

FIBA

We Are Basketball

IMPROVE YOUR... MENTAL TRAINING FACING UNCERTAINTY

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FIBA - International Basketball Federation

5 Route Suisse, PO Box 29
1295 Mies Switzerland fiba.com
Tel: +41 22 545 00 00
Fax: +41 22 545 00 99

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FIBA Referee Operations.

If you identify an error or a discrepancy in
this material, please notify the FIBA Referee
Operations at refereeing@fiba.basketball

IMPROVE YOUR...

MENTAL TRAINING FACING THE UNCERTAINTY

INTRODUCTION

Present uncertain situations are hard for anyone, but people who are working on the court can face mental health risks as they go from very active lifestyles with a lot of travels, games, social interaction to isolation, highly active lifestyles to isolation and boredom, and inactivity.

In order to help the basketball referees to cope better this difficult period, Mrs Dubravka MARTINOVIĆ, a sports psychologist who has been collaborating with the FIBA Referee Operations since 2014, has elaborated 3 sets of documents, this being one, that provides hopefully new tools to improve our wellbeing, including knowledge, tips and exercises.

Enjoy you reading and hopefully you find this material helpful.

At your service,

FIBA Referee Operations

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Facing the uncertainty	4
How to stay focused and prepared in these extremely extraordinary times?	7
Stay focused, active and productive	9
Self-talk & thinking style.....	12
Appendix - Worksheet 1 / Active coping.....	14
Appendix - Worksheet 2 / Strenghts.....	16

FACING THE UNCERTAINTY



During the last few months we have been all dealing with tough times, experiencing COVID-19 situations on a global level in many ways. What we are experiencing now is something that most of us have never experienced before – we are not able to live our lives normally, the way we used to. We are restricted from leaving our homes and spending time outdoors. We are instructed to avoid social contacts with the people in our environment. This can be intensively stressful. Many people struggle for their lives, the others live in isolation, the whole world is in a global quarantine and no-one knows how long this pandemic will last. It is the uncertainty that takes time to accept, to understand and to learn to live with. Above all, we are constantly being bombarded with the updates regarding COVID-19 from different media sources, from everywhere and everyone, including many fake and unofficial news.

Processing and analyzing this amount of information and coping with all the unusual circumstances we are currently in, can lead us to a sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. For example, we can experience anxiety because of the unknown, frustration towards what we can't control, or fear of the possible negative consequences in the future. All the above, combined with the stress of the possible job loss, getting sick and not being able to do what we like may lead us to the feeling of frustration and helplessness.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms - do not worry. It is a normal human reaction to these types of situations and that is how most people usually behave. It is not just you. When the threat is new, unfamiliar and it's uncertain when is going to end, it is appropriate to be concerned. But we should not allow these feelings to prevail and occupy us. The negative and catastrophic thinking doesn't serve us. It leads to fear and blocks our creativity and the ability to search for solutions. In situations like these, we find out who we really are and what do we learn about ourselves.

Which part of your personality and character will come out? What are you made of?



When we become aware of our negative thoughts and feelings, it is important to take a step back and learn how to cope with this negative emotional state. By our nature, we are resourceful and adaptive. We are able to cope with various stressors and uncertainty but we need to learn how to use them.

Your ability to choose how you view the world and its current state is variable that matters during the days of uncertainty!



HERE ARE PRESENTED FEW GENERAL GUIDELINES ON HOW TO FACE THE UNCERTAINTY:

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

- Stay focused on solutions, tasks, actions, and creativity!
- Almost every important decision we make contains at least a small amount of uncertainty. That's why it's essential that we focus our energy on what matters most to us.
- Ask yourself, "What can I do to stay focused, strong, and safe?" The answer to this question will help you make priorities and define what is important to you. "I choose where I am going to put my attention. I choose what am I going to do, and what actions will I take!"



FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE THINKING & CONSTRUCTIVE SELF-TALK

- There is a saying: "You can't stop a bird from landing on your head, but you can keep it from building a nest." In other words, negative thoughts are unavoidable in the times of uncertainty. But you can refuse to dwell on those thoughts and allow them to take root.
- Practice activating your flexible and creative thinking. Be creative and innovative in a way how you think, behave and what can you do. Choose a self-talk that is inspiring, constructive, and productive!
- Try to keep your thoughts and self-talk positive and avoid the habits that lead to negativity and unhealthy behaviours. "I want to focus on my desires, my tasks, my responsibilities, not on my fears."



