

Relaxation & Mindfulness Activities

Breathing

Deep breathing can help us feel calm



Remember, it is important that we breathe in through our nose and out through our mouth



- Ask the child to place their hands on their tummy, below their ribs and breath slowly in and out, noticing how their chest moves in relation to their breathing
- The breaths should be as slow as possible, without it becoming uncomfortable – try breathing in for 5 seconds through their nose, and then out for 5 seconds through their mouth
- Having a focus on something can be useful when deep breathing

Breathing Buddy

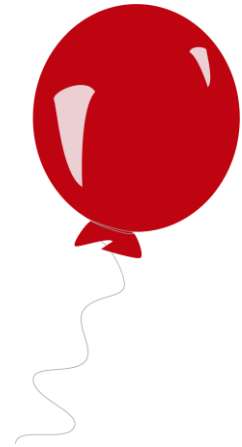
- Ask your child to choose a soft toy animal to be their “breathing buddy”
- Ask the child to lay down on their back with the toy on their tummy
- Tell the child to focus their attention on the rise and fall of the stuffed animal as they breathe in and out
- If you want, count “1, 2, 3” for each breath in and each breath out
- Ask the child:
 - Is your teddy moving up and down?
 - Can you feel the air moving in through your nose?
 - Can you feel the air moving out through your nose?
 - Does the air feel colder on the way in and warmer on the way out?
 - Can you hear your breath?
 - What does it sound like?

Hot Chocolate Breathing

- Pretend you are holding a cup of hot chocolate
- Breathe in for 5 seconds through your nose, as though you are smelling the delicious chocolatey smell
- Then pretend to blow it cool, by breathing out for 5 seconds through your mouth
- Repeat this exercise four or five times until you feel relaxed

Balloon Breathing

- Pretend you have a balloon inside your tummy
- Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds, filling the balloon with air
- Then, breathe out for 5 seconds through your mouth to slowly let the air out
- Repeat this exercise four or five times until you feel relaxed

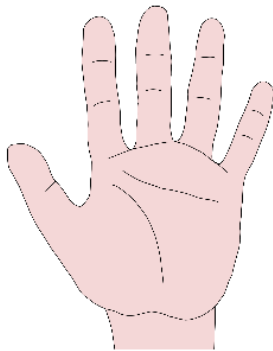


Bubble Breathing

Give your child a cup and a straw half-filled with water. Ask them to follow three steps:

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose for 3 counts
2. Hold your breath for 2 counts
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth into the straw for 3 counts (making small bubbles)

This exercise helps to aid children to practise paying attention to their ability to deep breathe



Star Breathing

- Spread one hand out like a star
- Use the index finger on your other hand to trace the outline of your star hand
- Take a deep breath in through the nose as you move to the top of your thumb
- Breathe out through the mouth as you move down between your thumb and first finger
- Take another breath in as you move to the top of your first finger
- Breathe out as you move down between your first and second finger
- Repeat until you have taken five, slow deep breaths
- The video link below explains and demonstrates the technique:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=sh79w9pn9Cg

Volcano Breathing

- Stand up and put your hands in front of your body palm to palm
- Breathe in slowly through your nose and raise your arms up in pencil shape whilst bending your knees
- Then breathe out through your mouth whilst opening your arms to let the volcano out

- Then slowly lower your arms so they are by your side and straighten your legs
- Repeat this until you feel calm

Massages

Warm, soft touch is an effective way for parents and children to feel close to one another and connected. Massage encourages nurturing touch and boosts people's emotional wellbeing. Using massage that has different focuses utilises children's imagination and creativity

Lotion Massage

To start, check with your child if they have got anything that they want you to take care of, or any poorlies on their hands. Make sure your hands are nice and warm and then gently rub in some lotion onto your child's hands, making sure we are taking care of any of those poorlies. Have they got any freckles that you can see? Or any birth marks that you've not seen before?

Next, you can write a word on each other's hand using the lotion. Can you guess what word it is?

