

Relaxation Exercises for Children



Breathing Awareness

Although breathing is something we do automatically, without thinking, we can also try to use our breathing consciously.

Ask the children to lie down on a mat in a comfortable position and to lie as still as possible. Encourage them to be aware of any parts of their body that might still be moving on the outside and on the inside of their bodies.

Children lying on their backs may notice their chest or bellies rising and falling with each breath. Tell the children to be aware of their tummies rising and falling and encourage them to put their hand on their chest or belly to feel the rise and fall of their body as they breathe.

Explain that each time we breathe in, we take air into our lungs. The lungs fill up with air and get bigger, like a balloon. When we breathe out again this air empties from our lungs and we get smaller again.

(p16, Bersma and Visscher, 2004)

Extension exercises

Children can be encouraged to feel their breath higher up in their chests. They might also be able to feel and hear their heartbeat.

Children can be encouraged to listen to any sounds in the environment, including physical sounds like the blood pumping around their bodies.

Children can do this exercise while sitting or standing. The breathing movements will be more subtle, so children will need to be encouraged to concentrate.

Children could be given a feather or paper boat which is put on their chest or tummy which they can be encouraged to watch rising and falling. This activity can be extended so that the children can blow on the feather to see it move and focus their concentration.

Seeing the breath

This exercise helps the children to get to know their breathing patterns.

Give each child a cotton ball. Have the children put the cotton ball in the middle of their open palm and have them hold the balls just under their noses. Then ask the children what they see. Tell the children to breathe normally, through their noses. Can the children see from the movement of the cotton whether they are breathing in, pausing when their lungs are full,

breathing out or pausing with empty lungs?

(p23, Bersma and Visscher, 2003)

Body scan relaxed breathing

This exercise is good for helping children to gain more awareness of relaxing each body part.

The child can sit crossed legged or flat on their backs on the floor. Encourage the child to feel the sensation of their tummy rising and falling. Say to the child:

“Feel your belly button rise with your in-breath and fall with your out-breath. Take five deep breaths. Now like a butterfly alighting on different parts of the body, draw your attention to each part of the body as the grown-up names it, from the toes, ankle, foot, knee, hip and upwards, until the adult has talked through the whole of the right side of the body. Take a few moments to concentrate on relaxing each body part.”

Encourage the child to repeat this on the left side of the body starting with the toes and finishing with the head and the ‘sense organs’ (the ears, eyes, nose mouth and tongue). Say to the child: “Every time you exhale, say to yourself in your head or whisper ‘peace’. Repeat five times. Now choose a word of your own that makes you feel happy and calm – just one word, rather than a phrase. Concentrate on your word for five out-breaths. Alternatively, you can say the word aloud.”

To awaken gently, bring awareness back to the room, as well as to the body. The adult can begin to open blinds or curtains if they have been closed. (p103, Lark, 2003)

Visualisation

It is essential to explore with individuals if they can ‘see’ in pictures; approximately 20% of the population can find this difficult. If they try and become frustrated this can inhibit their ability to relax. We need to encourage them to use their other senses to ‘feel’, ‘smell’ or listen to words or sounds.

Images: some images which for the majority of people promote a sense of calmness will for a susceptible few create an anxiety as a fear is rekindled.

Ideally visualisations are devised by the child themselves with the help from an adult.

This might be within a small group in school. Some children may have difficulty finding the language they need to help them to visualize. Parents doing this with their child may find scripted visualisations helpful as well. **The adult supporting the child in school would ask them to think of their most favourite place and guide them through the senses in this place.**

Visualisation exercise

This exercise is a guided journey/visualisation, which can be practised when the children are already aware of their breathing and in a relaxed state.

Encourage the children to lie on their back (in yoga terms this is the ‘corpse’ pose). Say to the children:

“Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful picture of a lake, trees and flowers in your imagination. Can you see it? It is a wonderful place to go for a picnic and you can feel the sun on your back.

Use your breath like a magic wand; as you breathe, the picture becomes clearer and more real. Now look at the colour of the lake. Look at the types of trees around the lake. See the boats on the water. See the flowers at the edge of the lake. What colours are they? See each one: one red, one pink, one yellow, one orange, one blue.

