

Relaxation Strategies for Children and Young People

Balloon Breathing

Find a comfortable position and close the eyes.

Start to think about the breath, become more aware of how you breathe in and out taking 3 deeper breaths.

Imagine a deflated balloon, it can be any colour you like perhaps the favourite colour or a colour you find relaxing. Pick up the balloon and put it to the mouth taking a deep breath in. Breathe out slowly imagining the balloon getting gradually bigger. Practice making the breath out longer than the breath in so that each time you breathe out the balloon gets bigger and bigger. As you do this imagine the balloon turns into a shape. It can be any shape you want but make it a shape that makes you happy. It might be an animal, an object or even a person. See the balloon getting bigger and bigger and feel the warmth and happiness that the shape and colour gives you. Continue to breathe deeply now keeping the balloon at a constant size but enjoy seeing the balloon dance around on the breath. Now imagine the balloon drifting away. Watch it dance on the breeze, move up and down and around as it drifts further away. As you watch it float away imagine it is taking all the worries with you leaving you feeling calm, relaxed and happy.

Count to 5 slowly before you open the eyes.

Happy Room

Find a comfortable position and close the eyes.

Start to think about the breath, become more aware of how you breathe in and out taking 3 deeper breaths.

Now imagine walking into a room which makes you feel really happy, calm and relaxed. Take a moment to look around the room. What things do you see? See everything really clearly in colour. What smells do you notice? What sounds do you hear? Take time to touch things. How do they feel? Walk around and explore the whole room and enjoy the sensation of feeling happy and calm. Choose a comfortable place to sit down and take a few moments to look around the room. Feel relaxed as you take in the room, all the sights, sounds and smells. Breathe in calm and breathe out stress and frustration. As you breathe out imagine the frustration and stress slipping out of the room leaving you feeling only happy and calm.

Take the attention back to the breathing and count to 5 slowly before you open the eyes.

Diamond (Vajrasana)

1. Start in a kneeling position with the heels close together.
2. Let the legs become heavy on the mat and the spine awake and straight.
3. Breathe out and bring the hands together in prayer position.
4. Take five deep breathes imagining theself as a brilliant sparkling diamond.

Dormouse / child (Pindasana)

1. Release the hands and gently fold over the legs with the forehead resting on the ground.
2. Be quiet and still like a little sleeping Dormouse.



Do Nothing Doll / corpse (Savasana)

1. Roll onto the back and lie flat.
2. Make sure the spine is straight and look up at the ceiling.
3. Close the eyes.
4. Let the arms and legs flop onto the mat like a rag doll.
5. Feel the ground beneath you.
6. Imagine the mat/the floor is a piece of hot toast and you are a little ball of butter gently melting over the toast.



Relaxation Station

Develop a "Relaxation Station." within the room. This should be a consistent, calming spot where kids and adults alike can go to relax. Place some comforting pillows, hang a pretty curtain, and include calm, soft lighting. You might want to consider some calming music, nature sounds, rosewater or lavender scents, nature pictures, sweet smelling bean bags to cover the eyes, stress balls to squeeze, blankets, and a favorite stuffed toy.

When consistently used over time, the relaxation response will come automatically upon entering the space. Spend some time practicing relaxation activities in the space to further strengthen the relaxation response associated with it.

The Mind is The Playdough!

Play with a ball of playdough and tell the child his/her mind is just like playdough - it can be stretched, changed, grow depending on what we tell it (how we manipulate it). Talk about the power we have to remind our brains to be calm. Practice good, happy thoughts (e.g. I am good at this, I can do this, I will have a good time, I choose how I feel, I remember to take a deep breath and squeeze my hands when I'm nervous) and for every negative thought remove a bit of playdough, transform it in shape and give it a more positive thought and return it to the bigger ball.

Relaxation Rhyme

Pull the hands into very tight fists.

Ahh, let them go with a swish, swish, swish.

Squeeze tight, tight, tight with all the might.

Now just relax and make them light.

Curl the toes into a ball.

