following practices by highlighting a specific agreement to strengthen awareness.

Make it a habit to always carry these agreements with you, so you can refer to them after an incident. In these situations, explain very clearly which agreement has been broken, how it has been broken, and what the consequences are.

Always ask players what effect they think their behaviour has had on the others involved and end reflections with the question of how they think they could handle the situation differently next time.



# Make a wave



This simple exercise helps teams learning to work together and to align their actions. Use this exercise during your warming-up or cooling-down.

**Goal:** Develop cooperative learning skills  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed



# Exercise: Make a wave

## Explanation:

Ask your players to form a circle together (while standing). Appoint one player to start the exercise. The player calls out a stretch exercise and demonstrates the exercise to the rest of the team. One by one, the other players follow the motions of the first player. The goal is to follow the movement of the player before you in one fluent movement so: if a player is in position, the other player starts the movement. This will create a wave effect.

You can do the exercise clockwise or counterclockwise and even switch the direction during the exercise when your players are more experienced. When all players have finished the stretch, the player next to the one who initiated the previous stretch, calls out another stretch and starts a new round. All players keep their end position until the new movement reaches them.

You can make this exercise as short or as long as you like. Make it more complex by offering the possibility to use a combination of movements per round or by speeding the process up.



# Team slogan



This exercise encourages newly formed teams to think about their team culture and stimulates the feeling of solidarity between teammates. It is, therefore, most effective during the first month of the new season. When used for teams with more mature players, coaches could choose to create a special handshake instead of a team slogan (or both).

**Goal:** Stimulate team cohesion  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Whiteboard and marker

# Exercise: Team slogan

## Explanation:

Co-create a team slogan or team cheer with your team and inform the team that you will start every following game with that cheer or slogan.

Explain to the team that you will also appoint two vibe captains every week and ask the team to make a schedule together in order to determine who will be the teams' vibe captains in the upcoming weeks.

Your teams' vibe captains are responsible for the team climate during that week. Together, both vibe captains are responsible for the warming-up during each practice. They will also be in charge of organising/deciding on a fun team activity of about 10 to 15 minutes long that they can do as a team or together with the opposing team after the weekly game to help all players connect and diffuse. It can be as simple as a quick game or telling jokes during the debrief.



# Happy birthday!



This exercise is particularly suited for teams of which several or many players are unacquainted still. It helps teammates to get to know each other, to collaborate with each other and the exercise is easily incorporated into a regular training exercise.

**Goal:** Stimulating team work and team communication  
**Duration:** 5 tot 10 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed

# Exercise: Happy birththey!

## Explanation:

Challenge your players to line up as quickly as possible based on their birthdays, in chronological order (so from the 1st of January to the 31st of December). In order to fulfill this challenge, they will have to start a dialogue with each other about their birthdays.

If you would like to make this exercise a bit more challenging for your team, tell them that they can't talk during the challenge but are only allowed to use hand signals.

If you would like to add a tactical aspect to the challenge, ask your team "How could we, as a team, line up even faster?"



# Keep those balls in the air



This is a cooperative exercise that teaches your players to work together and is especially suited for training camps and team outings.

- Goal:** Stimulate cooperation and team communication  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Several large sheets with one or more small holes and plastic golf balls

# Exercise: Keep those balls in the air

## Explanation:

Divide your players into smaller groups of about six players. Then provide each group with a sheet and tell them that they will have to keep their ball in the air as long as possible.

Place a golf ball in the middle of the sheet and ask them to keep the ball moving. The ball should not touch the ground. If the ball falls, the group has to sit down (or on the side of the field/court). The group that survives the challenge the longest, wins.

You can add another ball to make it more difficult or add more holes to the sheets (have those ready if you can).

Depending on how fast the challenge ends, you can repeat the exercise by switching up your groups. If you do, let the groups exchange the lessons learned with the whole team (what worked and what didn't).



# Trust me



This exercise teaches players to trust and support each other when they need to. It is a classic exercise, often used during camps and team outings. Yet it goes without saying that the exercise is just as suited for regular practice.

- Goal:** Develop trust and stimulating social support between team members
- Duration:** 30 to 40 minutes
- Materials:** Blindfolds, materials can be chosen based on what you have on site



# Exercise: Trust me

## Explanation:

Set up an extensive obstacle course with your team (or players).

Put players together in teams of two and let one player be blindfolded.

The partners help their blindfolded partner through the obstacle course by giving advice and/or guiding them physically/verbally.

After the blindfolded partner has completed the course, rearrange your course and let the other players be blindfolded. Repeat the process.

Together, discuss how they felt when they were being guided and how they felt when they were guided themselves. How did it feel to be in each role? What did they appreciate and what did they find challenging or uncomfortable?



# Snake race



This exercise stimulates intra-group cooperation.

**Goal:** Strengthening their ability to collaborate as a team  
**Duration:** 10 minutes  
**Materials:** Footballs or basketballs

# Exercise: Snake race

## Explanation:

Divide your team into groups of four. Ask each group to form a snake. The first player will stand on the field line and the three other group members stand behind the first player (thus forming a line).

The distance between the players is exactly big enough to place a basketball or football between every player. Hand each team 3 balls and ask them to place these balls between them.

The players clamp the ball between them. This means that the first player clamps the ball together with the second player in the group and has one ball in his back. The second player clamps a ball using his stomach with the first player and by using his back with the third player. They are not allowed to touch the balls with their hands or arms and the balls should not fall down.

The snake that crosses the field first, wins the race.

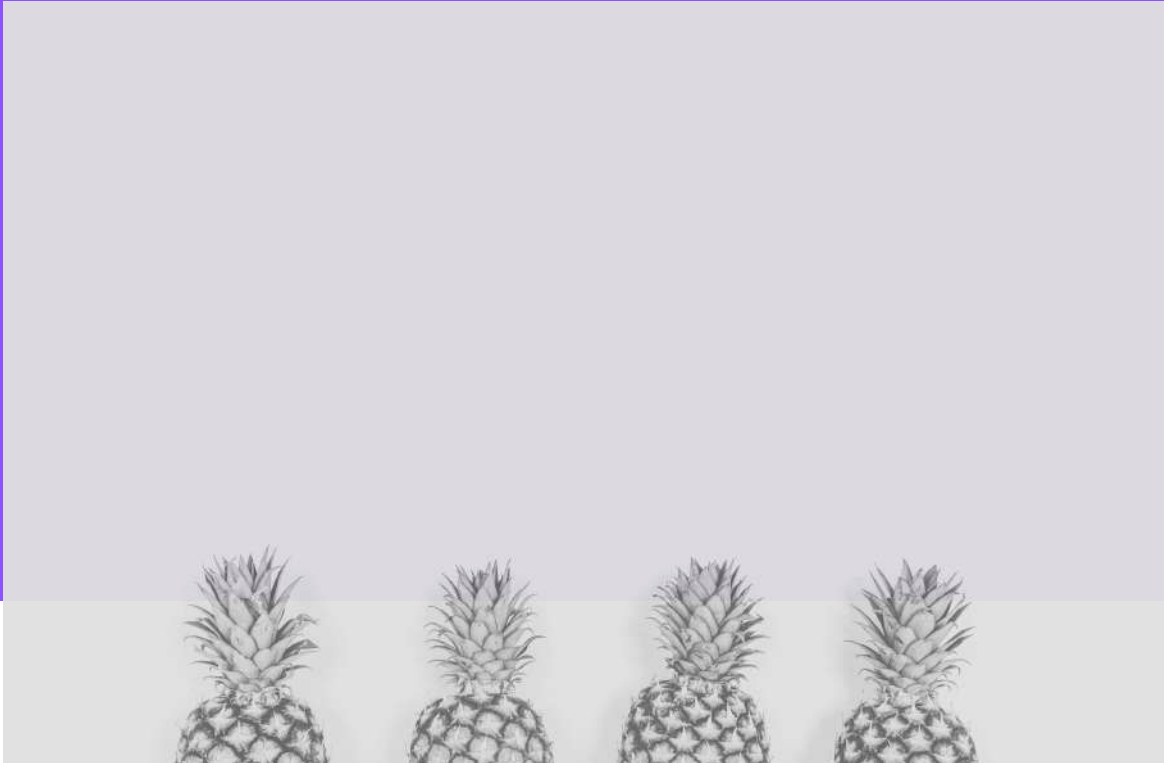
If a ball does fall, the snake has to stop and either place the ball back themselves or wait until the ball is handed to them by the trainer/coach before they can move forward again.

## Optional:

*Depending on the ages of your players, you can set a smaller distance or lengthen the track. If a team is more skilled, you can expand the group size per snake or introduce obstacles.*



# 4 each time



This exercise teaches players to work together while using non-verbal techniques.

**Goal:** Strengthening their ability to work together  
**Duration:** 10 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed

## Exercise: 4 each time

### Explanation:

Ask all the players to form a circle while sitting down. Explain that, as soon as the game begins, no more (or less) than 4 players can stand up at the same time and that each player is only allowed to stand 10 seconds per turn (max.).

If one player sits down, another player should take their place directly. The players can only use their body language to communicate with each other.

The goal of the game is to keep the game going as long as possible. Their game time ends when a player talks or if there are too many or too few players standing at the same time.



# *It's raining questions*



This exercise helps teams to get to know each other better and contributes to peer bonding by stimulation dialogues among team members.

- Goal:** Stimulate team cohesion  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Coloured balloons and cut-out questions (one per player)

# Exercise: It's raining questions

## Explanation:

*Prepare this exercise before practice by cutting out the questions on the following page and rolling them up. Place a question in each balloon, blow it up and tie it. Make sure that every player, coach, and/or trainer can answer at least one question (by having a filled balloon per person).*

Place the balloons in the field or court (preferably protected against possible winds).

Begin the exercise by asking your players how friendships develop. Emphasise that friendships develop when we get to know each other by sharing our thoughts, ideas, and values with others and by listening to the thoughts, ideas, and experiences of someone else. Explain to them that the following exercise is meant to get to know each other better.

Ask all players to pick out a balloon. Then let them choose another player that they would like to get to know a bit better. As soon as everyone has selected a partner, tell them this:

- Listen actively to what others are sharing with you
- Don't interrupt the other when they are talking and don't share anything with the other person as long as they are still sharing their own thoughts or experiences
- Encourage the other person to elaborate their story

Ask one person out of each duo to pop their balloon and to retrieve their question. Let them proceed by reading their question to their partner out loud and answer it themselves in about three minutes. When the three minutes have passed, the other person pops their balloon and repeats to process.

Conclude the exercise by calling everyone together. What have they learned about their partners? Did they find it easier to share or to listen and why? How could they see their partner was truly interested in what they had to say?



## Hand-out: It's raining questions

- 1.If you ever become a parent, what kind of parent would you like to be?
- 2.Describe your room, what do you like best about it?
- 3.What age would you like to be and why?
- 4.If you were in charge of our sports club, what would you like to change and why?
- 5.If you could give all of the club's trainers/coaches some serious advice on how to interact with youth players, what advice would you give them?
- 6.Why do you think that sometimes kids can be mean to other kids?
- 7.How do you think your life will be when you grow up?
- 8.What should all grown-ups know about how it feels to be as old as you are?
- 9.What do you worry about sometimes and how do you stop worrying?
- 10.Describe something kind you did for someone else during this last week.
- 11.Describe something that others sometimes do which makes you mad or sad.
- 12.Whom do you admire and why?
- 13.What do you like to do during your free time?
14. If you would receive 1.000 euros and you would have to give half of it to someone in your family, who would you give it to and what for?
- 15.If you could travel to any location or place in the world, where would you go first and why there?





## Hand-out: It's raining questions

- 1.If you could spend one afternoon with someone famous, who would you choose and why?
- 2.If you would have to leave your home forever in great haste and you could only take 3 things with you, what would you take?
- 3.Name three things you are thankful for
- 4.Do you feel it is ever okay to lie and why or why not?
- 5.If you could pick out another name for yourself, how would you call yourself, and why that name?
- 6.Name something you would really like to do before you grow old.
- 7.How do you prepare yourself for an important game/match?
- 8.What do you want to be when you grow up and why?
- 9.What are you proud of? And what is it that makes it feel so important to you?
- 10.Which characteristics do you find important or appealing?
- 11.What is your favourite movie or television series and why?
- 12.What do you like to eat? What makes it one of your favourites?
- 13.If you could paint your hair in any colour of the rainbow, which colour would you pick and why?
- 14.Imagine you are free to redecorate your room entirely, what would your room look like?
- 15.If you could be the boss of your school for one day, what would you change or do?
- 16.What are your first or best/fondest memories?
- 17.Describe your most precious possession and why you would hate losing it.



*Social  
skills*

# How can I help you?



This exercise is meant to teach young players how they can support someone else and strengthen their ability to deal with negative emotions of team members. This exercise is especially suited during the after care process of an incident.

**Goal:** Help players to deal with the emotions of others  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed

# Exercise: How can I help you?

## Explanation:

Start the exercise by asking a couple of questions to the team:

- Can you know how someone else is feeling? How can you know for sure?
- How can we notice if a team member feels unhappy or left out?
- How can we cheer someone up? How do cheer yourself up?

By introducing roleplay, players learn to use the ideas just mentioned in practice. Ask your team to split up in pairs. One of them pretends to feel sad/mad and the other tries to cheer them up. Let them switch roles after a couple of minutes.

Let the team talk about what solutions worked best for them. What cheered them up?

Listen to what they say, ask them how they are feeling, look at their face and body language, watch what they do.

Looks sad, doesn't smile or laugh when others do, doesn't make eye contact, or isolates themselves from the team.

Ask questions, involve them with a joke, sing, dance, give them a hug, run, ask them to join you, say something kind.



# Find someone who...



This exercise helps teams to get to know each other even better and stimulates the development of their social skills at the same time.

- Goal:** Get to know each other and develop the ability to listen actively and start conversations
- Duration:** 20 minutes
- Materials:** Bingo cards, pens

## Exercise: Find someone who...

### Explanation:

Collect pieces of information about all of your players, things that are fun, surprising, or interesting to know. The easiest way to obtain this is by asking their parents or caregivers to share something about their child with you. Write 11 of these fun facts on your bingo card. You can even insert facts that apply to several players at the same time.

Hand out the bingo cards and tell your players that they have to find the person that goes with each fact.

You can make this exercise more challenging by maximising the number of questions they can ask each player, making sure they have to ask their questions in a clever manner to get their bingo's. They are not allowed to ask each other for help or hints nor are they allowed to ask a teammate to tell them which box describes them.

If they find a player that matches one of the eleven facts, they can write their name in that box. They can call out bingo as soon as they have matched all facts with individual players.

It is intended that you help your players along by coaching them during the game. Help them come up with clever tactics and questions and stimulate them to reach out to all of their other teammates.

The goal of the game lies in the interactions and not so much in who is ready the fastest. End the game by sharing which player is linked to each box.



Hand-out: Bingo card



# What are you saying?



This exercise teaches players that how others respond to you and how you respond to others is not only about the words we use but also about what our body language is saying.

**Goal:** Learn to recognise body language  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed



# Exercise: What are you saying?

## Explanation:

Tell the team that you are going to play a game called "what are you saying". The game has two variations and the team is going to be playing them both.

During the first round, everyone is allowed to use their voice. During the second round, they are only allowed to communicate by using their facial expressions and body language. Not a single sound is permitted.

### Round 1

Line your players up and whisper a sentence in the ear of the first player. If you work with a larger team, create rows of 10 players each. Each player listens to the sentence and whispers that same sentence in the ear of the person standing next to them (or behind them). The last player in line, calls out the sentence and the team sees if the sentence they heard is the same as the original. Change the sequence of the line and let the first player choose a long sentence to pass on to their teammates.

After that, tell the players that they will proceed to play the same game but that they will not pass on a sentence but by expressing something with their body language instead.

### Round 2

Ask the players to form a new line. Only the first player in line should face you, the rest of the players should be facing the opposite direction, thus having turned their backs to you. Only when a player gets tapped on the shoulder, are they allowed to turn around.

Start the game by portraying an emotion or profession (or something simple) to the first player in line. As soon as the player thinks they've got it, they give you the thumbs up. Then they turn around, tap the player behind them on their shoulder, and repeat the movements themselves. Proceed until the last player has seen the movements and signals they understand what it means. Ask them to come forward, give their own interpretation through playing out the word(s) and see if the other players recognise its meaning. Repeat the process or make it more difficult by acting out a scene from daily life.

End the exercise by bringing your team together and discussing the experience. It is important that they understand the influence of body language. Have they experienced situations in which someone said one thing but clearly meant something else and they knew so by looking at their body language? What did they do? And how do you determine what someone truly feels or thinks?



# Buddy's



This exercise is meant to stimulate players to be attentive towards each other and show prosocial behaviour.

**Goal:** Learning how to give positive feedback  
**Duration:** Variable  
**Materials:** Name cards

# Exercise: Buddy's

## Explanation:

*This exercise can be used during each game or one can start by doing this exercise only once a month and build it up.*

Give everyone a name card, holding the name of one of their teammates. Let them read the name on the card and hand the card back to you again after doing so.

Explain to them that, during the game, they will be their buddy. As their buddy, they are responsible for cheering that teammate on and giving their buddy positive feedback.

Are you players unfamiliar with the word positive Feedback? Positive feedback stands for telling your buddy about the good, positive, and fun things you've seen them do, or by giving them a tip on how they could do something even better next time. If they give out a tip, make sure they do so by following Top! Tip. Top!

That means that they give out a compliment, tell how they could do even better next time (your tip), and end with another compliment.



# *Skillfully kind*



This exercise stimulates the moral development of players by setting up positive interactions between players. The exercise is most effective when coaches and trainers participate. Parents and caregivers can also be invited to join in.

<b>Goal:</b>	Stimulate moral development
<b>Duration:</b>	Variable
<b>Materials:</b>	Hand-out

## Exercise: Skillfully kind

### Explanation:

Give your players the hand-out “Skillfully Kind” at the end of your practice.

Tell them you have prepared a challenge for them. Everyone who succeeds to fulfill this challenge can give you a training exercise of one minute (you can also offer them a different reward).

The only rule of the challenge is that they have to provide evidence of completing at least 3 of the tasks within this challenge. This can be done by taking a picture when you complete the task or by having someone signing their name under the task if they witnessed you doing so.



# Hand-out: Skillfully kind

Give a big smile to  
10 strangers at the  
club.

Open the door for  
someone else.

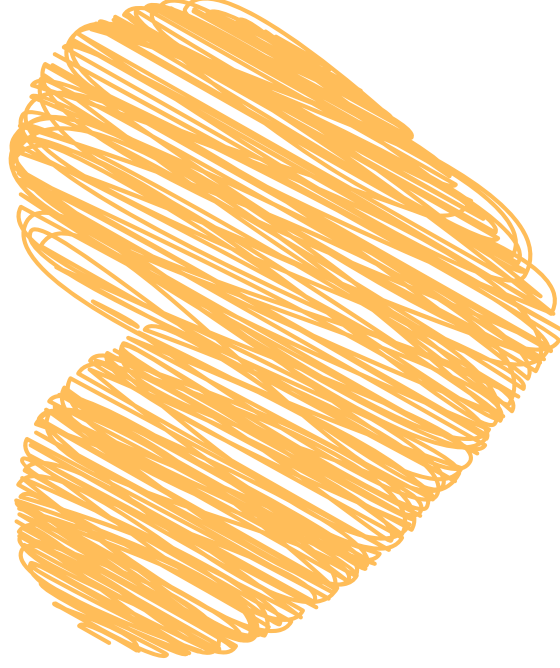
Do a chore around  
the house without  
being asked to do so  
to help out.

Choose your own  
good deed.



Write a kind card  
or note to someone  
and secretly put it  
in their bag or  
backpack.

Learn to say: have a  
great game in  
another language.



Write down two  
traits you have that  
make you feel proud  
about who you are.

Surprise and elder  
with a bouquet of  
flowers (feel free to  
pick some from  
your garden.)

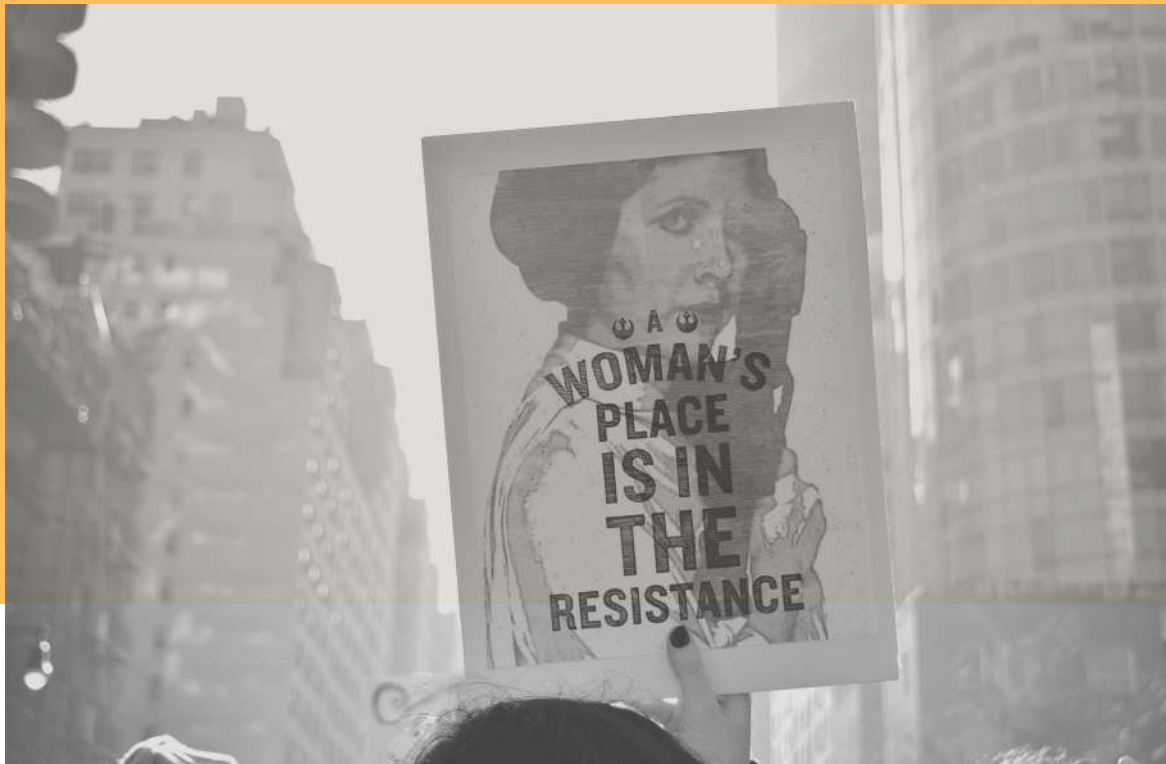
Compliment 3 people  
sincerely about  
something.

Ask someone, who  
you normally  
wouldn't ask, about  
their day.

Write a thank you  
note to your coach,  
trainer or teacher  
and hand it to them.

Make small talk  
with a shop  
assistant when  
grocery shopping.

# Respect



This exercise teaches younger players how to be respectful towards their teammates and people at the club.

**Goal:** Stimulate moral development  
**Duration:** 10 minutes  
**Materials:** Respect cards

# Exercise: R E S P E C T

## Explanation:

Respect can be a difficult concept to grasp, what does it mean to be respectful?

It is easier for youth players to learn respectful behaviour by seeing and experiencing it. Use the respect cards in support of this lesson.

Let players play out various scenes in smaller groups with the help of the respect cards.

Players can switch roles and play out scenarios with one or more of their teammates. When they finish a scenario, they are to discuss it together. How did the solutions play out? Were they respectful? What could they have done differently?

As a coach, you can support their learning by helping them come up with different solutions. Talk with your team about what respect looks like in daily life and on the field/courtlike and let them use the most popular examples during their role-play.

You can also flip the exercise and give out respect cards to players who show the actual behaviour you are looking for.

Use the following cards in support of this exercise:





## RESPECT cards

### RESPECT

Helping another player who has fallen down, get back up.

### RESPECT

Saying "thank you" when someone offers you something

### RESPECT

Throwing your trash in the bin

### RESPECT

Listening to your trainer when they explain an exercise

### RESPECT

Congratulate your opponent with a match played well

### RESPECT

Take someone else's wishes or needs into account

### RESPECT

Showing up on time for practice or a game

### RESPECT

Offering the opponent something to drink during and after the game/match

### RESPECT

Motivate and cheer for your teammates

# RESPECT kaartjes

## RESPECT

Help the trainer set up exercises and clean up after practice

## RESPECT

Wait patiently for your turn

## RESPECT

Take a stand for someone who is treated wrongly

## RESPECT

Actively involving someone when they are being (or feel) excluded

## RESPECT

Ask if you can help someone if they look like they might need it

## RESPECT

Help a team mate if they have difficulty with a move or tactic

## RESPECT

## RESPECT

## RESPECT

# Make a fist



This exercise shows the effect of various communication techniques.

**Goal:** Develop communication skills  
**Duration:** 10 minutes  
**Materials:** Instructional cards

## Exercise: Make a fist

### Explanation:

Divide the team into pairs. Give one of the players the first instructional card and the other player the second one. They are not allowed to look at the cards of any of the other players nor allowed to tell what is on their card. You can also give every player a number (1 or 2) and give them their instructions separately. Then let them follow up on their instructions.

*Most players with the first instruction will try to pull the fist of their teammate open by force.*

Afterward, ask all the players, who received the instruction to open the fist, which techniques they used to complete the task they were given.

How many players asked their teammates to open their fists kindly and did they do so in a kind and patient manner? Why did they or why didn't they?

What lesson did they learn from the challenge?

Your fellow player is going to make a fist. You **HAVE** to open their fist.

Make a fist. Your partner will try to open your fist. **DON'T** ever let them open your fist unless they ask you to do so patiently and respectfully.



*Flexibility*

# Everyone aboard



This simple exercise helps teams to collaborate together and to solve challenging situations together.

- Goal:** Stimulate (mental) flexibility  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** A very long rope (some music is optional)

# Exercise: Everyone aboard

## Explanation:

Ty the two ends of the rope together and create a large circle with the rope. The circle should be big enough for the who team to sit in it.

Invite the whole team to take a seat inside the circle. Then congratulate them for collaborating and tell them that you are happy to see that they could all sit inside the circle together.

Ask them if they are up for a challenge and ask them to exit the circle. Release the rope and narrow the circle (not too much). Invite the players to join each other in the circle. As soon as they made this happen, you congratulate them again for working together. Tell them you will challenge them even further.

Again, narrow the circle and repeat the process until your team starts to have difficulties fitting into the circle together.

The goal of this exercise is to get your players to work together and have them collaborate in order to find creative solutions for this challenge (they can sit on each other's necks, carry one another, etc). During the exercise itself, you can encourage their thinking process by asking questions to guide them in the right direction.

Conclude the exercise by sharing what you've seen (what did you notice) and ask them to share their own feedback with you and the rest of the team.



# Numbers



This exercise helps players adapt to changes.

**Goal:** Stimulate (mental) flexibility  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed



# Exercise: Numbers

## Explanation:

This exercise can be used on a regular basis during practice and has three different versions.

### Version 1:

Let players execute an individual exercise on the field and call out a number with varying intervals. If the players hear the number, they have to form groups as quickly as possible consisting out of the exact same size as that number. If players fail to do so (or choose the players who took the longest) they are taken out of the challenge.

### Version 2:

Connect an exercise/ move to certain numbers. For example:

1. Run across the field/around the court turning clockwise
2. Run across the field/around the court counterclockwise
3. Do 3 push-ups
4. Do 4 burpees

Let them start at a slower pace and call out different numbers, you can speed up the intervals or extend the number of exercises you use as you go along.

### Version 3:

This version helps players learn to collaborate by watching each other's body language.

The players call out a number taking turns. The goal is to see how far they can get. Each number has to be called out by a different player, spontaneously. The player calling out a number appoints the next player by using their body language.

The rules of this game are as followed:

1. Only one player can call out a number.
2. They are not allowed to plan the sequences in advance.
3. If two or more players call out a number at the same time, they have to start all over again.
4. They can't point to each other.
5. They can't call out or whistle.

Discuss how the team experienced the exercise, how can they use what they learned during a game/match? What signals did they catch? How can they use body language to their advantage?



# Chaos training



This exercise helps players to accept changes and think on their feet.

