

MUSCLE RELAXATION FOR CHILDREN

Author: Koeppen, A.S. (1974). Relaxation training for children. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 9, 14-21.

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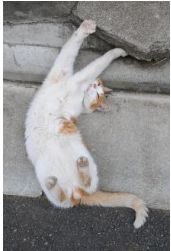
When you feel tense, upset or nervous, muscles in your body tighten. By practicing tensing certain muscles in your body, you will learn to relax them. Now get comfortable!

Hands and Arms: Squeeze a Lemon



Pretend you have a whole lemon in each hand. Now squeeze it hard. Try to squeeze all the juice out! Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Squeeze hard! Don't leave a single drop. **(Hold for 10 seconds)**. Now relax and let the lemon drop from your hand. See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed.

Arms and Shoulders: Stretch like a Cat



Pretend you are a furry, lazy cat and you have just woken up from a nap. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Now raise them way up high over your head. Feel the pull in your shoulders. Stretch higher and try to touch the ceiling. **(Hold for 10 seconds)**. Great! Let them drop very quickly and feel how good it is to be relaxed. It feels good and warm and lazy.

Shoulders and Neck: Hide in Your Shell



Now pretend you are a turtle. Try to pull your head into your shell. Try to pull your shoulder up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders. Hold it tight! **(Hold for 10 seconds)**. Okay you can come out now. Feel your shoulders relax.

Back: Swing up High



Pretend you are on a swing at the park. Swing your upper body back and forth, back and forth. To get really high, use your arms to help you swing. Keep swinging! (**Hold for 10 seconds**). Great! You're all done on the swing. Sit back and relax.

Stomach: Squeeze Through a Fence



Now pretend that you want to squeeze through a narrow fence and all the boards have splinters on them. You'll have to make yourself very skinny if you're going to make it through. Suck your stomach in, try to squeeze it against your back bone. Get it really small and tight. Hold it as tight as you can! (**Hold for 10 seconds**). Okay, you've made it! You got through the fence. Settle back and let your stomach come back out to where it belongs.

Stomach: Get Ready for the Baby Elephant



Here comes a cute baby elephant. But he's not watching where he's going. He doesn't see you lying in the grass, and he's about to step on your stomach. Don't move. You don't have time to get out of the way. Just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your stomach muscles really tight. Make your stomach into a rock. If he steps on you while your stomach is hard it won't hurt. Hold it. Here he comes. This is really it. You've got to hold on tight. He's stepping on you. (**Hold for 10 seconds**). He's stepped over you. Now he's gone for good. You can relax now. Let your stomach go soft. That feels so much better. Notice the difference between a tight stomach and a relaxed one. That's how we want to feel - nice and loose and relaxed. You can relax completely. You're safe. Everything is okay, and you can feel nice and relaxed.

Jaw: Chew that Carrot



Now pretend that you are trying to eat a giant, hard carrot. It is very hard to chew. Bite down on it. As hard as you can. We want to turn that carrot into mush! Keep biting. (**Hold for 10 seconds**). Good. Now relax. You've eaten the carrot. Let yourself go as loose as you can.

Face and Nose: Get That Fly off Your Nose



Here comes a pesky old fly and he has landed on your nose! Try to get him off without using your hands. Wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles in your nose as you can. Scrunch up your nose really hard and hold it as tight as you can. Notice that when you scrunch up your nose, your cheeks and your mouth and your forehead and your eyes all help you and they get tight too. **(Hold for 10 seconds)**. Good. You've chased that pesky fly away. Now you can just relax and let your whole face go smooth.

Legs and Feet: Squish Your Toes in Mud



Now pretend that you are standing barefoot in a big, fat puddle of mud. Squish your toes down deep into the mud. Try to get your feet down to the bottom of the mud puddle. You'll probably need your legs to help you push. Squish your toes down. Push your feet hard! **(Hold for 10 seconds)**. Okay, step out of the puddle now. Relax your feet, relax your legs and relax your toes. It feels so good to be relaxed. No tenseness anywhere. You feel warm and tingly.

Whole Body: Relaxing like a Rag Doll



Now close your eyes and pretend you are a rag doll and let your whole body go limp and floppy. Notice how good it feels to be relaxed. Now just enjoy the feeling of all your body being relaxed and floppy. **(Hold for 10 seconds)**.

As you go through the day, remember how good it feels to be relaxed. Sometimes you have to make yourself tighter before you can be relaxed, just as we did in these exercises. Practice these exercises everyday to get more and more relaxed. A good time to practice is at night, after you have gone to bed and the lights are out and you won't be disturbed. Today is a good day, and you are ready to feel very relaxed. You've worked hard and it feels good to work hard. Very slowly, now, open your eyes and wiggle your muscles around a little. You've done a good job. You're going to be a super relaxer!