

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Introduction

- 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 and tighten a specific muscle, squeeze and hold this for 5-10 seconds
- 2) RELAX – exhale 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*
- The two-step process can be practised through 'guided imagery scripts' whereby a child is guided through tensing and relaxing different muscles in their body
- You can write your own guided imagery script or visit some of the links to guided imagery scripts below including videos that talk the child through the relaxation

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 that can be tensed and relaxed*

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. Try this again”
- Ask them to tap their chest with their palm gently as they repeat, “I am calm, I am peaceful, I am quiet, I am relaxed.”
- Ask them to gradually open their eyes and come back to the room, say “you now feel relaxed.”

Useful Links for progressive muscle relaxation guided imagery scripts

- www.yourfamilyclinic.com/adhd/relax.htm
- <https://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/4%20Emotion%20Regulation%20Skills/Client%20Handouts/Relaxation/Relaxation%20Script%20for%20Younger%20Children.pdf>
- <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/progressive-muscle-relaxation-script.pdf>
- <http://childrenwithanxiety.com/how-to-teach-children-progressive-muscle-relaxation.html>

Guided Imagery Video Scripts

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc>
 - Excellent introductory muscle relaxation cartoon for children
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=aaTDNYjk-Gw
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=237&v=UPQak4vxoRE

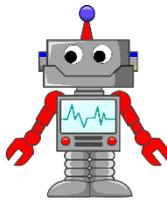
Guided Imagery: Top Tips!

- Make sure your child is sitting comfortably before each relaxation session e.g. sofa
- Before each session ask your child to take 5 slow deep breaths
- Complete the relaxation in a place with no distractions or disturbances
- If reading the script to your child speak slowly in a calm and soothing voice, pause after instructions to give your child time
- Sometimes it can be helpful to do it together with your child or as a whole family, however some children make prefer to do it independently with a video

Progressive muscle relaxation via guided imagery can take 10-15 minutes (or longer if you wish) and is best completed at home in a quiet environment. There are a few other progressive muscle relaxation activities listed below that can be done anywhere and are quick.

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
- This can be done at any point in the day and at random intervals to ensure that your child is constantly practising relaxing their muscles



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

Top Tips!

- Practice as much as possible – the more your child does muscle relaxation the quicker the relaxation response will be when they need it
- Don’t tense too hard – your child should feel the tightness but shouldn’t be in pain
- Especially practice progressive muscle relaxation with whichever parts of the body that your child says becomes tense when they feel angry or anxious, e.g. fists