



Know Your Feelings

All feelings are OK. Naming how you feel can help you feel better.

Research on the mental health of adaptive skaters is still limited, so these tips come from sport psychology and Special Olympics.

Feelings



Happy



Calm



Excited



Nervous



Frustrated



Sad



Tired

Your body gives clues

- **Nervous:** fast heartbeat, butterflies in your tummy
- **Frustrated:** hot face, tight fists
- **Tired:** heavy arms and legs, hard to focus

TRY IT: How do I feel?

Circle one face in each row.

Before skating:



After skating:



Remember: All feelings are OK. They come and go.

For coaches and families

Signs of stress can look different for people with intellectual disabilities, like changes in sleep, eating, or behavior. If you notice a change, talk with a doctor.



Calm Your Body

When feelings get big, try one of these.

Calm tools

1. **Smell the flower, blow out the candle.** Breathe in through your nose. Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
2. **Squeeze and let go.** Squeeze your hands tight for 3 seconds. Then relax them.
3. **Picture a calm place.** Close your eyes and think of a place you love.
4. **Take a break.** Get a drink of water or listen to a song you like.

TRY IT: My calm tools

Check the tools that help you.

☐ Flower and candle

☐ Squeeze and let go

☐ Calm place

☐ Take a break

Practice: color a circle each day you take 5 slow breaths.



Mon



Tue



Wed



Thu



Fri



Sat



Sun

Remember: Practice when you feel calm, so the tools are ready.

For coaches and families

Practice these tools together when the skater is calm. Then use them at the boards, between turns, and at home.



Helpful Words

What you say to yourself matters. Helpful words can help you skate and feel better.

Instead of...

"Don't fall."

"I can't do it."

"Everyone is watching."

Try saying...

"Soft knees. Look up."

"I'm learning."

"Eyes on my spot."

After a fall or a mistake: Stop. Take a slow breath. Try again.

TRY IT: My helpful words

A worry I have: _____

What I can say instead: _____

My cue word: _____

Remember: Say what to do, not what not to do.

For coaches and families

Tell skaters what to do ("look up") instead of what not to do ("don't look down"). Praise effort, not just results.



My Skate Day Routine

Doing the same steps each time helps you feel ready.

A simple routine

1. Pack your bag.
2. Get to the rink early.
3. Warm up.
4. Take a slow breath.
5. Say your cue word.
6. Skate and have fun!

Big day? Before a test or show, visit the rink and practice your program in your costume.

TRY IT: My routine

Write your own steps.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Remember: Focus on what you can control, like your breathing, your warm-up, and how hard you try.

For coaches and families

Picture schedules and photos of the rink help skaters know what comes next. Ask one short question at a time, and give extra time to answer.



Rest and Support

You are more than a skater. Rest and support help you feel your best.

Ways to recharge

- Sleep well and eat well.
- Move your body. It can lift your mood, and skating counts!
- Spend time with friends. Skating with others helps you feel part of a team.
- Do something fun away from the rink.

TRY IT: My support team

A coach I can talk to: _____

A family member I can talk to: _____

A friend I can talk to: _____

Learn more Scan a code with your phone camera.



SkaterSense
skatersense.org



Strong Minds
Special Olympics



Mental Health
U.S. Figure Skating



NAMI HelpLine
Family support



NADD
Mental health and IDD

References

1. Bulut et al. (2024). Adaptive sports and mental health. *J. Assess. Res. Appl. Couns.*, 6(2), 113–119.
2. Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2023). *Mental health problems in people with a learning disability*.
3. Cunningham (2018). *Identifying and managing organisational stress in para-athletes*. BelievePerform.
4. Disabled Sports USA & U.S. Figure Skating (2018). *Adaptive skating manual*.
5. Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2011). Self-talk and sports performance: A meta-analysis. *Perspect. Psychol. Sci.*, 6(4), 348–356.
6. Rowland, Moyle & Cooper (2021). Remediation strategies for performance anxiety across sex, sport and stage. *IJERPH*, 18(19), 10160.
7. Rupperecht, Tran & Gröpel (2024). The effectiveness of pre-performance routines in sports. *Int. Rev. Sport Exerc. Psychol.*, 17(1), 39–64.
8. Singh et al. (2023). Physical activity interventions for improving depression, anxiety and distress. *Br. J. Sports Med.*
9. Special Olympics (n.d.). *Strong Minds; Strong Minds tips for stress: Coach's playbook*.
10. Thorslund & Rosberg (2024). The meaning of adapted ice-skating for children and youths with disabilities. *Disabil. Rehabil.*, 46(24).