



# 3 Tips for Handling Performance Slumps

At the 2017 Swimming World Championships, Caeleb Dressel won seven gold medals to tie Michael Phelps for the MOST medals won at a World Championship meet. He's the first man ever to break 40-seconds in the 100-yard freestyle. And he's been called the fastest swimmer on the planet. So you wouldn't expect him to run into trouble at the 2018 Summer Nationals in California. But he did. In fact, he wasn't happy with his 50 or his 100 butterfly races —both of which are events he usually dominates. So, let's see what we can learn from how Caeleb handles an off day in the pool.



Every athlete that competes for any length of time will have to cope with performance ups and downs. A so-called “slump” may last a weekend, a week, or even a month. So how should athletes, parents, and coaches respond to these sub-par performances? Here are 3 things to keep in mind: First, **Confront the brutal facts, but keep the faith.** Doubt can creep in when you have an off day... and if it turns into a week or a season of “downers” it's tempting to draw some negative conclusions. But there's a better way for getting out of the doldrums. Here's how Caeleb responded in an interview after that difficult start at the Summer Nationals. “I started off really rough – there's no doubt about that. It was absolutely horrible. I wasn't happy with my 50 fly and even the 100 fly, there's so much left for me to improve so I'm excited.” Caeleb accepted the brutal facts, and then **CHOSE** to stay focused on the future opportunity of learning and improving. He didn't draw any conclusions about his sub-par performances. Keeping a positive outlook is job 1. Secondly, **Practice patience, not panic.** When you're used to performing at a certain level it's easy to panic when things start going wrong. Here is how Caeleb responded to yet another event in those same Summer Nationals— where qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics was at stake. “It was surprising looking up and seeing SIXTH place. “It was just a bad swim. You can't avoid it in this sport. I've had a couple of good meets back-to-back so it's kind of refreshing to have a really bad swim.” Caeleb recognized that bad performances are part of the deal; it's normal, and so he didn't panic. And just as importantly, he wanted to guard his inner talk against self-sabotage. Patience is the demonstration of confidence.

Lastly, **Choose positive responses.** Caeleb's coach, Gregg Troy points out that dealing with disappointment is an important mental skill. He says, “The negative points in a season can define a career. Since every swimmer encounters them, it's just a matter of how each swimmer can react to those downs.” Caeleb did go on to qualify for Tokyo. His response to the less-than-stellar events at that meet allowed him to perform well when he needed it most. Success in sports has a lot to do with an athlete's response to the hard times. Individual performances do not define careers. However, a pattern of negative responses to sub-par performances can create a habit. Great athletes know the truth about disciplined thinking – we become what we think about most.



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## Discussion Guide for Parent and Athlete

1

Which of the 3 tips could be most useful for your athlete:

Confront the facts but keep the faith.

Practice patience, not panic.

Choose a positive response

2

Discuss specific situations in which each tip would be beneficial for your athlete. Allow your athlete to choose the situation to discuss.