



PLAY BUILT RESILIENCE

Intellectual Athlete

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Play Built Resilience teaches young people how to manage stress and build resilience through fun play and sport activities centered around the awareness of breath.

OVERVIEW

Intellectual Athlete (IA) is a mental fitness company that integrates sport psychology strategies with play to enhance mental health. IA's Play Built Resilience model is centered around breath awareness and tailored to boost performance, manage stress, and strengthen resilience. Play Built Resilience integrates storytelling, breathwork, and structured and unstructured sport and play activities with mental performance skills to teach young people how to self regulate, improve performance, and combat anxiety. In sessions led by IA, students make real-world connections to the stories shared and have opportunities to practice mindfulness techniques during the physical activities and games they engage in. The goal is to make intentional breathing a habitual response to stress and to lay a foundation for lifelong mental health by increasing students' mental resilience, self-regulation, and mental performance skills.



IA's team of sports psychologists, mental performance instructors, coaches, counselors, and lifelong athletes have supported over 40 schools in implementing Play Built Resilience. IA offers various supports and can tailor their programming to meet the needs of individual schools. [▶ Play-Based Resilience in Action](#)

What Makes This Model Innovative?



Whole-Child Focus

IA teaches students how to integrate breathing techniques and mindfulness into play, developing foundational skills that enhance the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical factors that impact their overall health and well-being.



Affirmation of Self & Others

Students build confidence when facing a challenge by practicing how, when, and why to use breathing and relaxation techniques in response to stress during play, which can then be applied to real-world challenges.



Active Self-Direction

IA supports young people in leading their own play experience, which instills self-confidence, builds autonomy and agency, and fosters belonging.

DESIGN

Goals

IA builds mental resilience and teaches self-regulation through breathwork and play to lay a strong foundation for lifelong mental and physical health.

Bounce Back

Students develop the grit and resilience to overcome setbacks and see threats as challenges they can overcome.

Sharpen Focus

Students improve concentration skills, leading to academic and athletic success.

Master Emotions

Students learn to listen and respond to their bodies with healthy coping mechanisms to self-regulate emotions.

Experience

IA's Play Built Resilience model teaches students mental performance skills to self-regulate through sport and play activities centered on breathwork. The model can be tailored to a variety of contexts, from PE class to before-school programming. Across all contexts, each IA session begins with warm-up drills to foster a sense of community and connection amongst students. Next,

students hear a story of resilience to connect with a character who embodies the skills they are developing during the session and also learn breathwork and mindfulness skills. As students engage in play and sport activities throughout the sessions, IA instructors refer back to the stories of resilience and support students to integrate intentional breathing into their play and, ultimately, into their daily lives. Subtle in-game prompts and rules weave breathwork or mental exercises into the gameplay, making learning an organic and enjoyable experience. Each session ends with a closing meditation allowing students to calm their bodies and minds.

Intentional Engagement (Warm-Up)

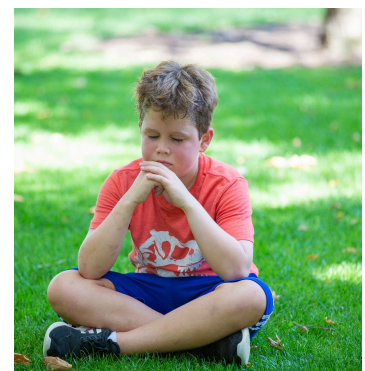
All sessions begin with intentional engagement that is student-led and includes warm-up drills that emphasize movement and teamwork. The primary aim is to foster social connection, a crucial first step for emotional well-being. Throughout the warm-up, students begin to synchronize their breathing with the physical activity they are participating in. The most important aspect of the warm-up is to connect students to each other and give them power over determining the stress level of play. Students are encouraged to be creative in the creation of their own games and to lead one another during this time of play. Students also decide when to raise the stakes of the game. This autonomy is critical in building confidence and for self-regulation.



Storytelling and Mental Performance Skills

Core to the model is storytelling of captivating true tales of resilience, in which relatable protagonists showcase the power of specific mental performance skills or breathing techniques to help them. These stories are then woven into the play of the day as instructors remind students, when they struggle with the game, to recall how the character responded to adversity and to integrate the techniques they have learned to use when they feel challenged.

