

Strengths-Based Approaches to Engaging and Motivating Adolescent Boys



A presentation to the USA Swimming community
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Thompson Coaching and Development Group, LLC

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☞ Adolescent Life Coaching

Transitions

Overcoming obstacles

Your Best Self

Relationships

Performance

Your Best Life

☞ Sport/Performance Psychology

Mindset Development

Overcoming obstacles

Your Best Self

Anxiety & Fear

Performance plateau's

Self-Doubt

☞ Clinical Hypnosis

Performance

Habit control

Psyching up/down

Your Best Self

☞ Workshops and Speaking Engagements

Your Best Self

Motivation/Leadership

Objectives



Familiarize coaches and parents with the biological (brain-based) and cultural challenges unique to adolescent boys, including the concept of “restricted emotionality” and its ramifications

Discuss healthy adolescent male development and how we can apply it to athletics (swimming)

Review and apply Kiselica’s model of Positive Masculinity

Present an overview of Positive Psychology interventions that work and can be transferred to the sport of swimming

Out of the box strategies

My Background



30 years as a head swimming coach at the high school, club, and collegiate level

10 years as a secondary school counselor

Adjunct faculty member at 4 colleges/universities

Doctoral student in Human Development – Dissertation on the impact of positive psychology interventions for adolescent male swimmers who have plateaued

Private Life Coaching/Sport Psychology practice – Nationwide

Director for the Academy of Academic Excellence and Student Success - NYCC

My Story

Anecdotal Evidence



Insights from Participants

Differences in boys and girls?

What motivates?

Ego focused competitors?

Hierarchy and status?

Emotional challenges?

Self-confidence?

Retention?

Biological and Cultural Challenges



Adolescent Boys

- ∞ 90% of all discipline problems in school
- ∞ 80% of all high school dropouts
- ∞ 70% of all earned D's and F's
- ∞ Majority of all ADD and ADHD diagnosis
- ∞ Majority of completed suicides
- ∞ Anecdotal evidence of retention in swimming

WHY?

Biological and Cultural Challenges



Brain Maturity

Cognitive and Emotional delays
Behavioral Self-regulation issues
Hierarchy

Emotional

Fear & vulnerability
Silence & solitude
Teasing and mockery
Anger & aggression

How This Plays Out



Painful Feelings/Fear of Rejection

- ❧ Emotional Intelligence (EI)
 - Need to feel emotional connections
 - Need male role models who emote
 - Boys more sensitive than girls?
- ❧ Delays in EI Inhibit ability to perform and excel
- ❧ Today's student not necessarily as prepared to manage themselves during crisis or challenge (deficits)
- ❧ Many youth are feeling helpless/ self-defeat
- ❧ Brain based delays (males)
- ❧ Issues influencing well-being & development; (race, ethnicity, identity, family, abuse, temperament, substance use/abuse, goals, identified passions and interests)

What Boys Value



- ❧ Winning
- ❧ Self-confidence and athletic identity
- ❧ Hierarchy & Status
- ❧ Independence & Autonomy (freedom)
- ❧ Psychological self-protection
- ❧ Connection and Autonomy
- ❧ Consultation
- ❧ Safety
- ❧ Acceptance (earned through performance)
- ❧ Approval

When Needs Aren't Met



Self-Esteem tied to Differentiation

Pressure to Perform

Restricted Emotionality

Emotional Illiteracy

Feel controlled/no options

When boys express anger or aggression we tend to see this as normal

When boys become surly or withdrawn we tend to see this as normal

When boys express sadness or fear, we tend to treat it differently

What This May Lead To



- ❧ Learned Aggression- Cruelty to others (girls)
- ❧ Defiance
- ❧ Ego focused behavior
- ❧ Added pressure to perform
- ❧ Hyper-activity
- ❧ Loss in feelings of well-being
- ❧ Decreased enjoyment
- ❧ Decreased Self-confidence
- ❧ Insecurity & Withdrawal
- ❧ Anxiety

Challenge & Adversity

Encouraging Boys to Grow



- ❧ Successful negotiation from challenge and adversity leads to well-being, confidence, hard work, and resiliency
- ❧ Emotional resources are essential
- ❧ Strength is cultivated when we;
 - Find meaning in life struggles
 - Realize our talents
 - Apply these talents
 - Love and care for others
 - Are true to our moral code

