

The Center for Psychology & Counseling

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Relaxation Activities for Parents and Children

Adapted from Relaxation, Guided Imagery and Visualization Techniques
by Sandra F. Rief, M.A. and from kidsrelaxation.com



Start by teaching your child relaxation techniques when your child is calm and moderately relaxed, as he/she will be more open to learning new skills at this time. It is also helpful to brainstorm with your child the times when these techniques may be beneficial as well as the warning signs that alert the child to when these techniques may be needed (ex: hands or jaw clenched).

Laughter

Laughter is one of the best ways to release stress and feel good. The chemicals released in the body through laughter reduce pain and tension. So, there is probably no substitute for finding ways to have fun and to laugh with our children. Enjoy a joke book or a funny movie together and enjoy the laughter.

- *Speaking Gibberish*

Speaking gibberish can be hilarious when you are doing it with passion and acting as if you are in competition for the next academy award. Explain to your children that gibberish is a made up language where you speak all kinds of nonsense syllables. Take turns speaking gibberish to each other while acting as if you are truly communicating to the other person. Use hand gestures in addition to your speech to convey your message.

Breathing

Help your child learn to take conscious, deep breaths to relax. Show him how to inhale deeply (preferably through the nose, but through the mouth is fine) and slowly exhale through the mouth.

- *Balloon*

Have your child pretend he or she is a balloon, which is slowly being inflated. With every breath taken, slowly stand from a squatting position, getting bigger and bigger. Slowly extend the hands and feet away from the body, until with a big bang, the balloon bursts. (Fall to the ground and lie there.)

Tension

It is particularly helpful for children to recognize that when they are nervous, stressed, and angry, they should feel the tightening of certain body parts. If they can recognize when fists clench, jaws tighten, and stomachs harden, they have the power over their bodies to relax and gain control. They can begin to breathe deeply and "send" their breaths consciously to relax body parts.

- *Progressive Relaxation*

Teach your child to isolate different body parts and relax them with each slow breath she exhales. For example, while lying on the floor, instruct her to tighten or squeeze her toes on the left foot, then relax with a deep breath. Now tighten her left knee and upper leg . . . then relax and breathe. Proceed in this

fashion to the right side of the lower body, to the abdomen and upper body, each arm, hand/fingers, chest, neck, jaws, and face.

Visualization

The ability to visualize with colorful, vivid images, rich imagination and detailed action are natural skills of childhood. These same skills have been found to be very useful in developing focus and concentration, in calming emotions and senses, in coping with stress/anxiety, and increasing positive study skills, social skills, and creative expression.

- *Walk This Way*

Have your child remove his/her shoes and socks, lie on the ground or a bed and close his/her eyes. You begin by speaking in a soft, calm voice: "Imagine you begin to walk slowly. Your feet feel the way forwards. You sense high grass that tickles your legs and fingers. Now you come to a gravel path. The stones are cool and they prick at your feet. You leave the path and come to mushy forest ground where now and again there are places of moss. After a long walk you sense warm sand and the sun in your eyes. You hear the sounds of waves and you smell the salty beach air..."

As you and your child become more skilled at using this exercise for relaxation, try having your child think of new parts to add or create an entirely new story. The goal is for your child to be able to use this technique alone to regulate his/her emotions or anxiety. Also, try to utilize all of the five human senses within your story.

- *Breathing Color*

Ask your child to think of a color that makes him feel very comfortable, peaceful, and relaxed. Then have him practice -- with closed eyes -- breathing in that color and "sending" it (blowing it) throughout the body. If your child, for example, chooses "turquoise," guide him to visualize the turquoise going down his throat, into the neck and chest, down to the stomach, and so on until he is filled with the beautiful, peaceful, wonderful turquoise . . . and is relaxed and in control.

The use of different aromas, sounds, lights, warmth, or other pleasant, comfortable feeling can be used in place of a color.

Other Activities

- *The Worry Wall*

Designate a poster board or other large paper as the Worry Wall. Have sticky notes available for a child to write or draw her worry and stick it on the wall. At the end of the day, pick the worries off the wall and address them one by one. Let the child decide what to do with the worry after it has been discussed. Be sure to let your child know that the Worry Wall is a place where she can release her worries and that the worries will be addressed later in the day.



