

RELAXATION

A guide to teaching relaxation
techniques to children

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Introducing Relaxation to Children

Relaxation can be introduced through asking children themselves what they think relaxation is and how it could be carried out. As the children begin to give their answers, think about matching their answers to the concepts such as calming one's body, emptying the mind and reducing stress or worry. Discuss the idea of feeling tense for too long and that relaxation would help to reduce tension. Introduce the worrying mind and how relaxation can interrupt thinking worry thoughts. Once there has been some general consensus that it is a positive process then introduce the idea that relaxation can be taught through tried and tested techniques. Gauge the children's opinion of this but trying to persuade them to think positively about relaxation practice and to own the idea of doing it together would make it easier to introduce.

Once there is agreement, then give a general introduction to the different techniques and plan with the children when to carry these out. Little and often would be the rule so choosing times such as at the start of lessons in the morning, after breaks and lunch and then perhaps just before leaving for home at the end of the day, if possible, having a longer session at the start and end of the day. It is up to staff the length of sessions but they should not last longer than a few minutes (maybe longer at the start and end of the day). The aim in the end is to help the children to begin to use the techniques independently themselves for when they are over-emotional or stressed.





Practicalities

- When introducing relaxation to your target group of children, one could produce a script based on what I have said in the introduction or if confident put down some quick notes to help you introduce the session.
- Think about how you will timetable relaxation practice in the curriculum and how long a “session” lasts. These can be very short such as some breathing exercises for a few minutes. (It will vary according to the technique).
- I have given an example of a questionnaire that could be used to measure the possible effects of the use of the relaxation techniques at the end of the document. If wanting to investigate this further, one could look into using a simple before and after type questionnaire or emotion measure techniques (emotional thermometers 1-10) etc. Other ways are to examine satisfied/worry statements or questions about school experiences. Then one sees how this might change over time by choosing a future date to reissue the questionnaire once more after a period of practice. This should be between three to six months to give time for the practice effect of the relaxation techniques. One could look up some examples online of such questionnaires that measure before and after effect.
- It would be helpful to familiarize yourself with all of the relaxation techniques before starting.
- A general discussion to help the children familiarize themselves with the techniques would be beneficial before starting the actual techniques officially.

- If there is time, one could have a practice week to be able to decide which are their favorite techniques and then focus on these for the final plans.
- The aim is for the children to be using these techniques themselves for their own wellbeing.

Benefits

| | | | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Better listening | Think on feet | Feel more confident | Better focus |
| Boost in energy | More creative | Feel healthier | Cheerful and Positive – things can be better |
| Get on with children – all ages, abilities and personality | Improve your memory | Better problem solving skills | Decrease in anxiety |

Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing is an effective way of slowing down the body's natural response to stress. It slows down the heart rate, lowers blood pressure provides a feeling of being in control.

1) Breathing Exercise

Close of one of your nostrils with your finger and breathe in slowly through the other nostril. Close of the nostril one has just breathed in through with one's finger, and breathe out though the other. Then breathe in through the nostril that is still open and repeat the process going from one nostril to the other. Repeat this exercise three times. This relaxation is to help one focus in preparation for activities.

2 Breathing Exercise

Close your eyes and use your imagination to carry out this slow breathing exercise. On the first breath in, imagine the air going up through your nose into your forehead, around the top of your head and down the back of your neck. The air goes down your spine to the bottom on through to your stomach. The teacher can talk the children through this until they can remember it for themselves.

You hold the air for one to two seconds and then slowly breathe out through your mouth for seven seconds. You then repeat the process three times, or as many times as it takes to relax. Once one becomes used to the time of taking the deep breath then one can just breathe long deep breaths in conjunction with other relaxation exercises.



An Imaging technique from Neurolinguistic Programming

To begin this relaxation technique, ask the child to relax and close their eyes. Suggest they clear their mind, perhaps imagining a blank TV screen and then seeing a scene on it. The scene should be vivid and meaningful, and relate to a memory from a very happy time in their life. When the child comes up with a scene, ask them about what they see, what they hear, what they smell and what they feel. Ask them to imagine the scene, not just as a picture, but also as a movie film, so they might imagine people moving around and doing things. Get them to practise calling up this scene several times: it does not have to be exactly the same each time.

Once the child has captured this scene, ask them to remember it so that they can use it later on. Then, when it comes to a situation where they are becoming agitated, use the following procedure:

- Ask them to hold the picture of what is making them angry.
- Ask them to imagine it as if it is on a TV screen.
- Get them to reduce the size of the screen to a pinpoint – like when you switch off the TV.
- Then ask them to ‘switch on’ the TV again, but the scene will be the happy one they have been practising. Encourage them to dwell on the happy scene for a while, calmly.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Progressive muscle relaxation offers an effective way to relieve stress. This is accomplished by tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body. Children can sit comfortable or lie down on a mat to do these.

