

Relaxation

Use This When:

To introduce relaxation training and its use in controlling tension.



Objectives:

- to present the idea that staying calm and relaxing is a good way to affect the way we feel
- to demonstrate what relaxation feels like to children who have difficulty relaxing
- to increase a child’s awareness about his or her own tension so that relaxation skills can be applied at the proper time
- to teach the child to relax on demand in certain situations (e.g., bedtime, before a test)

Steps:

<input type="checkbox"/> Introduce benefits of relaxation	Present the idea that staying calm and relaxing is a good way to affect the way we feel – especially when we are stressed out and tense.
<input type="checkbox"/> Relay the idea that being tense can make us feel bad	Discuss with the child times when he/she has felt up-tight, tense, or stressed, particularly focusing on the somatic or physical responses he/she experiences at such times. If the child has difficulty recalling somatic or physical feelings associated with stressful experiences, imaginal techniques might be used to help the child identify the physical expressions of his/her feelings.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss how bad feelings can make the body tense	Introduce the idea that many of the physical sensations associated with feelings of worry, sadness, or stress involve muscle tension. Suggest that when a person becomes upset, some parts of the body become tense, and that these somatic or physical responses are the result of that tension.
<input type="checkbox"/> Introduce idea that learning to relax can help combat bad feelings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ask the child to think of a time or situation in which he/she is really calm and happy. 2) Ask him/her to imagine him- or herself in that scene and to then focus on how his/her body feels. 3) Discuss with the child the difference between how his/her body feels when it is tense and when it is relaxed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce this idea by asking the child to make a tight fist by clenching his/her hand while you count to five and to focus on how it feels. • Then tell the child to relax his fist to the count of five and to focus on the warm, relaxed feeling.
<input type="checkbox"/> Initial training in deep-muscle relaxation	Tell the child that if he/she can relax tense parts, he/she will be taking the first step in coping with these feelings. Scripts are available for these exercises, but you will want to adapt your training to the child’s age level and other characteristics (e.g., emotional maturity). Steps (10-20 minutes): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ask child to get into a comfortable position, with closed eyes 2) Practice deep breathing 3) Prompt child to progressively tense and relax various muscles groups until the child feels relaxed

Steps:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Brief, self-calming techniques | Alternatively, or additionally, educate the child in other techniques that are designed to be practiced any time and any place that the child feels the need to reduce tension but cannot participate in deep-muscle relaxation. Give the child examples of such stressful situations (e.g., just before an exam). Steps: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Sit in a relaxed posture, with hands partly open [i.e., no fists] and resting on your lap or thighs.2) Check the tension level of the muscle group where child tends to become most tense (e.g., neck); try to relax those muscles.3) Take a deep breath and exhale slowly.4) Imagine that he/she is relaxing in his/her favorite place.5) Do this over and over, until child feels calmer, or until it is his/her time to perform. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imagery | Calming imagery may also be incorporated with any relaxation technique, such that the child is encouraged to visualize a peaceful setting/situation. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mood rating | Discuss with the child the effect of this activity on his/her mood ratings. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the child's mood rating went up after the activity, note how well this activity worked for the child.• If the child's mood rating remained the same or declined, discuss possible reasons for this (e.g., this particular activity is not mood enhancing for this particular child).• Emphasize that your goal in doing these activities together is:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) to help the child discover which activities are mood enhancers for him/her, and2) that using these activities to feel better is under his/her control. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss the experience of the relaxation exercise | Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the sensed difference between a relaxed body and a tense one• that slowing and paying attention to one's breathing can help relax the body• that tensing and relaxing muscles helps relax the body• that pleasant and relaxing imagery can magnify the relaxation experience• that the ultimate goal is to recognize tension in the body and then work to relax it• Reinforce and further develop the child's awareness of how and when relaxation might be useful by explaining that:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) relaxation training exercises (such as those practiced today) are done to help the child realize what it feels like to be tense or relaxed and2) to help the child learn to relax more quickly. |
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Helpful Tips:

- Remember to praise often
- Remember to review often, by **asking questions**
- Brief any caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures who may be involved
- Simplify these steps if you have to
- This material can be covered in more than one session/meeting