**Goal:** Stimulate (mental) flexibility  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Cones, balls and goals

# Exercise: Chaos training

## Explanation:

This exercise can be used on a regular basis during practice and has three different versions.

### Version 1:

During this exercise, the team is divided into two groups. These two groups will play a game against each other. After three minutes the conditions of the game will change by adding another ball to the game. Because of this, the players will all have to adjust quickly. Besides the adaptability this requires from each player, it also requires them to communicate together about using a new tactic.

*Make sure to add the ball during the game (the game will not be paused).*

### Version 2:

During this exercise, the team is divided into two groups. Each group gets a side of the field/court to defend. After three minutes, the coach or trainer calls out and tells the groups to change sides. Again, three minutes later, have them switch sides again.

*Switching sides happens while continuing the game.*

### Version 3:

During this exercise, the team is divided into two groups. These groups will play against each other. Every player gets a number (between 1 and 5). Start by putting numbers 1, 2, and 3 together in one group and 3, 4, and 5 in the opposing group. During the game, you call out two numbers (between 1 and 5). Everyone with those numbers switches teams. Because of the changes, everyone has to adapt quickly.

Ask your players how they experienced the exercise afterward. Do they know what the goal of the exercise was?

Make sure to explain that changing the circumstances of the game, helps them develop flexibility and adaptability. Also, not only requiring the individual to adapt but asking the entire team to adapt together, strengthens their ability to collaborate as a team.



# *I follow you*



This exercise teaches players to adapt to changes by responding to each other.

**Goal:** Stimulate (mental) flexibility  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Pencils and paper

# Exercise: I follow you

## Explanation:

The following exercise is fairly simple and consists out of three rules:

1. Draw one line or figure per turn
2. Don't talk to your partner
3. You can't erase or ignore the line or figure that your partner has drawn

Divide the players into pairs. One of the players starts by thinking of a drawing they would like to create and starts by sketching the first line or shape. For instance, if they think of drawing a house, they start by creating a square or triangle.

Without discussing ideas, their partner looks at the shape or line and thinks of something they could draw, using that shape or line. They continue the drawing by adding a second shape or line to the drawing. The other player then takes over and continues. They create a complete drawing together by adding something one line or shape at a time.

The players will have to adjust their plans/ideas based upon what their partner adds to their drawing. Their previous ideas might not make sense anymore.

Have them discuss how they experienced the exercise. How did it feel to adjust their ideas or plans during the course of the exercise? What was the end result?



*Setting  
goals*

# Show some muscle



This exercise teaches players to think flexibly and supports the development of their analytical skills regarding their personal goals.

- Goal:** Stimulate analytical capabilities  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Dumbbells and examples of exercises meant for the arms

## Exercise: Show some muscle

### Explanation:

This is a low-key exercise that can be used during practices that focus on muscle strength or fitness. Start by asking your players "how do we develop strong arm muscles?"

Let your players share their ideas. Then proceed by showing them an exercise meant to train a specific muscle or muscle group in your arms.

Ask your players if they think they would get super muscular and strong arms if they would repeat that same movement 50 times a day. Most youth players will confirm that it would.

Proceed by showing them a number of exercises that focus on different muscle groups in the arms. Explain that, to get strong arms, they will have to train different muscles and that it is, therefore, very important to do different types of exercises.

Show some of the exercises again and explain to them which muscles are trained by each of them. Then let them experience the difference themselves.

Continue by explaining to them that there are many ways to accomplish a goal and that many goals - like improving your condition or strengthening your body- ask for a combination of different tactics and exercises to reach those goals. Coming up with different ways to achieve something, in essence, requires flexible thinking.

End the lesson by asking players how they can use their flexible thinking to reach their personal goals.





# 3 stars and a wish



Deze simpele oefening laat spelers focussen op hun sterkten in het spel maar leert hen eveneens daaraan een doel verbinden.

**Goal:** Develop self-confidence and introduce goal setting  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Hand-out, pens, and markers

# Exercise: 3 stars and a wish

## Explanation:

Distribute the hand-out “3 stars and a wish” and ask each player to write down 3 things they are good at (sports-related).

Help younger players along by giving some examples: reading the game, work with others, perseverance. If players find it difficult to come up with three things, ask their teammates if they can offer some input to help them along.

As soon as all of the players have found their 3 stars, they have to think about what their wish is. The wish is something they would like to get better at (again sports-related).

Let them fill it in as specifically as they can be: "I want to improve my ability to keep my position during the game".

## Alternative:

*This version might be more fitting for more mature players.*

Let the player write down two personal goals that are tied to their sport. Note that is important to explain to them how they can formulate a goal properly; SMART: Specific, Measurable, Relevant, Attainable, and Time-specific.

As soon as they have formulated two SMART goals, the coach or trainer evaluates all of the chosen goals to see if they are all task-oriented. When needed, the coach or trainer helps players to adjust their goals to make sure each of them is task-oriented and SMART.

When everyone has set their goals, they all answer the following questions:

1. This goal is important to me because.....
2. The steps I will take to reach this goal are:

You can repeat to exercise to establish team goals too, use the hand-out "team goals" to do so.



# Hand-out: 3 stars and a wish

I am pretty good at:



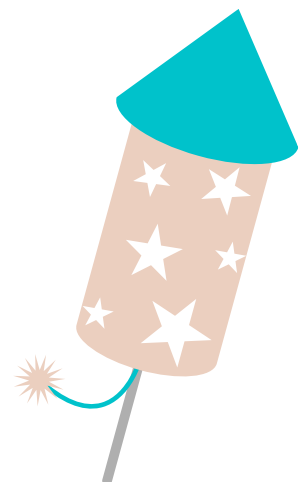
Think of something you haven't mastered yet and would really like to learn:

What is it that you wish to achieve? What would you like to master or improve?

*I did it!!!!!!*

Come up with a  
PLAN for HOW you  
will achieve your  
wish.

Divide your plan into  
different STEPS  
and write down what  
every step entails.  
Start at the bottom  
and work your way  
to the top.



# Hand-out: Team goals



Team:

*Team goal*

*Planned steps*

*We will achieve this when:*

.....

.....

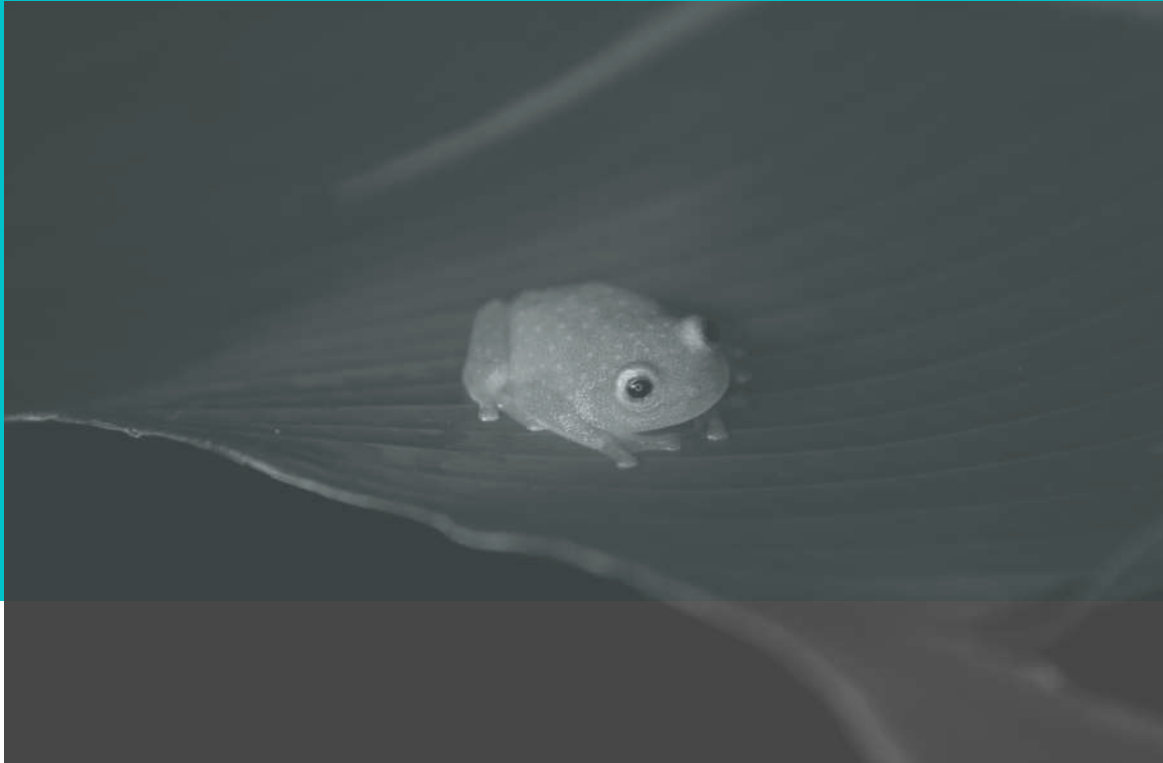
.....

.....

.....

*Signed by the whole team:*

# Setting Mini-goals



This exercise is a perfect way to introduce the principle of goal setting.

**Goal:** Introduce goal setting  
**Duration:** 5 minutes  
**Materials:** None needed

# Exercise: Setting mini-goals

## Explanation:

Ask each player to come up with a small goal for the upcoming practice. They can come up with something themselves or ask their parents/caregivers for support.

Before you let them answer the question, let them know what exercises you have planned for the upcoming practice. This will help them adjust their goal to the exercises that have been chosen already, making their goals achievable.

When practice starts, every player shares their mini-goal with the rest of the team while all others listen carefully.

