

The Power-Up Program: A manualised psychological skills training program for professionals working with competitive child and adolescent athletes and performers.

The use of psychological skills training for elite adult athletes and performers is well documented in research studies (e.g. Rogerson and Hrycaiko, 2002; Thelwell & Maynard, 2003; and Malouff, McGee, Halford & Rooke, 2008). Instruction in psychological skills for performance are also readily available in self-help style manuals for adults (e.g. Lardon, 2008; Mack & Casstevens, 2001; and Orlick, 2009). There is however a dearth of research investigating the use of these skills with children and adolescents, and no manualised programs are currently available. Available research indicates that children and adolescents may experience barriers to performance that are similar to those experienced by adults, and may therefore also benefit from the use of psychological skills training. Grossbard, Smith, Smoll & Cumming (2009) for example found that children experience somatic anxiety, worry and concentration disruption in regards to performance. Children were also found to benefit from using imagery when learning closed motor skills (Taktek, Zinsser & St-John, 2008).

In combination with this gap in targeted research and applied psychological skills programs for children and adolescents, there are relatively few sport and exercise psychologists providing services of this nature to children and adolescents. The lack of a developmentally appropriate, manualised program may also mean that other psychologists who work with children and adolescents may be unsure of how to adapt mainstream psychological interventions for use with the context of performance. This creates a barrier for children and adolescents to acquiring and applying psychological skills as a regular part of preparation and competition. As with all psychological skills, being introduced in childhood an adolescence helps develop a healthy awareness of internal processes, as well as beginning to develop tools to manage ups and downs. These skills are not only useful for improving performance, contributing to overall positive mental health and life skills.

Power Up! has been created to provide a manualised program that covers developmentally appropriate psychological skills training for competitive child and adolescent athletes and performers. With facilitation by a skilled clinician, coach or instructor, psychological skills are accessible and meaningful to young performers, being readily applicable to their experiences of preparation and competition. The program is designed to engage children and adolescents in a fun and creative manner, allowing them to more positively and confidently engage in training, practice or study and competition and exam experiences. Facilitators will find that the program is easy to use, provides a step by step guide to using the activities and gives a rationale of the skills covered.

POWER UP!

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E info@quirkykid.com.au **T** +61 2 9362 9297

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