

Coping Skill Idea

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Stress causes our muscles to be tense and tight. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you to relax your mind and to relieve stress by learning to slowly and progressively tense and then relax your muscles, one group at a time. This helps to improve focus and self-control, and it allows us to take charge of our emotions.

How to practice progressive muscle relaxation

- Take a deep breath by inhaling through your nose, holding it for a few seconds and exhaling slowly through your mouth. Notice your stomach rising and your lungs filling with air as you inhale. As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body. Do not hold your breath while doing this exercise.
 - After you tighten each muscle group, you will relax and allow the tension to flow out of your body. In between working on each muscle group, pause and breathe slowly.
1. Tighten the muscles in your face by scrunching up your nose and mouth. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 2. Tighten your eye muscles by squinting your eyelids tightly shut. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 3. Smile widely, feeling your mouth and cheeks tense. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 4. Lift your shoulders up as if they can touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds and then relax.
 5. Clench your fists by pretending to squeeze an orange or lemon. Squeeze for 5 seconds, as if you are getting all of the juice out of the piece of fruit, then relax.
 6. Tense both arms. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 7. Tighten the muscles in your stomach by sucking them in. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 8. Tighten your legs and thighs. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 9. Tighten your feet and toes. Imagine that your feet are in sand or mud. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.
 10. Take several deep breaths as your entire body becomes loose and relaxed. As you exhale, allow any lingering tension to flow out of your body. Imagine you are a rag doll as your entire body (head to toe) feels warm, loose and relaxed.

Remind your child that this exercise can be done at any time throughout the day, wherever you are, such as when he is feeling anxious, angry or needs to calm down before bedtime.

Tips for making progressive muscle relaxation work for your child

- ✓ You can make the exercise simpler and shorter by selecting only a few muscle groups, such as your forehead, hands and feet. You can even pick one muscle group, such as focusing on clenching and relaxing the hands. Regardless of how many you focus on and how long you pause in between, make sure to go slowly and take deep breaths throughout the exercise.
- ✓ Keep in mind that you should be tensing your muscles, but not to the point of straining them. If you are uncomfortable or feel any pain, stop.
- ✓ Some people prefer to close their eyes so that they can visualize the muscles tensing and relaxing, but if that is not comfortable for your child, she can keep her eyes open.
- ✓ You can start from the top and work down your body, or start at your feet and work your way up. Do whatever feels most comfortable and helpful for you.

Helpful Hint

It's difficult to learn things when we are anxious, angry or too distracted, so it is important to try new coping skills during a time when your child is calm instead of during a time of stress. A skill that works one day might not work the next, so encourage your child to try different strategies to help build her coping skills toolbox. Keep in mind that your child is watching and listening to you, so it's important that you practice with your child and role model using healthy coping skills to manage your own stress and emotions.

Coping Skill Idea

Journaling: for younger children

Sometimes we aren't ready to talk about our thoughts and feelings out loud, and that's OK. But what about writing or drawing to express our feelings? Journaling can help us become aware of our thoughts, feelings and behaviors and allow us to explore solutions to solve problems. You know your child best. Use some of the prompts below to encourage your child to write or draw in a journal or notebook. If your child is willing, he or she can share it with you when finished.

Journaling ideas

- List 3 things you are really good at (or 3 things you are proud of).
- When you feel sad or angry, what things or what people make you feel better?
- If you were granted 3 wishes, what would you ask for?
- Ask your best friend to describe her 3 favorite things about you. Write them down.
- Draw a picture of a happy time.
- Draw a picture of an animal most like you, and share with someone you love why that animal represents you.
- Draw a picture of who or what makes you laugh the hardest.
- Draw a picture or write a story about a time you were very kind to someone.
- List or draw 3 things you are grateful for.
- Think about a time you and a friend got upset with one another. How did you resolve the conflict?
- Sit with someone you love and draw a picture or write a story about a happy time you shared together.
- Close your eyes and think about your favorite smell. What is it? Where is it coming from? Why do you like it? Write about it or draw a picture.
- Close your eyes and think about a sound that makes you happy. What is it? Where are you when you're listening to it? Why do you like it? Write about it or draw a picture.

Coping Skill Idea

Journaling: for older children

Sometimes we aren't ready to talk about our thoughts and feelings out loud, and that's OK. But what about writing or drawing to express our feelings? Journaling can help us become aware of our thoughts, feelings and behaviors and allow us to explore solutions to solve problems. You know your child best. Use some of the prompts below to encourage your child to write or draw in a journal or notebook. If your child is willing, he or she can share it with you when finished.

