Exercise

UK English

Learning To Relax

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Learning To Relax

Description

Stress and tension are prevalent complaints amongst children and young people. Body sensations are often reported over and above cognitions & worries. Feelings of stress and tension accompany a wide range of clinical and non-clinical problems including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Teaching relaxation exercises can engender a beneficial sense of control and while not everybody enjoys the same relaxation techniques, most people find some techniques pleasant.

Relaxation exercises can be broadly divided into three categories including: diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation, and cognitive / visualisation techniques. The relaxation exercises in this *Learning To Relax* information handout include instructions for all three approaches. Relaxation techniques are best introduced as practical exercises within session and this exercise handout supports clinicians teaching younger clients. Clinicians might consider encouraging clients to record the exercises to guide their later practice. For the breathing exercises it is important that relaxed breathing be slower, lower down (in the tummy) rather than higher (in the chest). For the progressive muscle relaxation exercise, it is helpful to advise clients not to tighten muscles too hard, and to leave out any areas which cause discomfort. For the visualisation exercise the clinician might consider suggesting imagining actives that are soothing or activating / exciting – what is more important is to help the client to have an experience that is absorbing and engaging.

Instructions

> *"We all get stressed and anxious, and sometimes feeling worried, angry, or sad can make us feel tense or bothered. Do you ever notice feeling tense or tight in your body? And do you already have any good ways of relaxing? One really good way of managing when we feel stressed is to try a relaxation exercise. These are quick skills that you can practice feeling calmer and more in control. This exercise will teach you three great ways of relaxing: (1) making your breathing slower and deeper (2) relaxing all of the muscles in your body (3) using the power of your imagination. Would you be willing to try some with me? There's no right or wrong, and I'll be interested to hear about whatever you experience."*

References

Bernstein, D. A., & Borkovec, T. D. (1973). Progressive relaxation training: A manual for the helping professions. Champaign, Ill. : Research Press.

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Learning To Relax

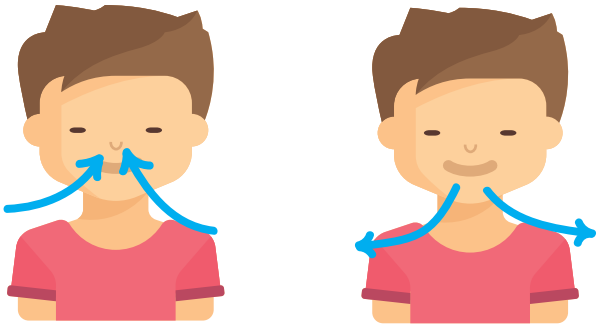
There are lots of ways that you can relax. Try some of these and see how they make you feel.

Calm breathing

If you make your breathing **slower**, **deeper**, and **more steady** then your body will relax.

1. Breathe in **slowly** through your nose
2. Pause for a moment
3. Then breathe out **slowly** through your mouth

carry on breathing calmly for 2 minutes



Relaxing your muscles

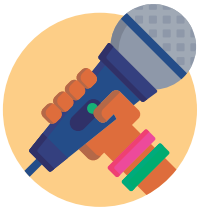
You can relax by letting the tension out of your muscles. A great way to do this is to **tense and then relax** all of the muscles in your body. Sit in a chair or lie on the floor and then:

1. Clench your fists ... then release
2. Tighten the muscles in your arms ... then relax
3. Push your shoulders back and up ... then release
4. Tighten the muscles in your tummy ... then relax
5. Tense the muscles in your legs ... then release
6. Curl up your toes and clench your feet ... then release
7. Scrunch up the muscles in your face ... then relax

Use the power of your imagination

Imagine **doing something** or **being somewhere** that makes you happy.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, then imagine finding yourself in a place or doing something that makes you really happy. Picture all of the details – the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. Notice all of the sensations. Notice how your body feels when you are in this place.



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Resource details

Title: Learning To Relax (CYP)
Language: English (GB)
Translated title: Learning To Relax (CYP)
Type: Exercise
Document orientation: Portrait
URL: https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/learning-to-relax-cyp/

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