

# FEAR OF DISAPPOINTING: WHEN ANXIETY TAKES HOLD IN ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents enjoy pushing themselves and taking on challenges. A healthy sports environment that allows them to explore their abilities can foster their growth and fulfillment. However, when there is no room for mistakes, when only results are valued, and when the fear of disappointing others takes over, young people's well-being can suffer.

Common among many teens, the fear of disappointing others is a complex emotion that can have significant consequences in their personal lives and interpersonal relationships. It can lead to excessive perfectionism, avoidance behaviors, demotivation, and low self-esteem.

## **Student-athletes' experiences: insights from the field**

- **Invisible pressure:** Young people often feel that every action, performance, or decision could potentially disappoint important adults in their lives—parents, coaches, mentors.
- **Emotional burden:** This fear can lead to self-censorship, perfectionism, or avoidance, at the expense of their well-being and their ability to experiment or make mistakes.
- **Isolation:** Performance anxiety linked to this fear prevents young people from sharing their doubts and difficulties, reinforcing feelings of loneliness and emotional vulnerability.



# CONCRETE ACTION

## Put words to the fear.

- Each week, set aside 5–10 minutes after practice for a quick round of sharing: each player names one thing they are afraid of disappointing others about, without judgment and without any impact on their playing time or selection.
- Encourage others to listen without interrupting or correcting, to normalize the fact that this fear is shared.
- Share a personal example of a situation where you experienced this fear and overcame it.
- Praise the effort and courage it takes to speak up rather than the outcome, reinforcing that mistakes or struggles do not diminish a young person's worth.

By repeating this practice, adolescents learn to recognize and name their fear, open up without feeling judged, and gradually detach from the constant pressure of “not disappointing.”