Students are also introduced to the mental performance skill of intentional breathing, a practice of deliberately altering one's breathing pattern to connect the mind and body with the goal of improving overall well-being. By introducing breathwork and mindfulness at an early age, IA hopes to equip children with effective coping skills to handle stressors as they grow. Students learn these breathing techniques and are then required to use them during games. Instructors pause play of the game to remind students to use the breathing technique. Over the course of multiple sessions, students learn a number of different breathing techniques that they will continually practice and integrate into their games.



Structured and Imaginative Play

IA's curriculum employs both structured (finite) and open-ended (infinite) games to cultivate mental resilience.

In finite games, instructors leverage natural pauses and transitions in well-known play and games to integrate mental performance skills. During finite games, there is always a "Breath Integration Rule," implemented where failure to take a focused breath results in consequences like losing possession or a turn. Instructors emphasize breathwork individually, especially after a mistake or before crucial moments (e.g., penalty shots). Instructors also use resets and transitions within the games to encourage students to practice focused breathing, helping them regulate their emotions and thoughts. An example of this is integrating the practice of inhaling when catching a ball and exhaling when throwing. The aim is for students to recognize the clarity and calmness that focused breathing brings, gradually making this an instinctual habit. The alternation between high-energy play and calming breathwork creates a powerful rhythm, with instructors reinforcing this pattern until it becomes instinctive under stress. IA instructors support students in drawing parallels between sports scenarios and real-life situations, enhancing transferability of skills.



Infinite games, conversely, immerse students in imaginative play, activating different cognitive pathways. Infinite games are different from finite games in that students use their imagination to create them with their peers, and IA posits that mental performance skills integrated during this state of flow, when students are lost in play, are more likely to become second nature. Instructors act as lifeguards, guiding students on when and how to apply breathwork techniques amidst unstructured play.

Throughout game play, IA integrates athletic skill development that is cross functional across sports, such as improving passing ability, catching, changing speed and direction, and balance. Finite and infinite game play, combined with cross-functional athletic skill development, creates a comprehensive framework for building both physical and mental agility.

Guided Meditation (Cool Down)

The closing meditation at the end of every session serves as an essential cool-down process, helping students transition smoothly from an active and playful state back to their everyday lives. This practice of meditation teaches the students to observe their thoughts without becoming entangled in them. Students are encouraged to watch their minds passively, learning to create a sense of separation from their thoughts. Over the course of multiple sessions, students experience different guided meditations that allow them to calm their body and mind and reflect on their experiences during the entire



session to integrate the lessons learned. This deliberate shift in focus aids in physical recovery and fosters a deeper understanding of one's mental and emotional processes. The closing meditation becomes a tool in cultivating self-awareness and resilience, equipping students with the ability to approach their daily lives with a more centered and composed mindset.

Supporting Structures

Play Built Resilience can be implemented into any school but may require shifts in curriculum, scheduling, and adult roles.

Schools leverage IA's Play Built Resilience curriculum and accompanying instructor guides.



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

IA's Play Built Resilience Curriculum has instructor guides for each session. The curriculum is broken into three units: Breathwork and Mindfulness, Visualization and Imagery, and Self-Talk. Each guide contains a story to connect students with session components as well as instructions for leading each part of the session. Each session includes a guide for Intentional Engagement, the portion of the session that includes warm-up drills to emphasize movement and teamwork through passing and catching exercises designed to connect the student with each other. Additionally, the instructor guide includes facilitator directions on how to model Breathwork, directions for Finite and Infinite Games, and a guided Meditation to close out each session.

Schools can choose to have IA instructors facilitate lessons or have IA train school-based staff to implement the model.



ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

IA employs sports psychologists and mental performance instructors that can facilitate the Play Built Resilience model during the school day. IA staff members work with school partners to implement the model into their existing schedule.

IA can also train school-based staff members to implement the model on their own. IA believes that staff training must mirror the student experience, to demonstrate the power and impact of self-regulation skills under pressure. To do this, IA instructors run experiential training for school-based staff designed to teach stress management techniques through play the same way they would with students. IA believes that if the staff members feel the benefit of self-regulation and learn how to manipulate their breath and body to calm their mind, they will be more likely to pass these teachings on to the students.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

The Play Built Resilience model is designed to fit within many schedules.