Journaling ideas

- List 3 of your best traits, and then list 3 traits you hope to develop as you grow older.
- When you feel sad or angry, what things or what people make you feel better?
- If you were granted 3 wishes, what would you ask for?
- What advice would you give to a younger sibling or friend?
- How would you describe yourself to someone new?
- List or draw 3 things you are grateful for.
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
- Close your eyes and think about your ideal future. Draw a picture or write about it.
- If you could enjoy a meal with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?
- Pause and think about a problem you are having. How will you resolve the problem? Who or what can help you figure it out?
- Think about a challenge you faced and what you did to overcome it. How did the challenge make you better or stronger?
- What about your life are you the most proud of? Brainstorm this with a few people who know and love you.
- Make a list or doodle different resources that can help you handle stress (these can be people, tools or ideas).
- Close your eyes and think about your favorite smell. What is it? Where is it coming from? Why do you like it?
- Close your eyes and think about a sound that makes you happy. What is it? Where are you when you're listening to it? Why do you like it?

Coping Skill Idea

Guided Imagery

Our minds are powerful, and with our imagination, we can visualize almost anything. This exercise uses words, images and all 5 senses to help move attention away from worry and stress to a relaxed state—which can help improve focus and learning, help your child reach her goals or help prepare her for a big event.

How to practice guided imagery

- Imagine yourself in a place where you feel comfortable, safe and happy. This might be a favorite place to go, somewhere you have seen or completely made up. It's up to you. You will use that place to help calm your body and mind. You can close your eyes or keep them open.
- Take a few deep breaths (inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth). Breathe in relaxation and breathe out any worries.
- When you have picked out a place, imagine yourself there. Think about every detail that makes this place special for you:



What do you see?



What do you smell?



What are you able to touch and feel?



What do you hear?



What do you taste?



What do you notice about how your body feels?

- Take a few moments to enjoy your time in this place. Soon it will be time to leave, but know that you can return here in your imagination at any time you need to relax or feel safe. Over the next 5 seconds, take a deep breath in and out slowly. Slowly open your eyes, feeling calm and refreshed.
- Notice how your body feels. Are your muscles relaxed? Is your mind calm? Think of times when this strategy would be helpful to use.

Remind your child that this exercise can be done at any time throughout the day, wherever he is, such as when he is feeling anxious, angry or needs to calm down before bedtime.

Tips for making guided imagery work for your child

There are many ways to modify this exercise for you or your child to keep it interesting and fun. Here are some examples:

- If your child wants to use guided imagery at the beginning of the day or before she takes an exam, you can modify the language slightly to have her imagine a positive outcome. For example: “Imagine that you have a great day at school. What will you notice? See? Hear? How will you feel?”
- If your child is nervous about a big game, you can use the exercise with modified language as well. For example: “Imagine yourself winning tonight’s game. Your coaches and teammates are excited to take the field and are giving you high fives. What will you see? Hear? Feel?”
- If you anticipate your child having a hard time thinking of a happy place, offer her some examples you think might work well, such as being at Grandma’s house, on the playground or at the beach.

Helpful Hint

It’s difficult to learn things when we are anxious, angry or too distracted, so it is important to try new coping skills during a time when your child is calm instead of during a time of stress. A skill that works one day might not work the next, so encourage your child to try different strategies to help build her coping skills toolbox. Keep in mind that your child is watching and listening to you, so it’s important that you practice with your child and role model using healthy coping skills to manage your own stress and emotions.

Coping Skill Idea

Deep Belly Breathing

Remind your child that this coping skill can be used at any time, when she wants to calm down and refocus her mind and body. Ask your child when she thinks that this may be helpful for her; perhaps it is before a test or on the way to soccer practice.

We breathe all day long and almost never think about it! Taking deep breaths can improve your child's ability to focus and better handle his emotions by slowing down his heart rate, allowing his muscles to relax and calming his mind and body.

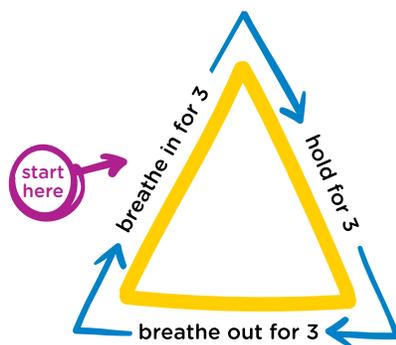
How to practice deep breathing

1. Put your hand on your stomach so that you can feel your stomach filling with air.
2. Inhale through your nose.
3. Feel your belly fill with air and hold it for a few seconds.
4. Exhale through your mouth.
5. Repeat several times.



