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# GUIDEBOOK



**Nurturing Mental Health  
through  
Inclusive  
Judo**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

ERASMUS-SPORT-2024-SSCP  
101184521 Be Judo Zen

## PROJECT PARTNERS:



Judo Club Sankaku  
Ljubljana



Judo Club for People  
with Disabilities „Fuji“



Sports association for  
inclusive judo  
and sambo "SENSEI-IN"



Slovenian Judo  
Federation



Croatian Judo  
Federation



Judo Federation of  
Serbia

Official website: [bejudoin.com/be-judo-zen/](https://bejudoin.com/be-judo-zen/)



# PART 1

## FOUNDATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The Be Judo Zen Interactive Guidebook has been developed as a key intellectual output of the Erasmus+ Sport collaboration between Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. The project focuses on supporting the mental health, emotional well-being, physical development, and inclusive participation of judoka with diverse abilities. By combining traditional judo values with modern therapeutic, pedagogical, and mindfulness-based approaches, this guidebook helps coaches create safer, more supportive, and more meaningful training environments.

Judo is much more than a physical discipline. It is a transformative practice that strengthens the body, sharpens the mind, and builds character. For children and young people, especially those with disabilities, developmental challenges, or social-emotional needs, judo can become a vital space for self-regulation, personal empowerment, and a sense of belonging.

The guidebook includes six comprehensive training modules that have been tested in practice, supported by theoretical foundations, and accompanied by short video demonstrations. It is designed for coaches of all levels and is adaptable to various training environments, from inclusive clubs to mainstream judo programs.



# ABOUT THE BE JUDO ZEN PROJECT

The Be Judo Zen project brings together:

- Three inclusive judo clubs, each with significant experience working with children and youth with disabilities: Judo Club Sankaku Ljubljana, Judo Club for People with Disabilities Fuji, Sport Association for Inclusive Judo and Sambo Sport Sensei-In
- Three national judo federations (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia)

Together, the partners developed:

- Six training modules (two per country)
- Three in-person practical workshops
- A comprehensive guidebook with applied exercises and 15 video demonstrations
- Tools for inclusive coaching and mental well-being support

Project Goals

- Promote mental resilience, emotional balance, and psychological safety
- Integrate therapeutic approaches (DNS, yoga therapy, mindfulness) into judo
- Increase accessibility for judoka with disabilities
- Equip coaches with adaptable, practical tools
- Foster cooperation, unity, and shared learning among participating countries

The project is guided by the belief that every child deserves a safe place to grow, and that judo's philosophy, combined with modern methods, can help each child reach their full physical, emotional, and social potential.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is designed to be both comprehensive and practical, allowing coaches to navigate it based on their needs.

Use it as:

- A training manual for learning new approaches
- A toolbox for planning inclusive sessions
- A mental health resource for supporting judoka
- A progress-monitoring instrument to assess development

What you will find:

- ✓ Clear explanations of breathing, movement, mindfulness, and emotional regulation
- ✓ Detailed training plans with step-by-step instructions
- ✓ Evaluations and feedback from real sessions
- ✓ Adaptation strategies for children with disabilities
- ✓ Practical checklists for easy implementation
- ✓ Short video demonstrations for visual learning

Flexible Application

The modules can be used:

- As full stand-alone sessions
- Integrated into warm-ups, main training, or cool-down
- Adapted to individual athletes or group settings
- Applied with or without equipment

Coaches are encouraged to personalize the guidebook based on their athletes' needs, abilities, attention levels, and emotional states.



# CORE PHILOSOPHY

The guidebook is built on four interconnected pillars:

## **Judo as a Safe Space**

Judo is built on core values such as respect, courage, honesty, modesty, self-control, and friendship. These principles create a positive and supportive environment that nurtures children's mental and emotional development.

For children with disabilities or neurodivergent profiles, predictability, structure, and emotional safety are essential. Judo naturally provides:

- Rituals (bowing, etiquette)
- Clear rules
- Structured progression
- Partner-based cooperation
- Physical grounding through movement

This environment helps children feel safe, regulated, and open to learning.

## **Holistic Learning Framework**

The guidebook integrates physical, emotional, cognitive, and social domains:

### Physical Development

- Stability, movement patterns, breath coordination
- Flexibility, proprioception, sensory integration

### Emotional Development

- Self-awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Stress reduction

### Cognitive Development

- Focus and attention
- Problem-solving
- Sequencing and memory

### Social Development

- Cooperation
- Communication
- Empathy
- Inclusion of diverse abilities

THIS HOLISTIC APPROACH  
SUPPORTS THE WHOLE CHILD,  
NOT JUST THE ATHLETE.

# CORE PHILOSOPHY

## Inclusive Coaching Principles

To support judoka of all abilities, coaches are encouraged to follow these principles:

### 1. Individualization

Assess each child's:

- motor skills
- attention span
- sensory needs
- emotional triggers
- communication abilities

ADAPT THE PACE, STRUCTURE,  
AND SUPPORT ACCORDINGLY.