IA will align their programming to fit within a school's schedule. Schools can implement the model before school as a zero period ("Morning Vitamins"), as a course during the school day (e.g., PE, electives) or even as an intramural sport program for recess or after school. While all programming contains the same core components of intentional engagement, storytelling and mental performance skills, finite and infinite games, and guided meditation, IA tailors lessons to fit the number of minutes determined by the school.



SPACE & FACILITIES

Schools must designate a large space, ideally outdoors, for IA programming.

Given the movement-based play that is core to the model, schools need a dedicated space to deliver IA instruction such as a gymnasium or large outdoor field. An outdoor space is highly desired to give students an opportunity to be outside during their IA time.

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[Intellectual Athlete](#) offers the following supports to help you implement their approach.

Morning Vitamins

Cost Associated



Morning Vitamins is a before school program where IA instructors lead engaging gameplay that incorporates breathwork and mental performance techniques. These sessions blend team-building, storytelling, and both structured and unstructured play, ending with a brief meditation session. These sessions are typically shorter than PE classes and are designed to support students as they arrive and prepare for the school day.

[Express Interest](#)

Physical Education Class Instruction

Cost Associated



IA can provide PE instructors to schools for a full school year as well as coaching for existing PE teachers. Instructors use the IA Play Built Resilience curriculum as well as existing class plans to add mental performance skills into physical education.

[Express Interest](#)

Play Built Resilience Curriculum

Cost Associated



IA's Play Built Resilience curriculum, centered on breath awareness, provides educators with a curricular framework for implementing IA programming in schools. It can be used during, before, and after school programming or during specials/ elective class periods. Homeroom teachers and those with PE duties also integrate this curriculum into their lessons. The program blends storytelling, team-building, various sports and play, and a closing meditation.

[Express Interest](#)

Intramural Sports

Cost Associated



IA provides an intramural program for middle schools, blending sports with mental resilience training. IA provides intramural instructors who serve as officials and mental performance coaches embedding mental resilience strategies within intramural sports. IA's intramural approach aims to develop well-rounded students who are equipped with both athletic and mental fortitude.

[Express Interest](#)

Train the Trainer

Cost Associated



IA's Train the Trainer program equips school staff with firsthand experience in resilience-building techniques through full or half-day training onsite at schools. This immersive approach allows educators to personally feel the benefits of mental performance skills and ensures that they can authentically model them for students.

[Express Interest](#)

Reach

42

Schools

940

Students

25

Instructors
Trained

Demonstration Sites

The following sites are examples of learning communities that have successfully implemented the model.

<u>Tubman Elementary</u> Washington, DC PK-5 Traditional Public	<u>Glenview Avenue Elementary School</u> Haddon Heights, NJ K-6 Traditional Public	<u>Hage Elementary School</u> San Diego, CA PK-5 Traditional Public
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Impact

Parents say their child showed improvement in self-regulation and self-confidence after completing a school-based IA program or camp. [📄 Impact Report](#)

Of 21 parents surveyed:

- 91% have seen their child practicing breathing techniques learned at IA at home.
- 93% agreed that the program had a positive effect on their child's confidence when facing a new challenge.
- 86% agreed that when their child feels angry or upset at home, at least sometimes they stop and breathe, and this makes them feel better.

Parents and teachers reported satisfaction, noting a significant improvement in students' productivity, behavior, and coping skills.

- "The students loved the program and couldn't wait for Wednesday. The breathing and meditation techniques helped to regulate the students and they were more productive during the class day and happier overall." – Enrichment Site Supervisor
- "My students who are in the morning IA class show a considerable difference compared to their peers when it comes to their behavior and ability to stay focused. There's also a noticeable difference between their behaviors during days that they have IA and days that they don't." – School Teacher
- "I think this is a great program and you are on to something special here. My son enjoyed his first day and did come home with a coping skill that he didn't have before. He promptly used it in his baseball game the next day and (coincidentally or not), pitched the best game he's ever pitched." – Parent

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RESOURCES



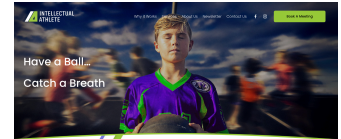
[Play-Based Resilience in Action](#)

Video overview of IA’s Play Built Resilience with testimonials from students, staff, and instructors.



[Impact Report](#)

2022 IA report on the impact of Play Built Resilience in school-based programs and camps.



[Intellectual Athlete Website](#)

This is the Intellectual Athlete website where you can learn more about the model.