

## Working with Athletes' Emotions

**Abstract:** During participation in sport, athletes often experience intense emotions, such as frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression. Sport psychology practitioners can help athletes identify and clarify what they are feeling, explore and understand the basis for these feelings, and learn new options for managing them. This workshop will provide an opportunity for the participants to increase their self-awareness, as they examine their own experience with strong emotions. This increased self-awareness can then be used to assist athletes in a similar process.

**Audience Participation-** Think of a recent event in which you had strong feelings. If you don't recall one, think of the last time you got upset about anything.

What was the emotion?

What was your reaction to that emotion?

What was the situation that triggered your emotion?

What did you think was the cause of your emotion?

Was this a familiar experience?

How did you deal with it?

Is there something you would do differently if it happened again?

Is there something in the way of your making that change?

**Language-** Clarify meaning of "feelings" other than "emotion" (intuition, sensation)

"I feel that..." – means think, believe, imagine, suspect, predict

"It is my feeling..." – means opinion, impression, belief, understanding

"I feel like..." – may mean "I want"

**Types-** **Basic-** early in life, physical sensation, range of language – illustrate

**Sadness-** loss; **Fear-** anticipation; **Anger-** not getting what you want;

**Learned-** not as early, physical, less language, with implied meaning:

- guilt (wrongdoing), shame (badness), hurt (worth), embarrassment
- (exposure)

**Complex-** Basic plus- helpless, bored, jealousy, envy, confusion, inadequate.

**General-** uncomfortable, strange, funny, peculiar- ambiguous

**Identifying and Clarifying-** "I don't know what I feel"- can result from discounting, disapproval, or avoidance of negative feelings

**Exploring and Understanding-** a) "trigger/stimulus"- external situation or incident

b) "meaning"- how interpreted- the "explanation"

c) importance- how much impact; part of deeper issue

**Options in Managing-** **Behavioral-** 1. Expressing- Directly- words, actions- venting

- Indirectly- joking, bravado

2. Talking about it- with other or a counselor

3. Suppressing- holding it in; tightening

4. Withdrawing- by choice or as victim

5. Blaming- the other or self

6. Retaliating- "getting even"- sabotage,

**Cognitive-** 1. Shift in perception- i.e., meaning given

2. "Letting go"- acceptance without action

3. Broader perspective- "larger picture"

**Lingering Emotions-** a) continuing "cause" (stimulus)

b) unexpressed, not talked about, not let go, unchanged

c) "holding on"- for strength or punishing (self or other)