### 2. Simplicity and clarity

Use:

- short instructions
- visual supports
- modelling and demonstrations
- consistent routines

BREAK DOWN COMPLEX TASKS  
INTO SMALLER STEPS.

### 3. Predictability

Children with ADHD, autism, or anxiety benefit from:

- visual schedules
- structured transitions
- predictable session flow

### 4. Sensory Awareness

Adapt environments for:

- noise sensitivity
- tactile needs
- overstimulation

PROVIDE QUIET CORNERS, SOFT  
LIGHTING, OR WEIGHTED  
OBJECTS IF NEEDED.

### 5. Positive Reinforcement

Highlight:

- effort
- cooperation
- emotional regulation
- self-awareness

THIS BUILDS CONFIDENCE AND  
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION.

# CORE PHILOSOPHY

## Interactivity and Personalized Learning

To support individual learning styles, the guidebook uses:

- ✓ Video demonstrations

Each key exercise includes a short video to support visual learning.

- ✓ Modular structure

Coaches choose which exercises are appropriate for warm-ups, technical sessions, or cool-downs.

- ✓ Adaptive exercises

Modules contain built-in modifications for judoka with varying abilities.

- ✓ Sensorimotor integration approaches

Useful for children with autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, or coordination difficulties.



# PART 2

## TRAINING MODULES

This section presents the six core training modules developed within the Be Judo Zen project. Each module is grounded in practice, informed by theory, and designed to be adaptable to diverse abilities, age groups, and training contexts. Together, they form a coherent system that supports mental health, inclusion, emotional regulation, and holistic development through judo.

Each module includes:

- A clearly defined training methodology
- A structured and adaptable training plan
- Evaluation outcomes based on real implementation
- Long-term benefits for judoka and coaches

The modules can be used independently or combined, depending on the needs of the group or individual athletes.



# MODULE 1

## Breathing Techniques and Dynamic Neuromuscular Stabilization (DNS) in Judo Training

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

Breathing is a foundational yet often overlooked component of movement quality, emotional regulation, and physical performance. In judo, effective breathing supports balance, posture, timing, endurance, and mental focus. For children with cerebral palsy and other motor challenges, correct breathing patterns are especially important, as they directly influence muscle tone, stability, and coordination.

Dynamic Neuromuscular Stabilization (DNS) is a rehabilitation-based approach that restores optimal movement patterns through proper activation of the deep stabilizing system. When integrated into judo training, DNS principles help judoka of all abilities develop better postural control, efficient movement, and safer execution of techniques.

This module combines breathing awareness, DNS-based exercises, and judo-specific application to create a training environment that supports both physical and psychological development.

### 2. Training Methodology

The methodology is based on three interrelated pillars:

#### **Breathing Control**

Breathing is taught as an active skill rather than an automatic process. Judoka learn diaphragmatic breathing that supports spinal stability, energy efficiency, and emotional regulation. Controlled breathing helps reduce unnecessary muscle tension and supports calm focus during both training and competition.

#### **Dynamic Neuromuscular Stabilization (DNS)**

DNS principles are used to activate deep core muscles and restore functional movement patterns. Exercises emphasize alignment, joint centration, and coordinated muscle activation, which are essential for balance, throws, transitions, and groundwork.

#### **Mindfulness and Relaxation**

Breathing exercises are paired with moments of awareness and reflection. This supports stress management, reduces anxiety, and improves attention, especially important for children with developmental or emotional regulation challenges.

The training approach is progressive and inclusive:

- Exercises begin in stable positions (lying, sitting) and gradually progress to standing and dynamic movement
- Breathing techniques are first practiced in isolation and then integrated into judo techniques
- Adaptations are provided for different physical abilities, attention levels, and learning styles

### **3. Training Plan**

This module can be delivered as a standalone session or integrated into regular judo training.

#### **Introduction (10 minutes)**

The session begins with a short explanation of why breathing matters in judo. Coaches demonstrate correct and incorrect breathing patterns and introduce the basic concepts of DNS and core stability in child-friendly language.

#### **Breathing Exercises (15 minutes)**

Judoka practice diaphragmatic breathing in lying, sitting, and standing positions. Exercises such as supine pelvic tilts with breathing help connect breath with core activation. Rhythmic breathing is introduced alongside gentle movement to prepare for judo application.

#### **Integration with Judo Techniques (20 minutes)**

Breathing is consciously applied during basic throws, transitions, and groundwork. Partner drills emphasize maintaining calm, steady breathing under light resistance. Coaches provide individualized cues and physical guidance when needed.

#### **Mindfulness and Relaxation (10 minutes)**

A short breathing meditation helps consolidate learning and calm the nervous system. Judoka are guided to notice their breath, body sensations, and emotional state.

