

Sport Coach + Resources



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SPORT COACH+ RESOURCES

Impacts of stress on young players' behaviour



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IMPACTS OF STRESS ON YOUNG PLAYERS' BEHAVIOUR

When the brain detects a threat, it engages in a series of automatic, protective responses to stress, these are referred to as flock, freeze, flight and fight.

Threat Response	Description	Response Characteristics	Example in Sport
Flock	The flock response is characterised by joining with others for safety. The brain uses “flock” as a way of assessing a situation according to the reaction of others (“social referencing”), particularly others with enhanced power.	<p>Running to others or joining a group when feeling threatened.</p> <p>Vigilance and constantly scanning the group.</p> <p>Monitoring social cues of others to understand what is going on.</p> <p>Mimicking others' reactions (social contagion) even if it is not how the young player would normally act.</p> <p>Securing the social approval of others.</p>	<p>A young player who is easily distracted or pays significant attention to their peers.</p> <p>A young player who engages in bullying to win the approval of their peers.</p> <p>A young player who joins others in their reactive behaviours, such as fighting, teasing other players, disengaging from the team or ignoring ground rules.</p>

Freeze	<p>The freeze response is the brain and body pausing to gather additional information in order to act in a protective way.</p> <p>The freeze response can be brief or extended, depending on how long it takes to assess the situation. It's like being stuck between two options and trying to decide which way to go.</p>	<p>Panicked, overwhelmed, confused or indecisive. Might appear to be "paralyzed" by the circumstance.</p> <p>Spacing out.</p> <p>Pale skin, loud pounding heart, decrease in heart rate, sense of dread, feeling stiff, heavy, cold, numb.</p>	<p>A young player who says "I can't" before trying any new activity or learning any new skill.</p> <p>A young player who gives up quickly, disengages as soon as the activity is new or challenging</p>
Flight	<p>The flight response is an attempt at protection by getting away from a threat in order to survive.</p>	<p>Constantly moving legs, feet and arms, restless body that will not stop moving, excessively exercising.</p> <p>Dilated eyes, darting eyes, feeling fidgety or trapped, sensation of numbness in extremities.</p>	<p>A young player reacts to a normal stressful event (the referee makes a controversial call) with a disproportionate reaction (stomps off the field and refuses to play).</p>
Fight	<p>The fight response is an attempt at protection and survival by overpowering a threat.</p> <p>In hyper-aroused young people, a fight response may indicate they perceive the threat as severe.</p>	<p>Explosiveness/ aggression, urge to stomp or kick, desire to punch someone or something.</p> <p>Tight jaw or grinding of teeth, crying, glaring at people.</p> <p>Upset stomach.</p>	<p>A young player reacts to a normal stressful event (a foul in football) with a disproportionate reaction (throwing a punch or screaming expletives).</p>



Sport Coach+ is a partnership of the Olympic Refugee Foundation and the IFRC PS Centre to support coaches working with young people (age 10-24) affected by displacement. It aims to provide sport coaches with skills, knowledge and techniques to understand how stressful experiences impact young players, create safe and supportive sport environments, and respond to young players in trauma-informed and healing ways.



Olympic Refugee
Foundation



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