

Module 4: Relaxation Techniques

- Deep Breathing
- Mental Relaxation (5-10min)
- Muscle Tensing (5-10min)
- Mental Imagery (10-15min)
- Brief Relaxation 5-10min)
- Brief Progressive Relaxation
- Question/answer/process

Given the pace of daily living and the demands placed on people it's not difficult to understand the level of stress experienced by the average person (i.e., making rent, buying groceries, raising kids, balancing our work with our needs, coming into a group and not knowing what to expect, etc.). ***[Have the clients give examples of their daily stressors.]*** Because it's physiologically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time, developing techniques – ways -- for alleviating distress (negative stress) is an important step in coping effectively with life stressors.

Many good, positive results have been found in the treatment of many physiological symptoms and emotional/psychological problems through the regular use of relaxation techniques. Regular use of relaxation techniques prevents the development of cumulative stress. Cumulative stress is generally associated with high levels of anxiety, which have become unmanageable. The effective discharge of stress and tension associated with relaxation techniques creates an opportunity for our body to recover from the consequences of stress and places us in an optimal position for managing normal stressors, especially if we are engaging in regular exercise, getting adequate sleep, and eating nutritionally.

So, today we're going to relax. We're going to look at different techniques we can use to relax our bodies and our minds. We're going to practice a few of them and just get an idea of some others. ***[Encourage clients to share any personal relaxation strategies they have used successfully before beginning with handouts.]***

Refer to Handouts.

As you go through the exercises, encourage the clients to share their experience/thoughts of it.

DEEP BREATHING
(5 minutes)

1. Select a comfortable sitting position
2. Close your eyes, and direct your attention to your own breathing process.
3. Think about nothing but your breathing, let it flow in and out of your body.
4. Say to yourself: "I am relaxing, breathing smoothly and rhythmically. Fresh oxygen is flowing in and out of my body. I feel calm, renewed, and refreshed."
5. Continue to focus on your breathing as it flows in and out, in and out, thinking about nothing but the smooth rhythmical process of your own breathing.
6. After 5 minutes, stand up, stretch, smile, and continue with your daily activities.

MENTAL RELAXATION
(5 to 10 minutes)

1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Close your eyes, and think about a place that you have been before that you found to be a perfect place for mental and physical relaxation. This should be a quiet place, such as the ocean, the mountains, a forest, a panoramic view, the woods, by a river, etc. If you can't think of a real place, then create one.
3. Now imagine that you are actually in your ideal relaxation place. Imagine that you are seeing all of the colors, hearing all of the sounds, smelling all of the different scents. Just lie back and enjoy your soothing, rejuvenating place.
4. Feel the peacefulness, the calmness, and imagine your whole body and mind being renewed and refreshed.
5. After 5 or 10 minutes, slowly open your eyes and stretch. You have the realization that you may instantly return to your relaxation place whenever you desire, and experience a peacefulness and calmness in your body and mind.

TENSING THE MUSCLES
(5 to 10 minutes)

1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Loosen any tight clothing.
3. Now tense your toes and feet. Hold the tension, study the tension, then relax.
4. Now tense your lower legs, knees, and thighs. Hold the tension. Study the tension, then relax.
5. Now tense your buttocks. Hold and study the tension. Relax.
6. Tense your fingers and hands. Hold and study the tension, then relax.
7. Tense your lower arms, elbows, and upper arms. Hold it, study it, relax.
8. Tense your stomach, hold the tension, feel the tension, and relax.
9. Now tense your chest. Hold and study the tension. Relax. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly.
10. Tense your lower back. Hold and study the tension and relax.
11. Tense the upper back. Hold the tension, feel the tension, then relax.
12. Now tense the neck, back, and front of your neck. Hold the tension, study the tension, then relax.
13. Now tense the shoulders. Hold and study the tension. Then relax.
14. Now tense your entire head. Make a grimace on your face so that you feel the tension in your facial muscles. Study the tension and then relax.
15. Now try to tense every muscle in your body. Hold it, study it, then relax.
16. Continue sitting or reclining for a few minutes, feeling the relaxation flowing through your body. Know the difference between muscles, which are tense and muscles which are relaxed.
17. Now stretch, feeling renewed and refreshed, and continue with our daily activities.

Mental imagery can deepen relaxation when used with other techniques, or may be used by itself. The purpose is to calm your body, thoughts, and emotions. It gives you the opportunity to take a break from tension and stress. Mental imagery uses all of your sense to create and recreate a relaxing place, perhaps a meadow, a walk through the woods, along the beach or perhaps a special place from your memory.

Prepare your environment so that you can complete this relaxation exercise without interruption. Spend some time getting comfortable.

MENTAL IMAGERY **(10 to 15 minutes)**

Close your eyes and scan your body for any tension. If you find tension, release it. Let it go and relax.

Relax your head and your face.
Relax your shoulders.
Relax your arms and hands.
Relax your chest and lungs.
Relax your back.
Relax your stomach.
Relax your hips, legs, and feet.

Experience a peaceful, pleasant, and comfortable feeling of being relaxed as you prepare to make an imaginary trip to a beautiful, peaceful place.

Take a deep breath, and breathe out slowly and easily. Take a second deep breath, and slowly breathe out. Allow your breathing to become smooth and rhythmic.

Picture yourself on a mountaintop. It has just rained and a warm wind is carrying the clouds away. The sky is clear and blue, and the sun is shining down.

Below you are beautiful green trees. You enjoy the fragrance of the forest after the rain. In the distance you can see a beautiful white, sandy beach. Beyond that, as far as you can see is a crystal clear, brilliant blue water. A fluffy cloud drifts in the gentle breeze until it is right over you. Slowly, this little cloud begins to sink down on you. You experience a very pleasant, delightful feeling. As the fluffy cloud moves down across your face, you feel the cool moist touch of it on your face. As it moves down your body, all of the tension slips away, and you find yourself completely relaxed and happy.

As the soft cloud moves across your body, it gently brings a feeling of total comfort and peace. As it sinks down around you it brings a feeling of deep relaxation. The little cloud sinks underneath you, and you are now floating on it. The cloud holds you up perfectly and safely. You feel secure. The little cloud begins to move slowly downward and from your secure position on it, you can see the beautiful forest leading down to the beach. There is a gentle rocking motion as you drift along. You feel no cares or concerns in the world, but are focused completely on the relaxed feeling you experience. The cloud can take you any place you want to go, and you choose to go to the beach. As you move to the beach, the cloud gently comes to the ground and stops. You get off the soft cloud onto the beach, and you are at peace. You take some time to look around at the white sandy beach, and the beautiful blue water. You can hear sea gulls and the roar of the waves. As you feel the sun shining on you, you can smell the ocean air. It smells good. As you walk slowly on the beach, you enjoy the feeling of the warm clean sand on your feet. Just ahead on the beach is a soft blanket and pillow. You lie down and enjoy the feeling of the soft material on the back of your legs and arms. As you listen to the waves and the sea gull and feel the warmth of the sun through the cool breeze, you realize that you are comfortable, relaxed, and at peace. You feel especially happy because you realize that you can return to this special and beautiful place any time you want to. Feeling very relaxed, you choose to go back to the place where you started, knowing that you will take these peaceful and relaxed feelings with you. There is a stairway close by that leads you back to the room where you started. As you climb the five steps, you will become more aware of your surroundings, but you will feel relaxed and refreshed. You are at the bottom of the stairs now, and begin climbing.

Step 1 to Step 2: moving upward

Step 2 to Step 3: feeling relaxed and more aware

Step 3 to Step 4: you are aware of what is around you, and your body is relaxed

Step 4 to Step 5: your mind is alert and refreshed, open your eyes and stretch gently.

BRIEF RELAXATION
(5 to 10 minutes)

Get comfortable.