#### **Cool Down and Reflection (5 minutes)**

The session ends with gentle stretching and group reflection, allowing participants to share experiences and reinforce awareness.

#### 4. Evaluation of the Module

After ten implemented sessions, clear positive outcomes were observed. Participants reported greater awareness of their breathing patterns, improved endurance, and better control during techniques. Judoka with cerebral palsy showed noticeable improvements in balance, postural stability, and movement confidence. Many participants experienced reduced anxiety, particularly before sparring or competition situations.

Challenges included difficulty maintaining diaphragmatic breathing under physical exertion and the need for individualized adaptations. These were addressed through additional drills and slower progression.

#### 5. Long-Term Benefits

Over time, judoka develop stronger breathing habits that extend beyond the dojo. Improved oxygen efficiency, enhanced proprioception, reduced stress, and better emotional regulation contribute to both athletic performance and overall well-being. Coaches recognized the value of integrating breathing and DNS principles as a permanent part of training practice.

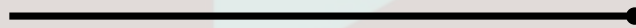
### Basic Breathing Pattern | 360° Core Breathing



### Supine 90° Position | 90° Core Stabilization



### Kneeling Variation for Judoka | Kneeling Core Stability for Judo



### Transition to Standing | Stable Transition to Stance



# MODULE 2

## Yoga Therapy for Mental Health in Judo Training

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

Mental health is a critical component of long-term participation, learning, and enjoyment in sport. Children with disabilities, anxiety, ADHD, or emotional regulation challenges often experience heightened stress, sensory overload, or difficulty maintaining focus. Yoga therapy offers a holistic, adaptable approach that supports mental well-being through movement, breath, mindfulness, and relaxation.

When integrated into judo training, yoga therapy enhances body awareness, emotional balance, and self-regulation while respecting judo's values and structure.

### 2. Training Methodology

This module is grounded in four core principles:

#### **Breath Control**

Breathing exercises are used to calm the nervous system, regulate energy levels, and support focus before, during, and after physical activity.

#### **Mindful Movement**

Yoga postures promote awareness of alignment, balance, and muscle engagement. Movements are slow, controlled, and adaptable.

#### **Emotional Regulation**

Mindfulness techniques help children recognize emotions without being overwhelmed, supporting resilience and confidence.

#### **Inclusion and Adaptability**

All poses and exercises can be modified to suit different physical abilities, sensory needs, and attention spans.

The approach emphasizes gradual integration: breathing first, then yoga movement, and finally mindful application within judo techniques.

## **Guided Relaxation & Sensory Visualization**

Guided relaxation and sensory visualization are incorporated at the end of selected sessions to support nervous system regulation, body awareness, and mental recovery.

The relaxation phase is based on a guided body scan, gradually moving through different regions of the body. Children are invited to notice physical sensations such as tension, warmth, heaviness, or relaxation.

This is followed by sensory-based visualization, during which participants are gently guided to explore:

- sounds they can hear or imagine,
- scents associated with calm or safety,
- tactile sensations, including the contact between the body and the surface, the touch of clothing on the skin, and areas of support and grounding,
- taste awareness, such as noticing neutral or familiar tastes in the mouth,
- visual impressions perceived behind closed eyes, such as colors, shapes, light, or imagery.

The process supports multisensory awareness, grounding, and present-moment focus, while remaining fully adaptable and optional for each child.

This component complements breathing and mindful movement practices, enhancing emotional regulation, self-soothing skills, and facilitating a smoother transition from physical activity to rest.

## **3. Training Plan**

The session can function independently or be embedded into regular training.

It begins with an introduction to mental health in sport, followed by breathing-based warm-up exercises such as diaphragmatic breathing and “balloon breathing.” Yoga poses like Mountain Pose, Tree Pose, and Cat–Cow Stretch develop strength, balance, and flexibility.

Mindfulness is then integrated into judo movements, encouraging slow, intentional execution of techniques. Partner exercises emphasize communication, respect, and presence.

The session concludes with guided relaxation, body scan exercises, and group reflection.

#### 4. Evaluation of the Module

After ten sessions, participants demonstrated improved emotional regulation, increased focus, and better balance. Children with disabilities showed enhanced body awareness and coordination. Coaches observed calmer behavior, improved engagement, and better stress management during training and competitions.

#### 5. Long-Term Benefits

Yoga therapy supports lifelong skills such as stress management, self-awareness, and emotional resilience. Judoka learn tools they can apply in school, home, and social environments, contributing to overall mental health and confidence.

### Tree Pose Balance



### Cat-Cow Spinal Mobility



### Breath & Movement Synchronization



# MODULE 3

## Mindful Judo – Enhancing Resilience and Unity Through Storytelling

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

Storytelling is a powerful pedagogical and psychological tool. In sport, stories help children make sense of experiences, name emotions, and internalise values without moralising or lecturing. In judo, where learning happens through physical contact, failure, and repetition, a well-chosen story can create a safe bridge between what happens on the tatami and what children experience in everyday life.

