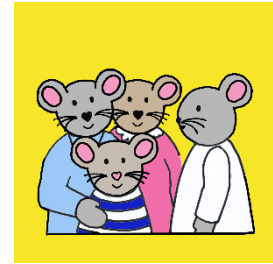


## Learning to Relax

### Use This:

To teach the child to relax via slowed breathing, deep muscle relaxation, and guided imagery.



### Goals

- The family will understand that staying calm and relaxing are good ways to affect the way we feel – especially when we are stressed out or tense
- The child will identify somatic cues that show when he or she is tense
- The child will learn how to do self-calming through deep breathing, deep muscle relaxation, and guided imagery

### Materials

- **Fear Thermometer** and **Fear Ladder** (2 unrated copies for anxiety/trauma), **Feelings Thermometer** (for depression) (pp. 318, 320, 342)
- **Learning to Relax** worksheet (2 copies) (p. 361)
- **Relaxing at Home** worksheet (p. 362)
- **Self-Calming Through Relaxation** parent handout (p. 363)
- Relaxation audio file for the child to keep, downloadable at <http://relax.practicewise.com> (you can email it, burn it on a CD, or show the child where to download it) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc>
- MP3 audio player (any type that has good sound quality; this could be your computer)
- Pens, pencils, markers
- **Weekly questionnaires** and **Monitoring sheet** (see pages 277-293)
- **Therapist Note Taking Sheet** (p. 276)

*If time is tight: Convey the link between activities and feelings and help the child brainstorm a list of 10 activities that he or she could do to feel better.*

### Main Steps

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Set an Agenda</b>         | Remember to start by setting an agenda together and by reviewing any practice assignments.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Obtain Weekly Ratings</b> | If the main focus is traumatic stress or anxiety, use the 0 to 10 scale of the <b>Fear Thermometer</b> to obtain <b>Fear Ladder</b> ratings from both the child and his or her parent. If the main focus is depressed mood, use the <b>Feelings Thermometer</b> to take a rating. Review the <b>Weekly questionnaires</b> and <b>Monitoring sheet</b> in detail. |

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- Discuss Feeling Stressed & Feeling Bad** Tell the child that the way our body feels when we are worried, sad, angry or stressed out involves muscle tension. When we feel upset or worried, some parts of our body become tense or tight, and that tension makes our body feel uncomfortable. Discuss with the child times when he or she has felt uptight, tense, or stressed, particularly focusing on the physical feelings he or she has experienced at those times.
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- Introduce Deep Muscle Relaxation** Introduce the child to the idea that learning to make our bodies relax can help combat stressful feelings and the tension that goes with those feelings. If we can make our bodies feel relaxed, we are taking an important step toward coping with bad feelings. In addition, it helps to breathe slowly and calmly; and it also helps to picture, in our minds, a calm, peaceful place.

**Example script**

*Sometimes when we feel sad, worried, or stressed, our bodies feel tense or tight. Today we are going to practise a way to get our bodies to relax. We are going to play a recording that teaches how to do something called Deep Muscle Relaxation. It teaches how to tense and relax different muscles in the body until we begin to feel more relaxed all over. (Demonstrate this concept by tightening and relaxing your fist, and having the child do the same.) In addition, the recording will teach us to slow down our breathing – to take deep breaths and let the breath out slowly. And it also teaches us to imagine a calm, peaceful place, and to picture that place in our mind while we relax. People who use this recording feel much calmer and more relaxed after using it.*