One more deep breath and you see the whole picture. Where are you? See the water lapping against the water’s edge. Now smell the fragrance of the flowers, the warm air, the breeze...Now feel the water with your fingers – is it warm? cold? Now hear the sounds around you – what can you hear?

Enjoy this beautiful place, surrounded by trees and flowers, the scent of each and every flower. Now say goodbye, as it is time to go home. One ... two ... three ... goodbye ...

Very slowly begin to wriggle your fingers and toes. Begin to stretch out your face, and then give a BIG body ‘yawn.’ Now wake up, fully refreshed, having visited [your special] place.”
(p100, Lark, 2003)

Useful Apps for Mindfulness and Relaxation

Many of us use apps on our phones or tablet devices to support our well-being, meditation, fitness etc. Increasing use of tablets in schools offers opportunities to use apps for supporting the emotional development of children and young people.

Mindfulness and relaxation make up a part of the PSHE curriculum and are integral to the well-being of staff and children in enabling effective teaching and learning to take place.

These free/ low cost apps may appeal to the children you are working with and can complement the strategies staff use to support emotional development and readiness to learn.



Sesame Street – Breathe Think Do

This app includes an ‘angry monster’ that needs to ‘calm’ using ‘belly breathing’. With the players help, the children assist him to make good choices and carry out his actions.

These apps can be linked to interventions in school such as **‘Smart Thinking’** , used whole class or in small groups with young children. Parents may also find it useful to encourage their child to use them at home.

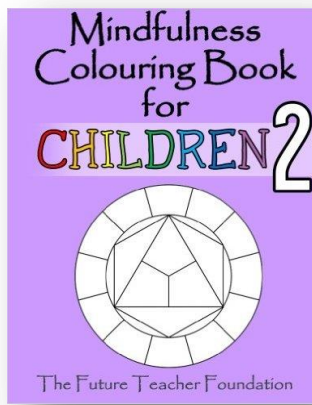
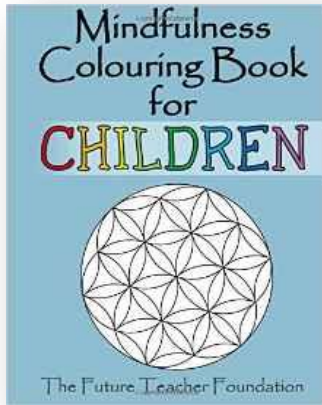


Sesame Street Kermit and Elmo discuss Happy and Sad These are short YouTube clips that can be used as part of whole class work on labelling and understanding basic feelings.

Elmo Belly Breathing encourages children to use simple breathing techniques to respond to the physiological changes associated with their feelings.

Mindfulness colouring books for children

Mindfulness colouring books for children, such as the ones below, offer collections of calming designs, abstract images and geometric patterns that are said to enhance a sense of peacefulness in children. Many of the general mindfulness colouring books on the market may also contain information for parents on mindfulness, such as the ones below, relating to the book and the importance of mindfulness in children.



References

Lark, L (2010) ***Personal Trainer Yoga for Kids***. Carlton Books.

Bersma, D and Visscher, M (2003) ***Yoga Games for Children***. Hunter House Books.

Irene Tubbs http://www.optimumwellbeing.org.uk/E_training.htm#Train_as_relaxation_coach

[accessed 20.4.16]

Further Reading on Relaxation and Mindfulness

Dunn Buron, K (2013) ***When My Worries Get Too Big!: A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live with Anxiety***.

Kluge, N (2014) ***Mindfulness for Kids 1:7 Children's Meditations and Mindfulness Practices to Help Kids be More Focused, Calm and Relaxed: Seven Meditation Scripts with Warm-Up and Follow-Up Activities: Volume 1***.

Snel, E (2013) ***Sitting Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)***.

Lorraine Murray, (2012) ***Calm Kids: Help Children Relax with Mindful Activities*** Floris Books

(Source of images: Google)