

PARENT HANDOUT: DEEP BREATHING



WHAT IS DEEP BREATHING?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **deep breathing**.
- ▶ Deep breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths in which you fill your belly with air on the inhales (i.e., the breathe *in* part) and release the air on the exhales (i.e., when you breathe *out*).
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

HERE'S HOW TO USE DEEP BREATHING AT HOME

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your child feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, you can point out to your child times when you can use deep breathing in your own life (e.g., "I feel stressed when the grocery store is this busy, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths before we go in."). If you notice your child looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try deep breathing to see if it makes them feel better.

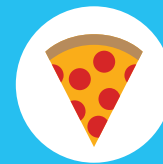
DEEP BREATHING PRACTICE

Deep Breathing Script: "Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to focus on our breathing. Start by taking some nice deep breaths, the same way you normally would. Notice how your belly rises and falls as you breathe. You can put your hand on your belly to help you feel the air going in and out. Now we are going to try to breathe in a way that will help us feel even more relaxed. Breathe in through your nose. This is the inhale. When you do this, make your belly fill with air like a balloon. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. This is the exhale and it makes you empty the air out of your belly balloon. Good. You can make a 'whoosh' sound on the exhale if that helps you. Now do that again, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to take in as much air as you can, slowly and calmly. Take your time and focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Try to make your belly balloon fill with air on the inhale and empty on the exhale. Great job. If other thoughts pop into your mind, that's okay. Just try to stay calm and start thinking about your breathing again. Now take three more slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, making your belly rise and fall three times. One. Two. Three. You can do this any time you need to relax. Great job! When you're ready, you can open your eyes."



Number Breathing

Once your child understands how to breathe more deeply, try variations such as 3-1-3. This involves breathing in for a count of three, holding it for one, and breathing out for a count of three. You can try other numbers and combinations and use whatever your child likes and finds comfortable.



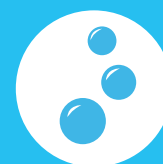
Pizza Imagery

A fun image that can help you or your child practice this skill anytime, anywhere: Imagine you are breathing in the smell of a slice of hot, delicious pizza and then blowing out to cool the slice down. Or think of another hot food you love!



Stuffed Animal Belly Breathing

Have your child lie down on the floor with a small stuffed animal on their belly. When they breathe in, the stuffed animal should rise as their belly fills with air. As they breathe out, the stuffed animal should sink slightly as air flows out. Older children can use their hand on their belly to practice instead of a stuffed animal.



Bubbles

Have some fun and use bubbles to show how breathing in and blowing out calmly can help you make bigger bubbles. Show your child how fast, more anxious breathing doesn't work as well.

PARENT HANDOUT: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



Anxiety Skill 2

WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **progressive muscle relaxation**.
- ▶ Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing different muscle groups one at a time and then releasing them. An example is flexing your arm muscle, then relaxing it.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

HERE'S HOW TO USE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION AT HOME

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your child feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, when you can point out to your child times when you can use progressive muscle relaxation in your own life (e.g., "I've been clenching the steering wheel the whole way home. I'm going to try to relax my muscles now to feel calmer."). If you notice your child looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try progressive muscle relaxation to see if it makes them feel better.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION PRACTICE

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script:

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to practice relaxing our muscles by squeezing them tight and then releasing them. Let's start with our legs. Stretch your legs out in front of you and point your toes. Hold your position and count to 5. Now relax your legs. Good job! Do that again. Stretch, hold for 5, and relax. Now make two fists like you are squeezing a lemon in each hand. Squeeze your lemons as tightly as you can to get the juice out for a count of 5. Now drop your lemons. Great job! Now repeat. Squeeze for 5 and drop. Let's next focus on our arms. Hold them out in front of you, stiff and straight for 5. Good. Now drop your arms to your sides like they are cooked, limp spaghetti. Now repeat. Stiff for 5 and then loose. Okay, now we're going to squeeze our stomach muscles as if we are trying to squeeze through a door. Hold them tight and count to 5! Now release. Great job. Repeat. Squeeze for 5 and release. Now we are going to scrunch up our faces like we are trying to get flies off our noses. Keep your face scrunched up for 5! Good. Release. Again, scrunch for 5 and release. For our last step we are going to hold our whole body as tight and scrunched up as we can. Tense all the parts and count to 5! Great job. Now release. Do that one last time. Tense for 5, now relax. Notice how good it feels to relax all your muscles. You can open your eyes."

Simon Says:

(best for younger children)

Turn progressive muscle relaxation into a game of Simon Says. Start with the caregiver as Simon and tell your child to tense different body parts ("Simon says scrunch your toes" or "Simon says flex your arm muscles"). Have your child release each part before moving on. Now let your child be Simon. Get creative and have fun!

