

# CALMING STRATEGIES



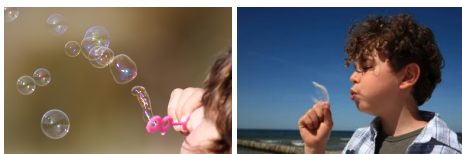
## STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IN LEARNING DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUES

### First... find your breath!

The mechanics of deep breathing:

1. Breathe in through your nose while counting to 5
2. Fill your belly with air
3. Breathe out through your mouth – try to make your breathe last

**To teach** children to exhale slowly and steadily, consider using some props like feathers, pinwheels, bubbles...



Children may also enjoy practicing their deep breathing while laying on their backs with a small stuffed animal,

light book or even their shoe on their belly. This allows them to see their stomach rising with each breath.



**Imagery** can be helpful in getting children to engage in learning about deep breathing. Try making imagery fun and inviting, while allowing children to practice their breathing.

- Hold an imaginary cup of hot chocolate and have children gently blow it cool. Enjoy drinking it.

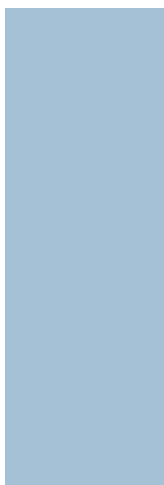
- Take your pretend balloon out of your pretend pocket and blow it up with three deep breaths. (You can add an element of progressive muscle relaxation by squeezing the balloon flat before putting it back into your pretend pocket).
- Cross your arms in an 'x' across your chest and smell the imaginary flowers in your left hand then blow out the imaginary candle in your right.
- Add a selection of vegetables to your pretend soup, taste it... ow... too hot, now have everyone gently blow it cool so you can eat.
- Have each child hold up 3 (or 4 or 5) fingers to represent candles. As they pretend to blow out each candle, they can lower that finger.

*Deep breathing is one way to help our bodies to regulate intense emotions and get ourselves ready to learn. Children are not born knowing how to do this. As educators, we can support this life-long skill with these fun and easy activities.*



## CULTIVATE BODY AWARENESS

When doing deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation activities with children, be sure to talk about how their body feels before and after. How does their tummy feel before a breathing exercise? What is different afterwards? How does their head feel before doing PMR? What about afterwards? Which activities do they like the best? Encourage them to become mindful of how their body responds to relaxation activities.



## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Progressive muscle relaxation (or PMR) is a relaxation technique where you tense different muscle groups and then relax them. Adults can do this easily by saying, “tense your feet, relax, now your legs.” Children have a harder time, so we can use imagery, just like for learning deep breathing.

Start with some imagery that **isolates each muscle group**. Do just one activity during a session to start.

- **Feet and legs:** Pretend you are standing in a mud puddle and are trying to get to the bottom – push your feet down hard into the mud. Now scrunch your toes and pretend the mud is squishing between your toes. Continue to squish the mud and push further down into the puddle. Now step out of the puddle and relax.
- **Tummy:** Imagine that an elephant wants to sit on your stomach – make your stomach tight so that he cannot squish you. He has now walked away and you can make your tummy soft.
- **Hands and arms:** Pretend to

make lemonade by squeezing a lemon in your left, then your right hand. When you are done make your hand limp.

- **Arms and shoulders:** Imagine you are a furry cat stretching up to the ceiling. Now stop and feel your arms go floppy.
- **Face and nose:** Pretend a pesky fly has landed on your nose and try to get it off by scrunching your face – no hands! Whew, the fly is gone and your face goes soft.
- **Jaw:** Imagine you are chewing bubble gum, hard candy, or a jawbreaker. You finally get the gum soft or the candy eaten. Feel your jaw go limp.

After you complete an activity, remember to get the children to relax that body part. You can use words like, soft face, limp arms, or floppy legs to help the children understand what relaxed muscles feel like. Walk around the room and help each child to feel their relaxed muscles.

After you have done each muscle group separately over a few sessions, try some imagery that **involves the whole body**:

- Pretend you are an ice cube or popsicle in a cold freezer (make yourself small and tight) when someone takes you out and places you in the warm sun where you began to melt
- Imagine you are a piece of spaghetti (again make yourself hard and tense) when you get put into a pot of water to cook – you slowly become limp and floppy
- Use your imagination to create your own imagery for progressive muscle relaxation. Have fun!

You can also use the imagery that isolates muscles groups as a larger script. That is, you can start with squishing your feet in a muddle puddle, have an elephant come in the room, make lemons, be a cat, get rid of a fly, and then chew some hard gum. This would be a full progressive muscle relaxation sequence.

Older children can be talked through a more traditional progressive relaxation script, found on page 4.