Some mini-goal examples:

- I want to offer three good assists during the end game.
- I want to give positive feedback to 4 or more players during practice
- I want to be the fastest at the sprinting exercise at the end of practice

Reflect on the goals after practice. Did everyone reach their goal? What made them successful (or not)?

What can they do next time to make sure to reach their goal?

Try to emphasise the value of goal setting. Even in daily life, setting goals can be very beneficial.

A good example is: "Today I will make my last two assignments of my math homework half an hour before having dinner".

Discuss the possible advantages of setting goals with your team. How will it help them?



# Drawing circles



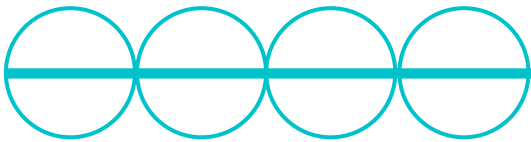
This exercise teaches players to concentrate on a task while under pressure.

- Goal:** Practice task-related attention and how to deal with the pressure to perform
- Duration:** 10 minutes
- Materials:** Pens and paper

# Exercise: Drawing circles

## Explanation:

Give every player a piece of paper and a pen. The aim is to let the players draw four circles next to each other and set a horizontal stripe through all four circles.



For every series they complete, the player receives 1 point. The exercise consists out of 3 rounds of 30 seconds each. All players start as soon as the coach/trainer gives the signal.

1. Who's the best? During this round, the players try to obtain the highest score possible. Discuss the results as a group.
2. Improve yourself. During the second round, the player tries to improve their score from the first round.
3. Relax and have fun. During the last round, the players perform the exercise without a goal or mission. Tell the team you are doing it for fun and as sort of a cool-down. Make a joke before you give the start signal.

Explain to the team that some players perform better when there is a competitive element present. Other players perform at their best when they have a self-oriented goal set. And others perform best when they are relaxed and having fun.

Proceed by asking all of your players to look at their own performances, what was their best round? And why do they think that they did best in that specific round? Which round produced the best (best looking) circles?

End the exercise with the question of what they learned about themselves through this exercise.





*Perspective  
development*

# *This is how it felt*



This exercise is suited for players of all ages. Just make sure that all the clips or stories are attuned to the ages of the players within the team. It is highly recommended to use stories or clips that match the sports environment or the social environment of the club. Use concrete examples of certain social situations. Youth players develop their empathy by putting themselves in the place of the characters in the shared stories/clips.

- Goal:** Develop the empathic skillset  
**Duration:** Variable  
**Materials:** A screen, various clips or short stories and, pens and paper

# Exercise: This is how it felt

## Explanation:

Sit the players down (comfortably) to watch or listen to the story or clip you chose. Afterward, ask them to pick out one of the characters from the story or clip and answer the following three questions:

1. what happened to your character?
2. how did your character feel when that happened to them?
3. what did your character need or want?

Discuss every character as a group or divide larger teams into smaller groups based on the characters they chose.

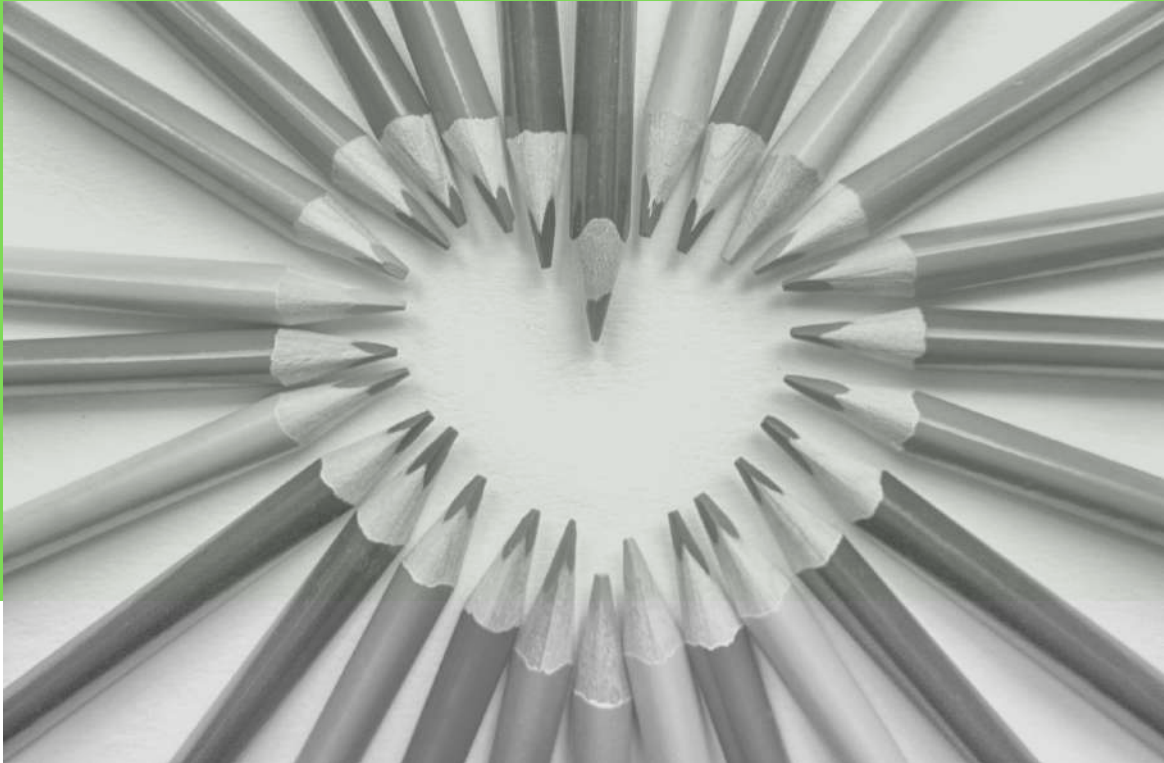
*Depending on the age group of your team, you can repeat the process or break it up into one session a month or per quarter.*

## Suggestions:

- About exclusion:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOMbySJTKpg>
- About working together:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4duPBWzf46E>
- About prejudice:  
<https://vimeo.com/152985022>
- About respect:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hgNwjTLMRw>



# The same yet different



This exercise is meant to give players a moment to reflect on the fact that we all have similarities in our lives but at the same time, we also have a lot of things that make us unique and that both of these elements make life interesting. The exercise, therefore, stimulates the development of their self-identity and the room for self-expression within the team.

- Goal:** Develop an appreciation for both the similarities and differences between people
- Duration:** 20 minutes
- Materials:** None needed

# Exercise: The same yet different

## Explanation:

Bring the team together and tell them you would like to talk about the many ways we resemble each other and at the same time have our own experiences and qualities that make us unique.

Proceed with some simple examples:

- Some kids are big, others are smaller
- Some kids run fast, other kids are slower but can run longer
- Some kids like to play offence, others prefer to play defence
- Some kids grow up in a large family, others in small families
- Some kids enjoy the hustle and bustle of life, others need to have moments of peace and quiet (alone time)
- Some kids are outgoing and love to chat with everyone, others prefer to listen and observe especially around strangers or in larger groups.

Ask them if they would like to have a team filled with teammates, exactly the same as they are. Emphasise that this might sound fun and easy but that it would actually become difficult and boring quite quickly. Why would that be?

You would never try out anything new nor step out of your comfort zone, everyone would want to play in the same position, every race or match would end up in a tie and you would all grow up liking the same person, wanting to have the same job (add some arguments that would be relevant to your team).

Proceed by asking them the value of differences in a group or team. You will find that many players have amazing reasons lined up already. If they have difficulties with coming up with valid arguments, you can help them along by providing some hints or tips: different talents create a stronger and more all-round team, different opinions create a better plan, different experiences enable us to support each other and learn from one another, etc (give concrete examples whenever you can).

When you come to think of it; how strange it is that some people attack others for being different from them as if these differences make them weaker or bad while it is actually those differences that make us stronger together.



Proceed by asking your players what they all have in common. Again, you can help them by offering some examples: all children need to eat, play, grow, need love and care, and get sad or insecure when someone bullies them.

Summarise your talk by stating that we can all agree that differences are something to cherish and that no one likes to be excluded or be undervalued just because they are in some ways, different from us.

End the discussion by giving out compliments to the teammates for being so open and sharing their thoughts.



# *In every colour*



This exercise is ideal for camps or team outings. Note that this exercise is best suited for younger youth players between the ages of 6 to 8.

**Goal:** Appreciate diversity  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Coloured markers, pencils and/or crayons and two sheets of paper per player

## Exercise: In every colour

### Explanation:

Hand out 2 sheets of paper and let them select one marker, pencil, or crayon.

Ask them to create a drawing on their first sheet of paper. As soon as they are done with their drawing, let them make a second one on the other sheet of paper. This time, they can use all the markers, pencils or crayons they want.

As soon as all the players have finished both of their drawings ask them:

- Which of your drawings do you like the best?
- Why is that drawing the prettiest?
- Which of these drawings would you like to put up in our clubhouse or at home?

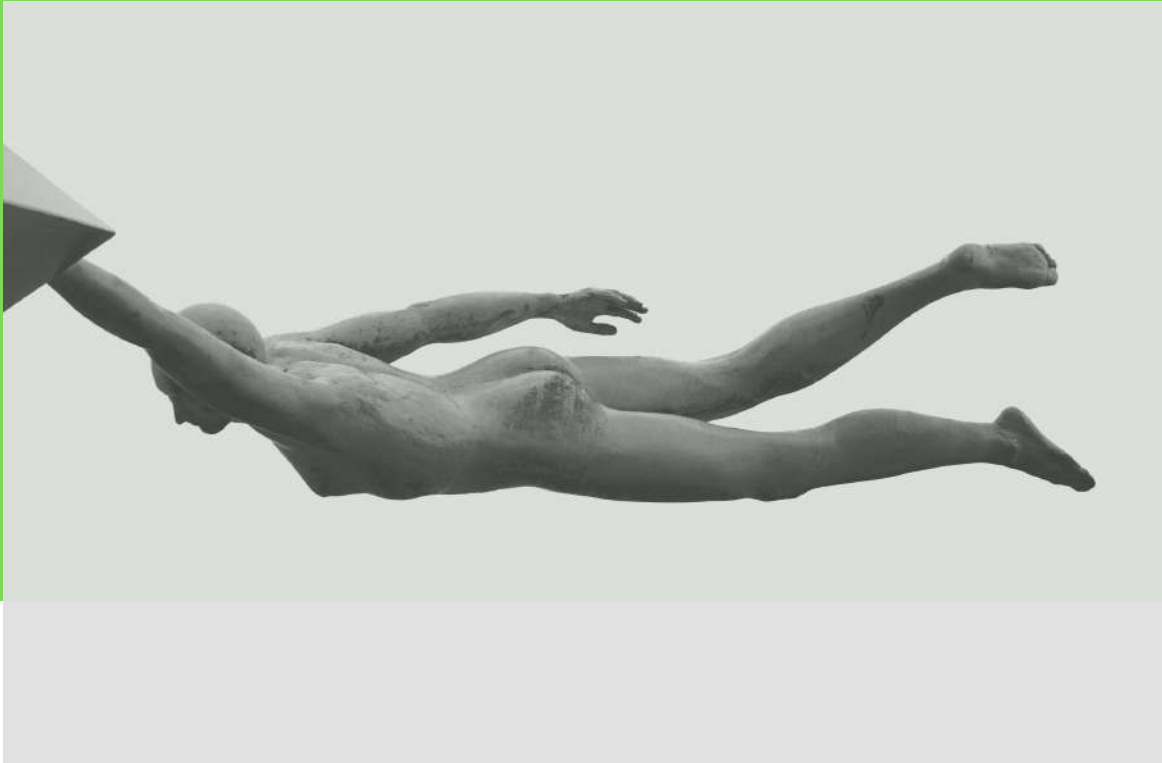
Most players will choose the drawing for which they were able to use all of the different colours.

You can respond to that by saying: "how boring would our world be if we were all the same, just like the drawing we did with only one colour. The differences between us are just like the colours in the world, endless, colourful, fun, special and exciting!"





# How do you look at it?



This exercise teaches youth players that we can perceive or experience something in different ways, yet both be right. Because concepts like duality and perspective-taking can be challenging to understand for younger age groups, these concepts are introduced in a simple and concrete manner.

**Goal:** Introduce the concepts of duality and perspective  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Referee spray, crayons, or a large sheet of paper with a marker

## Exercise: How do you look at it?

### Explanation:

*If you decide to use a sheet of paper, write a large 6 on it, then roll the piece of paper up.*

Divide the players into two groups and place each group on the opposite side of each other. Make sure they face each other and that there are at least 4 meters in between them. Lay down the sheet of paper in the middle, making sure one group sees a 6 and the other group will see it as a 9. Ask everyone what is written on the piece of paper you just laid down. One group will shout out a 6 and the other group a 9.

Ask one of the groups who is right and why. Then let both groups switch positions.

Tell your players that you came up with this exercise after hearing about an old legend from the middle-east, about two princes who were at war with each other for over a decade.

The two princes were from neighbouring regions and had been like brothers since the day they were born. As they grew up, they did not only become friends but grew up working together for the sake of their own countries.

During a negotiation about the price one prince would pay the other, they got into a huge fight. One prince looked at the piece of paper, just like you are now (point to one of the two groups), which held the number they agreed upon and said he owed the other 6 pieces of gold while the other prince got furious and said he was trying to fool him as they both agreed on 9 pieces of gold. The argument led to a war and destroyed both countries. The princes fought for years before they agreed to negotiate peace for the sake of their country. A young servant, who had heard about the fight from years before, decided to sit the princes at the same table, put down the piece of paper and then turn it around for them to see. For the first time, both princes realised that they both had had a different perspective and both had been right and wrong at the same time. They reconciled their differences and lived the rest of their lives in peace.

Ask the players if they have had a similar experience and let them share it with the rest of the group. How could these situations be prevented? What could the princes have done differently to prevent their fight?

Reflect with the team on what they've learned from this experience.



## Optional extension:

*If afterward, you sense that some players have not yet fully grasped its meaning, follow-up a couple of weeks later with the following exercise:*

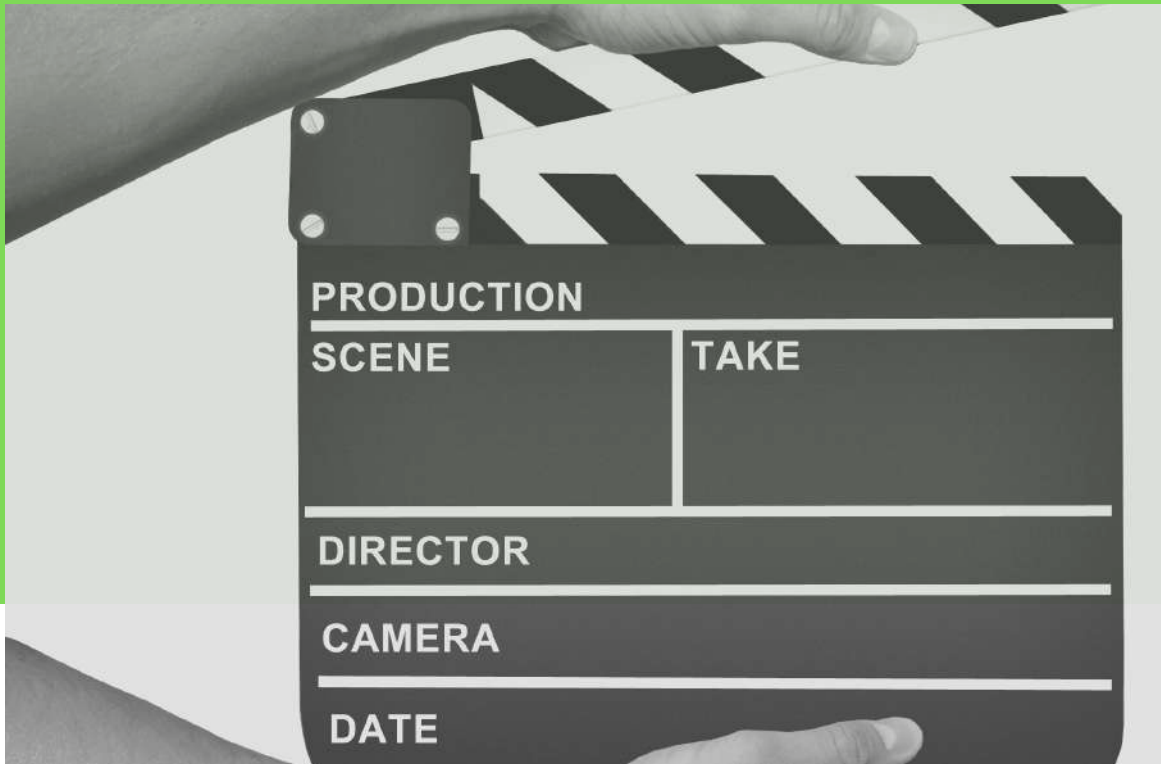
*Put all players against each other (back to back) and ask them to write down what they see (in silence). Let them switch papers. Are their views the same? Where do their differences come from? Explain that the answers aren't wrong, just different.*

*Let both players change position. What do they see now? Do their surroundings change? If not, what does? Can you see something from exactly the same perspective as someone else?*

*Continue by explaining that everyone has their unique perspective. This means that while one notices a poster on a pole or a hole in the ground, someone else will notice a tree or a cloud in the sky. No moment is the same and we can't always know what the other has seen or experienced because our perspective is unique to us.*



# *I can get into character*



During this exercise, players will learn to inquire about and understand the perspective of others. At the same time, they will be stimulated to reflect on their own convictions.

You could choose to divide the exercise into three consecutive exercises.

**Goal:** Strengthen the emotional intelligence  
**Duration:** 45 minutes or 3x 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Screen, an internet connection, hand-outs and pens

# Exercise: I can get into character

## Explanation:

Provide all players with a copy of the hand-out.

Watch one of the clips and give them 10 minutes to answer all of the questions. Discuss the answers per clip with the entire team before continuing to the next.

1st clip:

<https://youtu.be/1lo-8UWhVcg>

2nd clip:

<https://youtu.be/JutrLer3k-A>

3rd clip:

[https://youtu.be/38y\\_1EWIE9I](https://youtu.be/38y_1EWIE9I)



# Hand-out: I can get into character

## Questions after watching the first clip:

1. How did the different characters look at what happened?
2. What happened that made Joy see Heron differently?
3. What did Heron do to thank Joy?
4. What is it that sometimes changes the way we feel or think about someone?
5. Have you ever experienced this too: what happened?

## Questions after watching the second clip:

1. What was each character after? What goals did they have?
2. What feelings did each of the characters experience?
3. What made them feel that way?
4. What changed the thoughts of the wrestler?
5. What do you feel when your opinion about someone changes?

## Questions after watching the third clip:

1. What did you think of grandma?
2. What did you think of the young man?
3. What do you think the grandma in the clip is thinking?
4. And what could be the thoughts of the young man?
5. Watch the clip again: how do you feel about the characters now? Did something change? If so, what was it and why did it change?



