



JUNIOR FOCUS & CONCENTRATION

— TRAINING GUIDE —
ICM TENNIS ACADEMY



How to use this guide

The goal is not to empty the mind or force children to concentrate. The skill is to notice distraction and gently return attention to a chosen anchor (breath, sound, ball or next tennis task).

- **Frequency:** 3–5 optional sessions per week; approximately 3–8 minutes per session. Shorter is fine.
- **Setting:** quiet, comfortable place; a parent can join. Eyes may stay open.
- **Approach:** curious and playful; never use meditation as punishment or rank children by focus.
- **Safety:** breathe normally; no prolonged breath-holding or forced deep breathing. Stop if dizzy, upset or uncomfortable.

Six home exercises

1 | Breath Anchor (2–3 min)

Sit comfortably. Notice normal breathing at the nose or belly. When distracted, say “thinking” silently and return attention. No need to change breathing.

2 | Tennis Ball Observation (1–2 min)

Place a tennis ball on a table. Notice its color, seams and texture. When attention wanders, return to one detail. Blink normally.

3 | Sound Detective (2 min)

Notice three sounds, near or far. Choose one and listen briefly; return gently after distraction.

4 | Forehand Imagery (2–3 min)

Imagine ready position, split step, unit turn, racquet preparation, contact and balanced finish. Imagine a smooth controllable stroke, not a guaranteed winner.

5 | Next-Point Reset (1–2 min)

Pretend you missed a forehand. Name the feeling (“frustrated”), take one comfortable breath, choose a simple cue (“watch the ball”), and get ready.

6 | Body Check-In (2–3 min)

Notice feet, hands and shoulders. Let unnecessary tension soften. Children may move, keep eyes open or stop at any time.

Four-week home plan

Optional, child-led activities. Times are suggestions, not clinically proven doses.

WEEK 1 | Notice & Return

Mon	Breath Anchor	2-3 min
Wed	Tennis Ball Observation	1-2 min
Fri	Sound Detective	2 min
Weekend	Child's choice	2-4 min

WEEK 2 | Calm & Reset

Mon	Breath Anchor	3 min
Wed	Body Check-In	2-3 min
Fri	Next-Point Reset	2 min
Weekend	Breath + Reset	3-4 min

WEEK 3 | Tennis Imagery

Mon	Ball Observation	2 min
Wed	Forehand Imagery	2-3 min
Fri	Breath + Forehand Imagery	4-5 min
Weekend	Child's choice	3-5 min

WEEK 4 | Match Readiness

Mon	Next-Point Reset	2 min
Wed	Forehand Imagery	3 min
Fri	Sound Detective + Reset	4 min
Weekend	Personal pre-point routine	3-5 min

A missed session is not a failure. Children may stop or choose another calming activity.

Tennis-specific focus routines

BETWEEN-POINT RESET | BREATHE → RELEASE → CHOOSE → READY

After a point: (1) take one normal, comfortable breath; (2) let the previous point go; (3) choose one controllable cue such as “early preparation”; (4) return to ready position. Adapt to the child and official match timing.

FOREHAND IMAGERY SCRIPT | 2 MINUTES

“Stand or sit comfortably. Picture yourself seeing the ball early. Your feet move into position. Your shoulders turn together and your racquet prepares smoothly. You swing forward with balance and meet the ball in front. Notice the feeling of a relaxed, controlled finish. If your mind wanders, that is okay. Begin again with the ready position.”

Parent and coach guidance

- Ask: “What helped you return your focus?” rather than “Were you perfectly focused?”
- Praise effort, curiosity and using a reset routine, not only wins or unforced-error counts.
- Do not require children to disclose personal feelings in a team channel.
- For ages 6–8, keep sessions playful and brief; for ages 9–12, offer more choice and self-reflection.

Optional weekly family check-in

Week: _____ Favorite exercise: _____ One thing I noticed: _____

When distracted, I tried: _____ Next week I choose: _____

No numerical focus score is required. A skipped session is not a failure.

Safety, inclusion & professional boundaries

This guide teaches general attention and self-regulation skills; it is not psychotherapy, psychological assessment or a substitute for qualified healthcare. There is limited direct evidence that this specific four-week schedule improves tennis performance in children under 12.

- Meditation is optional. Offer alternatives such as a short walk, mindful listening or quiet drawing.
- If a child experiences panic, distress, dizziness, trauma-related discomfort or other adverse effects, stop the exercise and consult an appropriate healthcare professional.
- For children with neurodevelopmental, sensory, mental-health or medical needs, seek individualized advice from their pediatrician, relevant specialist or qualified child mental-health professional.
- For persistent anxiety, significant distress or interference with daily life, refer to a qualified child mental-health professional rather than increasing practice time.

Evidence & further reading

These sources inform the general principles; none formally approves this ICM program. Some guidance addresses older athletes and should not be treated as U12-specific evidence.

- [Tennis Canada — Whole Player Development Pathway](#)
- [ITF — Science and Medicine / Psychology](#)
- [International Olympic Committee — Youth Athletic Development consensus \(2015\)](#)
- [IOC — Elite Youth Athletes consensus \(2024\)](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics — Meditation Breaks for Kids](#)
- [Association for Applied Sport Psychology — Sport Imagery Training](#)
- [British Psychological Society — Psychological skills in youth sport \(2024\)](#)
- [IOC — Safeguarding in Sport consensus \(2024\)](#)

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Scientific review | Evidence & implementation notes

Evidence standard. This four-week schedule is an ICM educational design, not a clinically validated treatment or a proven way to increase match wins. Published guidance supports age-appropriate attention practice and sport-specific imagery, but evidence specifically evaluating this exact program in tennis players aged 6–12 is limited.

What “refocus” means in tennis. The ITF describes concentration as attending to relevant cues (including the ball, opponent and strategy). Attention may shift toward past errors or future worries. The child-friendly response is to notice the shift and return to one helpful cue, not to demand uninterrupted concentration.

Practical use. Start with 2–5 minutes; allow shorter sessions and optional participation. A child may keep eyes open, move, listen to sounds or use a tennis ball as the anchor. Do not force deep breathing, breath-holding, disclosure of emotions, or meditation as a punishment.

Care and referral. If a child has a mental-health condition, sensory or neurodevelopmental differences, a history of trauma, breathing-related problems, or experiences distress during an exercise, consult their pediatrician or appropriate licensed specialist for individualized advice. Coaches should not diagnose or treat mental-health conditions.

Primary references | Direct reading links

- [Tennis Canada — Whole Player Development Pathway](#)
- [ITF — Concentration \(2019\)](#)
- [ITF — Tennis & Children \(2019\)](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics — Meditation Breaks for Kids](#)
- [Association for Applied Sport Psychology — Sport Imagery Training](#)
- [IOC — Medical & Scientific Consensus Statements](#)
- [IOC — Mental Health in Elite Athletes \(2026\)](#)

Attribution: ICM Tennis Academy developed this resource with reference to the publications above. None of these organizations has endorsed, certified or reviewed this particular program.