
Dealing with Fear

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How to get the best of fear when you feel like it's getting the best of you. It's happened to all of us at one time or another. There you are, standing on the beam, ready to throw a series, when it hits you; paralyzing fear. Your hands start sweating, your heart racing, and you think, "I JUST CAN'T GO!"

Gymnastics can be a scary sport. Learning to deal with fear and push yourself through it is a very important skill to learn if you are going to reach your goals.

Where does Fear come from?

That's a good question. Fear can come from many sources. Sometimes it comes from watching a fall and being afraid you're going to do the same thing. Some-times it comes from a fall you have taken or an injury that was scary and painful. Fear can also come from the wipe-outs we create in our minds! Fear can be very sneaky. It can rear its head when we are burned out, feel too much pressure, or want to try other sports besides gymnastics. No matter what the source of fear, what results are negative thoughts. Most often when you are afraid, you begin this tirade of negative thoughts. You may say to yourself things like, "I'm going to fall," "I can't do this," and "I'm going to peel off the bar and go flying into the wall!" Of course, when you say these things to yourself over and over, you feel very afraid. So afraid in fact, that you feel you can't push through it. These negative thoughts are like a runaway train. They feel out of your control. But actually they aren't, because you control the thoughts in your head! When your thinking is negative and out of control, the result is fear, stress, balking, and tears.



Out of control thinking leads to out of control gymnastics. That is very important for you to know. Once you know this you'll discover the key to fighting fear and inconsistency. That key is getting your thinking disciplined and in control. One way to do this is Mental Choreography.

What is Mental Choreography?

It is just as important to choreograph thoughts as it is to choreograph a floor or beam routine. Do you go out on the floor without your floor routine being choreographed? No. Do you go out and compete beam without a beam routine? No. But most gymnasts have no idea what they should be thinking when they are

working out or competing. That's why we do mental choreography. Mental Choreography is cue words you create and say in your mind during routines, skills, while waiting for your turn, and in competition. Mental choreography will keep your mind focused, so that no negative thoughts can enter. Remember, disciplined thoughts increase consistency, and concentration. Loose, out of control thinking leads to loose, fearful, out of control performance. Constructing positive, mental choreography is the first step in fighting negative thinking!

There are three types of thoughts that you want to use in mental choreography.

They are:

- **Mechanical Statements:** Statements reminding the gymnast of a physical or mechanical technique (i.e. "lift then twist," "higher arms," and "breathe").
- **Energy Statements:** Statements that evoke an emotional response (i.e. "GO," "Push here," and "Relax").
- **Self-esteem Statements:** Statements that encourage self-confidence (i.e. "I can do it," "I've done it before," and "Be the best I can be").



Use these statements to choreograph your routines and individual tricks as well. It is important to keep your thoughts focused all the time. Use mental choreography on dance, easy skills, as well as the skills that cause you fear. When your mind is focused, your body will do exactly what you have trained it to do.

How to create mental choreography.

Putting together your mental choreography is easy. First write out all of your routines. Then write the thoughts you will be thinking during each of your skills. The following is an example of beam mental choreography, beginning while the gymnast is waiting for the judge to raise his/her hand.

Example: Beam Choreography

Before Judge Raises Hand: While I'm waiting I will do some series timers and visualize my routine. I will think: "Shake it out," "I can do it," Deep breaths, "stay tight."

Before Mount: Breathe, "I can do it," "over the top," "square." **Routine:**

- Mount (think "square")
- Dance (think "breathe")
- Gym Acro (think "connect it")
- Flight Series (think "I can do it")
- Dance (think "relax")
- Straddle Down (think "tight toes")

- Leap Series (think "straight legs, don't rush")
- Back handspring (think "sharp arms")
- Dance (think "relax")
- Turn (think "smooth")
- Jumps (think "square hips")
- Dismount (think "go hard, arms up, stick")

Remember to do your mental choreography ALL THE TIME! Do it in your head as you visualize your routines before bed. This trains your body to do the skill perfectly every time you say your words. If you are having trouble with a skill, do some extra drills, or do beam skills on the floor with your mental choreography. This will help your body do the skill automatically whenever you say your words. Fear cannot get in your way if your thinking is strong and disciplined. Creating strong mental choreography will help you get the best of fear before fear gets the best of you!

This article is reprinted from the May/June 1999 *USA Gymnastics* magazine.
