



BE HAPPY

RELAXATION FOR CHILDREN

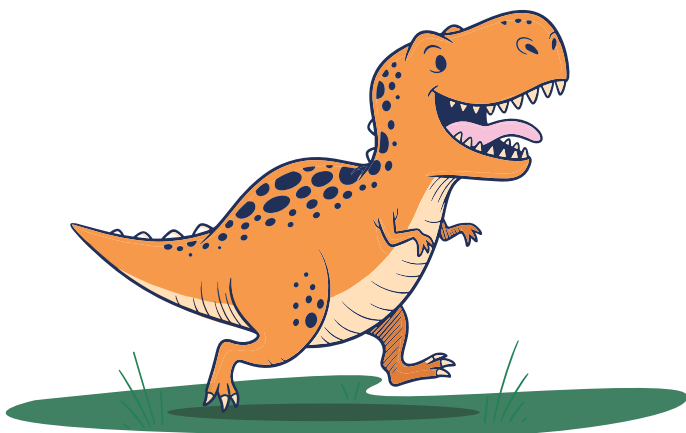
The University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine

WHY IS RELAXATION IMPORTANT?

When you are calm, your body is in what is known as “rest and digest” mode. Your breathing is normal, your muscles are relaxed, and your heart rate is normal. It’s how you would be when you’re watching your favorite show on television and relaxing.



But suddenly, a dinosaur is chasing you!



When you experience a stressful event (like a dinosaur chasing you.... or like taking a hard test, meeting someone new, or talking in front of people), your body automatically goes into what is known as “flight, fight, or freeze” mode. Your heart rate increase, your stomach stops digestions, your muscles tense, and your breathing becomes more shallow.

The goal of relaxation is to get yourself from “flight, fight, or freeze” mode back to “rest and digest” mode. These relaxation strategies will help you slow down your breathing, relax your muscles, and calm your mind. Remember, when your body feels calm, your mind will feel calm too!



RELAXATION STRATEGIES

When you are calm, your body is in what is known as “rest and digest” mode. Your breathing is normal, your muscles are relaxed, and your heart rate is normal. It’s how you would be when you’re watching your favorite show on television and relaxing.

1. Deep Breathing

- a. Cookie Breathing: Deep Breathing for Young Children
- b. Basic Abdominal Breathing: Deep Breathing for Older Children and Adolescents
- c. YouTube Video: Relaxed Breathing Training

2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- a. Toy Solider, Rag Doll: Muscle Relaxation for Young Children
- b. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script for Children
- c. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script for Adolescents

3. Favorite Pleasant Place: Guided Imagery

4. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

RELAXATION TIPS

- 1. Relaxation strategies are a set of skills that anyone can develop with practice.** Just like baseball or soccer or playing a musical instrument, your ability to do these things increases with regular practice.
- 2. Find a comfortable place to practice.** Do the exercises in a place that is relatively quiet, and you will not be disturbed. If you need to, talk to your parents about how to get alone time when you are not disturbed by brothers, sisters, or pets.
- 3. Use your favorite, most comfortable chair, couch, or bed to relax on** (Some exercises are easier to learn in certain positions but do what feels comfortable for you).
- 4. When first learning relaxation, do not practice in bed at bedtime because you might fall asleep before finishing!** (Later on, these techniques might help you fall asleep, so feel free to use them at bedtime after you have mastered them).
- 5. Keep your arms and legs uncrossed.** This helps your blood circulate in a healthy way.
- 6. Find a regular time in your schedule to devote to practice.** Remember to practice even when your body is not in pain.
- 7. When you practice breathing or relaxation, your mind will often wander.** When this happens, just notice that you’ve wandered and bring your mind back to breathing. It will get easier each time you practice.



RELAXATION STRATEGY 1: DEEP BREATHING

When you are in “flight, fight, or freeze” mode, your breathing becomes faster and more shallow. Deep breathing will help you get more oxygen into your bloodstream, open up your capillaries, and help your body get back to “rest and digest” mode!