This module uses storytelling to deepen value-based learning (respect, humility, perseverance, courage, friendship), strengthen group cohesion, and support emotional resilience. Stories offer a shared language that helps children express “how it feels” to lose balance, to feel fear, to be frustrated, or to try again. This is especially helpful in inclusive groups where children may communicate differently or need additional support to understand social situations.

### 2. Training Methodology

Sessions are built around a story that functions as a thematic anchor. The story is connected to a specific judo principle (e.g., yielding, balance, timing, mutual welfare and benefit) and then translated into movement tasks, partner work, and reflection.

The methodology follows five interconnected elements:

- **Emotional engagement through narrative**

The coach tells a short story (3–7 minutes) using simple language, clear images, and a calm voice. The goal is to invite attention and curiosity, not to “test” children. For younger groups, stories can be interactive (sound effects, repeating phrases, simple choices).

- **Emotional safety and inclusion**

Children are never forced to share personal experiences. Reflection can happen through speech, drawing, gestures, choosing an emotion card, or a simple thumbs-up/down. Predictable structure (story – movement – reflection) supports children with anxiety, ADHD, or autism.

- **Guided reflection and meaning-making**

The coach uses 2–4 questions to connect the story to judo and daily life (e.g., “What helped the character?”, “Where do we see this in judo?”, “What can we try next time we feel stuck?”). Reflection is short and concrete.

- **Embodied learning through movement**

Technical and playful tasks translate the story’s message into the body. Examples: yielding and adaptability through kuzushi games; perseverance through ukemi progressions; respect and cooperation through partner mirroring drills; courage through graded exposure (safe, small challenges).

- **Closing ritual and group cohesion**

The session ends with a brief closing routine: bowing, one shared sentence (“Today we practised...”), or a quiet breathing minute. This consolidates learning and strengthens unity.

### **Suggested video integration**

The project includes short storytelling video examples that demonstrate calm delivery, child-friendly language, and clear links between story themes and training tasks. Coaches can use these videos for preparation, for standardising delivery across coaches, or as a prompt for reflection in mixed-ability groups.

- Storytelling video 1 –

### **FIVE ELEMENTS OF NATURE FROM ITSUTSU NO KATA**



- Storytelling video 2 –

### **THE PRINCIPLE AND VALUES OF JITA KYOEI**



### 3. Training Plan

This module can be implemented as a stand-alone session (45–60 minutes) or as a 10–15-minute block inside regular judo practice.

A typical 60-minute structure:

- Story circle (5–7 minutes): coach tells the story; children listen in a seated circle.
- Warm-up (10 minutes): games and movements inspired by the story theme (e.g., “strong tree vs. flexible reed” movement play).
- Technical block (20–25 minutes): one main technique or principle connected to the story (e.g., off-balancing, relaxed posture, controlled falling, grip adaptation).
- Partner cooperation block (10 minutes): drills that emphasise communication and mutual support.
- Reflection and closing (8–10 minutes): guided questions + short calming transition (breathing or quiet sitting).

Across a 10-session cycle, coaches can rotate themes such as: adaptability and yielding; perseverance after failure; respectful communication; managing anger and frustration; courage and trying; humility and learning; friendship and inclusion; coping with competition stress; fairness and rules; gratitude and mutual support.

### 4. Evaluation of the Module

After ten implemented sessions, coaches observed clear benefits in both group dynamics and individual self-regulation. Children were more willing to name emotions (“I’m nervous”, “I’m angry”, “I need a break”), and conflicts between partners were resolved more quickly when the group could refer to a shared story theme (“Let’s be flexible like the reed”).

Participants showed increased motivation, stronger sense of belonging, and improved cooperation during partner work. In mixed-ability groups, storytelling supported empathy and normalised differences by focusing attention on values and effort rather than performance.

Challenges included maintaining attention during longer stories and supporting children who became emotionally activated by certain themes. These challenges were addressed by shortening stories (1–3 minutes when needed), adding movement breaks, using visuals/props, and keeping reflection questions concrete and optional.

## 5. Long-Term Benefits

Over time, storytelling strengthens emotional vocabulary, resilience, and moral reasoning. Children learn to connect physical experiences (falling, losing balance, being pinned) with inner skills such as patience, self-control, and persistence. For coaches, this module provides a simple and sustainable way to build an emotionally safe training culture, improve group cohesion, and integrate judo values into everyday practice without additional equipment or specialised therapeutic training.



# MODULE 4

## Short Stories in Judo for Learning

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

This module uses very short, focused stories (typically 1–3 minutes) to support learning, reflection, and ethical understanding. Unlike Module 3, which builds an entire session around a story, Module 4 uses micro-stories as quick interventions: to introduce a principle, to reset the group after conflict, or to clarify “why” a behaviour matters.