*Self-knowledge*

# The good in every day!



This is an easy and approachable exercise, usable for any age group. It is most beneficial when the exercise is done before practice or before a game. By sharing positive experiences, the children obtain a more positive mood and because they can share personal experiences, it helps them feel seen and heard by the rest of the team.

**Goal:** Stimulate a positive mindset  
**Duration:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** A whiteboard and marker



# Exercise: The good in every day!

## Explanation:

Instruct all players to create a circle and to share something positive with the person standing on their left (or right). To help them along, there are several sentences they can use to start with:

- What I really like about my life is.....
- What I most look forward to today is.....
- Something good that happened recently.....
- I am really excited about.....
- What made me laugh the loudest this week was....

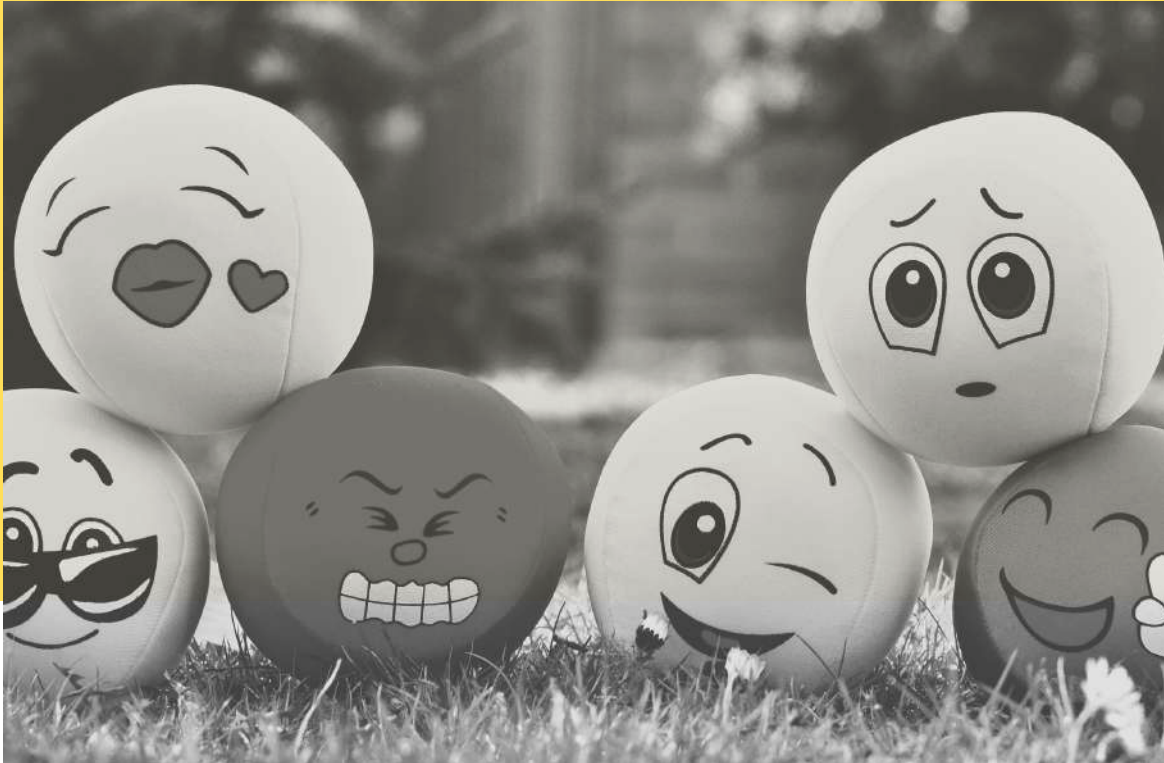
Encourage your players to get creative with their answers. If a player finds it difficult to come up with something, help them by letting them know that something good or positive can be as simple as something good they ate or when they cuddled with their pet.

As soon as all players have shared their positive experiences with their neighbours, refocus their attention. Ask if someone would like to share their story or the story that was shared with them, with the rest. End the exercise by thanking everyone for sharing their stories.

You can repeat the exercise on a weekly or monthly basis. The attention for positive moments gets automatised after a couple of months. This means that the players will focus on the positive experiences in their lives without being aware of doing so. Thus creating a habit that has a positive effect on their wellbeing.



# Emotions



This exercise is suited most for players between the ages of 5 till 8. Through the exercise, players learn to express how they feel, recognise emotions and develop their emotional vocabulary. It also helps coaches and trainers to get a clearer picture of how their players are feeling. This enables them to respond to their mental state and offer support.

- Goal:** Develop emotional regulation
- Duration:** First practice 20 minutes, proceeding with 2-5 minutes every week
- Materials:** Laminated Emorie poster, small stickers (give each player their own pattern or type) a mobile phone, and a camera

# Exercise: Emotions

## Explanation:

Start the exercise by creating a list of emotions with your players. What emotions do they know?

As soon as they are happy with the list, ask them to portray each emotion. Who can portray each the best? Photograph each player with one of the emotions from the list.

Tell the players that you will create an emotions scale on a poster. Everyone gets their own sticker and by using the sticker on the poster, before practice starts, they can show their coach/trainer how they are feeling that day at the beginning of practice.

You can pick out a specific emotion each week and take a moment to discuss with the team how you can help or support someone who feels those emotions best.



# My heart



Deze oefening maakt de gevolgen van pesten en het uiten van vooroordelen heel tastbaar voor jeugdspelers. Dit draagt bij aan de ontwikkeling van het zelfbewustzijn.

- Goal:** Create awareness about the consequences of bullying
- Duration:** 20 minutes
- Materials:** Paper hearts (1 per player), A-2 or A-3 sheets (1 per player), glue, pens or pencils

# Exercise: My heart

## Explanation:

Write the following text on top of each sheet: *Before you speak think long and hard, for it is very hard to fix a wrinkled heart.*

Give out a heart to all players. Then ask them to crumple it. They can wrinkle the hearts, stand on them but they can not break or tear them.

As soon as they have done so, ask them to repair the heart and bring it back to its original state. As soon as they are done, ask them if they succeeded to bring it back exactly how it was.

Tell them that "however hard they tried to take out the wrinkles from the heart, it is actually impossible to bring it back exactly the way it was. Some wrinkles will never disappear anymore, no matter how hard we try to repair them".

Bullying has the same effect, we can say we are sorry and we can try to make amends but the other will always be left with wrinkles in their hearts.

Explain to the players that they, and they alone, can decide how to handle the hearts of others.

End the exercise by giving them a sheet of paper and ask them to glue their heart on it. If they want, they can write their own thought around the heart.

Ask them to take the paper with the heart home with them.



# What if I.....



This exercise is meant to give players insight into their ability to affect how they feel. Children often find it difficult to recognise their own emotions and deal with them.

Afterwards, the coaches and trainers can refer to certain behaviours as one of the four emotions mentioned in the hand-out. This will help the players with developing their self-awareness and ability to regulate their emotions.

**Goal:** Develop emotional regulation and self-awareness  
**Duration:** 30 minutes  
**Materials:** Hand-outs

## Exercise: What if I....

### Explanation:

Distribute the hand-out and discuss with the players what the different levels on the hand-out mean and ask them how they can determine when they reach each level.

How do you know if you are feeling calm or angry?

Ask them to talk with a friend (that knows them really well) or with their parent or caregiver about how they can go back from each level to light blue.

Give out the second hand-out " This is how I relax" to help them along. They can fill it in at home.

Ask them to bring a copy of the filled-in exercise the next time they come to practice.



# My ladder of emotions



*Feeling*

*What happens*



**Furious**

I am feeling so mad that I can't hold it in anymore! I will say or do something that I later regret. I feel flustered, scream, yell, cry and want to use my entire body to show I am furious!



**Angry**

I feel terrible as if I am in actual pain. I have difficulty thinking and would really like to express how I feel. My heart is racing, my body is tense and my fists are clenched.



**Frustrated**

I am not getting what I need or want and that makes me feel uncomfortable. If this happens while I am doing something, I really want to walk away. My heartbeat is raising, I feel warm and I am clenching my teeth.



**Unhappy**

I am not feeling happy and feel a bit dissatisfied or uncomfortable. I can snap at others and moan about stuff. The corners of my mouth are pointed downwards.



**Okay**

I feel fine, I am relaxed and calm. My heart beats slowly and my body is relaxed.



**Happy**

I am happy with how things are and I feel light as a feather. I can think clearly and feel like smiling. The corners of my mouth are pointed up and I look forward to doing what I plan to do.



# Hand-out: My ladder of emotions

## Explanations:

People who know you well can often help you fill in this exercise but maybe you are already aware of what works well for you yourself. If so, feel free to complete the following exercise alone. What helps you to feel calm or happy again when you are angry or sad? In other words, how do you reach the blue or green level of the ladder?

It might require some time to try and find out what works for you so take your time and experiment with different ideas before you fill it in.

