

TAKE CARE OF YOUR  
*coach*

# The Manual



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## Introduction

TAKE CARE OF YOUR COACH is the Erasmus+ Sport project. The goal of this project is to promote mental health awareness among sports coaches and to put mental health on the priority agenda in sports organisations.

In the sporting fields all over the world everything concentrates on the athlete, however, who cares for and helps coaches get the necessary support they need?

In this project we concentrated on the coaches and their needs. We developed tools to help them navigate through their often very stressful job and prevent professional burnout. We are asking the sporting community to acknowledge one of the most important roles in sports and the wider community - the role of the coach. It is one of the hardest jobs because coaches are often taken for granted and are usually the first to take the blame for a team's poor performance. Instead, we would like to shift the focus on the coaches and ask them: "How are you doing?"

Coaches never speak about how anxious they are when the competition starts, or about their fears and worries regarding the outcomes. We do not hear them talk about their own (high) expectations and how they always have to respond to the expectations of the environment. Rarely do they speak out about their fear of failure, unstable job and poor working conditions, difficult or maladapted athletes, and other worries they might have. All of these things can lead to burnout\* and deterioration of coaches' mental as well as physical health.

*\*Burnout occurs when dedicated and loyal people realise that they are deeply disappointed with the job or career from which they have drawn much of their identity and will to live. This happens when changes (expected or unexpected) cause things and work that previously inspired and excited them to disappear or diminish, and tedious or unpleasant tasks increase (Mindtools, 2022).*

## WHO is the coach

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The authors of many sports books define the coach as a key person in shaping an athlete's career and define the tasks a coach should perform (Tušak and Tušak, 2001; Krevsel, 2001; Martens, 1997; Gummerson, 1992 and Sabock, 1985). Tušak and Tušak (2001) define the coach's tasks in terms of a complex approach to the athlete and define his activity into six areas.

**Activity planning** - when planning the training cycle, the coach must have insight, not only into the sport but also into various fields (biomechanics, psychology, medicine, organizational skills...), especially in order to be able to include expert advice in his work and coordinate the work of a professional sports team.

**Training** - in all types of training (fitness, technical and tactical) it is important to constantly intertwine and use new ways of training, to be innovative.

**Training Performance Control** - coaches encourage their athletes to monitor the effectiveness of their own training constantly.

**Universal care for the athlete** - this includes activities with which coaches ensure the well-being and mood of athletes: creating good external conditions, testing different technical conditions, taking into account the individual wishes of athletes, managing the pre-start conditions, keeping athletes informed, analysis and feedback after the competition and managing with the media.

**Counselling and assistance** - regarding schooling, contacts and relationships with friends, teammates, partners and parents.

**Role in the competition** - the coach acts as a model, helps the athlete implement pre-start and start strategy, acts as an incentive to use the planned behaviours, and strategies, and affects the athlete's self-confidence.

As we can see, coaches have a lot of responsibilities in sports and they can only fulfil them with a lot of knowledge and constant reinventing. Their decisions can be difficult and sometimes awkward for others, and their duty is to constantly revise and doubt those decisions. With this project, we want to encourage all sports participants, to start talking regularly about the coach's well-being, and to teach coaches and their teams about the steps they can take to be better equipped for this beautiful but stressful vocation.

## What is stress

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Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone. It is a common feeling we get when we feel under pressure, overwhelmed or unable to cope. Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain and it can be seen in a change of behaviour. Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action.

Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to your overall well-being. There are many different things in life that can cause stress. Some of the main sources of stress include work, finances, relationships, parenting, and day-to-day inconveniences (Scott, E. 2022).

### What happens in our brain during a stressful event

"I don't know what I was thinking, I didn't recognize myself in that situation!" is an often response to a critical event. We say things we didn't mean to. We do things we know we would regret. Make stupid purchases. Act aggressively in the heat of the moment. Eat mindlessly.

Let's have a look at what is happening when we experience stress. For the purpose of our explanation, we will use an oversimplified model. Our brain is much more complex than this. But the model is useful to understand how we are driven and manipulated by our primal instincts.

## We can divide our brain into three parts:

**The reptilian brain.** The reptilian brain is the primitive and animalistic part of our brain. Also referred to as the lizard brain, it developed over 100 million years ago. And its primary task is survival. It controls all the life-sustaining functions of our body: heart rate, breathing, body temperature, excretion, etc. The reptilian brain ensures that we stay alive at any cost.

**Limbic system.** The limbic brain wraps around the reptilian brain. It kind of connects parts of the brain that deal with high and low functions. This part of the brain handles our emotions, non-verbal behaviour and instincts. It is also responsible for our memories and keeps track of pleasant and unpleasant experiences. The limbic brain shapes a lot of our behaviour and relationships.

**Neocortex.** The Neocortex is the outermost layer of the brain and is linked with high-level cognitive abilities. It enables our complex and logical thinking. It gives us the power of abstract thinking, language, imagination, art and higher-order thinking like thinking about thinking. The neocortex is what separates us from animals (Paul D. MacLean, 1969).

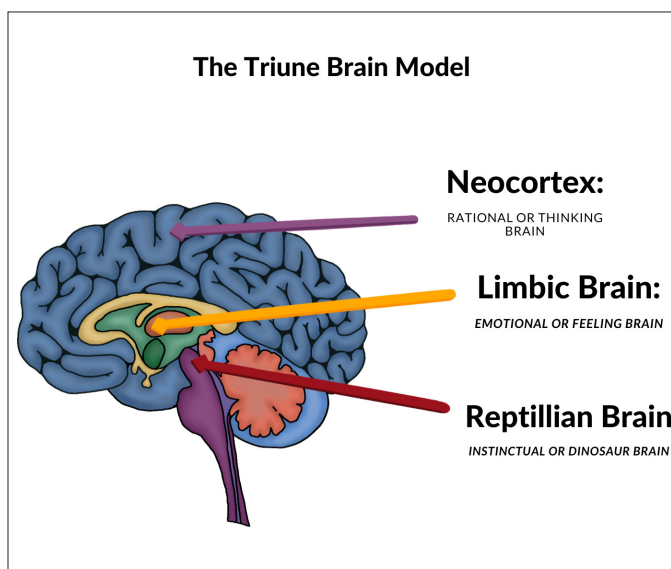


Image 1: Three different parts of the brain.