Stories such as *The Oak and the Reeds* illustrate core judo principles, including yielding, adaptability, and the balance between strength and flexibility. The short format is especially effective for younger children and for judoka who have limited attention span, sensory overload, or difficulty processing long verbal explanations.



### 2. Training Methodology

Short stories are integrated at key moments of training:

- Before practice, to set the emotional tone and highlight a value (respect, self-control, courage).
- During practice, when the coach notices frustration, conflict, unsafe behaviour, or loss of focus.
- After practice, to support reflection and transfer to daily life.

The coach tells the story simply, then immediately links it to one clear behavioural or technical cue (e.g., “In randori, we don’t fight the force – we find the angle”). The story is followed by one short question and one short physical application drill. The goal is quick understanding, not a long discussion.

### **3. Training Plan**

This module can be used in 5–12-minute segments inside a regular session.

Example micro-sequence (8–10 minutes):

1. Story (1–3 minutes): told in one clear arc, with a single main message.
2. One guiding question (1 minute): “What helped in the story?” or “What would you do?”
3. Physical application (4–5 minutes): a drill that embodies the message (e.g., yielding and redirection in a pushing game; relaxed grip switching; controlled ukemi after a “storm” signal).
4. Closing cue (30 seconds): one sentence that names the takeaway (“Be strong and flexible”).

Coaches can prepare a small set of 6–10 stories and reuse them repeatedly so that children begin to remember the message and apply it independently.

### **4. Evaluation of the Module**

After repeated use across regular training sessions, coaches observed improved attention and faster behavioural resets. In situations of conflict or frustration, children more easily accepted redirection when it was framed through a familiar story (“Remember the reed”).

Judoka demonstrated better understanding of judo principles such as efficiency, yielding, and mutual respect. The stories supported calmer transitions between exercises and reduced the need for repeated verbal corrections.

### **5. Long-Term Benefits**

Over time, short stories become part of the dojo culture and offer a shared moral compass. They strengthen value-based learning, empathy, and self-awareness, while also improving retention of technical principles through memorable images. For inclusive groups, micro-stories provide a gentle, non-stigmatising tool that supports emotional regulation and respectful behaviour, helping children transfer judo lessons into school, family life, and social relationships.

# MODULE 5

## Guided Relaxation Sessions in Judo Training

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

Guided relaxation is essential for judoka who experience sensory overload, anxiety, or difficulty with transitions. This module introduces structured relaxation techniques to support emotional regulation, recovery, and readiness for learning. These sessions typically involve a facilitator or guiding participants through calming activities to promote relaxation and reduce sensory overwhelm. It is important that they be adapted to the age, abilities, and sensory-motor needs of the child.

### 2. Training Methodology

Relaxation strategies are individualized, simple, and developmentally appropriate. Techniques include: **deep breathing with visualisation, progressive muscle relaxation and guided imagery**. Sessions may occur at the beginning, end, or midpoint of training, depending on group needs.

#### Fundamental Principles:

1. Relaxation strategies are individualized according to each child's developmental level, communication style, sensory preferences, motor skills, and cognitive abilities. For example, a child with auditory sensitivity may benefit more from silent breathing exercises than from music-based relaxation.
2. Instructions are simple, clear, and broken into small steps can be supported by modeling and visual cues. For example: "Breathe in like you are smelling a flower... breathe out like you are blowing out a candle."
3. Short relaxation routines are used to support transitions between activities, particularly for children with autism, ADHD, or attention difficulties.
4. Exercises are brief and developmentally appropriate. Short, effective routines are prioritized over longer sessions that may cause overload.

### 3. Training Plan

The choice of technique depends on the goal, the judoka current state, and the training context.

### 3.1 Deep Breathing with Visualization

Use when:

- The judoka is anxious, stressed, or frustrated
- Quick calming is needed
- Before a competition or challenging task
- At the beginning of training for stabilization

Deep breathing quickly reduces physiological tension (heart rate, rapid breathing), and simple visualization. Helps the child focus and it's best for short interventions (1-3 minutes).

#### Examples of Deep Breathing with Visualization exercises:

Judoka form a circle with their feet in the center of the circle, lie onback or sitting with cross legs.

##### Flower and Candle

- **How:** Inhale slowly as if smelling a flower. Exhale slowly as if blowing out a candle.
- **Purpose:** Teaches controlled breathing and helps focus attention.

##### Balloon Breathing

- **How:** Imagine your stomach is a balloon. Breathe in to fill the balloon, and exhale to let the air out slowly.
- **Purpose:** Encourages deep diaphragmatic breathing and body awareness.

##### Ocean Waves

- **How:** Inhale while imagining a wave coming in, exhale while imagining the wave going out.
- **Purpose:** Creates a calming rhythm and helps regulate emotions.

##### Magic Bubble

- **How:** Imagine holding a bubble in your hands. Inhale deeply to “inflate” it, exhale slowly to make it float away.
- **Purpose:** Makes breathing fun while teaching slow, controlled exhalation.