Now let them go, release them all.

Squeeze tight, tight, tight with all the might.

Now just relax and make them light.

Cloud Garden Game

Arrange cushions in a circle to form the "cloud garden". Start with some gentle stretching to signal the body to begin to relax. Explain to children that this cloud garden is a place for all of us to relax. It is a place for peaceful voices and peaceful bodies. Sit on the pillow and give everyone a few cotton balls to hold. Each of the cotton balls represents something you would like to give to the cloud garden. This can be a special wish or affirmation related to bedtime such as "I am feeling light and soft like a fluffy cloud" or "I am ready for peaceful sleep." Or, if you have had a particularly challenging day, this can be thoughts or feelings you would like to release into the cloud garden in order to feel more relaxed and ready to sleep. Take turns releasing the cotton balls into the circle.

Deep Breathing Check

After you have spent some time practicing deep breathing with the children, teach them this quick method to check in and see if they are chest or tummy breathing. While teaching deep breathing to children, deep, diaphragmatic breathing is often referred to as "tummy breathing." To do the check, instruct the child to put one hand on her chest, the other hand on her tummy. Take some slow deep breaths. If the hand on her chest is moving, then she is still taking shallow chest breaths and it's time to practice more tummy breaths. If the hand on her tummy is moving, then she is successfully engaging the diaphragm in deep breathing. Time to celebrate!!!

Shake Out

For a quick energy shift-help the child to shake out their stress. Tell them that we are going to shake, shake, shake our bodies until all the tense energy is released into the space around us. Begin by simply allowing the body to shake in whatever way it feels comfortable. Let go everywhere. Pay attention to the energy moving through the body. Remember there is nothing to "do"-just relax and allow it to happen. The perfect amount of energy will be released. After you are done shaking, stop for a moment and check in with the body. Simply pay attention to the sensations and how you feel.

Big Fat Puddle

Pretend you are standing in your bare feet in a big, fat muddy puddle

Squish your toes right down in the mud

Try to get right down to the bottom of the puddle

Now step out of the mud and relax your feet

Let your toes go loose and see how nice that feels

Back into the muddy puddle

Squish your toes right down

Use your legs to help you push right down

Push down, harder, harder

Come back out the puddle now

Relax your feet, legs and toes

It feels so good to relax - feel all warm and tingly all over

Pack Your Bag

When you go to school or on holiday you pack a bag. You pack all the essentials in and check it so you don't forget anything. It's just as important to pack a mental bag so you have everything you need if you face a difficult situation.

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Spend a minute or 2 focusing on your breathing - try not to be distracted by other thoughts but if you are just bring your focus back to your breath.

Imagine a bag in front of you - it might be your favourite bag or one you've made up in your mind. It might be very plain or very colourful or covered in stickers or pictures of your favourite things.

Once you have a clear image of your bag. Start to think about some of the things which make you feel happy, relaxed, confident and calm. You might picture:

- a **person** like a family member or friend
- an **activity** like swimming, running or drawing
- an **object** like a bed, music player, paint brush, tv
- a **place** like the beach or a room in the house
- a **word or phrase**, positive mantra or something good that someone has said about you
- a **strategy** which you have developed to help you cope like walking away, counting to 10, breathing deeply

You can picture as many or as few things as you like as long as they are images that you associate with being relaxed and happy.

Take some time to look at the things you've selected - some more might pop into your mind as you're doing this. Focus on the good feelings you get when you think about these items. Remember it doesn't matter what size your bag is everything will fit in! When you are happy with your items you can start to put them in the bag - imagine physically putting them in.

Now you have all the things you need in one place. When you start to feel nervous, worried or upset you can imagine opening up your bag and pulling out some of the things you might need to help you feel better in that moment.

Squeezing Lemons

Imagine squeezing all the juice out of a lemon by closing your fist tight. Hold for 5 seconds then release for 5.

Repeat with the same hand 5 times and then swap to the other hand

Focus on how each hand feels when it's squeezing the lemon and relaxing and compare to the other hand