

# Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Tips for the Sport Community

Brooke Lamphere, M.A.

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology, University of Denver

Student Contractor Sport Psychology Consultant, United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee



Looking for tips on how to maintain mental and physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic? Take a look at each section to see what resonates most with you or your family.

## SECTIONS

- We are in this Together
- Maintain Baseline Health
- Make Space for Emotions
- Focus on What You Control
- Take Committed Action
- How You Respond Matters
- Start Your Mindfulness Practice

## We are all in this together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted athletes from all levels of sport, across the world. Whether or not you, or a loved one, have been directly affected by COVID-19, everyone has been affected to some degree – by emotional stress or sadness, by loneliness due to physical distancing, by the loss of opportunities and resources, economic hardships, difficulties caring for others or navigating challenging family relationships, or, as in the sport community, immense changes in goals, training, and daily life. We are dealing with unprecedented levels of change, uncertainty, and adversity. Many of us are grieving the loss of someone, something, or a way of life. In the face of uncertainty, it can be easy to focus on everything that's going wrong, that's missing. Instead, remind yourself of everything that you have, what you are grateful for. Remember that we, as a human community, are all in this together. We are not alone.

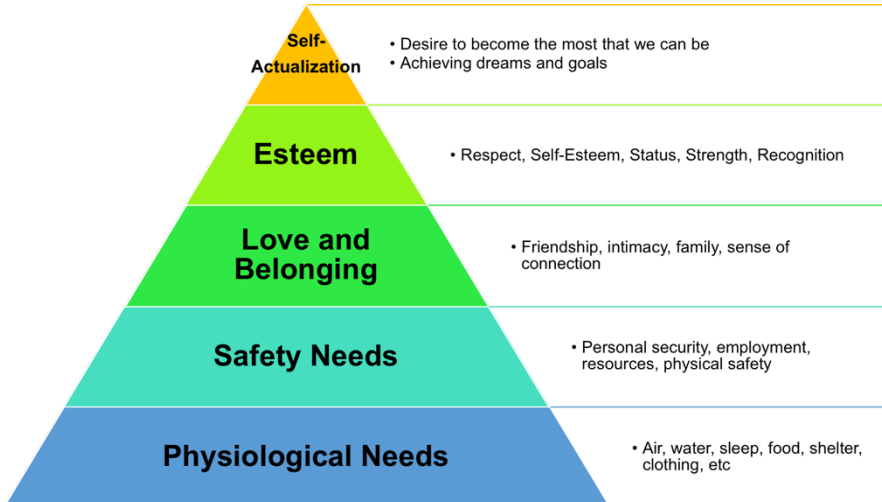
# Maintain Baseline Health

Physical distancing measures have limited our access to work, people, and resources. It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by these changes, and to abandon daily routines. In reality, changing your routines more than absolutely necessary can do more harm than good. To maintain a baseline level of health, try the following:

- Create a regular daily routine and stick to it. This routine should be as close to your pre-quarantine routine as possible.
- Schedule time for self-care, social connection, and

refueling as well as time to work.

- Ground your routine in your values – what matters to you most in life. Spend time each day engaging in activities that are in line with your values.
- Put your **basic needs** (physiological and safety needs) first. Basic needs are the foundation of physical and mental health. Click on this link for an explanation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how needs influence our behavior: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-4ithG\\_07Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-4ithG_07Q)



## FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CONTROL

When facing a crisis of any kind, fear, anxiety, and stress are inevitable. It's very easy to get lost in worries about what might happen in the future, how the virus might affect you and your loved ones, or your community and the world. We can get lost in "what if" thoughts or try to predict the future. While this is completely natural, it's not helpful. The more we focus on things that we do not control, the more stressed, anxious, and hopeless we will feel. One of the most important things you can do

in any crisis, is focus on what you control. You can't control the virus. You can't control how the government or others around you respond. You can't control your feelings. But you can control what you do, here and now. You control how you respond. You control how you set up your day, how you treat yourself, and how you take care of yourself. What you do now matters. Be mindful what you pay attention to. Connect with the present moment, the here and now. Take everything one day at a time.

## Make Space for Emotions

In the midst of a global crisis, feeling like you're riding an emotional roller coaster is normal. Constant changes in information, regulations, and uncertainty, increasing daily stressors, and limited time or space to adjust can create waves of stress, anxiety, fear, loss, and sadness. Many of us work hard to avoid negative feelings, and put pressure on ourselves to "be fine" and "be strong." Avoiding or ignoring what we feel can exacerbate stress, making matters worse.

Instead, give yourself permission to feel exactly what you feel. You cannot control your feelings – they serve a purpose. Feelings give us information about what's going on, in the world around us and inside our heads. Creating space for your feelings, riding the waves, and accepting emotions without judging them is a healthier way to navigate our stressful reality. The only way out is through.

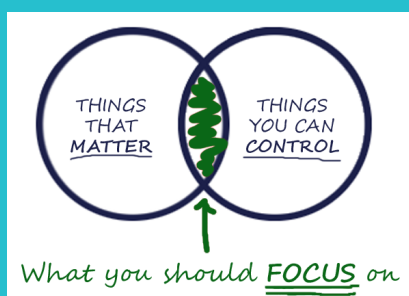
### HOW TO MAKE SPACE FOR EMOTIONS

- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
- Come back to your body by paying attention to your breath or physical sensations
- Stay Present – spending too much time thinking about the past or the future can fuel stress and anxiety
- Start a regular mindfulness or meditation practice (see pg 3).
- To learn more about creating space for emotions, watch this TED talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHQndz9qvtw>



*“Adversity isn’t an obstacle that we need to get around in order to resume living our life. It’s part of our life.*

- Aimee Mullins



## Things You Control

- Your attitude
- Your mindset
- Your actions
- Your attention
- Your eating
- Your exercise
- Your sleep
- How you communicate with others
- How you talk to yourself
- Boundaries that you set
- Expectations that you hold
- You get to choose what matters and what doesn't

## Take Committed Action

Committed action means action that is guided by your core values: what you believe to be most important in life. Committed actions are those that are truly important to you, that you find meaningful, and that you take even if you have negative thoughts or feelings.

Not sure what your core values are? No problem! Ask yourself the following:

- What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis?
- What sort of person do you want to be as you go through this?

- How do you want to treat yourself and others?

The answers to these questions will include your values.

Complete this worksheet to identify your values:

[http://thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/Values\\_Questionnaire.pdf](http://thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/Values_Questionnaire.pdf)

Ask yourself how you can act on your values. For example, if you value compassion, ask yourself how you can show yourself and others compassion in this time of crisis.

## How You Respond Matters

When faced with uncertainty and change, our perspective shapes our view of the situation. Managing our perspective shapes how you respond to adversity. Focusing only on the challenges and difficulties that we face does not help us navigate them successfully. Paying attention primarily to our stresses, fears, and everything that's going wrong fuels anxiety. Sometimes, focusing on what's going on in the world causes us to focus on a lot of things that we can't control. If you're focusing on things you can't control, making changes can seem really daunting. This perspective keeps you stuck.

Responding to adversity with resilience is about adapting and adjusting to adversity and accepting it as part of life. Reality doesn't just include the challenges we face, it includes our ability to adapt – how we cope, how we respond! Reality isn't just external – what's happening around you – it's internal too! Create a balanced perspective – focus on the things that are going well, things you are grateful for, things that haven't changed or have changed for the better. Spend time focusing on what you have instead of everything that's missing.



# START YOUR MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

- Mindfulness is a state of awareness, cultivated by paying attention to internal and external events without judgment.
- Regular, ongoing mindfulness meditation practice has remarkable benefits for mental and physical health, in particular stress management, anxiety, and resilience.
- 5-10 minutes of formal mindfulness meditation per day can enhance your ability to respond to the pandemic in a way that you value and that protects your health.
- These applications can help you get started:
  - Headspace
  - Calm
  - Stop, Breathe, & Think
  - Insight Timer
  - Buddhify

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <https://appliedsportpsych.org/blog/2020/03/the-covid-19-pandemic-tips-for-athletes-coaches-parents-and-the-sport-community/>
- <https://www.psychcongress.com/article/coronavirus-crisis-staying-safe-smart-and-kind>
- [http://www.commpsyh.com/wp-content/uploads/FACE\\_COVID-1.pdf](http://www.commpsyh.com/wp-content/uploads/FACE_COVID-1.pdf)
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mental-hygienist/202003/maintaining-mental-and-physical-health-during-covid-19>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/mental-health-covid-19/art-20482731>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1754616>
- [https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/trauma-disaster/working-with-your-clients?utm\\_source=informz&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=covidresources](https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/trauma-disaster/working-with-your-clients?utm_source=informz&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=covidresources)

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Visit [Psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) to find a mental health provider in your community

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>

Talk Space also provides access to licensed mental health providers via online platforms:

<https://www.talkspace.com/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>