### **3.2 Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Use when:

- The judoka has noticeable physical tension
- The judoka is physically restless
- After intense physical training
- At the end of training
- For judoka who have difficulty sensing tension vs. relaxation

Alternating tensing and relaxing muscles helps the child become aware of their body and learn to release tension. Ideal at the end of training or during a calming phase. Progressive Muscle Relaxation involves tensing the muscles, followed by releasing them. Start with the feet and move upward through the body (thighs, abdominal muscles, arms and hands, shoulders, neck, face). Each time, hold the tension for 5-10 seconds, then relax the muscles. During relaxation, focus on the difference between tension and release. Noticing this difference helps you become more aware of the tension you carry in your body.

### **3.3 Guided Imagery**

Use when:

- The judoka experiences anxiety or fear
- Emotional security needs to be strengthened
- Working on self-confidence
- At the end of training
- For judoka who respond well to stories and images

Through a guided imagery (e.g., “safe place,” “peaceful beach,” “mountain of strength”), the judoka develops inner resources and emotional stability. Works best in a calm environment in the end of training session. The coach leads the judoka to imagine a peaceful, happy place using descriptive, calming language. Change the imagery every 1-2 weeks to keep things fresh and engaging. Always individualize. What soothes one judoka may overwhelm another. Start simple: use only the voice and gradually add soft background sounds if appropriate and if the judoka enjoys it.

#### 4. Evaluation and Outcomes

After completing 10 training sessions, participants provided feedback on their experiences with the guided relaxation activities integrated into judo training. Overall, the feedback indicated positive effects on both physical and emotional aspects of practice.

Participants reported feeling calmer and more focused before and during training sessions, with reduced anxiety or restlessness, particularly at the beginning of exercises. Many judokas noted improved recovery after intense physical activity and an enhanced ability to self-regulate emotions, especially in challenging situations.

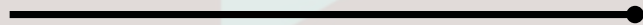
#### 5. Long-term benefits

Regular integration of guided relaxation sessions into judo training provides significant long-term benefits for both emotional development and athletic performance, particularly for children and judoka with sensory or attention challenges. Regular practice also enhances focus and attention, helping them concentrate during training and other tasks. Relaxation techniques support better physical health by reducing the body's stress response, while increasing self-awareness of tension and strategies to release it. Overall, using guided relaxation exercise help judoka to become more prepared for learning, transitions, and challenging situations, promoting resilience and well-being.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation



### Guided Imagery in Judo Training



# MODULE 6

## Stretching and Movement in Judo Training

### 1. Module Overview and Rationale

Stretching and movement support flexibility, coordination, posture, and injury prevention. For children with motor challenges, structured stretching improves body awareness and comfort during training.

### 2. Training Methodology

The module follows safe progression:

- **Safety:** It is important to ensure that stretching and movement activities are safe, effective, and developmentally appropriate, while also meeting the specific needs of each judoka.
- **Warm-Up before stretching:** Never stretch cold muscles. Begin with light movements such as walking, jogging, or jumping jacks to increase blood flow.
- **Start with dynamic, end with static:** Use dynamic (moving) stretches before training to prepare muscles and joints, and static (holding) stretches after training to improve flexibility and support recovery. Balance both sides of the body.
- **Progress gradually:** Flexibility develops over time. Avoid pushing judoka into deep stretches too soon. Regular practice, patience, and gentle progression build safe flexibility and confidence.
- **Adapt to individual needs:** Consider each judoka's physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities. Use visual cues, hands-on support, or shorter sets as needed. Allow breaks and provide sensory-friendly options, such as a quiet space or weighted balls, to support participation and comfort. Make it fun: use games, music, or stories.



### 3. Training Plan

Sessions include themed warm-ups, targeted stretches for judo-relevant body areas, and calming cool-down routines with breathing.

- **The introduction** (3-5 minutes) begins with gentle movements such as jumping jacks, fast walking, or marching in place to gradually warm up the muscles. To make it engaging, these activities can be presented in a game-like format, for example, “Move like a ninja!” or “Freeze dance” combined with stretching.
- **The warm-up main dynamic stretching routine** (10 minutes) focuses on key judo-relevant areas, including the neck, shoulders, hips, legs, wrists, and back. At the beginning, it is best to use a stick as a prop to help ensure even work of the left and right sides of the body, improve body control, and support proper execution of exercises. Select 10 exercises that engage the whole body, starting with a smaller number of repetitions (6-8 times) and gradually increasing to 10 repetitions. During dynamic stretching, especially for beginners, it is helpful to also teach the movement patterns for strength exercises such as sit-ups, back exercises, or squats.
- **Cool Down & Stretching** (5-10 minutes). In this part of the training, static stretching exercises and/or relaxation exercises are primarily used. At the beginning, static stretches can be performed while counting. The coach explains the correct position, emphasizes key points to pay attention to (e.g., knees fully extended, elbows straight, etc.), and instructs participants to hold the position first for 2 seconds, gradually increasing the duration.