## SIMPLE DO'S & DON'TS

**Do** make it a regular part of your classroom routine

**Don't** make it a consequence

**Do** allow children some wiggles while they are learning – being calm is hard for some children

**Don't** chastise or scold those that can't do it all

**Do** praise little successes – like sitting still for the whole chime

**Don't** offer a reward or make it part of your token economy – being calm and focused is its own reward

**Do** encourage participation

**Don't** deny the calming strategy or participation in a breathing activity because a child is acting out – this is one way to regain emotional and behavioural control

**Do** keep your relaxation routine simple and short to begin with, you can add complexity over time

**Don't** think that one strategy will work for every child or every situation – introduce a variety of techniques

**Do** use these strategies yourself – you will be surprised at the calm you feel!



## THE CHIME:

A chime is a wonderful tool to help you and the children in your class to relax. It can be used in different ways:

- Have children sit or lie comfortably, then ring the chime. The children can breathe deeply until they can no longer hear it. They can then open their eyes and are ready for the next instruction or activity.
- Ask children to tense their muscles (for PMR) until you ring the chime. They can then focus on relaxing their bodies until they can no longer hear the chime.
- Ringing the chime once can signal that you are about to begin a relaxation activity. You could also end the activity by ringing the chime again or ringing it twice.



## GUIDED IMAGERY

Guided imagery is one way to teach mindfulness to children. It uses children's imagination to help them develop self-awareness and regulation by helping them to create a picture in their mind of a place where they feel safe and calm. To start with, choose short scripts: only 3 to 5 minutes in length. You want a script that allows a child to begin by relaxing and breathing deeply, guides them through an image (a walk on a beach, sitting in a tree house, or smelling flowers), and then gives them time to gently return to thinking about being in the classroom. By pairing a soothing image with deep breathing, the brain begins to associate these two things. Later, the image can be used to help calm a child: this is where the phrase "find your happy place" really comes from. We want children to carry within themselves an idea of a place where they are calm and safe.

You can add to the relaxation by playing soft music and dimming the lights. You can also encourage children to draw what they imagined, talk about how it made them feel, or ask them how they can carry the relaxed feeling with them.

## ONE EXAMPLE OF A PMR SCRIPT FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Close your eyes now or find something to look at and focus on. Breathe in deeply, hold it a moment, and breathe out slowly. Now breathe in your usual way, just slowly and regularly.

Clench your right fist and hold it closed as tight as you can. Feel how tight it feels. Now let go and relax your fist. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of your hand, as it gets loose. Now, less tightly, clench your right fist again and hold it. Think about how it feels this time. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings, as your right hand gets loose and droopy.

Clench your left fist and hold it as tight as you can. Feel how tight it feels. Now let it go and let it relax. Just let it droop loosely. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, less tightly, clench your left fist again and hold it. Think about how it feels this time. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your left hand.

Press your upper right arm toward your ribs and press the elbow back. Hold it tight. Feel your muscles tighten as you hold it. Now, let it relax. Just let your arm sink back to a comfortable position. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, less tightly, once again press your upper right arm toward your ribs and press the elbow back. Hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your right arm.

Press your upper left arm toward your ribs and press the elbow back. Hold it tight. Feel the tension, feel your muscles tighten. Now let it relax. Feel the difference as your arm loosens. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, less tightly, once again press your upper left arm toward your ribs and press the elbow back. Hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice how the relaxation feels in your left arm.

Lower your eyebrows as far as possible and hold them there. Feel the tension in your forehead. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, once again wrinkle your forehead and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your forehead.

Wrinkle your nose and shut your eyes tightly. Hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again wrinkle your nose and shut your eyes. Hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your nose and eyes.

Clench your teeth, pull back the corners of your mouth, and press your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again clench your teeth, pull back the corners of your mouth, and press your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your mouth and jaw.

Press your head backwards and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again press your head backwards and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your neck.

Bring both shoulders upward toward your ears and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, bring both shoulders upward toward your ears and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your shoulders.

Make your stomach hard, pull it inward, and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again make your stomach hard, pull it inward, and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your stomach.

Press your right leg backwards and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again press your right leg backwards and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your leg.

Press your left leg backwards and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again press your left leg backwards and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your leg.

Point your right toes, stretch, and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again point your right toes, stretch, and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your leg and foot.

Point your left toes, stretch, and hold it. Feel the tension. Now let it relax. Feel the difference. Notice the feelings of relaxation. Now, with less tension, again point your left toes, stretch, and hold it. Feel this level of tension. Now let it relax. Notice the feelings of relaxation in your leg and foot. Notice how relaxed your body feels.

Taken from [www.aboutkidshealth.ca](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca)