

Lesson 8: Mental Resilience and Focus

EBCS Level 2 CPD – Advanced Coach as Mentor

Learning Objectives (for the coach)

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of mental resilience and focus in bowls performance.
- Coach players in techniques to manage pressure, setbacks, and distractions.
- Teach practical routines such as pre-shot rituals, self-talk, and breathing control.
- Design drills that develop focus and resilience under competition conditions.
- Encourage players to create personal mental strategies for long-term growth.

Background (why this matters)

Bowls is as much a mental game as a physical one. Many technically strong players fail under competition pressure due to lapses in concentration or an inability to recover from mistakes. Resilient players:

- Accept errors quickly and refocus.
- Maintain composure under stress or distractions.
- Trust routines rather than overthink technique.
- Use positive self-talk to boost confidence.
- Apply breathing and visualisation to steady nerves.

Coaches must equip players with practical tools to strengthen mental toughness, so they can deliver skills consistently in competition.

Practical Activities

Session Options:

Option 1 — 90-minute CPD Workshop:

- 1) Introduction to mental resilience and focus (15 min)
- 2) Demonstration of coping strategies (20 min)
- 3) Resilience-building drills (30 min)
- 4) Group reflection on personal strategies (15 min)
- 5) Wrap-up and homework (10 min)

Option 2 — 70-minute On-Rink Player Session:

- 1) Pre-shot routine reinforcement (10 min)
- 2) Mistake recovery drill (15 min)
- 3) Focus reset activities (20 min)
- 4) Distraction training game (15 min)
- 5) Homework briefing (10 min)

Example Resilience and Focus Drills:

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- Mistake Recovery Drill: After a poor bowl, players must step off, reset breathing, repeat the routine, and deliver again.
- Focus Reset Routine: Players use a trigger word or gesture (e.g., tapping the bowl) before delivery to refocus attention.
- Distraction Training: Teammates create mild distractions (movement, noise) while the bowler must maintain focus on the target.
- Pressure Countdown: Deliver 4 bowls within a time limit, maintaining routine and composure.
- Visualisation Exercise: Players close their eyes, picture delivering the perfect shot, then immediately deliver with that mental image.

Questioning Prompts

- 'How did you feel after making a mistake—what helped you reset?'
- 'Which part of your pre-shot routine calms you most?'
- 'What self-talk phrases helped focus your mind?'
- 'How did distractions affect you, and how did you cope?'
- 'What mental strategy will you take into your next match?'

Coach Notes (ethics, inclusivity, safety)

- Avoid shaming mistakes—frame them as learning opportunities.
- Ensure all players are supported equally—mental skills benefit everyone, not just skips or leaders.
- Respect individual differences—allow players to create personal routines that feel natural.
- Keep distraction drills safe and respectful (no negative or harmful behaviours).
- Encourage a positive, growth-focused training environment.

Reflection (self + peer)

Coach self-reflection:

- Did I balance technical correction with mental support?
- Which drills helped players refocus after errors?
- Did players engage positively with routines and self-talk?
- How did players respond to pressure or distractions?

Peer feedback:

- 'I noticed you supported resilience by... (specific). This helped when... (evidence). You could also try... (suggestion).'

Player homework:

- Practise pre-shot routine daily until it becomes automatic.
- Write down 2 positive self-talk phrases and use them in practice.
- After each session, note how quickly you recovered from a mistake.



Outcomes (what you should achieve)

- Ability to coach resilience and focus as core performance skills.
- Confidence in using routines, self-talk, and breathing with players.
- Skill in designing resilience-building drills.
- Support players to cope with mistakes and pressure effectively.
- Foster a growth mindset and an inclusive mental skills culture.



Appendix A

Resilience and Focus Drills: Mistake Recovery Drill (Reset & Refocus After Error)

Objective:

To train players in mental resilience by practising how to recover quickly and positively after a poor delivery, using reset routines such as breathing and refocusing.

Setup:

1. Place a jack at a standard length.
2. Each player delivers a bowl as normal.
3. If the bowl is poor (too short, wrong line, overweight), the drill begins:
 - The player must *step off the mat*.
 - Reset with breathing and routine.
 - Deliver the next bowl with focus on the process, not the mistake.

Method:

1. Player delivers a bowl — regardless of the outcome, the coach calls for a reset if the delivery was poor.
2. Player physically **steps back off the mat** to break the moment.
3. Use a **reset routine**:
 - Three deep breaths.
 - Positive self-talk (e.g., “*Next one will be better.*”).
 - Visualise the correct line and weight.
 - Step back onto the mat with purpose.
4. Player delivers the next bowl as if starting fresh.
5. Repeat across a set of bowls, reinforcing recovery rather than dwelling.

