

Unit Name: Relaxation

Parents, carers and families are an integral part of the Positive Living Skills Initiative.

The Positive Living Skills program is a universal and practical program designed specifically for children from Preschool onwards, and the principles and positive effects of the learning experiences can reach teachers, school staff, parents, families and wider communities.

The goal is to prevent problems before they develop, by implementing a positive life skills program from an early age. The Positive Living Skills program assists to create habitual positive, healthy supportive behaviours by guiding children to learn to understand and self-direct their own thinking processes, emotions, actions, responses and outcomes, and build effective self-management and social skills.

Two particular techniques, deep breathing and muscle **relaxation**, have been shown to effectively decrease anxiety levels in individuals who have difficulty relaxing in anxious situations (Zuercher-White, 1998). Zaichkowsky and Zaichkowsky (1984) found that children as young as 9 can learn stress control in a short period of six weeks via progressive muscle relaxation and imagery-based techniques.

Applying relaxation techniques daily can assist children to focus and concentrate, and to relieve mild or perceived stressors or anxieties in a range of situations.

It promotes self-management and increased physical and emotional health, and helps children to manage their energy levels.

Definition of Relaxation:

'Relaxation helps me feel calm and peaceful and stay strong and healthy. Relaxation helps me to concentrate and focus, and go to sleep quickly and easily.'

Relaxation is an essential part of human function. Regular relaxation allows our body and mind to integrate and rejuvenate, and helps to calm the nervous system, calm the mind and regenerate the body.

Achieving a regular Relaxation Response is widely linked to achieving the following benefits:

- Slows the heart rate
- Increases blood flow to muscles
- Reduces blood pressure
- Reduces muscle tension
- Lowers risk of cardiovascular disease
- Boosts memory
- Helps maintain healthy weight

A **relaxation technique** (also known as **relaxation training**) is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of pain, anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower blood pressure and slow heart and breath rates, as well as delivering other health benefits.



The evidence is growing with regard to how Relaxation Training can decrease stress and anxiety levels in children and promote a positive outlook and improved concentration.

Cox and Orlick's (1996) study used the Positive Living Skills Program (Orlick 1998), and investigated relaxation and stress control skills in elementary children (kindergarten to sixth grade students) as measured by heart rate. They discovered that the children exposed to the program could significantly lower their heart rates following a 10-week intervention period as compared to before it began. No improvements were found for the group of children who did not participate in the study.

Gilbert and Orlick's (1996) study with second grade students also used Orlick's program and similar findings emerged. The experimental group children were able to significantly lower their heart rates on the post-test as compared to the pre-test. The control group children showed no such improvements.

In 2003, Lohaus and Klein-Hessling utilized progressive muscle relaxation techniques with 160 fourth and sixth grade students and found that relaxation techniques had a significant calming effect in children within five sessions.

Research also suggests that test anxiety can be reduced via relaxation techniques. 177 third grade students in the US participated in a study where the experimental group were taught relaxation techniques two days a week over a five week period via deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation techniques. Results showed that the experimental group showed a significant decrease in anxiety. In contrast, a group of their peers, receiving no relaxation training, conveyed no significant difference in test anxiety.

Building moments and experiences of focused breathing and relaxation within the school day or week can assist teachers to assist their students to remain centred, to focus more fully on the tasks in front of them, and can encourage more positive relationships within the School Community.

The Positive Living Skills program provides a range of relaxation techniques for students, including the following audio and guided imagery tracks and exercises:

Spaghetti Toes;
Jelly Belly;
Floating on clouds;
Flowing Stream;

One Breath Relaxation
Following Your Breathing;
Special Place Relaxation



Students also use imagery to create their own Special Place for Relaxation, allowing them to create their own stress control tools to help them to focus and succeed in School and life.

Here are some ideas for how to apply the concepts of the Relaxation into your home life:

As well as applying the Relaxation lessons within the delivery of the Positive Living Skills program, here are some suggestions for how the concepts within this Unit could be applied at home:

- Applying the concepts of the Relaxation Unit of the Positive Living Skills program will assist children to maintain a balance at home and School, and can lower energy after high energy activities
- Relaxation can assist children to re-focus after a disruption, interruption or event
- The whole family can also develop and apply relaxation techniques that assist them to become more present and focused or less stressed at any time of the day or evening, e.g., at the end of the day or before dinner or after dinner before bed
- Encouraging your children to use relaxation techniques can assist in managing perceived anxiety or nervousness before tests or exams or any significant event and can also assist to diffuse escalated situations
- Using guided relaxations can assist with the transition to bed time and potentially assist the quality of sleep achieved for all family members

*****For more information about the Positive Living Skills program, and to access free resources via our Familylink, including relaxation audios, visit www.positivelivingskills.com**