

Counselor's Corner

Mindfulness and Calming Strategies

April 12, 2022

Once your child learns these easy to try relaxation activities, they keep them up throughout their lifetime. Relaxation strategies tend to work the best in stressful moments when they have been practiced. If your child doesn't like one type of relaxation strategy, that's OK! There are lots to try.

Deep Breathing ('belly breathing')

Deep breathing can be one of the easiest and quickest ways to relax. Teach your child to find their "calm center" anytime they're feeling overwhelmed by stress.

By slowing down their breathing your child learns to "turn down" their body's natural response to stress (e.g. quick breathing, speeding heart, and muscle tension).

When you try belly breathing for the first time, do so when your child is feeling relatively calm. That way, they'll have some practice in before a stressful situation comes up.

Belly breathing in 3 easy steps:

1. Sit down with your child and explain you're going to teach them a new type of breathing. (Practicing belly breathing together often works better than telling them to do it!)
2. Put your hands on your stomach and feel your bellies move in and out as you breathe. (Make sure to sit up straight, or to stand and do it.)
3. Now take a deep, slow breath, together, then slowly breathe out through your mouths.

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Tummy breathing: This style has children lie on the floor with a stuffed animal on their stomachs. The children breathe in and out slowly as they imagine rocking the animal to sleep as it rises and falls.

Bubble breathing: This style has children sit comfortably and imagine they are holding a bubble wand. They breathe in slowly and then breathe out as they would if they were blowing bubbles filled with peace, love, and happiness that soon fill the entire room.

Balloon breathing: This style is similar to bubble breathing, but the children place their hands around their mouths as if they were blowing up a big balloon, slow breath by slow breath. When the balloon is bigger than they can hold, they release it, swaying gently from side to side as they do.

Shoulder roll breathing: This style starts with children sitting comfortably. They take a slow breath through the nose, raising their shoulders as they do, and lower the shoulders as they exhale through the mouth, repeating the actions with several slow breaths.

Take 5 breathing: This style also begins with children sitting comfortably but with one hand stretched out in front of them like a star and the pointer finger of the other hand ready to trace the outstretched hand. As they breathe in, they trace the outside of the thumb, and as they exhale, they trace the inside, repeating a breath in and out for the inside and outside of each finger.

Bumblebee breathing: This style is done by children putting the tips of their pointer fingers in their ears and closing their eyes as they sit comfortably. They breathe in slowly through the nose and hum quietly as they breathe out

Relaxing Muscles: Our muscles often tense up when we feel stress. Here's a muscle relaxation exercise you and your child can do together.

Contract your muscles as tight as you can, all at the same time - including arms, legs, face muscles, and clenched fists. Now hold for a few moments, and then release. Tighten then release. Feel the wave of relaxation that follows!

Visualization

Summon up soothing feelings using your imagination and visual imagery. One way is to close your eyes and think of a calm place - and now picture yourself in that place. Visualization is easy to practice with your child, and there are many ways to

do it. Some visualization techniques focus on stress, while others can be used to manage worry.

Emotional Literacy

[In My Heart: A Book of Feelings](#) (video reading)

[I'm Bored](#) (video reading)

[Today I Feel Silly: And Other Moods That Make My Day](#)

[Tough Guys Have Feelings Too](#)

[My Mouth is a Volcano](#) (video reading)

[The Way I Feel](#) (video reading)

Five recommendations for ensuring the long-term success of relaxation training for children:

- Make sure children and teens understand why it is important to relax their bodies to calm their minds.
- Teach young people relaxation techniques they can apply in a minute or less as well as methods that require more time as their attention spans increase.
- Focus on relaxation techniques that are simple as well as effective.
- Introduce children to relaxation exercises while they are calm rather than when they are agitated.
- Remind children to apply the relaxation techniques as the symptoms of stress and anxiety first start to appear.

Exercises to Help Calm Young Children:

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/breathing-exercises-to-help-calm-young-children>