- Face- Ask your children to close their eyes tightly and bite their teeth together for five seconds. Then they are to relax their eyes and jaw and feel the relaxation as they do so. Tell them to really focus on the sensation in the muscle as they relax. Repeat once.
- Shoulders- Ask your children to hunch their shoulders up tightly aiming to theoretically touch their ears in the process for five

seconds. Slowly then let them relax, focusing on the sensation in the shoulders and back as they do so. Repeat.

- Hands and Arms- Ask your children to clench their fists tightly as well as the muscles in their forearms as they lift them from their sides for five seconds. Then ask them to relax and focus on the sensations in the arms.
- Stomach- Ask your children to suck in their stomachs and hold for five seconds. Then ask them to relax in the stomach area, letting the breath out.
- Legs- Ask your children to tighten their upper leg muscles. By pushing their knees together as if trying to hold a small thin object using the knees. Hold this for five seconds and then release. Finally ask your children to tense their calves and feet muscles by pulling their toes towards themselves for five seconds and then relaxing.

Autosuggestion

This is a technique, which involves repeating phrases inside our minds. We say or repeat to ourselves a positive phrase and keep repeating it at a slow pace. Usually we are saying something that is good for us. Whatever we say, it has to be helpful to our situation. It would help to do a little relaxation breathing before beginning to repeat a phrase over and over in our mind

One would say phrases that will be good for our wellbeing. Therefore one can think of different things such as:

I am calm

Inner peace

I feel strong and healthy

May I be well!

May I feel happy!

Relax

May I be free of unhappy thoughts!

I am Still and Peaceful.

You can make up your own autosuggestion and out of all the phrases, chose the one that works for you. As you do it, others will not know that you're doing it. When you do repeat it, between each time you say it, imagine a stone falling into deep water. Autosuggestion can be carried out in conjunction with other practices such as breathing or stretching. It may also be beneficial to you to wish others well too once you have practised it many times for yourself.

Now come up with a phrase that suits you.



Stretching

1) While standing, with your hands at your side, stretch out your hands to the sides to make a cross shape. Then slowly lift them above your head, while slowly breathing in. Hold your hands above your head for

five seconds. Then lower them slowly breathing out. Repeat two more times.

2) Link your hands together, and then turn them to face palm outwards. Stretch them out in front of yourself and then raise them above your head breathing in. Stretch for five seconds and then lower to your sides slowly breathing out. Repeat two more times.

3) Link your hands together behind your back. Then try to lift your arms as high as you can, keeping them linked and holding for five seconds. Then release your arms. Repeat this two more times.

4) Stretch your arms together above your head for a couple of seconds breathing in. Then bend over keeping your legs straight and try to touch your toes while slowly breathing out. Try and touch your toes for five seconds breathing out and then lift yourself with your arms stretched above your head once more. Then lower your arms.

5) With your legs 50 cms apart, lift one arm straight up above your head. Stretch it over to one side while breathing out. Hold it for five seconds and then stand straight up breathing in. Then repeat for the other side.



Guided Visualisation

Guided visualization is reading a script out loud to the pupils that evoke mental images to help the student relax. The idea is to stimulate the senses while reading the script so that whatever scenery is described is accompanied by lots of suggestion to see, hear, smell, taste and feel the environment that they are in. One is educating the student on altering their mental imagery away from negative to positive perceptions to help them relax in situations. As one asks the student to close their eyes while doing the visualisation then the young person needs to feel a degree of trust in the relationship. If students have a degree of choice over how they construct the narrative of their own personal visualisation it will help keep them focus on listening while the visualization is read out. One needs to let them know that it may be over five minutes.

The pace of reading should be very slow so that one allows the images to form in the mind of the student.

Visualization.

Close your eyes and sit comfortably listening to your own breathing. Allow yourself to take three deep breaths, and let yourself relax as you breathe out. Now imagine in your mind that you are standing at the top of 15 steps staring down into a large garden. It is the most beautiful garden, you have ever seen. You start to descend the steps. You walk at a relaxed pace noticing your feet take each step down, down into the garden.

You step into the garden on a warm summer's day looking at the trees and flowers. You follow a path and notice all the colours of the plants and the beautiful scents in the air. It is better than any perfume that has ever been made. The trees are wonderful shapes with green lawns all around. You keep walking through the garden enjoying all its summer glory. You stop and rest on a comfortable bench, soaking in the beauty of the garden.

After a while, you get up and walk across cool grass in your bare feet. The grass is soft under your feet and the smell of freshly cut grass is in the air. Finally though you come to some sand, which is beside the ocean. Now you can feel the sand between your toes. It is soft and dry, but as you walk closer to the sea. It becomes damper and firmer. You look up at the huge ocean in front of you with its crashing waves. You take a good look at this new and beautiful place. You can smell the salt in the air and feel the warmth of the sun on the back of your neck. It warms up your whole body. You feel absolutely free in this place.

Now it is time to return and you take one last look at the ocean. You then walk back across the sand, as it goes from hard to soft. You then walk back across the grass feeling the change on your feet as the sounds of the ocean fade. You walk towards the garden and find the path through the trees and bushes. You now walk on towards the steps and count 15 up. Now you are back in the room.