**From the evolutionary perspective,** our ancestors used to be constantly under threat. They had to always be on the lookout for threats and react instantly. When you're faced with a sabre-tooth tiger, there's no time to think. If you try to logically determine the next step, you are too slow and won't survive. That is why in such situations, the reptilian brain overrides the neocortex (which is slow and demands more energy). It activates the body's fight-or-flight response. The actions and emotions that emerge from the reptilian brain do so automatically, without us having to think about them. The reptilian brain is simple but very efficient at keeping us alive.

*The fight-or-flight response, also known as the acute stress response, refers to the physiological reaction that occurs when in the presence of something mentally or physically terrifying. This response is triggered by the release of hormones that prepare your body to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety (Goldstein, 2010)*

## What Triggers the Reptilian Brain?

There are certain triggers that occur daily in our modern world which can activate your reptilian brain directly. When this happens, your neocortex or thinking brain will be bypassed resulting in irrational behaviour.

**Threat to Safety:** Anything that threatens your or your family's safety triggers your reptilian brain. Not just physical safety, it could also be your emotional, social and financial safety. It could be someone invading your personal space. Fear of losing your job, or in a sports environment, fear of being kicked off the team.

**Social Status:** For thousands of years, high status ensured access to resources and reproductive success. In a way it still does. Money, power, attractiveness — the possibility of gaining or losing any of these things triggers the reptilian brain. In sports this means a better contract, changing the club, and being promoted to head coach. This is why getting loud or aggressive when one's authority is challenged, is very common.

**Stress** triggers a combination of reactions in our bodies. Your heart rate shoots up, breathing quickens, and muscles tense up. This response, also known as the fight-or-flight mode, evolved as a survival mechanism. It enabled our ancestors to react quickly to life-threatening situations.

**Sexual arousal, hunger and addictions** also trigger your reptilian brain (Dismantledmind, 2020).

Unfortunately, the body also overreacts to stressors that are not life-threatening such as traffic jams, work pressure, or relationship difficulties. In such situations, your reptilian brain overrides your neocortex.

### *Example*

*Student-athlete is experiencing bullying at the school and has just found out that his father is really ill. His sports performance started to drop because his focus is more on the safety and survival of his parent and so the neocortex shuts down partly. That is why we can see a regression in his competitive results although he is giving his best at practice.*

### *Write your own example:*

## The list of possible stressors, common stress responses and stress management techniques

Table 1: list of the most important coping techniques as predicted by Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 and Meichenbaum, 1971, after Taylor, 1992) (and updated for the project)

Stressor	Stress Reaction	Management Techniques
Personal		
<b>Self-doubt</b>	negativity, depression	Mindfulness. Rethinking damaging thoughts and developing affirmative (solution and task-oriented) thinking habits (cognitive restructuring, ABC technique)
<b>Physical health</b>	exhaustion, disease	Regular physical exercise, healthy diet, regular visits and counselling with a doctor. Relaxation exercises.
<b>Lack of competencies</b>	confusion, helplessness	Assessment and skills development.
Social		
<b>Lack of support</b>	loneliness	Development of social support system (Coach Support System)
<b>Team conflicts</b>	anger	Team building, taking breaks, making a realistic schedule, problem-solving, 3 F technique
<b>Outside pressure: fans, media, parents ...</b>	anxiety	Organizing scheduled contacts with media, fans and parents, using relaxation techniques, learning assertiveness, improving communication skills. Problem-solving.
Organizational		
<b>Workday</b>	exhaustion, illness	Planning the recovery and rest time. Self-awareness, knowing when you are tired, and having a good warning system when to take a break.
<b>Travel</b>	loneliness, isolation	Searching, creating and developing adequate communication network (Coach Support System).
<b>Responsibility overload</b>	procrastination, frustration	Delegating responsibilities, planning the season in advance, and preparing backup plans.
<b>Administrative problems</b>	confusion, inefficiency	Getting help with assistants in administration.
<b>Time pressure</b>	anger, helplessness	Time management training. Mindfulness, situation awareness.

Table 1: Types of stressors, stress reactions and proposed techniques for managing the negative consequences of stressors (Taylor, 1992).

***Write your own example:***

Make a list of stressors that affect you the most.



# Techniques and examples

## Stress management - how to deal with stressful situations

Here we propose some of the strategies that can be used by any professional and have proven to be successful in stress management. You will find techniques and examples of how to deal with your stressors in sports and private life. After each example, you will have a space where you can work on your own situations.

## Mindfulness and Breathing Techniques

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Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention to one's inner and outer experiences in a non-judgmental manner in every present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In other words, mindfulness is the act of increasing present-moment awareness of physiological, mental, and environmental events without imposing judgement on their quality or meaning (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In practising mindful awareness, thoughts are noted as simple passing states in the mind that do not require action. Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. It entails engaging deliberate attention to one's experience from moment to moment, to what is going on in our mind, body and day-to-day life. That consists of body sensations, emotions, objects of awareness (thoughts and perceptions) and awareness itself (Wynne, 2007).

### Directing Attention To Breathing

Breathing techniques have been known to help manage stress. Deep breathing expands and relaxes the chest. Stretching and relaxing muscles are the most common ways to manage stress. When stretching, substances such as lactic acid are released from the muscles and thus help to relax. Hormones that create happiness and relieve stress are also released. After a few deep inhales and exhales, the heart rate slows down and the stress slowly dissipates.

Directing attention to breathing and breathing awareness is one of the basic and key exercises in developing mindfulness. With this exercise, we learn to observe our breath without trying to control and change it. We learn to focus on the present moment, the experience of "being here and now". If the exercise is performed correctly, we focus only on the moment of breathing, not the previous or next, we do not change the breathing (we do not calm it or accelerate or deepen it). The exercise also has the purpose of calming down.