Weather Report Massage

This activity practices helping others to feel good and reinforces the concept of relaxation through touch. Touch is a crucial part of play as it is a sign of affection and love towards parent and child



- It is time to open the curtains and check the weather
 - Swipe hands across the back, starting in the centre and moving outwards
- The first thing that can be seen is a big, yellow sun...
 - With one hand on the shoulder, take the other hand and make a circle clockwise on the back
- ...that warmed the whole world
 - Make "rays" to the sides
- But look, clouds appear and cover the sun
 - Make small circles with fingertips
- Then the wind comes, and blows harder... and harder...and harder
 - Stroke with hand from side to side, harder and harder
- ...until the wind turned into a tornado and hurricane
 - Make spiral with finger, starting in the centre of the back, getting bigger, harder and faster

- Then came the lightning
 - Make lightning bolt shape with finger
- ...And thunder
 - Pat hands on back gently
- Then came the rain...
 - Begin at shoulders and stroke down with fingertips, tapping each finger
- And it rained harder, and harder
 - Same as above but harder and faster
- Until the rain turned into hail...and more hail
 - "Play" with fingers on back... harder and harder
- Then it began to snow, and everything was white and beautiful
 - Pad clenched fists on back gently and slowly
- And the only thing to see was the cat that climbed up to the roof of the house
 - Climb hands up back towards neck
- Finally, fog appeared
 - Swish hands round back
- Until the sun came out and warmed earth again
 - Make large circle with one hand on back
- Everything looked bright and golden as the curtains closed
 - Swipe hands back towards the centre of the back

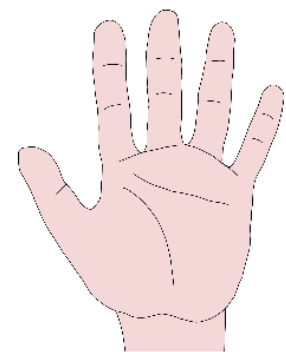
Hands

Mirroring

Face the child, move arms, face or other body parts and ask child to move in the same way. Vary tempo and use slow motion actions too. Take turns being leader

Hand Stack

Make a stack of hands going up and then down. Guide child to put their hand on top and alternate hands to make a stack. Leader calls out "fast, slow, medium, getting slower" etc.



Palming

- Ask your child to rub their hands together to let them warm up for about 15 seconds
- Ask them to make a cup with their hands and place them over their eyes gently, not pressing their eyes with their hands
- Hold this position for 30 seconds to 2 minutes
- The more relaxed they become, the blacker the darkness they will see with closed eyes
- This exercise brings rest and relaxation to the eyes

Guided imagery

Imagination is a great way to slow down your mind and help release any worries. Ask the child if they have good imagination? Then say, shall we practice? Let them close their eyes if they would like to

Colour

Imagine your favourite colour, the colour that makes you feel peaceful and safe. Imagine taking in that colour with each breath and sending it throughout your entire body as you exhale. Continue this until you can see yourself being filled with your special relaxing colour



Smell

Imagine your favourite smell, maybe a food you like or the smell of your favourite candle. Think of the smell that makes you feel peaceful and safe. Imagine taking in that smell with each breath and sending it throughout your entire body as you exhale. Continue this until you are filled with your special smell and you feel peaceful and relaxed



Light

Imagine a light straight ahead of you. That's all you can see. Start with a bright light and as you breathe in it gets dimmer and dimmer until it's just a candle light. Then breath out, and slowly watch the light grow and become brighter and brighter again

Mindfulness

Full Body Mindfulness

Complete this full body mindfulness in about 5 minutes, going through each point slowly, giving them chance to focus on each body part

