



SHAKING OFF MISTAKES IN SPORTS

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The only sure way to avoid mistakes while you are playing sports is quite simple: **Do not start playing sports in the first place!**

Every professional athlete in every sport ever played has probably made hundreds if not THOUSANDS of mistakes throughout their amateur and professional sporting careers. Along the way, those athletes have had to develop their own strategies of “**shaking off**” their dropped balls, missed shots, poor throws and false starts to keep their head in the game.

We all agree that making mistakes doesn't feel very good. Our mistakes can physically hurt (like cutting our finger when we are slicing fruit), cause embarrassment (like tripping and falling at school) or tarnish our grades (like turning in a project late.) It is human nature to avoid things that don't feel good. So, we learn to associate mistakes

with bad feelings and then go to great lengths to avoid making them. Makes sense, right?

But, think back to when we were much younger and learning how to sit up, eat food and walk. Our parents will happily remind us of the times we fell over while trying to learn to sit up, tripped and hit our head on the coffee table learning to walk or show us photos of ourselves covered in baby food as we tried to master using the spoon! Despite our bumps, bruises and messes as youngsters, we kept on trying and didn't let our MANY mistakes drag down our motivation to succeed. Unfortunately, somewhere in childhood or early adolescence making mistakes as we learn a new skill becomes

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unacceptable and unexpected. At that point, our challenge is to learn how to pick ourselves up, brush ourselves off and keep on going in life.

BOUNCING BACK FROM OUR SPORTING MISTAKES

First of all, give yourself permission to make mistakes and experiment with new moves or plays while you warm up or during practice. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to be perfect during practice. This is the time to stretch our abilities and try new things.

Develop your own ritual to let go of mistakes you make in games. Some players visualize throwing the previous play in the toilet and flushing it. Other athletes shake their head or clap their hands in an effort to “shake off” the bad play and get rid of it. Many times, players develop their own ritual or visualization that signifies that the previous play (and error) is done and that they are moving forward. Imagine a dog that just got out of the pool and how they shake their head and body for quite a while until they have shaken away that feeling of being wet (which they don't like.) It's these kinds of vivid visualizations that really are helpful in moving past mistakes in a game.

It is very easy to allow your thoughts to get stuck on your game mistake. Develop

some positive self talk or phrases that you can tell yourself to refocus on the game and not dwell on your mistake. Examples of positive self talk could be: “Well, that was my one error of the game!” or “Even professional athletes make the mistake I made just now.” Be sure to remember to take some time after the game to think about and analyze your error so that you can learn from it.

We will probably make millions of mistakes during our lifetime in school, at home, at work and in sports. If we are able to develop our own way of shaking off and learning from those mistakes, we will have more time and energy to enjoy our successes!

HOW PARENTS CAN BEST SUPPORT OUR YOUNG ATHLETE'S MISTAKES

Parents can have a positive impact on their child's ability to work through mistakes (both in sports and in life) in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most powerful (and least used) strategy that parents can try is to share stories of their OWN mistakes as a youth or even as an adult. As parents we usually try to act as if we know the answers to life's questions and always know what to do to solve a problem. However, it is important for our children to hear stories of how we messed



up in school, in sports, with friends. It is important to share how we felt, what we learned from it and how we moved on. This type of sharing also opens up the lines of communication about mistakes so that children feel comfortable talking about their mistakes.

Another way parents can help their young athlete's to refocus after a mistake is to offer up those positive self-statements mentioned above. By doing this we give them an alternative to the negative self-talk that can very easily derail our child's self confidence and focus while they are competing.

By remembering that our children continue to make mistakes after they learn to walk, tie their shoes and ride a bike, parents can still encourage, educate and comfort our older children as they progress through and learn from the mistakes that we all make in life!