



Helping your child Relaxation and mindfulness strategies for children

Relaxation and mindfulness are valuable life skills for children (and adults) to learn and practise regularly. Feelings like shock, anxiety or fear release hormones that increase blood pressure, raise heart rate and quicken breathing.

Relaxation techniques can help reverse these effects, relieving stress, tension and anxiety. Teaching young children relaxation and mindfulness techniques while they're feeling calm can improve their health and wellbeing, while giving them coping tools to use in times of stress. Regular practise is important to get the benefits – practise makes perfect!

Relaxation techniques

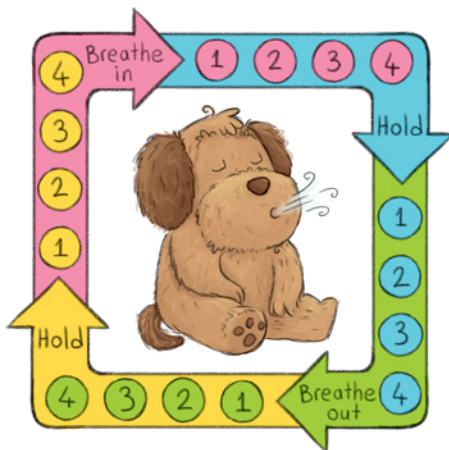
There are many ways to relax, so it's important to find what works for your child. Relaxation is a skill children can learn early and use throughout their lives. Here are some types of effective relaxation.

Deep breathing

Deep belly breathing is a common strategy used to help slow down breathing, lower heart rate, calm the body and lower feelings of stress and anxiety.

Ask your child to get comfortable (e.g. lie on their back) and take a slow deep breath in through their nose, filling their lungs and belly with air and then slowly breathe out through their mouth. Children can practise their deep breathing by placing their hand or a toy on their tummy and watching it ride up as their belly expands and down when they exhale.

Square or box breathing is another helpful technique for distracting or refocusing the mind and calming the nervous system.



Progressive muscle relaxation

Muscle relaxation is a helpful way to release tension in the body. To help a child feel more relaxed and calm, try playing 'spaghetti muscles' with them. Imagine each body part is uncooked spaghetti – hard, tight, rigid and straight. Then relax so it feels like cooked spaghetti – soft and noodly. For an example of how to do this, watch the [Relaxing with Birdie – Spaghetti muscles](#) animation together. Or play 'Lemonade' – squeeze your body into a ball, like squeezing a lemon tightly, then let the lemon burst, releasing all your arms and legs.

Guided imagery

Guided imagery involves imagining or visualising a happy or calming place. It's a simple technique that can be done anywhere, to help a child manage pain and reduce their anxiety. Your child might like to imagine flying on a magic carpet, floating on a fluffy cloud, or drifting on a raft down a river. Try the [Relaxing with Birdie - Fluffy cloud](#) animation.

Another example to try:

- Ask the child to lie down, close their eyes, and take three or four deep belly breaths.
- Tell them to imagine they're going to their special place. Where will they go? Somewhere they feel safe and happy, whether remembered or imaginary. Maybe a sandy beach?
- Ask them to use all their daydreaming skills to think about what they can hear, see, smell, touch or taste in this place.
- How does their body feel? Maybe they feel heavy, maybe their body is 'melting' into the sand, maybe they feel warm and floaty.
- To end the visualisation, ask them to gradually come back to the room, feel the floor they're lying on, listen to the sounds, smell the smells – and open their eyes.



Or you could try asking your child to lie down, close their eyes, and imagine a magic stone (or something similar) on their forehead. Guide them to focus on the stone, imagining its shape, size, colour, texture, weight, warmth, or coolness, etc. Maybe the stone has some magic that can lead them on a guided visualisation (e.g. help them swim underwater, talk to animals).

Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment instead of focusing on the past or the future. Mindfulness aims to rest the mind and body by shifting your focus away from thinking to simply observing thoughts, feelings and sensations (e.g. sight, sound, smell, touch, taste). There are many techniques to practise mindfulness, including meditation.

The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique is a great strategy to help your child learn how to tune into their senses one at time.

Smiling Mind (smilingmind.com.au) is a free web and app-based program of meditations for children and adults of all ages.



Kids' yoga

Yoga is a great way to calm the body, relieve stress and regulate emotions. It's also a great way to connect. [Relaxing with Birdie](#) is a freely available e-book with relaxation and yoga moves for young children. Scan the QR code below to access online.

Soothing sensory activities or objects

Music

Singing and playing music together can be relaxing, calming and enjoyable for children and parents. Make it part of your daily routine in a comfortable setting (e.g. during nappy changes, bath time or getting ready for bed). Your child doesn't care if you can't hold a tune – they just want to have fun with you.









Put actions to the words, clap, dance or cuddle with your child. Remove distractions to help create special time together. Sometimes it takes a little while for children to learn to relax and listen to music. Start out by listening to one song and gradually increase. Your child may enjoy listening to songs that are freely available from the [My Hospital Music](#) or [Let's Sing Together](#) music therapy collection.

Touch

You can help a child relax by stroking their legs, arms or back, or brushing their hair. Try a 'pizza massage' with your child. They can give you a 'pizza massage' too!

Pizza massage

-  **Knead the dough:** Gently knead and press your child's back for a minute or two.
-  **Roll the dough:** Using your fist or fingertips, rub up and down the back in straight lines.
-  **Spread the sauce:** Make a flat palm and rub smoothly over the back in circular motions.
-  **Add the toppings:** Chop, chop, chop.
-  **Don't forget the cheese:** Use your fingertips to lightly tap or tickle all over the back.
-  **Pop the pizza in the oven:** Give a big warm hug.

It's also relaxing for children to use their sense of touch through sand play, finger-painting or stroking a toy or pet.

Cuddle soft toys or comforters

It can be soothing for children to hold, stroke or cuddle stuffed toys, blankets, clothing or their favourite comforters.

Warm bath or shower

Having a warm bath or shower engages your child's senses, for example watching bubbles burst, listening to water splash, feeling bath toys and smelling soap. Warm baths can also support relaxation by lowering heart rate and blood pressure, soothing sore muscles and enhancing sleep.

Create safe relaxation spaces

All family members can benefit from having their own relaxation space. For children, this might be their bedroom or another area created especially for them to chill out (e.g. children's tent or cubby). Place items in the space that encourage quiet activities and pleasant sensory experiences (e.g. children's books, soft furnishings, squeeze toys, calm down jars). Parents may move into this space with a baby or young child and help them use different objects to relax (e.g. stroke the fur of a soft toy, squeeze a pillow, snuggle under a blanket, play quiet relaxation music, hum a tune). As children become more mobile, you can encourage them to move to this space whenever they want or need some quiet time.

Babies and young children with no or few words yet can also benefit from relaxation. Consider sensory strategies such as calm soothing music, warm baths, soft lighting, soft textures, gentle wrapping, rocking and massage may be relaxing and calming.

Scan this QR code for more information and resources to help build your child's relaxation and mindfulness toolkit.