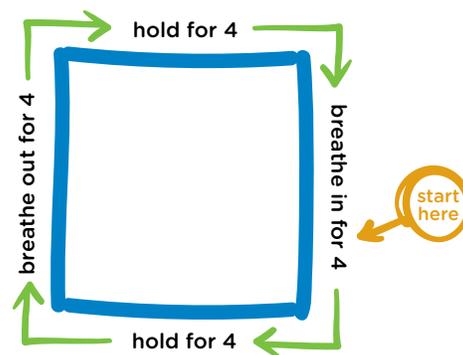
Make deep breathing fun

- ✓ Think of your belly as a balloon. As you breathe in, let the balloon fill with air, then breathe out and let the balloon deflate.
- ✓ Practice taking deep breaths by inhaling and then exhaling as you blow bubbles, or blow on feathers, dandelions or a pinwheel.
- ✓ Lie down and place a small object on your stomach so that you can see the object rising and falling with each breath.
- ✓ Inhale as if you are smelling a flower, and exhale as if you are blowing out birthday candles.
- ✓ You can trace shapes to help you focus on your breathing. Use the triangle and square shapes to practice.



Triangle breathing

- Start at the bottom left of the triangle.
- Breathe in for 3 counts as you trace the first side of the triangle.
- Hold your breath for 3 counts as you trace the second side of the triangle.
- Breathe out for 3 counts as you trace the final side of the triangle.
- You have just completed 1 deep breath!



Square breathing

- Start at the bottom right of the square. Breathe in for 4 counts as you trace the first side of the square.
- Hold your breath for 4 counts as you trace the second side of the square.
- Breathe out for 4 counts as you trace the third side of the square.
- Hold your breath for 4 counts as you trace the final side of the square.
- You just completed 1 deep breath!



Helpful hint: It's difficult to learn things when we are anxious, angry or too distracted, so it is important to try new coping skills during a time when your child is calm instead of during a time of stress. A skill that works one day might not work the next, so encourage your child to try different strategies to help build her coping skills toolbox. Keep in mind that your child is watching and listening to you, so it's important that you practice with your child and role model using healthy coping skills to manage your own stress and emotions.

Coping Skills for younger children

Learning to manage our emotions begins when we are young and continues throughout our entire lives. Help support your child in developing healthy habits and skills to manage her emotions and to deal with stress with the following coping methods.

Practice coping skills regularly, not only when your child is upset. Practicing (and introducing) these skills when your child is calm helps her to be more prepared when the emotions or stress hit.

- Listen to music or sing a song
- Make up a silly dance
- Take deep belly breaths
- Have a drink of cold water
- Take a quiet break
- Cuddle or play with your pet
- Blow bubbles
- Color or draw
- Hug a stuffed animal
- Read a book with someone
- Play a game
- Close your eyes and count to 5
- Play with Play-Doh or sand
- Build with Legos or blocks
- Close your eyes and think of something that makes you happy
- Do 10 jumping jacks or run in place for 10 seconds
- Bounce a ball

Tips

- ✓ Help your child label her feelings, and encourage her to use coping skills. For example: "It seems like you feel disappointed when we have to leave the park. What are some ways you can help yourself feel better when that happens? I know that listening to your favorite song usually helps you feel happy."
- ✓ Model coping skills for yourself and the whole family. Explain the connection between feelings and healthy coping strategies. For example: "I'm feeling stressed after a hard day at work. I am going to take the dog for a walk to help me calm down. Would you like to join me?"
- ✓ Help your child build a long list of coping skills so that he has lots of options to pick from (because what works one day may not work the next). The list should include things he can do inside or outside, things that don't cost any money and things you can do together. There is no age limit on coping skills, so let your child pick which ones work best for him.

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- Take deep belly breaths
- Listen to music
- Take a quiet break
- Go for a walk, run or hike
- Look at pictures from a happy memory
- Do 10 jumping jacks
- Play an instrument
- Tighten muscles, then relax them
- Bounce a ball
- Have a drink of cold water
- Play a board game
- Work on a puzzle
- Make a list of your strengths
- Journal or write someone a letter
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Stretch
- Close your eyes and think of a safe, happy place
- Jump rope or hula hoop
- Sing a song
- Build with Legos
- Draw, paint or color
- Clean or organize
- Count to 10 or count backward from 100
- Share your feelings with someone you trust
- Cuddle or play with your pet
- Write a song or poem
- Blow bubbles
- Think about something that makes you laugh
- Read a book or magazine
- Put on a favorite song and dance

Tips

- ✓ Help your child label his feelings, and encourage him to use coping skills. For example: "It seems like you feel disappointed when your team loses a game. What are some ways you can help yourself feel better when that happens? I know that listening to your favorite song usually helps you feel happy."
- ✓ Model coping skills for yourself and the whole family. Explain the connection between feelings and healthy coping strategies. For example: "I'm feeling stressed after a hard day at work. I am going to take the dog for a walk to help me calm down. Would you like to join me?"
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