PARENT HANDOUT: GUIDED IMAGERY



WHAT IS GUIDED IMAGERY?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **guided imagery**.
- ▶ Guided imagery involves imagining a calm image or scene using all 5 senses (i.e., sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), sometimes with the help of a script or recording.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

HERE'S HOW TO USE GUIDED IMAGERY AT HOME

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your child feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, you can point out to your child times when you can use guided imagery in your own life to feel better (e.g., "What a busy day! I need to take a mini vacation to my relaxing place!").
- ▶ If you notice your child looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try guided imagery to see if it makes them feel better.

GUIDED IMAGERY PRACTICE

Guided Imagery Script

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. I want you to use your imagination to go on a vacation in your mind. Think of a calm and peaceful place. It can be some place you have been before or some place you would like to go. The place doesn't even have to be real; it can be imaginary. Spend a few moments picturing your peaceful place. Now think about the things you **see** in your special place. Notice the colors, shapes, and patterns. Think about how peaceful it is to see the details of your special place. Now think about the things you **hear** in your peaceful place. Is there music, animal sounds, or ocean waves? Or maybe you hear something different. Now think about the things you **feel** in your calm place. Warm sunshine on your face, grass under your feet, or something else? Notice how these feelings help you relax. Now think about what you **smell** in your relaxing place. The salty ocean, cookies baking, or something else? Take a deep breath of the amazing smells. Now think about what you **taste** in your calm place. A popsicle? Or a fresh cookie? Or something else? Think about how good it tastes. You can always take a trip back to your relaxing place if you need to feel calm. This is a tool you can always use to feel better. When you are ready, you can open your eyes."

Mini Vacation

Once you have practiced with the script above, encourage your child to close their eyes briefly and go on a mini vacation to their calm place when they feel tense or down.

5-4-3-2-1 Relaxation

Help your child relax at any time by prompting them to notice 5 things they see, 4 things they feel, 3 things they hear, 2 things they smell, and 1 thing they taste. This technique is a **grounding exercise** and can help your child feel better in challenging moments. Here's an example of using this in the kitchen: "I see my plate, the table, my sister sitting across from me, the clock, and the wall. I feel the chair, the floor, the table, and the warmth from the heater. I hear water running in the sink, water boiling on the stove, and my sister's voice. I smell cookies in the oven and the pasta I am eating. I taste the pasta."

PARENT HANDOUT: RELAXATION SKILLS TIPS



HOW CAN RELAXATION SKILLS HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Muscle tension is often associated with anxiety. Think about yourself clenching the steering wheel while stuck in traffic. Your muscles are tight and you are likely feeling stressed. Similarly, children with anxiety can experience shoulder tension, stomachaches, headaches, and other physical symptoms.
- ▶ This is because the mind and the body are connected. When children who are anxious or feeling some other negative emotion learn to practice relaxation, they find that they can calm their bodies, reduce anxiety, improve their sleep, and experience many other benefits.
- ▶ Your child needs to practice relaxation skills regularly during times of low anxiety so that they are better able to use the skills when they need them during times of higher anxiety. You can't use a skill well in "the game" if you don't practice!
- ▶ Relaxation skills are "portable." Your child can do them at home, school, or in public. Most relaxation skills can be done quickly and without anyone noticing.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

My child thinks this is too hard.

Relaxation skills may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first. Practicing regularly helps make the skills feel easier and more comfortable. Figuring out which skills (and methods of practicing the skills) your child prefers will also be helpful. Try out the different strategies we suggest, and see which ones work best for your family.

My child doesn't want to practice regularly.

Relaxation practice should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into the daily routine. For example, can they practice for a few minutes on the way home from school or use an app on their phone before getting ready for bed? Together, set a specific goal for regular practice (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward your child can earn for reaching it. Remind your child that this skill gets easier the more they do it, and that this is one way they can be in control of their anxiety.

My child thinks relaxation practice is boring or strange.

Ask specific questions to find out what could make it more appealing. Do they prefer a certain skill over others? Do they want to use technology in their practice (e.g., relaxation phone apps, guided imagery videos, etc.)? Would they be more interested in an active practice like yoga? Encourage them to keep trying new things until they find something that is enjoyable and comfortable.

My child can never use the skills in the moment to manage their anxiety.

If you are in a situation with your child where they could use a relaxation skill but are not doing so, give a gentle reminder to encourage them and then model the skill yourself. Talk with your child about times when relaxation skills can be helpful (e.g., deep breathing before a test) and set a goal with them to try to use that skill in that specific situation for a reasonable amount of times for the next week.