- Learn how to become more agile in your thinking and prepare for all possible outcomes. Ask yourself, "What is the worst that can happen?" It is not a pessimism, it is a powerful question because it prepares you for the worst so you can think and plan how you could handle it. This question challenges us to look at all possibilities we have, and those that we can create. When we do so, we expand our ability to cope and adapt to different situations, making uncertainty look more manageable.
- Remind yourself that the fear comes from a primitive part of your brain that wants to take over. Scan fearful thought so you can look at it in a rational manner. It is not easy to think well under challenging and novel situations, but it is important to try and repeat it.

CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES

- Recognize the things you can always control and use them effectively.
- Many circumstances in our life, like this one with COVID-19, are out of our control. There are limits to personal control in some situations, but our response and attitude certainly are.
- In situations like this, the only way to enhance personal control is to deal with the emotions that result from this experience, reframe the meaning of this situation and engage in some activities to cope with the consequences.
- Remember, you are in control of your effort, attitude, actions and emotions, your strength is in your ability to manage the way you respond to what is happening around you.



ACCEPT THAT ONLY CHANGE IS CONSTANT

- If change is the only constant, then flexibility and adaptability are among the most important traits you can develop. This situation will also pass and it will bring some changes. It is important to be strong, patient and adaptable.



"The strongest people are not those who show strength in front of us but those who win battles we never see them fight."

(Jonathan Harnisch)

Uncertainty exists in our lives and it is everywhere in our universe, even in our very own nature. In these situations, it is important to choose to face the uncertainty and to accept it as a part of our nature. The uncertainty will never go, it will be always in our lives. It is important how we are going to deal with it.

Even if all summer tournaments and sports competitions are cancelled it is not catastrophic, because there will be many opportunities for new ones in the future. There are many things in life more important than this. Most of them still exist and are still available for us – hope, family, friendship, spring, sun, creativity, enthusiasm, kindness, altruism, education, and many others!

Despite social distancing in a physical way, we have an opportunity to deepen our relationships with ourselves and with others.

HOW TO STAY FOCUSED AND PREPARED IN THESE EXTREMELY EXTRAORDINARY TIMES?



During these turbulent days of the social distancing and many restricted everyday activities, when you are not able to officiate any game in any competition, it is necessary to maintain the strength and fitness of your body and mind. It is equally important to stay mentally strong, focused, and prepared for the sake of your physical and mental health, as well as for your job demands. Eventually, this extraordinary situation with COVID-19 will also end. Therefore, it is vital to be prepared to continue with our lives by doing what we have been trained to do.

“Luck follows the brave, but even more those who are prepared.”

(Unknown author)

Prior to the presentation of some basic referees' preparation activities, please try to reflect on the following questions about COVID-19 prevention and try to respond:

- Am I engaging in any behaviours that are potentially putting myself and others at risk?
- Is there anything that I could be doing more efficiently?
- What actions do I need to take to stay safe and to protect others?
- Is there someone I can turn to for support?
- What are the things I can control in my life right now?

Clearly, we cannot fully control this situation no matter how much we would like to. Nevertheless, there are many actions that are within our control and they could help us to stay focused, prepared, and safe.

Successful people do not rely on luck, they rely on preparation.



If you carefully reflect on how you prepare for basketball games, you'll see that it is somehow a similar situation. When you are preparing to officiate a game, you are preparing for it not knowing for sure how it is going to end. You are preparing for many possible game situations, but you are also getting ready for the unexpected. Many of you have experienced some unpredictable episodes, but you knew how to handle them by anticipation, preparation, focus and adaptivity. The better you are prepared and maintain flexible thinking regarding possible solutions, the better you are as a referee. In other words, the uncertainty is the reality of referee's life during every game. You never know what will surely happen in the game or how it will end, still you are prepared for multiple situations and you stay focused on your tasks and responsibilities.

Moreover, when you are preparing for the game, you are also preparing for the possible overtime. In these circumstances we should prepare for the overtime too. Even for two overtimes or more. We do not know for how long this unfortunate situation is going to last. Neither do we know how the world will look like when all of this is over. However, we need to stay focused on our responsibilities and available solutions.

As said, it is mainly about the ability to adapt and activate your flexible, creative, solution-mode thinking style:

- What can I do in this situation?
- What options and solutions do I have?
- Which actions should I take?
- Which skills and strategies should I use?



"Strength doesn't come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn't."
(Rikki Rogers)

Stay Safe and Strong !

STAY FOCUSED, ACTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE



As mentioned before, it is important staying focused on the things that you are able to control, as well as performing day-by-day activities in order to maintain the physical and mental shape. This will help you to stay on track and to keep up with the demands of your professional activities and the officiating. Here are some specific guidelines on how to remain focused and productive.

CREATE YOUR DAILY SCHEDULE

Build your 'to-do list'

- Make a plan and write down your timeline for activities during the day.
- Make it for each day during the week. (You can have one day 'activities off').
- Be organized and follow it as much as possible.