We can see how our thoughts and body try to control our breathing (when we observe it we inadvertently slow it down, deepen it), and we see how difficult it is to just observe our breathing without trying to change it. We may be surprised at how much exercise it really takes to stay focused on breathing.

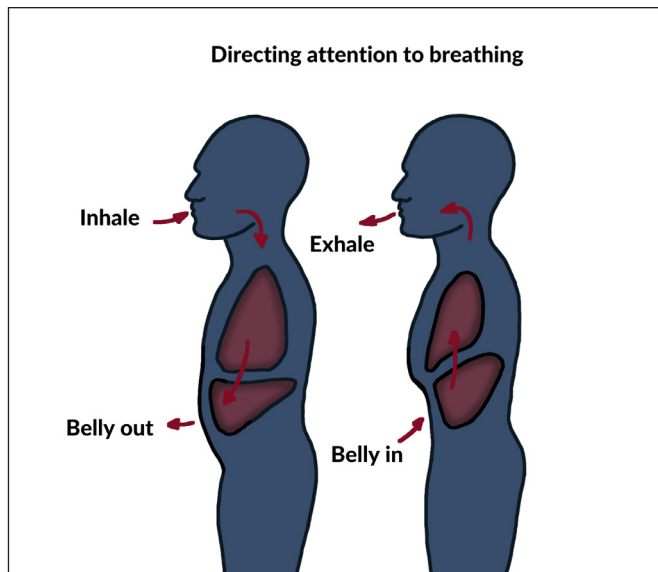


Image 2: Directing attention to breathing

## Breathing Awareness

When practising breathing awareness, the goal is to be able to shift your attention to the whole process of your breathing. Observe all the aspects of breathing. For instance, is the air cold or warm, humid or dry? What is the rhythm of your breathing and the sensations you feel while breathing?

### ***Follow these instructions:***

*"We observe the air when it enters through our nostrils, and how we exhale the air through our mouth or nose. The purpose of focused awareness is not to change the rhythm of breathing or deepen breathing, but only to focus attention on breathing. Counting individual breaths helps us maintain attention to breathing, it is also very helpful if we count: one-inhale, one-exhale, two-inhale, two-exhale..., five-inhale, five-exhale ... Etc. Usually, we can focus our attention more easily if we count in our minds. When our thoughts escape (we also pay attention to how the thoughts wander), we try to calm them down again and focus back on breathing."*

## Abdominal Breathing

In moments of high stress your breathing gets shallow as if air doesn't completely fill your lungs. When under stress, we often don't breathe with our diaphragm (the muscle under our ribs that pulls air in and out), which can make us light-headed or dizzy and cause even more distress.

Although breathing is automatic, it can be controlled (Galanti, 2021).

### ***Follow these instructions:***

- 1. Lie on your back or sit comfortably in a chair. If you want, close your eyes, or focus on a spot in front of you.*
- 2. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Notice which hand moves as you breathe normally.*
- 3. Breathe in slowly through your nose. As you inhale, feel your belly filling with air. Feel it press against your hand.*
- 4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth or nose and feel your belly sink in, almost like you're pulling your belly button towards your spine.*
- 5. Repeat. As you breathe in, feel your belly fill with air. The hand on your chest should stay relatively still. As you exhale, feel your belly relax and fall inward. Try not to tense your stomach muscles; just let the breath fill your body naturally through your nose and into your lungs. Let it leave your body the same way, without forcing it. This exercise works best when you exhale for longer than you inhale.*

Sometimes you may find this type of relaxation uncomfortable. That's normal. It can still be useful to be aware of our breath and to learn how to take calming breaths, even if they're initially not so calming. A good time to practise this skill is in bed before falling asleep.

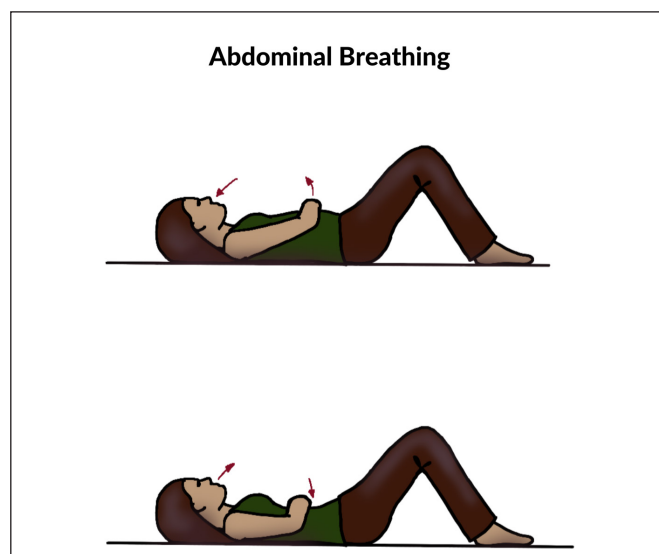


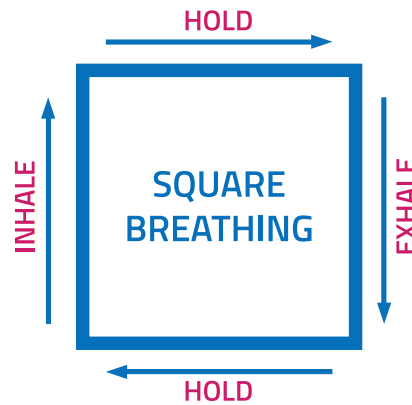
Image 3: Abdominal Breathing

## Square breathing

This skill that can help refocus your mind and calm down your body. This breathing technique can be used when you are stressed and need a moment of calm, or as an extended meditation when you have more time.

### Follow these instructions:

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Slowly inhale for four seconds.
3. Hold your breath for four seconds.
4. Slowly exhale for four seconds.
5. Hold your breath for four seconds.
6. Repeat this cycle four times.