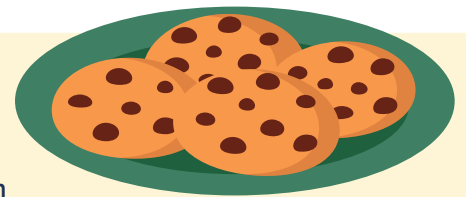
COOKIE BREATHING: DEEP BREATHING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- 1. Put your hand on your tummy, where your belly button is.** Slowly breathe in and out. When you breathe in, your tummy should move out. When you breathe out, your tummy should move in.
- 2. Breathe in and out like this three times and feel your tummy move in and out.** When doing cookie breathing, make sure your shoulders and chest are relaxed and still. Only your tummy should be moving in and out.
- 3. Continue this special way of breathing, but now when you breathe in, do it through your nose for three seconds.** Imagine a yummy batch of cookies that just came out of the oven! As you breathe in, smell those yummy cookies.
- 4. But they're hot, so you have to blow on them to cool them down.** Breathe out through your mouth for three seconds—imagine you are blowing on the cookies to cool them down!

REMEMBER:

Smell the cookies: Breathe in through your nose for three seconds, tummy moves out.

Blow on the cookies: Breathe out through your mouth for three seconds, tummy moves in.





BASIC ABDOMINAL BREATHING: DEEP BREATHING FOR OLDER CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

- 1. Sit comfortably, placing one hand on your chest and one on your belly**
- 2. Breathe in through your nose as much as you can while you count to 5, filling you belly with air, then pushing it out.** Feel your bottom hand move out. Your top hand on your chest should stay still. You should be able to see your belly moving in and out (If you're having trouble seeing your belly moving in and out then lie down, knees bent, and place a book flat on your belly. See if you can make the book go up and down).
- 3. Hold your breath and count to five.** Your belly should get round.
- 4. Now breathe out through your mouth, through puckered lips, letting your bellow down while counting to eight.**
- 5. Remember to breathe out slowly until your stomach is flat.** Feel all the muscle tension flow out of your body.
- 6. Repeat slowly, 10 times.** Remember to breathe from your belly slowly and calmly.
- 7. Notice your body beginning to feel more relaxed with each breath out.**

YouTube Video: Relaxed Breathing Training | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLbK0o9Bk7Q>

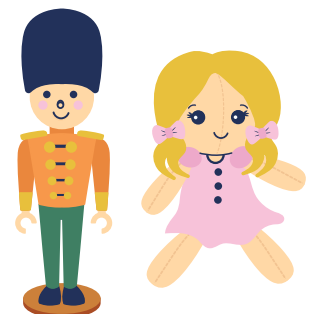


RELAXATION STRATEGY 2: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

When you are in “flight, fight, or freeze” mode, your muscles get tight and tense. Progressive muscle relaxation will help you relax all the muscles in your body and get back to “rest and digest” mode!

TOY SOLDIER, RAG DOLL: MUSCLE RELAXATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- 1. Stand comfortably in the middle of the room.**
- 2. Stand up straight and tall like a toy soldier.** Keep your body very stiff and don't move at all!
- 3. Now, relax your body and be all floppy like a ragdoll.** Pretend you don't have any bones in your body.
- 4. How does your body feel different when it is stiff and when it is floppy?**





PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION SCRIPT FOR CHILDREN

Get comfy, relax: To get started, you should get comfortable by sitting in a chair or lying down. Close your eyes and relax. Take nice, deep breaths in... and let it out slowly. Take nice, deep breaths... not too fast or too slow... whatever is comfortable for you... notice that your body is starting to feel relaxed and clam... when you breathe out, feel your body become heavy and relaxed.



Hands and arms: Pretend you have two lemons in your hands and you want to make lemonade. Take your hands and make tight fists, like you are going to squeeze the juice out of the lemons. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon and relax. Let's try it one more time... Okay, not drop the lemon. Notice how your muscles feel when they are relaxed.