Organize a workspace where you can work, study and exercise

- Find the quiet place in your home and turn off the distractors.

Do your best to stay well prepared and in touch with your profession and officiating:

- Use this time as an opportunity to learn something new and master it.
- Upgrade your English (the official FIBA language).
- Read the FIBA rulebook and the interpretations, as well as the modifications
- Once a week organize a meeting with your colleagues – e.g. a 3PO discussion, new rules or some interesting clips from the season.
- Practice visualization, imagery, and relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness. Use the imagery to keep up your mental preparation at the optimal level.

EXERCISE: VISUALIZATION & IMAGERY

Start your imagery exercise with relaxation breathing rhythm that is most comfortable for you. You can use imagery to:

- Work on **your IOT**. Practice specific movements, presentation and signalling, and repeat them many times in different imaginary situations.
- Improve your **3PO rotation mechanics and positioning**. After watching a clip you can repeat proper rotation by visualizing it.
- Learn and rehearse **new rules**. After you read the new rule book and interpretations you can rehearse these situations in many different imaginary scenarios. Be creative.
- Master your **communication skills** (especially for the situations when communicating with coaches and players).
- Stay on track with the **officiating experience**. You can recall some interesting games you've had and experience it again. Firstly by watching it and later by visualizing the most educational situations you had in the game.
- Build up your **self-confidence**. You can recall the best game or the best tournament you've had and experience it again. Firstly by watching the game video, and later – in visualization.

Exercise and stay physically fit:

- Do your best to stay prepared and adjust your workout.
- Follow the guidelines and suggestions provided by physical preparation professionals.
- Watch your diet and proper nutrition.



Take time to relax:

- Listen to the music, read books, watch movies, do things that help you to stay calm.
- Take time to meditate and have time just for yourself.



SOCIALIZE ONLINE

To emotionally cope with the psychological effects of this unusual situation share your thoughts and emotions with your family members, friends and colleagues. Even if you live alone you do not need to be lonely.

- Use video calls to share your emotions, thoughts, and ideas. Even if you feel sad, angry or frustrated try to speak with the psychologist or with someone you trust and someone who can listen to you.
- Be careful and sensitive when listening to your family members, friends and colleagues if they openly speak to you about their feelings. Show them your support and try to understand them.
- Share suggestions and ideas about what you can do and how to spend time.
- You can even have an online exercise session with your fellow game officials.

Select the information source you will trust

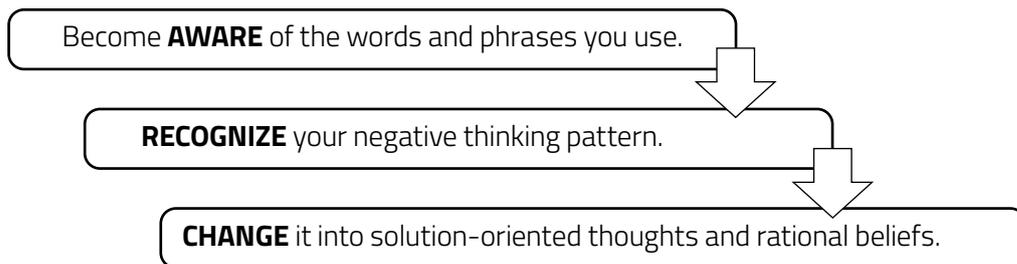
- Follow the trusted media portals that provide verified information and the advice from the National Institute of Public Health (or the equivalent body in your country).
- Check for updates only 2 – 3 times a day. There is no need for more frequent updates. (By constantly monitoring and checking the various information and data, feelings of powerlessness and anxiety can begin to emerge.)

If you are occasionally in a bad mood because of what is happening, do not worry. It is a normal human reaction in situations like this. The feelings of anxiety, worry or sadness are not unusual, but do not allow fear and negative thoughts to take control over your behaviour and the overall well-being. Turn your attention to something else, like an activity that calms you down and keeps you in a good mood. Concentrate on your goals continuing with your daily activities.

***Stay home, but stay active
& productive!***

SELF-TALK & THINKING STYLE

During this situation with COVID-19, it is truly important to develop an affirmative and constructive self-talk.



The solution-oriented positive self-talk will help you to remain productive and mentally strong by focusing on solutions, responsibilities and actions you can take during this period. This way, by focusing on the things you can control, you will be able to deal more effectively with the current situation day-by-day.

In the thought challenge exercise you may list the ways how the negative and unhelpful thoughts could be effectively challenged. Replacing these with positive and realistic thoughts could be a great coping tool.

Your ability to choose how you view the world and its current state is variable that matters during the days of uncertainty!