### Example

*We decided to teach breathing exercises to children who are very nervous during races. We immediately saw the positive effects. They reported that the focus on breathing helped them feel better at the start of the race. They did fewer mistakes and the tension among the competitors improved. One child was particularly nervous at the start - she could hardly speak and would look desperately at the coach. The girl was taken to the side, asked if she was nervous and the coach did some breathing techniques with her. That turned out very helpful for the girl, she was much more relaxed and she could concentrate on the start.*

### Write your own example

*Describe a situation where you can use a breathing technique, describe the one that works best for you.*

## Mindful attention

How to practice attention? Apply this situational awareness exercise.

The first step: notice where you direct your attention at this moment - what do you see, observe, and pay attention to?

The second step. Observe what you are doing. For example:

I am breathing

I am sitting

I am looking

I am listening

I am walking

What do I want to focus on?

*Now, you practice being aware of the situation. Follow this instruction:*

**Choose an activity** which you will be doing mindfully throughout the day (for a few minutes every day, 5 days in a row). For example: Drink a cup of tea. Walk. Wash the dishes. Shower with your eyes closed. Brush your teeth with the other hand.

*Whatever you are doing, be in that moment, right now. See, hear, smell, touch, feel, breathe.*

*Simply notice whenever other thoughts and sensations come to mind, then re-focus on your chosen mindful activity.*

*Be patient and compassionate with yourself. Describe rather than judge good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. It is as it is.*

### Each day write down:

*What did you observe?*

*Did you observe any thoughts running away or changing the point of attention?*

*Describe at least one feeling or sensation:*

*Did you notice any particular changes during the exercise (i.e. relaxation, calmness, boredom ...), did you have problems with something specific?*

**Example 1**

*One of the coaches decided he will observe what happens when he is petting his cat.*

*"I love being able to feel the softness of the cat's fur and its warmth. I could calm down my flying thoughts. When I was petting the cat, I noticed I am able to disconnect from my problems and felt calmer."*

**Example 2**

*This coach used mindful observation to increase his awareness of the situations in training and that helped him refine his coaching.*

*Before, when a part of the training ended, he would usually say to the players: "Collect the balls and drink water!" After the players collected the balls, they sat on the bench and drank water, but they no longer listened to the coach and his feedback or additional explanations about the exercise. The coach noticed, that after he says "Balls and water," the players tended to lose concentration and were no longer mentally present (because they were on the "break").*

*The coach changed his behaviour and rephrased his instructions: when they would finish with a specific part of the training, he first invited the players to gather in the centre of the court. Then he would ask a specific questions, for example: "Why do you think we did this exercise?" or "How can it be applied in the game?," or "Please, make some comments on the exercise."*

*He was very satisfied that his ability to observe the responses of his team had improved. He also reported that it was easy to implement changes into his coaching behaviour. The best part was, he reported that the players were happier and were able to concentrate well for a longer time.*

**Write your own example**

*Choose an activity which you will be doing mindfully throughout the day (for a few minutes every day, 5 days in a row).*

*Write down:*

*What did you observe? \_\_\_\_\_*

*Did you observe any thoughts running away or changing the point of attention? \_\_\_\_\_*

*Describe at least one feeling or sensation: \_\_\_\_\_*

*Did you notice any particular changes during the exercise (i.e. relaxation, calmness, boredom ...), did you have problems with something specific?*

## Control the controllable to manage stress

How do we perceive our stress and what can we control in a stressful situation? When we face a certain situation, it is important to understand what is under our control and what is not. There are many sources of stress that are out of our control, yet we direct a lot of our attention towards them, such as: competition rules, opposing teams, referees, weather, venues, etc.

On the other hand, there are a lot of things we can control, but we forget about them: our thoughts, our actions and our behaviour.

The more something is out of your control, the more stress it causes. This is understandable because we tend to think we can control everything and we have the desire to control our environment. This is even more visible in the sports environment as coaches usually have the desire to control "everything" - from the practice conditions to the final actions. But the sooner we accept that certain things are not in our control, the faster we can let go of stress and release our burden.

The **green** circle in Image 4 represents the things we have under control. We can control only ourselves, our actions, how we think, what we do and the way we behave and express ourselves. In any situation and especially in a stressful one, it is important to recognize what is under our control and what is not. We control how we perceive the situation, what we think about it and how we are going to respond, what actions and decisions we are going to take.

The **yellow** circle represents things that are not in our control directly but we have an influence on them, we can affect them in a positive or a negative way. If we keep ourselves under control, we can have a positive influence on others - our team, our colleagues and our athletes. Think about the situation during the competition when you become agitated because your team doesn't play the way you prepared them. You become uneasy, you start to make irrational decisions and you are focused on their bad decisions. Instead, focus your mind and be aware of the controllable things. Carefully decide how you will respond to their actions and design additional guidance during the time-out or between the starts. Focus on the solutions, decisions and strategies that may positively affect your athletes to continue the game or to compete in a different way. If your behaviour and decisions during the stressful competition stay under control, there is an opportunity that you will also positively affect your players and help them direct their attention towards things they can control (their performance and not the final result).

Also, there are some things that are not in our control and we have little influence on them - they are presented in the **red** circle. These are things such as the organisation of the event, the other teams, opponents, weather conditions, the schedule of the games and tournaments, etc.

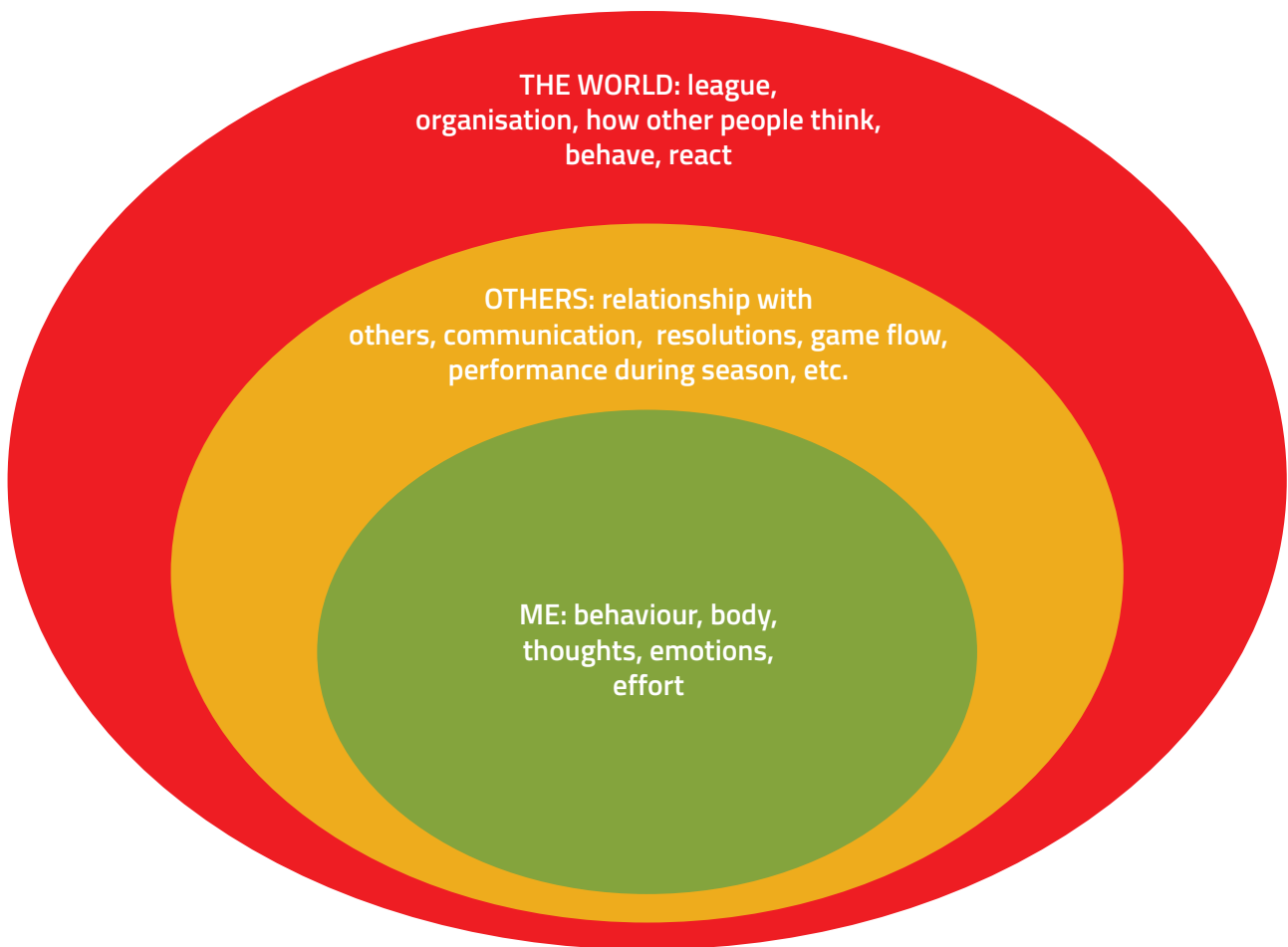


Image 4: Image 4: Control the Controllable

### The ABC technique

Imagine a situation that is typically very stressful for you. Then think about your reactions, thoughts and feelings in this particular situation. When we ask people how they would react, we see that different people react differently in the same situation. The same situation can trigger different responses. Let's say that your date is late. What is your first thought and reaction? Do you call the person and yell at them, feel anger, or do you feel offended and leave the place without explanation?

*How do people deal with stressful situations? With flight (escape) from the situation, fight, cope with a situation, or freeze: not being able to do anything, feeling like they can't even breathe.*

Some of these reactions and feelings are in our consciousness and we are aware of them, many others are subconscious. Subconscious ones come from our early experiences, beliefs and rules, as well as the values and rules we inherited through our upbringing. Our beliefs, concerns and interpretations of the situation strongly affect our emotions and behaviours. Our subjective interpretation of events can have an influence on how we'll feel and behave and what we experience in the situation.



How can coaches become more aware of their responses in stressful situations? We practised the ABC technique.

*The ABC model is a technique used in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a form of psychotherapy that helps individuals reshape their negative thoughts and feelings in a positive way and to be more aware of how their thoughts and feelings affect their behaviour. The ABC model is used to help people develop healthier responses. A. Ellis formulated the ABC model in 1955, it describes how an activating event (A) contributes to people's emotional and behavioural reactions (C) since they're influenced by people's beliefs about activating events (B). During negative experiences, the first thing we naturally do is subconsciously explain to ourselves why the situation happened. Our beliefs about the causes of adversity determine our reaction (Ellis, 1991; Ramnero and Torneke, 2008).*

**A. ACTIVATION EVENT, SITUATION:** a negative situation occurs – an activating event

Describe the situation and trigger (the world around you, other people, experiences, your history and future, yourself, your memories). What happened?

**B. BELIEFS:** the explanation we create for why the situation happened

Why did this happen? What is the first thought that comes to your mind? This is usually connected with our past experiences, core beliefs we have about ourselves, the world and others and our values.

*Based on our experiences and upbringing, we can form RIGID or FLEXIBLE BELIEFS. If our beliefs are rigid, we usually perceive the situation as threatening. If our beliefs are more FLEXIBLE, we usually perceive the situation as a challenge.*

**C. CONSEQUENCES:** our feelings and behaviours in response to adversity, caused by our beliefs

What is our reaction to that situation? How do we behave, react, and what do we do? What do we say out loud or to ourselves? What are our physiological reactions (heart rate, face blush, shallow breathing, muscle tension, trembling, etc)?

### **Example**

Situation: The coach is late for practice

Interpretation: "I'm never late, this can't happen to me, it's not in my habit. Only lazy people are late."

Thoughts: "Who will get the children into the swimming pool? Maybe they will start the training by themselves ... Will I be able to handle the whole planned training session? The boss will notice and give me a hard time. Parents hate it when people are late, they will talk about it behind my back."

Emotions: stress, nervousness, anger, fear, pain in the stomach.

Behaviour: Doing things in a hurry, snapping at others, angry behaviour, searching for apologies and explanations for the delay, hoping nobody will notice, and making excuses if they will.

