



Relaxation and Mindfulness

Aberdeenshire Council Educational Psychology Service November 2019

The developing brain

In today's world, children as much as adults need to find time to turn off, slow down and unwind. Research has shown that children can be just as overwhelmed by our busy modern world. However, a child's brain is still developing and is less able to handle stress and negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, particularly over longer periods of time.

These overwhelming emotions can lead to increased levels of stress for children and can:

- ◆ Create anxiety and tension
- ◆ Affect performance at school
- ◆ Cause problems with relationships (adults and peers)
- ◆ Affect the way they view themselves

Why is relaxation important?

- ◆ It can help the body cope with life's anxieties and stresses.
- ◆ A relaxed child is able to think and behave more practically and positively. They have the space to step back and reflect on issues resulting in better behaviour, focus and relationships.
- ◆ It teaches the subconscious brain that you are safe and there is nothing to run away from.
- ◆ When we slow our breathing down, the activity in our brain moves away from the parts of the brain that want to fight, or cause a stress response.
- ◆ When we relax our muscles, it tells our brain to switch on "calm thinking" parts of the brain.

The two main types of relaxation are the **physical** and the **fixed**. Fixed relaxation includes techniques such as **meditation, mindfulness, visualisation and breathing**. Physical relaxation comes in the form of movement, e.g. **exercise, progressive muscle relaxation**.



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Relaxation and Mindfulness

5 4 3 2 1
SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN
 FIRST- TAKE 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS!

5 List 5 things you can SEE 

4 List 4 things you can FEEL 

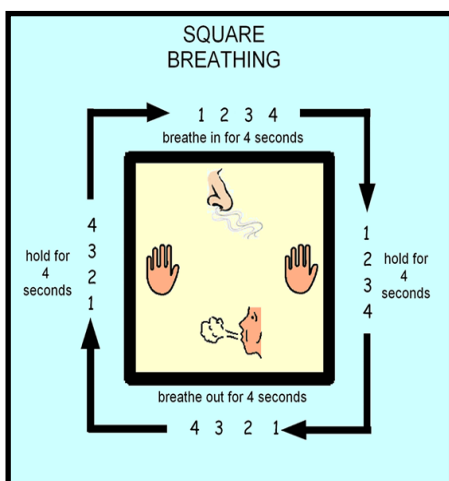
3 List 3 things you can HEAR 

2 List 2 things you can SMELL 

1 List something you like to TASTE 

FINISHED? - TAKE ANOTHER 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS

When you are feeling overwhelmed, it can be helpful to focus on the sensations you are feeling right now. This is an example of a grounding technique called 5, 4, 3, 2, 1



4 Square Breathing.
 Take a deep breath, breathing in for 4 secs.
 Hold your breath for 4 secs.
 Slowly exhale for 4 secs.
 Do nothing for 4 secs, and then repeat the process as many times as you need until you calm down.

What you can say

- ◆ Notice when you see them feeling calm. Say: I see that you are breathing slowly. You look calm.
- ◆ Holding your (stuffed animal) helps you to calm down, doesn't it.
- ◆ Your face looks relaxed— you are staying calm.
- ◆ Let's take some deep breaths together before we go outside. I feel so much better after I have taken a few big breaths.
- ◆ You took some big breaths in and out. How do you feel now?
- ◆ Let's think together. What are some things that help us stay calm?
- ◆ Use grounding: 4 sounds you hear, 3 favourite colours in the room, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing which is great about you (see diagram)
- ◆ Use daily positive affirmations. (I am strong, I can do hard things, I am brave, I learn from my mistakes, I am calm, I can do anything, I like myself)



Watch [Jessica's Daily Affirmations](#) for a giggle



What you can do

There are different types of exercises that you can do with children, these can be used at set times, or fitted into daily activities such as walking to school or eating dinner and there are many examples available online. Children will need you to practice them alongside them initially and you will feel the benefits too.