Many believe emotions and behavior are the products of the situation in which someone happens to be. Quite the contrary, it is our view and the thinking pattern that determines our mood, emotions and adaptability.

When you become aware of your negative thoughts and the inappropriate self-talk, it is important to change them into positive and affirmative ones. This could be achieved by using a **thought stopping** and **solution mode thinking!**

EXERCISE: CONTROLLING SELF-TALK

In order to change negative thoughts into more constructive and positive ones, it is important to:

- Become aware and recognize a negative thought or self-talk (i.e. "This is horrible. Why this is happening? This will last forever and I can't handle this anymore.")
- Stop and interrupt negative thought with a rational belief (i.e. "It is normal that I feel a bit anxious in this situation, but this will not help me to deal with this situation effectively. I should focus on the things I can do and the actions I can take.")
- Regain control with 2-3 breaths
- Frame your new affirmative thought and repeat it (i.e. "This will pass too! Stay focused on the things you can control. Search for the best solution you can / you have in this situation.)

By doing so you will tell yourself that it is normal to be concerned in this situation, but you will not let the negative thinking to overwhelm you. Also, shift your attention towards the things you can do and the responsibilities you have in order to remain healthy and productive.

EXERCISE: “WHAT IF ... ?” SCENARIO

When we tell ourselves “What if something bad happens?” we often identify the potential danger. Each time we do this there are many positive possibilities. Yet, we fail to see them because the fear blocks our creativity and innovation. If we primarily see bad possibilities and not the good ones, we develop an unbalanced and unrealistic view of the situation.

Therefore, try to come up with at least three possible solutions for each negative consequence.

“WHAT IF...?”	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
“What if something terrible happens? “What if all goes wrong?” “What if I get sick?” “What if this will last more than expected?” “What if I lose my job?” ...	“Did anything similar happen before? How did I cope with it?” “Who could I call on to help me get through it?” “What resources, skills, and abilities would be helpful to me if this happened?” “What would a friend tell me about my worry?” “What can I do, what other options and solutions do I have?”

By simply thinking through the likelihood and possible outcomes of a catastrophe may help you to decrease the anxiety towards the potential situation you are fixed on.

This kind of thinking requires to set the mind into a solution-oriented mode in any problematic situation. If we start thinking that everything is going to be perfect and there will be no problems or consequences afterwards, this will definitely not be a productive or effective way of thinking. We do not know for sure what the future holds. Similarly, we cannot predict events. What we can do, however, is to take actions we can and prepare for the future. By doing so, we give ourselves directions and stay mentally strong.

APPENDIX - WORKSHEET 1 / ACTIVE COPING

ACTIVE COPING

Active coping refers to strategies that are directed at a problem-solving to deal with a stressor and to reduce its effects. People who engage in active coping rely upon their own resources, skills, and strategies to deal with a specific situation. Active coping is an adaptive way of dealing with stressful events.

EXERCISE 1: Identify things under your control and things that are not under your control

THINGS UNDER YOUR CONTROL	THINGS THAT ARE NOT UNDER YOUR CONTROL
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*Things that are under your control include your effort and attitude, your reactions and responses, your behaviour and actions you take. And there are many others you can think of.

EXERCISE 2: Think about actions you are going to take

Now think about and write down actions that are fully within your power, that are specific and effective. Think about what resources, specific skills, supports, strategies you have and how can you include them to actively cope with this situation.

- How can I cope with this?
- What solutions do I have?
- What skills and strategies can I use?
- What specific actions am I going to take?

ACTIONS YOU ARE GOING TO TAKE

*Including actions like problem-solving technique, investing more effort in one area, seeking official and proven information, reframing the meaning of the problem, learning a new skill, improving your knowledge on some topic, redefining your values, and many other specific actions and activities.

APPENDIX - WORKSHEET 2 / STRENGTHS

STRENGTHS

In these worksheets you will become aware of your 'strengths and skills' you already possess and also those that you may gain dealing with this specific situation effectively.

1) Think about and write down the strengths you already possess.

MY STRENGTHS

2) Think about and write down the strengths you think you will gain (or you are already developing) by experiencing this specific situation (COVID-19).

STRENGTHS & SKILLS

I WILL GAIN / I HAVE GAINED DURING THIS SITUATION

3) Which of these 'strengths' and experiences will be useful for you (a referee) and helpful in the officiating environment? How this experience will be valuable in the officiating world?

HOW IT WILL BE VALUABLE IN THE FUTURE?

STANDARD QUALITY GLOBAL CONNECTION



5, route Suisse - P.O. Box 29
1295 Mies
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 22 545 00 00
Fax: +41 22 545 00 99