It is important to explain that discomfort during stretching serves as a protective signal for the muscles, while flexibility develops as this mild tension is gradually overcome (myotatic reflex). Therefore, exercises should always be performed slowly and in a controlled manner.

When working with children, beginners, or individuals with developmental disabilities, it is best to start with relaxation exercises. Once they have developed good body awareness and control over all parts of the body, static stretching can be introduced. Performing static stretches without first establishing proper body control can be risky and may lead to injuries, so it is important to progress gradually and ensure the child is ready before moving to these exercises.

Alternatively, you can use familiar or playful imagery and descriptive terms during relaxation exercises to help children understand and remember the movements more easily. (etc. „Let your arms hang like spaghetti noodles“ or „Let’s draw a rainbow in the sky“).

#### 4. Evaluation and Benefits

After completing 10 training sessions that combined dynamic stretching with a stick and relaxation exercises, several positive outcomes were observed. Judokas showed improved flexibility and range of motion, stretching further with less discomfort and moving more easily during judo activities. Additionally, the judokas learned better body control and how to perform the exercises correctly. Muscle tightness was reduced after each session, which increased strength, muscle tone, and the ability to maintain proper posture while executing judo techniques more fluidly.

#### 5. Long-Term Benefits

Regular implementation of structured stretching and movement training in judo brings significant long-term benefits, especially for children and judoka with motor challenges. Continuous practice helps maintain and gradually improve joint range of motion, supporting more efficient and technically correct execution of judo techniques over time. Improved muscle elasticity, joint stability, and body awareness reduce the risk of strains, sprains, and overuse injuries, contributing to long-term participation in judo. Consistent stretching and relaxation exercises support healthy spinal alignment, balanced muscle tone, and better overall posture during both training and everyday activities. Long-term engagement in structured movement routines strengthens neuromuscular connections, leading to better balance, timing, spatial awareness, and technical precision. As judokas gain greater control over their bodies and experience less discomfort during movement, they develop self-confidence, emotional regulation, and a positive attitude toward physical activity, promoting lifelong healthy habits.

### Dynamic Stretching Part 1



### Dynamic Stretching Part 2



### Cool Down & Stretching



# PART 3

## IMPLEMENTATION & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

### 1. IMPLEMENTING THE MODULES IN DAILY JUDO PRACTICE

The Be Judo Zen modules are designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing coaches to integrate them seamlessly into existing judo training structures. Rather than replacing traditional judo practice, the modules enhance and enrich it by adding layers of emotional regulation, mental focus, and inclusive pedagogy.

Each module can be implemented:

- as a stand-alone session,
- as part of a warm-up, main training block, or cool-down,
- or as a short intervention when emotional regulation or refocusing is needed.

The key principle is intentional integration: coaches choose exercises based on the emotional state, physical readiness, and cognitive capacity of the group on that particular day.

#### 1.1 Combining the Modules

The six modules are designed to complement one another and can be combined within a single training session or across a weekly training cycle.

Examples of effective combinations include:

- **Breathing & DNS + Stretching and Movement**  
to support postural stability, injury prevention, and calm focus.
- **Yoga Therapy + Guided Relaxation**  
to regulate emotional states and reduce anxiety before or after demanding sessions.
- **Storytelling Modules (Mindful Judo & Short Stories) + Technical Training**  
to deepen understanding of judo principles and support value-based learning.

By rotating modules, coaches prevent monotony while addressing different developmental needs.

## 1.2 Weekly Training Plan Examples

### Example 1: Inclusive Youth Group (2–3 sessions per week).

- Session 1
  - Warm-up: Dynamic stretching (Module 6)
  - Main part: Technical judo training
  - Integration: Breathing & DNS during throws (Module 1)
  - Cool-down: Guided relaxation (Module 5)
- Session 2
  - Warm-up: Yoga-based breathing (Module 2)
  - Main part: Technical drills
  - Reflection: Short educational story (Module 4)
  - Cool-down: Static stretching (Module 6)
- Session 3
  - Warm-up: Movement games and mindfulness
  - Main part: Randori adapted to abilities
  - Reflection: Storytelling and group discussion (Module 3)

### Example 2: Competitive Youth Group

- Short breathing interventions before randori
- Yoga-based recovery after intense sessions
- Storytelling used selectively to address motivation, discipline, or team cohesion

## 1.3 Adapting to Different Age Groups

### Children (5–8 years).

- Short exercises (1–3 minutes)
- Playful imagery, animal movements, stories
- Focus on emotional safety and enjoyment

### Children and Youth (9–14 years).

- Structured breathing and mindfulness
- Simple reflection questions
- Emphasis on self-awareness and cooperation

### Adolescents (15+ years).

- Greater focus on autonomy
- Application to competition stress
- Deeper reflection and self-regulation strategies

## 2. INCLUSIVE ADAPTATIONS AND CASE EXAMPLES

### 2.1 ADHD

Judoka with ADHD often struggle with attention regulation, impulsivity, and transitions.