When I reach **red**:

When I reach **orange**:

When I reach **yellow**:



# Hand-out: This is how I relax

## I distract myself by:

- Writing, drawing, painting, or taking pictures
- Playing an instrument, singing, dancing, or acting
- Taking a long shower or a bath
- Going for a walk, a run, skating, or riding my bike
- Watching television or a movie (a funny one)
- Playing a game
- Cleaning and decluttering my room
- Reading a (comic) book

## I look for support by:

- Talking with someone I trust
- Setting boundaries and saying "no"
- Standing up for myself
- Using humor, joking around with a friend
- Spending time with family or friends
- Cuddling or playing with a pet
- Helping someone
- Practicing situations I find difficult to deal with, with the help of others
- Cheering on others

## Things I can try:

- Write down what relaxes me
- Write down things that cheer me up
- Keep a list of moments that made me happy or feel grateful
- Come up with different solutions for challenges I face
- Write down and carry around a quote of someone that inspires me
- Act flexibly
- Create a list of my personal goals and hang that list in my room
- Do exactly the opposite of what my negative feelings are telling me to do
- Make a list of pro's and con's
- Reward myself with a job well done
- Make a list of my strong traits and talents



# Hand-out: This is how I relax

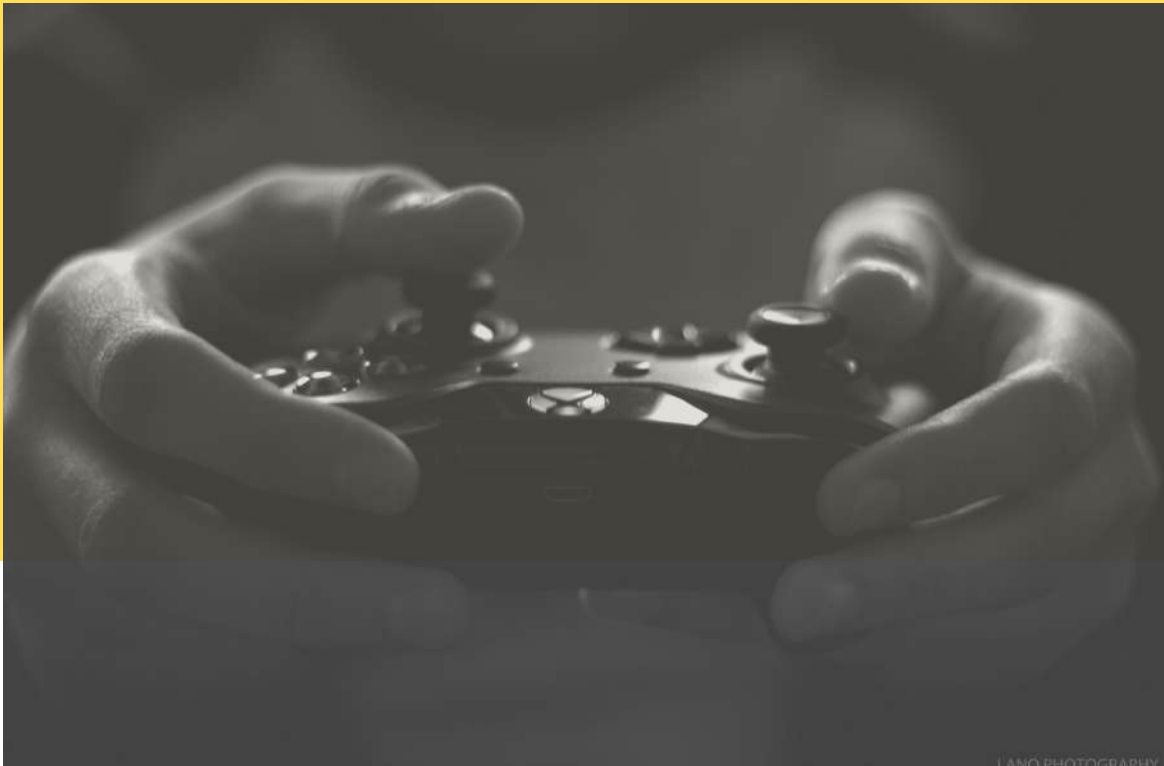
## This helps me to stay content and healthy:

- Practice my favourite sport and repeating exercises
- Letting of steam (scream in a pillow or beating it)
- Crying
- Laughing
- Cuddling
- Making sure I get enough sleep
- Eat healthily
- Creating a predictable schedule, so I know what to expect each week
- Practice breathing in and out deeply
- Enjoy nature
- Meditate or pray
- Join a good cause: helping others will make us feel happier too
- Make sure I have enough "down" time
- Stand up for myself
- Make my own decisions and stay true to who I am
- Share my feelings
- Celebrate my mistakes and then learn from them
- Ask for help when I need it
- Sing my favourite songs and dance to them if I feel like it

We are certain you have some great and valuable additions for this list so write them down wherever you want!



# What do I have control over?



This exercise helps players to become aware of the things they have control over and accept what they can't control. Coaches or trainers can either choose to limit this exercise to their sports or extend it to life in general.

- Goal:** Develop self-awareness
- Duration:** 20 minutes
- Materials:** A large whiteboard, flip over or an a-2 sheet, and various markers

# Exercise: What do I have control over?

## Explanation:

Call your players together and start the exercise by drawing a large circle in the middle of your sheet of paper. Outside of the circle, in the top corner, write "Things I don't control". Then write "What I do control" inside of the circle.

Tell the players you would like to talk with them about things we control, and can therefore influence, and the things we don't have any control over.

Ask them why they think it would be valuable to learn to recognise what you can and can not change.

The goal of this exercise is that players will come to realise where their power and influence lies. This will help them focus on things that are within their circle of influence. And also that you can tire yourself out by fretting over things you don't have any control over because it will only impact you negatively.

Continue the exercise by filling out the sheet. Ask your players what things are outside of their circle and what things belong within their circle.

Some possible examples: the weather, what others do, how your opponent performs or if they play fairly, what others say, the quality of a referee, how you take care of yourself, how you treat others, how often you train, how you work with others, what sports you do, the ability to read a game, etc.

Afterward, take a picture of the poster the team has made and send it out to all of the parents/caregivers, tell them what the exercise entailed and why it matters. This will enable them to talk with their child about life, control, and letting go.

You can also frame the poster within your canteen, the dressing room, or even around the field or court to create a reminder for the team.



# *This is my saying*



This exercise offers the players the opportunity to choose their own haka or mantra that will center them when they are feeling restless. Having your own mantra, proverb or haka will help regulate emotions and strengthen your sense of self-worth. By doing this exercise with the entire team, the process of having and using a mantra becomes accepted and can strengthen the team's cohesion.

**Goal:** Strengthen self-confidence  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** A ball

# Exercise: This is my saying

## Explanation:

Start the exercise by asking the players if they know what a personal mantra or haka is (choose another term if you think this suits them better). Explain that a mantra is another way of saying a quote or line which you repeat to help you focus on one thought or idea.

A haka is a dance or challenge stemming from the Māori. The group performs a haka together, energised movements, stemming with the feet, and rhythmic short cheers (the mantras).

Ask your players if they know mantras that some professional athletes use to help them focus. Think of: *I am enough, I got this, why not me, why not us, or we are in control.*

Invite your players to come up with a personal mantra that will help them focus during practice. Let them consider their personal values, goals, or challenges.

Ask them to create a mantra that is short, meaningful, and positive: it should let you focus on what you want to do or achieve.

Make sure they feel free to brainstorm together as long as they keep their mantra personal (fitting for them).

When everyone has come up with a mantra, ask everyone to join in on the following group exercise.

Ask the players to create a circle together and join in yourself too. Take a ball into your hands and tell them that whoever has the ball, should call out their mantra while looking at the player who passed them the ball. Start by calling out yours and pass the ball to a player. Make sure everyone receives the ball at least three times to break any possible tensions.

Talk with the group about how they felt saying their mantra out loud. And how was it to hear the mantras of other players? How did it affect the vibe? Was their mantra or haka fitting for them or did they get ideas of something that would suit them even better?

Encourage your players to share their personal mantra with you and help them use it during the moments they need focus, stay motivated or keep calm.



# *I won't be distracted*



This exercise helps players gain insight into what stimuli are often distracting them and helps them understand how they can channel their attention to what matters most.

**Goal:** Enhance self-control  
**Duration:** 20 minutes  
**Materials:** Hand-outs and pens



# Exercise: I won't be distracted

## Explanation:

This exercise is ideal when your players are easily distracted during practice, for instance when you explain tactics or technical elements.

The goal of the exercise is not for them to not let them get distracted anymore but to teach them how they can interrupt their process and gain self-control.

It is helpful to determine what distracts each player first. What are their personal distractors? When are they distracted most? Why then? And how do they refocus now?

Their distractors can be stimuli from outside, like birds flying by, their mobile phone, sounds they hear, movements they see. But distraction can also come from the inside out. Think about worries you have, thoughts that keep crossing your mind, lists of things you have to do, daydreaming, etc.

To help them understand and get a grip on their thought process, the handout on the next page will be extremely helpful. This hand-out will also help them talk to their parent/caregiver or other people they know well, about what distracts them and what they could do to refocus on what really matters.

As soon as everyone has finished their lists, have the team choose a word their coaches and trainers can use when one or more team members seem distracted. What would they feel most comfortable with? Is that something like "focus!" or "attention" or with a hand signal? When a word and/or signal has been chosen, players can use it towards each other too.

To make sure the team will stay aware of their ability to refocus, use the "attention" word or signal yourself during games and matches.



# Hand-out: I won't be distracted

## Explanation:

Distraction happens to all of us. While our trainer explains the next exercise or move, we let our minds wander. Or just when your opponents break through, you are daydreaming and their tactic surprises you. While dreaming away or losing attention is not always such a bad thing, there are plenty of moments that our loss of attention is really working against us. Especially if the distraction leads us to miss important moments or hurts our performance.

This is exactly why it is nice to learn and recognise when we are distracted and what we can do to counter it. The schedule below will help us do just that. Ask some of your friends or family members to help you fill it in, do they have any tips or insights that could help?

This distracts me:

Often during:

This comes from  
within/outside of me

This is what I can  
do to refocus: