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# Coaches Helping Athletes Past Their Fears

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“How can coaches help athletes past their fears after a mishap, such as a beaning in baseball, being thrown by a horse or falling from a gymnastics apparatus?”**

## PCA Response by Al Adamsen, PCA Trainer – San Francisco Bay Area

Fear – being scared of something or someone – is extreme stress. While athletes may use stress productively, fear is often debilitating, especially for a young person. Fear creates noise in the mind – negative self-talk, for example – which often inhibits, if not paralyzes, performance. Therefore, coaches must use techniques to help young athletes move past fear to a mindset that’s positive, present, and productive.

Some say that removing fear requires athletes to experience the particular situation or occurrence over and over again, creating familiarity and the chance to remove the fear. But in the case of helping a baseball player past a beaning, for example, this would mean throwing fastballs into a kid’s shoulder until he gets used to it, which is not OK. It’s as absurd as someone repeatedly falling off a horse intentionally, or falling off a gym apparatus intentionally.

But you can simulate scenarios and instruct kids on what to do in situations where the accident threatens to re-occur. You can teach them how to turn away from an inside pitch to avoid or reduce its impact. You can teach riders and gymnasts to fall more safely. All these are advisable.

It’s also important to teach a self-care routine, which enables athletes to re-focus after an accident and get ready for the next action. A self-care routine is a set of steps to athletes can take to consciously respond to an unforeseen event.

For example, a self-care routine can look like this after a mishap. 1. Breathe. 2. Acknowledge. 3. Establish intent. 4. Respond appropriately. Breaking the routine into steps like that guides athletes’ self-talk so they exhibit authentic mental toughness and resilience. Athletes can practice the routine in response to anything that may jolt them off center – mishaps, mistakes, taunting by opponents, etc.

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