Strengths-Based Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness

- ☞ Elite athletes use a base strength to achieve excellence
- ☞ Elite athletes find ways to capitalize on their strengths
- ☞ Elite athletes use strengths to overcome obstacles



Strength Development



- ❧ VIA Classification of Strengths
- ❧ CliftonStrengths Finder
- ❧ Your Own Unique Set
 - Individuals
 - Team
 - Sport Culture
 - Stroke/Event Specific
 - Physical Skills (ie. Starts)



Strength Development



☞ Adolescents are drawn to challenge

Emotional well-being vs. Psychological well-being

Is it ok for kids to simply feel happy, but rarely challenged?

Adolescents are drawn to leadership

Adolescents are drawn to learning

Adolescents are drawn to love, hope

gratitude and zest

Positive Masculinity

Kiselica & Englar-Carlson 2010



- ❧ Friendships & intimacy through shared activity
- ❧ Caring for, and protecting, loved ones
- ❧ Male self-reliance – Confronting challenges
- ❧ Sense of purpose and meaning through work
- ❧ Male courage, daring, and risk taking
- ❧ Group participation creates identity
- ❧ Service to others
- ❧ Humor communicates caring and coping
- ❧ Male nobility/heroism

Positive Masculinity

Kindlon & Thompson 2009



∞ Boundless Physical Energy

∞ Curiosity

∞ Boldness

∞ Desire for Action

How Sport Transforms Boys

Loss and imperfection can be experienced in a group
Creates opportunities to meet challenges head on
Shared sacrifice
Personal goal achievement
Friendships through shared activity
Strong teams = strong identity
Strong identification = pride/service
Safely negotiate power
Play and passion
Flow States- Engagement



How Positive Psychology Transforms

Flourishing
Subjective Well-Being
Positivity
Engagement
Strengths Awareness
Resiliency
Vitality
Self-esteem
Optimism
Perseverance
Engagement



Specific Theories



Personal Leadership Positive Psychology Interventions

- ❧ Subjective Well-Being (Diener)
- ❧ Self-Theories (Dweck)
- ❧ Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan)
- ❧ Happiness (Lyubomirsky)
- ❧ Broaden-and-Build (Fredrickson)
- ❧ Optimism (Seligman)
- ❧ Well-Being Theory (Seligman)
- ❧ VIA classification of strengths (Peterson)
- ❧ Clifton Strengths Finder (CSF)



Specific Applications



- ∞ Gratitude
- ∞ Your Best Self (BPS)
- ∞ Do a Good Deed
- ∞ Visualize- Mastery Experience
- ∞ Identify and apply Signature Strengths
- ∞ Challenge/Skill Dynamic
- ∞ Find Meaning- Involve them
- ∞ Goal Setting = Engagement

Specific Applications



- ❧ Adopt a Growth Mindset
- ❧ Encourage Their Strengths to Shine
- ❧ Apply One Signature Strength Everyday
- ❧ Consult with Boys on Decisions
- ❧ Celebrate Male-ness- “You da’ man!”
- ❧ Share Your Emotional World
- ❧ Connect with Boys Everyday
- ❧ Promote Introspection and Empathy
- ❧ Encourage ways to promote bonding

Outside of the Box



- ❧ Try focusing ONLY on the strengths of the performance
- ❧ Connect
- ❧ Teach a Growth Mindset
- ❧ Help Boys Become Aware of their Teammates Strengths
- ❧ Shared activity
- ❧ Create challenge in practice – (Individualized skills)
- ❧ Acknowledge and Celebrate All Strengths!

Strengths-Based Questions

Life Coaching

Strengths-Based- Whatever we pay attention to expands

What is already working?

What makes it work?

What would be ideal?

What is not yet quite working?

How can we utilize our strengths & resources to make it work?

Kurt Wright

Questions?



Services by Pete Thompson,

Ed.S; MS



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Resources



Ashrafi, Bain et al., Bronfenbrenner, CASEL, Deci & Ryan, Diener, Dweck, Fredrickson, Frost, Gardner, Gurian & Stevens, Hoskins et al., Kegan, Keyes, Kindlon & Thompson, Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, Lyubomirsky, MIT Young Adult Development Project, Pollack, Rose & Rudolph, Seligman, Wright, Yergulento-Todd