

Relaxation Strategies to Use with Young Children

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Muscle Relaxation:

*Be sure to work slowly.



- A. Squeeze – squeeze a sponge, ball, porcupine ball, wooden egg, etc. as tightly as possible in your hand or fill a plastic bag with shaving cream; seal shut rub until cream liquefies. (Each of us has a preference of texture/solidity when it comes to what is relaxing to squeeze.)
- B. Rag doll – make your whole body limp and floppy; begin at head by tucking chin to chest, shrug shoulders, bend slowly from waist; dangle arms and hands above feet; bend knees; slowly wiggle fingers; come back up slowly
- C. Owl – fold arms so opposite hands touch shoulders (make wings); slowly and gently turn head left, then right (*Crossing midline is very calming & refocuses the brain.)
- D. Tree – stand up straight and stretch spine tall; plant your roots by separating feet shoulder width apart, slowly stretch arms up to sky (imagine you are growing); slowly spread hands (imagine your leaves are budding); wiggle fingers (imagine a gentle breeze in the leaves); slowly sway arms (breeze in the tree)
- E. Melting Icecream – stand tall as an icecream cone; imagine the warm sun; slowly relax from head down to feet as you slowly “melt” to the floor



Breathing Exercises:

*Be sure to breathe slowly and deeply, breathing in through the nose and out the mouth. It takes at least 3 relaxation breaths to disrupt the brain's stress response.



- A. **Flower and Candle** – Have the child hold up one pointer finger in front of his/her face, with tip just beneath the nose. Ask the child to imagine s/he is slowly smelling a flower (nasal intake breath). Next have the child lower his/her finger to lip level and pretend to blow out a candle (oral exhale breath). Repeat at least 3xs.
- B. **Bunny** -- Ask child to imagine s/he is a rabbit holding a nice, juicy carrot in its mouth. Have the child breathe in through his/her nose while wiggling the nose like a rabbit that is sniffing. Next, have the child breathe out his/her mouth around the big carrot (encourages open mouth, relaxed jaw). Repeat at least 3xs.
- C. **Balloon** – Have children place their hands on top of their heads with one hand on top of the other. As they breathe in through their noses, slowly raise arms with hands still connected, forming a circular “balloon” shape above the children’s heads. Have the children breathe out their mouths, making a raspberry sound as they “deflate” their balloons until their hands rest on their heads again. Repeat at least 3xs.
- D. **Dragon** – *This is a forceful technique, especially good for angry children. Take care not to repeat too quickly due to hyperventilation (take several “normal” breaths in between).* Tell the child to imagine s/he is a fire breathing dragon. Take a “long, powerful dragon breath of cold air” in through the nose. Next, forcefully exhale “the hot dragon fire” out the mouth.
- E. **Frog Hop** – Have the children lie down on their backs and relax. Place a small frog (rabbit, kangaroo, or grasshopper) on each child’s upper belly (near where the ribs separate/above diaphragm). Instruct the children to breathe slowly and deeply, going in through their noses and out their mouths. If the children breathe deeply enough for relaxation, the animal will “hop” (rise and fall) with each breath.