**Write your own example: ABC Report**

*Please, fill in the report 3 - 4 times, at least once per week (for example every Wednesday) for 3-4 weeks: think of one situation and go over the steps:*

- 1. SITUATION:** Describe the situation and the trigger.
- 2. INTERPRETATION:** How did you interpret the situation? What values, beliefs, experiences and personal rules are behind it?
- 3. THOUGHTS:** What was the first thought that went through your mind?
- 4. EMOTIONS:** What about your feelings, did you feel relaxed, calm, agitated or otherwise?
- 5. BEHAVIOUR:** What did you do, how did you behave or react?

Keep in mind, whatever happens, any challenges you face STAY PROACTIVE and SOLUTION ORIENTED. It is important to look at problems as 'challenges' or opportunities that can lead to improvement. By doing so, we also set an example for our athletes. With a positive attitude, we can influence the possibility of the entire team/club's success.

## The Problem-solving technique

The Problem-Solving technique could be very useful when facing some organisational issues. As a team you can brainstorm to find the best solution. It includes the following steps:

0 - this zero starting point indicates the first thing that should be on your checklist - what is under my control in this situation?

**1 - DEFINE THE PROBLEM** - In this first step try to define the problem in detail. The definition and the facts behind the problem are valuable information for solutions.

### **2 DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE**

In this step try to see the problem from a different perspective. Try to see it as if it happened to someone you know and see how you would perceive it now, as you are watching it from a different viewpoint, from a different position, as if you are not involved in it. This can give you another aspect of the problem and possible new findings, and new information.

### **3 WHAT OUTCOME (RESULT) DO I / WE WANT**

What result or outcome do you desire? How would you like this situation to resolve? What kind of an outcome do you wish for? What do you expect to happen as a result of this situation? You may find that this situation could have a few outcomes that are suitable for you (not just one).

### **4 WHAT SOLUTION(S) DO I / WE HAVE**

In this step, try to write down any solutions that come to your mind. Think about any solutions that could apply to the situation you want to solve. Be creative, imaginative and solution-oriented.

### **5 EVALUATE SOLUTION(S)**

When you have written different solutions (possibilities) try to evaluate them (rate them) which are more applicable ones than others. Rate pros and cons for each solution, based on the desired outcome from Step 3.

### **6 SELECT THE BEST SOLUTION**

Out of all the possible solutions you have written, select the one with the most pros, with the most pluses, the most applicable one.

### **7 APPLY (TEST) SOLUTION**

In this step you apply the selected solution in the subsequent situation. You test if the selected solution will bring you the desired outcome (result).

### **8 ADJUST THE SOLUTION**

If necessary, you adjust the solution from the step 7 did not work out well. You apply the next one from your list or redefine the selected one in a different way for application.

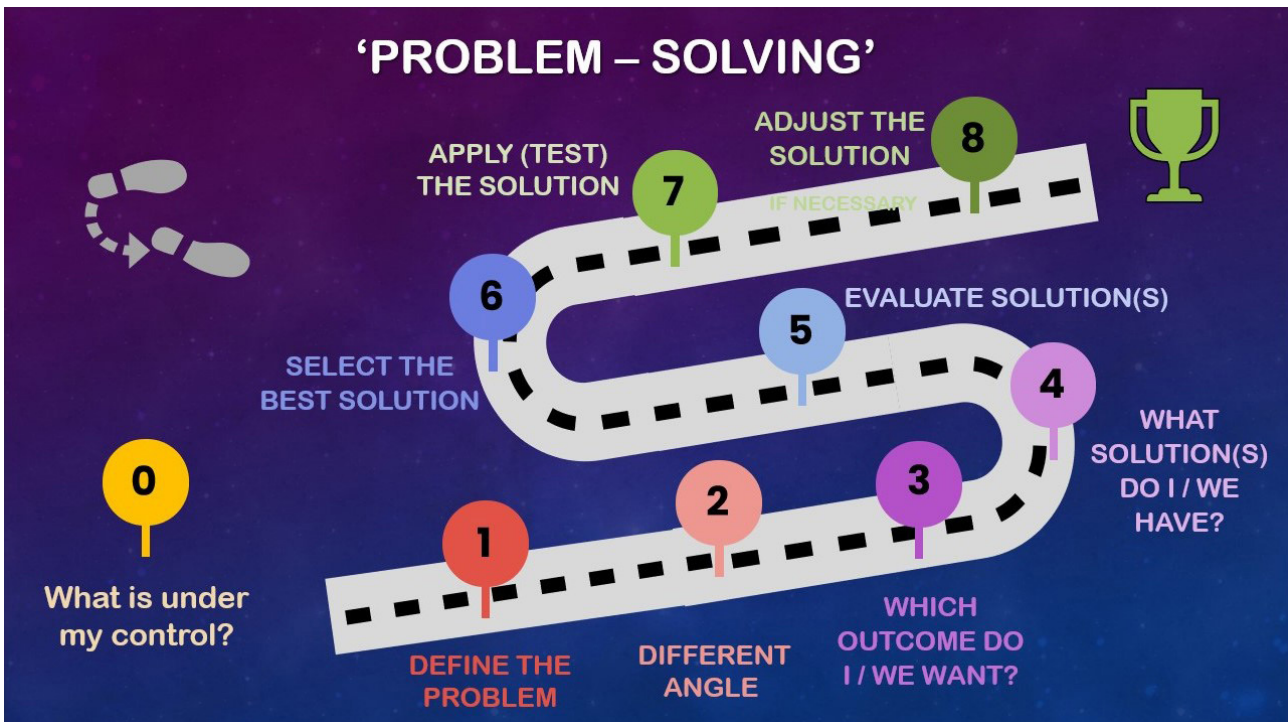


Image 5: Problem-solving Method Roadmap

### Example

A promising young player announced that she will not be able to come to training every day, in particular the evening session that ends at 21:00.

Coaching staff in the Club decided to use the problem-solving technique. Here are the steps:

#### 0) What is under our control?

We control how we will communicate with the player and her parents;

we can present more than one possible solution;

we also control the training schedule and her training obligations.

