



**Coach behaviours, parent behaviours, and negative perfectionistic thoughts. This summary describes the findings of a study examining the relationships between coach and parent behaviours and the experience of negative perfectionistic thoughts in junior athletes.**

## **Introduction**

Some junior athletes experience negative thoughts that undermine their motivation, performance, and wellbeing. Research suggests that coaches and parents can influence the degree to which these thoughts are experienced through their behaviour. Some behaviour contributes to more of these thoughts and other behaviour contributes to less of these thoughts.

## **Negative perfectionistic thoughts**

Many athletes experience perfectionistic thoughts. These are frequent, intrusive thoughts focused on mistakes, failure, and the need to be perfect. Research has found that perfectionistic thoughts are associated with negative emotions such as anxiety and are also associated with symptoms of athlete burnout.

## **Coach behaviours and “achievement climates”**

Coach and parent behaviours can be classified as creating either a “mastery climate” or a “performance climate.” A mastery climate is created by coaches when athletes are encouraged to learn together and from each other, everyone is given important roles in the team, and effort and personal improvement is promoted. A mastery climate is created by parents when they emphasize the value of effort over the value of ability. In contrast, a performance climate is created when athletes are encouraged to compete against one another when on the same team, only the better athletes are recognised and rewarded, and mistakes are punished. A performance climate is created by parents when they worry about their child’s performance and emphasise success with as little effort as possible.

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## The study

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between a mastery climate, a performance climate (created by coaches and parents), and negative perfectionistic thoughts among junior athletes. To address this purpose, 190 male and female junior athletes from sport academies (age ranged from 10 to 18) completed a questionnaire to measure perceptions of their coach and parents, as well as their experience of negative perfectionistic thoughts.

## The results

The study revealed that:

When junior athletes reported that their coach created a performance climate, they experienced more frequent negative perfectionistic thoughts.

When junior athletes reported that their parents created a performance climate, they experienced more AND less frequent negative perfectionistic thoughts depending on the gender of the athlete and parent.

Specifically, both male and female junior athletes reported that when their father created a performance climate, they experienced more frequent negative perfectionistic thoughts.

However, only female junior athletes reported that when their mother created a performance climate, they experienced more frequent negative perfectionistic thoughts.

## Practical implications

A mastery climate offers the best means of reducing the experience of negative perfectionistic thoughts in junior athletes. Therefore, coaches should consider the following:

- Make athletic development the main focus of participation (not winning or outperforming others).
- Design tasks where effort (not ability) is the reason for success.
- Encourage parents to provide strong mastery-focused messages to their children (e.g., the importance of effort, not ability).

## This summary is based on the article below:

Appleton, P. R., Hall, H. K., & Hill, A. P. (2011). Examining the influence of the parent-initiated and coach-created motivational climate upon athletes' perfectionistic cognitions. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 29, 661-671.

## Other useful readings on the topics discussed are:

Duda, J.L. & Balaguer, I. (2007). Coach-created motivational climate. In S. Jowett & D. Lavallee (Eds.), *Social Psychology in Sport* (pp. 117-130).

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