Coaching Points:

- Emphasise that **mistakes are part of bowls** — what matters is the *response*, not the error.
- Stress *body language reset*: shoulders back, chin up, confidence restored.
- Encourage players to “park the mistake” with a physical cue (e.g., tap bowl, wipe hand).
- Ask reflective questions:



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- “What helped you reset?”
- “Did you feel calmer after the breathing?”
- Reinforce that this skill transfers directly into matches.

Progression:

- Add mild pressure: teammate or skip observing closely.
- Simulate end-game scenarios: e.g., “You missed the last shot — now you must draw to save the game.”
- Encourage peer feedback on visible confidence recovery.
- Run a competition: players score points for good recoveries, not just outcomes.

Outcome:

- Builds **mental resilience** and emotional control.
- Helps players develop a reliable **reset routine** after errors.
- Reinforces positive body language and focus under pressure.
- Teaches that recovery is a *coachable skill*, not just a personal trait.

Resilience and Focus Drills: Focus Reset Routine (Trigger Word or Gesture)

Objective:

To train players to use a personal trigger (word, gesture, or action) to refocus attention before delivery. This builds concentration, reduces distractions, and creates a repeatable mental anchor under pressure.

Setup:

1. Place the jack at a chosen length (medium is ideal to begin).
2. Ask each player to choose a **simple trigger** that feels natural:
 - A **gesture**: tapping the bowl, touching the mat, adjusting grip.
 - A **word/phrase**: “smooth,” “focus,” or “trust it.”
3. Coach explains that this trigger is a signal to *switch into delivery mode*.

Method:

1. The player stands behind the mat, holding the bowl.
2. Before stepping onto the mat, they perform their **trigger action/word**.

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3. The player then goes through their normal pre-shot routine (stance, aim, delivery).
4. Deliver 4–6 bowls, repeating the trigger each time.
5. After each end, reflect: did the trigger help sharpen focus or reduce wandering thoughts?

Coaching Points:

- Stress that the trigger should be **short, simple, and repeatable** — not distracting.
- Reinforce that it must become part of the **routine**, not an afterthought.
- Encourage self-awareness: *“Did you feel more focused after the trigger?”*
- Highlight that the trigger is especially useful when:
 - Coming back after a mistake.
 - Facing pressure shots.
 - Playing in noisy or distracting environments.

Progression:

- Add **mild distractions** (noise, time pressure, observers) and see if the trigger helps focus.
- Encourage players to try the drill across different jack lengths and hands.
- Combine with **Mistake Recovery Drill** — use the trigger as part of the reset process.
- In team play, allow each player to share their trigger so teammates can reinforce it.

Outcome:

- Builds a **consistent mental anchor** for focus.
- Helps players regain concentration after errors or distractions.
- Creates a personal cue that carries into competitive play.
- Increases confidence by giving players control over their focus.

Resilience and Focus Drills: Distraction Training (Maintaining Focus Under Pressure)

Objective:

To train players to stay focused on their target and routine despite mild external distractions, building mental toughness and composure.

Setup:

1. Place the jack at a chosen length (medium to start).

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2. Nominate one bowler to deliver, while teammates (or coach) create **controlled distractions**:
 - **Visual distractions**: small movements at the head, shifting position, walking past.
 - **Auditory distractions**: light chatter, coughs, clapping, background noise.
 - **Environmental cues**: placing extra cones or bowls in peripheral vision.
3. Stress the rule: distractions must be **mild and safe** — not mocking or negative.

Method:

1. Player prepares as normal with their pre-shot routine.
2. Teammates begin light distractions while the bowler sets up and delivers.
3. The player must use routine and focus tools (breathing, trigger word/gesture) to maintain concentration on the target.
4. After delivery, reflect: did the distraction affect line, weight, or rhythm?
5. Repeat with several ends, rotating bowlers and varying distraction types.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce that **focus is a skill** that can be trained, not just “natural.”
- Encourage use of reset routines (breathing, trigger word) to block out distractions.
- Highlight body language — staying calm, steady, and confident despite external noise.
- Ask reflective questions:
 - *“What distraction affected you most?”*
 - *“What helped you block it out?”*

Progression:

- Increase distraction intensity gradually (more movement, louder noise).
- Add **time pressure** alongside distractions.
- Use match-like scenarios (e.g., noisy crowd simulation).
- Score performance: 1 point per bowl within the target zone despite distractions.