You are going to count backwards from ten to zero.

Silently say each number as you exhale.

As you count, you will relax more deeply and go deeper and deeper into a state of relaxation.

When you reach zero, you will be completely relaxed.

You feel more and more relaxed, you can feel the tension leave your body.

You are becoming as limp as a rag doll, the tension is going away.

You are very relaxed.

Now drift deeper with each breath, deeper and deeper.

Feel the deep relaxation all over and continue relaxing.

Now, relaxing deeper you should feel an emotional calm.

Tranquil and serene feelings, feelings of safety and security, and a calm peace.

Try to get a quiet inner confidence.

A good feeling about yourself and relaxation.

Study once more the feelings that come with relaxation.

Let your muscles switch off, feel good about everything.

Calm and serene surroundings make you feel more and more tranquil and peaceful.

You will continue to relax for several minutes.

When I tell you to start, count from one to three, silently say each number as you take a deep breath.

Open your eyes when you get three. You will be relaxed and alert.

When you open your eyes you will find yourself back in the place where you started your relaxation.

The environment will seem slower and more calm.

You will be more relaxed and peaceful.

Now, count from one to three.

BRIEF PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Clench both fists, feel the tension. Relax slowly...feel the tension leave. Feel the difference now that the muscles are relaxed.

Tighten the muscles in both arms. Contract the biceps...now relax the arms slowly.

Curl the toes downward until the muscles are tight up through the thigh...now slowly relax. Feel the tension ease.

Push the stomach muscles out and make them tight. Now slowly...relax.

Your arms are relaxed, your legs are relaxed, and your even breathing gives you a feeling of calmness and releases stress.

Pull your stomach in until your diaphragm feels the pressure. Now...slowly relax...slowly. Feel the tension ease.

Pull your shoulders up to your ears. Feel the tension in your back and chest.

Now...slowly relax. Let your arms relax. You are feeling good. Your breathing is easy and restful.

Tilt your head backward as far as you can. Stretch the muscles. Feel the tenseness.

Now...slowly...relax. Feel the tension go.

Wrinkle your forehead. Hold it. Feel the tension. Now, relax. Feel the tension go.

Squint your eyes as tight as you can. Hold it. Now...relax.

Make a face using all of your face muscles. Hold it. Now relax...slowly...let it go.

Your arms are relaxed...your breathing is easy and you feel good all over.

In a perfect state of relaxation you are unwilling to move a single muscle in your body.

All you feel is peaceful, quiet, and relaxed. Continue to relax.

When you want to get up count backward from four to one.

You will feel relaxed and refreshed, wide awake, and calm.

These are just a few of the techniques we can use to help us learn to relax and rejuvenate our bodies, minds, and emotions. There's no one right way to relax. Everyone has their own special things that can put them in a place to let go of stress and tension – some may want to add soft, relaxing music to their relaxation strategies, others may want complete silence during these times. Make your relaxation strategies work for you. The point is to do it regularly. Give yourself permission and do it – and do it in a way that works for you.

There are many different books and guides for helping people develop relaxation skills. Here's a list of some more resources to expand your relaxation strategies.

Give list of resources for relaxation.

RESOURCES FOR RELAXATION

Benson, H. (1975). *The Relaxation Response*. New York: Avon.

Charlesworth, E. A. & Nathan, R. G. (1984). *Stress Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Wellness*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Davis, M., Eshelman, E. R., & McKay, M. (1995). *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook*. (4th Ed.). Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Elkin, A. (2001). *Stress Management for Dummies*. Foster City, CA: IDG Books.

Goudey, P. (2000). *The Unofficial Guide to Beating Stress*. Foster City, CA: IDG Books.

Lehrer, P. M., & Woolfold, R. L., (1993). *Principles and Practice of Stress Management*. (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

McKay, M. (1997). *The Daily Relaxer*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

O'Hara, V. (1996). *Five Weeks to Healing Stress: The Wellness Option*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.