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- ACTIVITY**  
**Deep Muscle Relaxation & Guided Imagery**
- Before you ask the family to play the recording, do the following:
1. Work with the child to create an image or a story of a very stressful day or a stressful situation, thereby inducing a negative mood.
  2. Have the child complete the top half of the **Learning to Relax** worksheet – rating his or her mood while thinking about the imaginary stressful situation, and also describing how he or she feels physically while thinking about the stressful situation.
  3. Make the room more comfortable (e.g., you may dim the lights).
  4. Have the child sit comfortably in a chair with feet on the floor and arms at his or her side. The child can also close his or her eyes (or look at a boring spot on the floor or wall, if closing eyes makes the child uneasy or uncomfortable).
  5. Play the relaxation audio file.
- Have the child finish filling in the **Learning to Relax** worksheet.
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<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss the Relaxation Exercise</b>	<p>Discuss the relaxation exercise with the child. Did the child's rating and physical feelings change, as shown on the worksheet? Did the child feel more relaxed? What did the child like/dislike? What was most helpful?</p> <p>Make sure to explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The big difference between a relaxed body and a tense one</li> <li>• How slowing one's breathing and paying attention to it can help relax the body</li> <li>• How tensing and relaxing muscles helps relax the body</li> <li>• How picturing a calm, relaxing place can make the experience even more relaxing</li> <li>• How calming it can be when we combine all three of the things the recording teaches – i.e., slowing down our breathing, tensing and relaxing our muscles, and imagining a calm, peaceful place</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Repeat the Relaxation Activity</b>	<p>If time permits, repeat the relaxation activity with the child. Note that relaxing and calming ourselves is a skill that we can get better at the more we practise. Use the recording to practise relaxation one more time. Then discuss with the child what he or she noticed the second time that was different from the first. Ask the child which activities seemed easier to do the second time than the first.</p> <p>Tell the child that you are going to give him or her the recording to use for this week's practice assignment. Encourage the child to use it anytime he or she feels tense, uptight, angry, or even just sad.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Reinforce Relaxation</b>	<p>Reinforce and further develop the child's awareness of how and when relaxation might be useful. Help the child identify situations in which relaxation could be helpful and most needed.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT</b> <i>Relaxing at Home</i>	<p>Explain to the child that he or she should practise the relaxation activity twice during the week and should complete the <b>Relaxing at Home</b> worksheet. Review this worksheet with the child to make sure he or she understands how to do the practice assignment and how to fill in the sheet. Discuss the mechanics of how the relaxation practice will work by identifying when and where the child can practise.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Review Self-Calming Through Relaxation Handout</b>	<p>Review the <b>Self-Calming Through Relaxation</b> parent handout. The main goal of this part of the session is to familiarise the parent with the concepts (and provide a good review for the child), so the parent can assist the child in using his or her new relaxation skills.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Send the materials for the next session</b>	<p>Tell the parent/s you will send a written summary and the materials for the next session. Remind them that they <u>do not</u> need to be completed for next session as you will go through them together in the session. Tell the family you will also send</p>

the **Weekly questionnaires, Monitoring sheet** and **Feelings Thermometer** which need to be completed for the next session.

Confirm date and time of the next call.

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Summarising</b>	Ask if they would like you to summarise the session, if they want to summarise or if you should do it together.
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### Leave ‘Em Laughing

End the session on a positive note with the family by perhaps talking about things that are unrelated to treatment or a game or activity that will leave them feeling good about the work you’ve done today. The end of each session should be used to praise the family’s efforts and to convey support and encouragement.

### Helpful Tips

- Be creative! Use your imagination to find ways to help the child understand relaxation.
- If the child is having difficulty describing physical sensations, have the child imagine and describe a stressful situation (a test, giving a speech), or play a stressful game in the session (e.g., Jenga, Operation). Have the child describe his or her anxious feelings and muscle tension during this activity.
- To demonstrate the physiological effects of self-calming, you can take the child’s temperature using a thermometer and/or pulse prior to and after relaxation. For most people, temperature rises slightly, and pulse slows, as they become more relaxed.
- Check in on goals: Does the child feel that he or she is making progress? How does the material you covered today relate to the goals you set together?

### Special Cases

<i>Depression or Conduct Problems</i>	If the child enters the session in a bad mood, or seems tired, lethargic, or uninterested, this is an opportunity to introduce a mood booster: take a brief mood rating using the <b>Feelings Thermometer</b> , spend a few minutes engaging in a pleasant activity, and then take another mood rating. If the activity was successful, highlight to the child that what we do changes how we feel and then move on to covering the problem solving skill.
<i>Generalised Anxiety</i>	Relaxation techniques can be beneficial for children with generalised anxiety, particularly when the child can’t fall asleep. In such cases, the recording may be used just prior to bedtime to help the child relax enough to fall asleep.
<i>Posttraumatic Stress</i>	For children who have posttraumatic stress symptoms or have experienced trauma, it may not be helpful- and it may increase distress- to darken the room, or have the child lie on the floor or a couch, or to ask the child to close his or her eyes, because these procedures may trigger distressing memories of past trauma.

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	Instead, have the child slouch in a chair and look down at an uninteresting place, perhaps the floor.
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### **How's Your Style?**

- Did you praise often?
- Did you review often, by asking questions?
- Did you simplify the steps as needed?
- Did your pace match that of the child or family?
- Did you stay on track?