- ◆ Deep breathing.
- ◆ Movement, gentle exercise such as walking, swimming, skipping, resistance bands.
- ◆ Visualisation and guided meditation—using all your senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch; helps your thought processes to switch off and you will feel relaxed.
- ◆ Create a comfy, safe space for your child to relax in with cushions/ soft toys, favoured items, pictures, calming colours, sensory toys, relaxing smells and music.
- ◆ Calming activities such as colouring, drawing, fiddle toys, blocking out noise/ light, physical touch/ massage, dot to dots, photos, bubbles.
- ◆ Make up a calm box containing a few things individualised to your child:

a box full of tools that they can use when feeling emotions they don't understand—usually frustration and/or anger—to help calm them down



- ◆ An hour before bedtime turn off all electronic devices and help your child to relax with a warm bath, bedtime story or a guided meditation CD. Yoga is an excellent way to help us all to relax and concentrate on our movement and breathing.



What happens to the brain?

The brain is made up of neurons that send messages to each other and create neural pathways. The more we use these pathways the stronger these connections become. The brain is considered to have preferred pathways. If a person is consistently using the pathway to access anxiousness, that will be their brain's 'preferred pathway'. However, if they start to train their brain and strengthen the pathway to access calmness, this will become their 'preferred pathway'.

Helping children to practice being calm will mean their brain becomes wired for calmness, they will feel and act calmly more often.



Mindfulness and early years children

During the preschool years children go through major changes in their worlds. They have to adjust to the new environment of the nursery and to leave their parent for the first time. This can be extremely stressful for children and as they are not yet able to verbalise their feelings, but it can be seen in their behaviour and play. It is during these early years children begin to gain a knowledge of themselves and start to self-regulate their behaviour. Mindfulness can help younger children to feel calm and to cope with some of the feelings of separation anxiety, worry and fear they may have.

“Mindfulness is nothing other than present moment awareness, an open and friendly willingness to understand what is going on in and around you”

Eline Snel

Mindfulness for all

It is important that we all press pause - make time during the day to take breaks. Pausing throughout the day can prevent stress from building up.

Stop what you are doing. Look out of the window.

Let your shoulders drop. Stretch.

Allow your mind to calm down.

If you find yourself in a stressful situation give yourself time afterwards to pause and calm down.

It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges. Learn more at NHS [Mindfulness for mental wellbeing](#).

The benefits of mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness can have a positive impact on:

- ◆ Regulating emotions
- ◆ Anxiety and depression
- ◆ Sleep
- ◆ Improving relationships, communication and interactions
- ◆ Cognitive flexibility
- ◆ Executive functions (ability to organise tasks, direct attention, manage time, set priorities and make decisions)



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We value your feedback, please complete our short survey by scanning the QR code.



How to make a glitter jar

"Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you're stressed, mad or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That's why it's so easy to make silly decisions when you're upset – because you're not thinking clearly. Don't worry this is normal and it happens in all of us (yep, grownups too).

[Now put the jar down in front of them.]

Now watch what happens when you're still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you're calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer. Deep breaths during this calming process can help us settle when we feel a lot of emotions" (Karen Young, 2017)



Further information & resources



[Aberdeenshire EPS website: relaxation and stress](#)

[13 Effective calm down activities for kids](#)

[Young minds: Making a self-soothing box with teenagers](#)

[Relax kids, for example visualisations and relaxation CDs](#)

[Mind, for better mental health](#)

[Understood– 10 ways to relax and bond with your child](#)

[Guided mediation for children-your secret treehouse-relaxation for kids](#)

Yoga, meditation and breathing techniques:



[Yoga for complete beginners—relaxation & flexibility stretches](#)

[Deep breathing exercises](#)

[Breathe—Calming music for stress & anxiety relief](#)

[Guided Imagery Mediation](#)

Relaxation quotes:

[101 life changing quotes that will help you relax](#)



Sitting still like a frog by Eline Steel (2014)

Positively Teenage: A positively brilliant guide to teenage well-being by Nicola Morgan (2018)

Calm: Mindfulness for Kids by Wynne Kinder (2019)

The Monster Handbook by Marneta Viergas Relax Kids

Pause for thought.....



The list of things children or adults can do to calm down is endless and obviously different things work for different people. **Try one of these when you feel upset, worried or disappointed and see what works for you/ your child:**

pet an animal

give someone a hug

read a book

build something

stretch

visualise a peaceful place

listen to relaxing music

look at a glitter jar

play with plasticine/ kinetic sand

take a warm bath

take 10 deep breaths

hum or sing a song

jump on a trampoline

draw how you feel

put an ice pack on neck

yoga poses

splash face with water

make a fist then relax it