Arms and shoulders: Continue to breathe, but think about your arms. Pretend that you are a furry, lazy cat stretching its arms. Stretch your arms as far as they will go... that's good... now relax them. Let's do that again... Now, notice that your arms feel heavy and relaxed. Let them hand loosely on your lap.



Shoulders and neck: Now think about your shoulders and your neck. Let's pretend now that you're a turtle... tuck your head into your shell, just like a turtle... good... now, take a deep breath and relax your shoulders and neck. Notice how good it feels to have relaxed muscles.



Jaw: Now focus on your jaw muscles... bite down as hard as you can, just like you would bite down a big jawbreaker... hold it... good, now relax your jaw.



Face and nose: Now, pretend there is a pesky fly on your nose, then on your forehead. You have to scrunch your face to get it off... hold it... good, now relax your whole face.



Stomach: Now, think about your stomach. Pretend that an elephant is about to step on your belly. Then, make your belly as skinny as you can, so skinny you can squeeze through a fence... hold it... good, now relax your belly.

Legs and feet: Notice how good it feels to have relaxed muscles... now think about your legs and feet. Pretend that you're on a beach and you have your toes in the warm sand. Stick your toes deep in the sand... as far as they can go... good, now relax your toes.

Notice how your whole body feels after all the tightening and relaxing of muscles.



RELAXATION STRATEGY 3: GUIDED IMAGERY

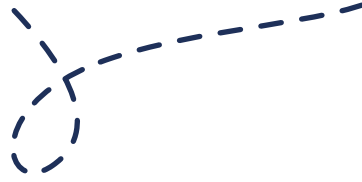
Guided imagery is a type of focused relaxation that involves concentrating on a specific object, sound, or experience in order to calm your mind. As your focus on pleasant things, your breathing slows and your muscles relax.



RELAXATION STRATEGY 4: GROUNDING

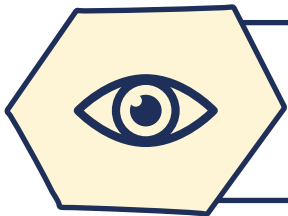
Grounding techniques can help you pull away from anxious or distressing thoughts and emotions. The techniques may help distract you from what you're experiencing and refocus on what's happening in the present moment. Grounding techniques usually work best when paired with deep breathing and other relaxation skills!





FAVORITE PLEASANT PLACE: GUIDED IMAGERY

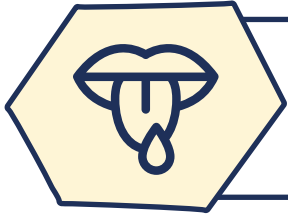
My favorite pleasant place is: _____



I SEE...



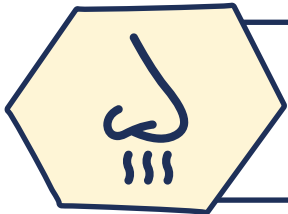
I HEAR...



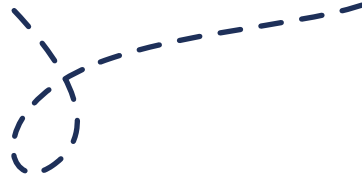
I TASTE...



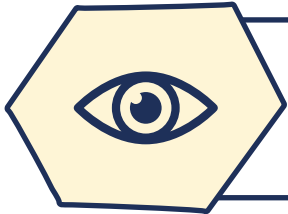
I FEEL...



I SMELL...



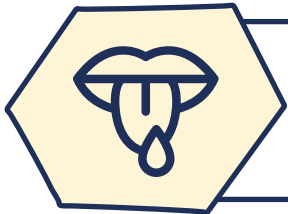
5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING



5 THINGS I SEE



4 THINGS I HEAR



3 THINGS I CAN TOUCH



2 THINGS I SMELL



1 THING I TASTE