Outcome:

- Builds **mental resilience** under pressure.
- Prepares players for real-world match distractions (crowds, movement on adjacent rinks, external noise).



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- Reinforces reliance on routine and focus anchors.
- Boosts confidence that performance can hold up even in imperfect environments.

Resilience and Focus Drills: Pressure Countdown (Timed Delivery Challenge)

Objective:

To train players to maintain composure, routine, and focus while delivering bowls under a time constraint. This simulates pressure situations such as televised matches, tournaments, or tight match scenarios.

Setup:

1. Place the jack at a chosen length (medium or long is best to start).
2. Give each player **4 bowls**.
3. Set a visible timer (phone, stopwatch, or countdown clock).
4. Set the time limit (e.g., **2 minutes to deliver all 4 bowls**).

Method:

1. The player begins behind the mat with their first bowl.
2. Timer starts — the player must deliver all 4 bowls before the countdown ends.
3. Player must still go through their **full pre-shot routine** (breathing, trigger word, focus) — rushing is not allowed.
4. Score or review results:
 - Were bowls delivered on time?
 - Did consistency (line/length) hold up under the time limit?
 - Was routine maintained, or did the player cut corners?
5. Repeat for several rounds, reducing the time limit to increase pressure.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce that *time pressure is not an excuse to skip routine*.
- Watch body language: calm, confident players handle the clock better.
- Encourage players to self-reflect: *"Did you feel rushed?" "Which step of your routine did you shorten?"*
- Highlight that composure under time stress separates good players from great ones.

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Progression:

- Reduce time gradually (from 2 minutes → 90 seconds → 1 minute).
- Add mild distractions (noise, teammates watching closely).
- Run in groups: each player takes a turn, others observe.
- Add competition: score points for bowls in a 1m target zone within time.

Outcome:

- Builds the ability to maintain **routine under pressure**.
- Reinforces confidence in the pre-shot process.
- Improves time efficiency and decision-making speed.
- Prepares players for competitive scenarios with shot clocks or final-end pressure.

Resilience and Focus Drills: Visualisation Exercise (Mental Rehearsal of the Perfect Shot)

Objective:

To improve focus, confidence, and consistency by using mental imagery before delivery. Players learn to “see” the shot first, then execute it with belief and clarity.

Setup:

1. Place the jack at a chosen length (medium is a good starting point).
2. Ask players to stand behind the mat with a bowl in hand.
3. Create a quiet environment where players can concentrate without interruption.

Method:

1. Player closes their eyes for 10–15 seconds.
2. Coach guides them through a **mental rehearsal**:
 - Picture stance, smooth backswing, steady step, clean release.
 - Imagine the bowl rolling on the correct line, over the shoulder point, slowing perfectly to rest near the jack.
 - Hear the sound of the bowl finishing, feel the satisfaction of success.



3. After building this vivid image, the player steps onto the mat and immediately delivers the bowl.
4. Reflect briefly after delivery: did the bowl feel closer to the visualised version?

Coaching Points:

- Encourage players to use **all senses** in the visualisation — sight, sound, and feel.
- Remind them that visualisation should be **positive only** (picture success, not mistakes).
- Stress the link between **confidence and imagery**: believing the shot is possible before playing it.
- Ask reflective questions:
 - *“Did your bowl match the image in your mind?”*
 - *“How did the visualisation affect your confidence?”*

Progression:

- Increase complexity: visualise different shots (front bowl, positional cover, trail).
- Add mild distractions — train players to refocus through imagery even in noisy settings.
- Use it in **pre-match routines**: 2–3 visualised shots before play begins.
- Combine with **Pressure Countdown Drill** — visualise under time stress, then deliver.

Outcome:

- Builds confidence and mental clarity before delivery.
- Reinforces consistency of routine through imagery.
- Helps players handle pressure by pre-playing success in their minds.
- Creates a transferable skill for competitive preparation and recovery.

Appendix B – Glossary of Coaching Terms

Mistake Recovery Drill: An activity where players practise refocusing quickly after an error.

Focus Reset Routine: A personal trigger (word, gesture, breath) to restore concentration.

Distraction Training: A drill where mild distractions are introduced to practise staying focused.

Pre-shot Routine: A set of consistent actions before delivery that anchors focus and reduces anxiety.

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Visualisation: The mental rehearsal of a successful action to boost confidence and focus.

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