#### 1) Define the problem and describe the situation:

The player likes to go to rest early, around 9 p.m., therefore she misses 1 or 2 training sessions per week. Late practices are for the seniors - she was invited considering she is very promising and shows great progress. It is possible that this represents a burden to her, an additional obligation to play for an older team since she is already a permanent member of the junior team.

#### 2) Change the perspective of the point of view:

Parents are correct to want her to go to bed earlier considering her age and obligations at school. At the senior training sessions, all the players are older than her.

**3) What is your goal in this situation? What outcome do you want?**

*We want her to stay in the club and be happy and amazing as a player.*

**4) What solutions do you have?**

A *She only trains with her age group.*

B *She comes to senior practice but can skip the ones that end after 9 p.m.*

C *She can play matches only with her age group but train with the senior team as well (except late training).*

D *to combine training (half with her age group, half with the senior team), and to play for the senior team only at home matches (so that she does not have to go to away games).*

**5) Rate each solution. What are the pros and cons of each solution?**

*C and D proved to be the most realistic and best solutions.*

**6) Choose the best solution**

*C to play matches only with his own age group, but to train with the senior team as well (except late training). That solution will be presented to the player and parents.*

**7) Apply the solution - test it at the first opportunity.**

*The player and her parents were interviewed. The girl agreed to come to the training sessions with both her age group and the senior team (except late training on Wednesdays).*

**8) Adjust (change the solution - if necessary).**

*It was not necessary to change the solution.*

**Write your own steps for the Problem-Solving**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

## Peer-To-Peer Psychological Support

Peer-to-peer psychological first aid is a system which supports coaches, team members, and athletes after a very stressful or critical event.

The concept of a coach support system (peer-to-peer psychological support) reduces harmful stress and makes one aware of possible emotional, cognitive, physical or behavioural reactions to critical incidents and stressful events. It can prevent burn-out and feelings of incompetence in their role as coach. It builds trust and cooperation in the group through experiencing exchange – if somebody tells me how they felt at a certain event, next time I am aware of that and can work to prevent it myself.

Every individual reacts differently to difficult situations. There are two main causes: every person has a different support network that helps them overcome the crisis (family, friends, work, material goods, external support sources). Internal coping resources are equally important – trust in yourself, good self-esteem, proactivity, a positive view in life, a solution-oriented mindset, and resilience.

## The normal reaction to a traumatic event

How to recognize that someone is experiencing a traumatic event

The threat we face in a critical situation (physical, emotional, psychological) triggers our body alarm systems to protect us. Our brain recognizes the event as dangerous and triggers a chain reaction of physiological events. The alarm system in the brain makes sure the body starts producing the necessary substances. The body reactions include faster heartbeat and higher oxygen and sugar levels in the blood thus allowing more blood to the muscles.

Reaction to a traumatic event happens on 4 levels, cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioural. It is important for you as a coach to be aware of these reactions and recognize when someone is in distress. As already mentioned, we might not perceive a situation as a stressful, but somebody else might.

Possible critical events/stressors in sports environment:

- injury
- losing an important game
- violence, harassment from a team member
- not making it into a team/losing a position in a team
- losing a job
- not being able to return after an injury
- personal crisis events: a family member is involved in a bad accident, divorce, etc.

## The 3 F MODEL Facts – Feelings – Future

To help a colleague in a stressful situation, first try to get the person out of the situation and find a calm place that offers them safety. Ask the person what they need. Reassure them the conversation is private and confident. After the initial shock, when the person has calmed down, use the following steps of the 3F Model:

### 1- FACTS

Allow the person to describe what happened as they see it. No judgement as experiencing stress and trauma is very subjective. We just gather the information through active listening.

### 2 - FEELINGS

Reassure the person that it is normal to experience powerful thoughts or emotions. There are no right or wrong emotions. Be empathetic and acknowledge their point of view.

### 3 - FUTURE

Let them know they may experience more reactions in the following hours or days, such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite or distractedness. These are normal and usually short-lived. Encourage self-care, such as contact with loved ones or any healthy activity that brings the person a sense of peace. Suggest to the person to make specific plans for the day and share with you what they will do between now and the end of the day.

### Example 1

*The players are sad and angry because they lost an important game. They sit quietly in the locker room, no one wants to talk to each other or to the coach.*

#### 1- FACTS

*What happened, from their point of view*

*"We lost the game that we should win. We could play better and this result does not show our real skills. We did not show what we practiced well, we did not stick to the plan."*

#### 2 - FEELINGS

*Describe how you feel, without the evaluation and judgement*

*"We felt that there was a lot of talk about the winning and the result. We didn't have fun while playing. Our confidence in ourselves and our team is low."*

*Coach replies that these emotions are normal and will pass in a few days.*

#### 3 - FUTURE

*What happened happened, we cannot go back. The plan is to go on about your day and do your everyday routine when you come home. We will work on trusting the team again and the coach wants you to enjoy the competitions and enjoy playing the game.*

**Write your own example**

1 - *FACTS*

2 - *FEELINGS*

3 - *FUTURE*



## Coach Social Support

Sometimes we experience an acute stress situation or a traumatic event in a sports environment (for example an injury). This kind of situation needs a bit of a different approach and is closer to the concept of psychological first aid. The immediate stress reaction should be minimised and the person affected should be helped to get to safety. In addition, people that witness an accident or a traumatic event, can also have a traumatic response to the situation.

You can follow the next steps:

- Structuring the situation: try to take control of the situation; make clear to everyone involved you are there for them.
- Make contact with persons in distress: use their name to talk to them and speak directly to them whilst you have their full attention. Try to adapt to their energy level: if they are apathetic, describe what happened, make sure environment is calm and speak in a calm voice. If they are agitated, try to breathe with them.
- Calmness, safety and reorientation: try to bring the person back to the present moment. Describe the situation and assure the person they are safe. Bring them to a calm space or go for a walk (away from the stressful environment).
- Let them talk: no questions or judgement, just let them talk.
- Describing the person's state, condition and situation. Tell them that they are in shock.
- Asking the person what they need: Offer them water and ask what they need in that moment.
- Take care of their social network: ask them if you can call someone.
- Further agreements: whatever the person in distress wants to do, whether they want to go home, or stay, they should not be given any important tasks. Talk to them and let them describe what they will do between now and the end of the day.