Effective strategies include:

- Short, clearly structured exercises
- Frequent movement breaks
- Breathing games and rhythmic activities
- Relaxation sessions used proactively, not only after dysregulation

Observed outcomes:

- Improved focus during technical drills
- Reduced impulsive behaviour
- Better emotional transitions between activities

### 2.2 Autism Spectrum

For judoka on the autism spectrum, predictability, sensory awareness, and emotional safety are essential.

Key adaptations:

- Visual schedules and consistent routines
- Minimal verbal overload
- Calm voice and clear demonstrations
- Sensory-friendly relaxation (no forced music or touch)

Observed outcomes:

- Increased participation and engagement
- Reduced anxiety
- Improved social interaction with peers

### 2.3 Cerebral Palsy

Judoka with cerebral palsy benefit greatly from DNS, breathing, and stretching modules.

Adaptations include:

- Individualized movement range
- Slower pace and additional support
- Focus on quality of movement rather than performance

Observed outcomes:

- Improved balance and postural control
- Greater confidence in movement
- Increased independence on the tatami

## 2.4 Mixed-Ability Groups

One of the strengths of the Be Judo Zen approach is that all exercises are inclusive by design.

In mixed-ability groups:

- Exercises are scaled rather than separated
- Peer support is encouraged
- Differences are normalized, not highlighted

This fosters empathy, cooperation, and group cohesion.

# 3. ROLE OF THE COACH

## 3.1 Creating Emotional Safety

The coach plays a central role in shaping the emotional climate of the dojo.

Emotional safety is supported by:

- Respectful communication
- Predictable session structure
- Acceptance of emotional expression
- Clear boundaries and calm leadership

When children feel safe, learning becomes deeper and more sustainable.



### **3.2 Observation and Regulation**

Coaches are encouraged to observe:

- breathing patterns,
- body tension,
- emotional reactions,
- attention levels.

These signals help coaches decide when to slow down, when to activate, and when to regulate.

### **3.3 Communication Strategies**

Effective communication includes:

- simple, clear instructions,
- positive reinforcement,
- focusing on effort rather than outcome,
- validating emotions without reinforcing negative behaviour.

## **4. VIDEO INTEGRATION GUIDE**

The guidebook includes 15 short instructional videos designed to support visual learning.

### **4.1 How to Use the Videos**

Videos can be used:

- before training (coach preparation),
- during training (group viewing),
- after training (reflection or home practice).

### **4.2 When, Why, and for What Purpose**

Videos are particularly useful:

- when introducing new exercises,
- for children with visual learning preferences,
- to ensure consistency across coaches and clubs.

The goal is not passive watching, but active embodiment of the exercises.

# 5. MONITORING PROGRESS AND WELL-BEING

## 5.1 What Coaches Should Observe

Progress is not measured only by technical improvement.

Key indicators include:

- emotional regulation,
- ability to focus,
- confidence and participation,
- quality of movement,
- social interaction.

## 5.2 Signs of Progress Beyond Sport

Positive outcomes often appear as:

- reduced anxiety,
- improved self-esteem,
- better peer relationships,
- transfer of coping skills to school and home environments.

# 6. SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSFERABILITY

## 6.1 Application Beyond Judo

The Be Judo Zen approach is transferable to:

- other martial arts,
- team sports,
- physical education,
- therapeutic and recreational programs.

The principles of breathing, mindfulness, storytelling, and emotional safety are universal.

## 6.2 Long-Term Impact of the Be Judo Zen Approach

The long-term value of Be Judo Zen lies in its ability to:

- support mental health through sport,
- empower coaches with practical tools,
- promote inclusion as a lived practice,
- strengthen resilience and well-being beyond the dojo.

By integrating body, mind, and values, Be Judo Zen contributes not only to better judoka, but to healthier, more confident, and more resilient individuals.

# CLOSING REFLECTION

This guidebook was created through the collaboration of dedicated judo coaches, practitioners, and enthusiasts from Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia who have, for many years, believed deeply in the transformative power of judo.

It is the result of lived experience, daily work on the tatami, and a shared commitment to inclusion, mental well-being, and human development. The coaches involved in this project have witnessed how structured movement, respectful relationships, and emotional safety can profoundly change the lives of children and young people, especially those facing developmental challenges or disabilities.

Be Judo Zen is more than a collection of methods. It is a shared vision that judo can be a safe space, a place of growth, and a community where every child is seen, supported, and valued.

At the heart of this project stands a simple belief:

**“CHILDREN WHO FEEL BETTER, DO BETTER.”**

This belief continues to guide our work, our training, and our future cooperation.