- Ask the child to sit on a chair with their hands on their lap. Let the child close their eyes if they would like to
- Start by asking the child to focus on their toes. Feel the pressure of the floor under their toes and focus on that feeling for a moment
- Then move onto how their feet feel, slowly feeling the floor through their feet
- Next, ask the child to focus on the feeling of their legs, moving up bit by bit until they are at their knees
- Then, feel the pressure of them being sat on the chair. And how calm and comfortable their lower body feels
- Move up to their tummies. Get the child to focus on how their tummy moves slowly out when they breathe in and slowly in when they breathe out. Get them to focus on their breathing pattern for a moment
- Next, ask them to focus on the tips of their fingers. Right at the edges and how they are placed on their laps
- Slowly move up their fingers, into their hands, feeling the light pressure of their hands on their laps
- Then move up into their arms. Feeling how loose and relaxed their arms feel
- Finally move up their shoulders and their neck, into their head
- Ask them to focus on how there is no tension or pressure and their entire body feels relaxed
- Let the child sit for a minute and feel all parts of their body together. Focus on how each part is connected to one another, and how they all feel calm
- When the child is ready, ask them to open their eyes and come back in the room



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Alternatively tightening and then relaxing muscle groups improves a child's awareness of their own body and how it feels different when they are relaxed, to when they are stressed. Progressive muscle relaxation can help reduce physical problems such as stomach aches and headaches as well as improve sleep

How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

Progressive muscle relaxation is a two-step process whereby you tighten then slowly relax different muscles

1) TENSE – inhale through your nose and tighten a specific muscle, squeeze and hold this for 5-10 seconds

2) RELAX – exhale through your mouth and relax, releasing tension, be still and relaxed for 10-20 seconds before repeating both steps

Compare the feeling between tension and relaxation. Make sure you vary the muscle groups tensed e.g. hands, feet, shoulders, neck, face – don't forget to use both the left and right side of the body

Look at the list below for examples of the different muscles to tense and relax

Different Muscles:

- Hands – clench fists
- Upper Arms - curl your arm and flex your bicep as if "making a muscle"
- Shoulders – breathe in and shrug both your shoulders towards your ears
- Feet – curl your toes downward
- Lower leg – tighten your calves by pulling your toes towards you
- Whole leg – Squeeze thigh muscles and calves
- Bottom – pull your buttocks together and squeeze
- Stomach – tighten your stomach muscles
- Chest – breath in, hold your breath and tighten your chest muscles
- Face - frown, scrunch face and make a stiff "pucker" with your lips, shutting eyes tight
- Forehead – Raise your eyebrows as much as you can
- Eyes – Shut your eyes tightly
- Mouth – Open your mouth as wide as you can

Remember to repeat exercises on each side of the body for your feet and hands, etc. You may wish to write your own guided imagery script specific to your child using this list of muscles



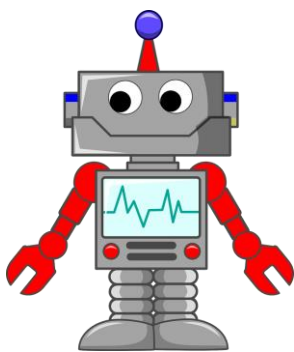
Ending a progressive muscle relaxation session:

After moving through the muscles, it is important to take a moment to be still and relaxed before finishing the session

- Ask your child to remain quiet with their eyes closed for a few seconds
- Ask them to put one hand on their chest and one hand on their belly – breathe in and out – then say something such as:
 - “feel your chest go out and your belly come in when you breathe in.. and your chest come back in and your belly back out when we slowly release the air out of our lungs
- Ask them to gradually open their eyes and come back to the room, say “you now feel relaxed.”

Quick Tense and Relax: Robots, Giants and Ragdolls:

This activity can be done quickly at any time and in any place. It reinforces to children how their bodies feel different when they are relaxed and tensed



- Tell your child that when you say the following words - “robots”, “giants” or “ragdolls” they must get into position by making their body stiff and tense like a robot, standing tall like a giant, or floppy and like a ragdoll
- Robots: Children freeze with arms at 90-degree angles, with all muscles tensed
- Giants: Children freeze tall on their toes, making sure their muscles are tense
- Ragdolls: Children relax every muscle in their body to feel floppy



Quick Relax: Ragdoll

Once your child has learnt to tense and relax the whole body the next step is to practise relaxing without tensing so that they can relax whenever they need to in any circumstance

- Ask you child to take a deep breath in through their nose and out through their mouth while silently saying ‘rag doll’ and letting their body go floppy like a rag doll
- The child can then use this to relax whenever they are feeling stressed or anxious, or at any time of the day to practice