### **Example 2**

*Situation: During training a child passes out underwater in a swimming pool.*

*Structuring the situation: After the child was safe out of the water, the coach assured him, that everything is ok, he is safe and that he is there for him.*

*Contact with the person in distress: The coach made sure that he had the child's attention and made a few deep breaths with him.*

*Calmness, safety and reorientation: The coach told the child what happened, that he passed out underwater, but he is safe now and took the child away from the group to a calm area.*

*Let them talk: The coach asked the child to describe what happened and allowed him to express his reaction to the situation.*

*Describing the person's state/condition/situation: The coach explained to the child that he might be feeling in shock right now.*

*Asking the person what they need: The coach asked the child if there is anything he needs at the moment and how he is doing. Does he want to stay at the practice or go home?*

*Take care of social networks: After the practice, the coach told the child's parents what happened.*

*Further agreements: The coach talked to the team about what they should pay attention to at the next practice and how to react in this kind of situation.*

**Write your own example**

1 - STRUCTURE

2 - PERSONAL CONTACT

3 - REORIENTATIONS

4 - THE TALK

5 - DESCRIBE, EXPLAIN

6 - ASK WHAT THEY NEED

7 - SOCIAL NETWORKS

8 - FUTURE

## Conclusion

This manual is a result of a two year project on stress management, problem-solving, and solution focused techniques with coaches from four different sports and countries.

The ability of coaches to deal with stressors effectively and constructively has a significant impact on their performance and their mental and physical health. It is important that they develop effective coping techniques.

Coaches have learned how to deal with the stressors in their working environment successfully. They learned the techniques presented in this manual which proved to be very beneficial. They reported applying techniques learned in their working environment as well as in everyday life. They will continue to do so because they see so many benefits in all areas of life.

Coaches also pointed out the importance of experience exchange meetings during the transnational project and how important these meetings were in their learning process. They became more aware they are not the only ones with the problems at work and they could see how these problems are universal to many coaches at different levels in various sports and countries around the world. We believe coaches will be able to implement the learned techniques in their sports clubs as well as other areas of life.

***Dear coaches, you take care of your athletes, please, also take care of yourself!***

## APENDIX:

### Extra techniques, guidelines etc

#### TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

**Breaks:** by the coach occasionally stepping out of a situation, not running away, acting preventively. These can be short, 15-minute breaks or longer vacations, depending on the situation. A short break can be just a retreat from the room (gym, office), we take a short walk to give our mind a little rest. We also alleviate stress at work by taking time for physical activity and recreation. After a long break, and holidays, coaches return to work fresh and regenerated, relaxed, full of new ideas and have enough energy to deal with the problems that sports coaching brings.

**Realistic schedule:** a motivated coach always finds himself in a situation where he has too many tasks on the schedule - in order to be as effective as possible, he gets complicated and the work drags on too many weekends and nights. It makes sense to do this occasionally, and the constant time pressure doesn't do any good. An organized schedule has enough space to accurately schedule tasks and space for tasks that are more time-consuming, and some reserve for unexpected, more demanding events.

#### Realistic goals:

**Delegating tasks** is a strategy, a skill that keeps you organized and at the same time alleviates your daily workload. The assistant coach and the administration of the club can perform quite a few tasks (telephone arrangements, club management, talent management, etc.). Plan the season, trips, and meetings together. If you trust the people around you, you can significantly reduce your stress levels.

**Take time to stay in shape:** coaches work all day to prepare the athletes to be their best, but they forget about themselves. There is no time to stay in shape, they say. Coaches have mostly been top athletes and they know what it feels like to be in shape - but let's look at the benefits of being in shape as well:

Improving self-confidence, self-esteem and body self-esteem.

An example to athletes: a commitment to sport and health lasts a lifetime.

Maintaining a healthy weight.

The release of endorphins makes you happy, and relaxed muscles relieve physical stress and frustration.

After a long workday, it's too easy to forget about time for a personal workout. Remember that exercise is one of the easiest and most beneficial ways to relieve stress.

**Spending time with your loved ones.** The sports schedule is always the same: weekend matches and afternoon workouts. Due to a busy schedule, it quickly happens that you lose touch with family and friends. Planning and taking the time you spend with your people helps relieve stress. Hang out with those friends, either from the sports world or outside the industry, to whom you can express all your frustrations. It may happen that, with their help, you bring some new perspectives, ideas into your profession. Family and friends are the ones who balance a professional career with a private life and are essential to maintaining

oneself in times of uncertainty. Contact with important others can be a phone call, a shared meal, or a short chat - keep in touch with the people who matter most.

**Maintain your hobbies**, so make sure you also nurture life outside the world of your sport. At first glance, an extra hobby may seem like a distraction and time away from the profession, but interests outside of training are essential to keeping a fresh mind, because by focusing on something other than sports, your brain relaxes and ideas air out. The hobby should be such that you can maintain it during the coaching work and schedule. It has been proven that those who do not find happiness in things that are not on the map of sports and training suffer the most.

### **Get to know your team in person**

A group, even one that functions externally as a whole, is always made up of individuals with personal stories. Getting to know athletes outside of training can be easy - we go to a restaurant for dinner or meet someone at home or watch a movie together. Sometimes, however, a little more complexity is required; in such a case we can perform a structured team building. With such meetings, we encourage networking and enable the team to get to know each other and have fun outside of training and sports performance. The goal is to find time and space together to talk about topics other than sports, so we can relax the atmosphere in the team and reduce stress levels - such an approach is important to maintain a team atmosphere and at the same time diversify private life.

If necessary, visit a **consultant**. Although there is still a stigma among people about seeking help from a psychologist, counselor or therapist, in the end this is an important step towards managing stress. Professionals have fantastic ideas on how you can manage stress, have been advised to do so for a couple of years of study, and are armed with the expertise needed to tackle careers and relationships.

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