

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Teen Version)

What stressful situations do you or others in your community deal with?

Have your peers ever made racist comments at school? Have you or someone you know had a racist or scary encounter with the police? Have you noticed that you or your parents are treated differently because of the color of your skin? For example, someone watching you while you shop, people giving you dirty looks while hanging out with friends, or a group of kids at school leaving you out of an activity because you're Black.

Think back to one of these times and remember how it made you feel. When we're upset or stressed, our bodies react in a certain way. Your heart might beat really fast, you might get sweaty, it may be hard to breathe, your body might feel shaky, it might feel like someone is sitting on your chest, you might clench your jaws or your fists..., your body may feel all sorts of ways. How does your body feel in these situations?

If you noticed that you have physical reactions in your body, this is why we sometimes call "emotions" our feelings-- because we can "feel" it when we're stressed or upset. This is an exercise that will help you relax in these types of stressful situations. We relax our bodies because it let's us better handle our feelings, or emotions. To do this, you can tighten your muscles and then relax them. This is a good way to relax because you can use it in class, at home, in the car, anywhere really! So we're going to practice going through different muscle groups, one by one, to relax them.

Get comfy, relax.

To get started, you should get comfortable by sitting in a chair, or lying down. Close your eyes, and relax. Take nice, deep breaths in... and let it out slowly. Take nice, easy breaths... not too fast, or too slow... whatever is comfortable for you... notice that your body is starting to feel relaxed and calm... when you breathe out, feel your body become heavy and relaxed...

- Hand and Arms -

We know the saying that when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. Beyoncé taught us most recently, right? How do you make lemonade? By squeezing lemons, of course. Pretend you have two lemons in your hands and you want to make lemonade. Take your hands and make tight fists, like you are going to squeeze the juice out of the lemons. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon and relax. Let's try it one more time... Okay, now drop the lemon. Notice how your muscles feel when they are relaxed.

- Arms and Shoulders -

Continue to breathe, but think about your arms. Tense your arms...like you're showing off your muscles. Keep flexing as hard as you can....that's good...now relax your arms. Let's do that again... tense your arms super tight. Hold that tension. Now, let your arms fall back down and notice that they feel heavy and relaxed. Let them hang loosely on your lap.

- Shoulders

Now think about your shoulders and your neck. Tense your shoulders by pulling your shoulder blades together and raising your shoulders up toward your ears. Tense the muscles in your shoulders. Hold it... now drop your shoulders and relax. One more time. Tense your shoulders by pulling your shoulder blades together and raising your shoulders up toward your ears. Tense the muscles in your shoulders. Hold it... now drop your shoulders and relax. Notice that your arms and shoulders feel heavy and loose.

- Jaw -

Do you ever notice that when you're stressed, you grind your teeth or clench your jaws? We hold tension in our mouths too. Tense your lower face and jaw by clenching your teeth and pulling the corners of your mouth backwards in an exaggerated grin, tensing the muscles in your lower face and jaw. It might look like this: - ____-. Hold that tension. Now relax. Take a deep breath and feel the tension leave your face.

- Face and Nose -

Now, tense your cheeks and upper face by squinting your eyes and wrinkling your nose, tense the muscles in your upper face and cheeks. Wrinkle your face up really hard. Now relax, let all the wrinkles leave your face. Feel the muscles in your face relax. Okay, one more time. Tense your cheeks and face up. Squint your eyes and wrinkle your nose so that that your face is squished together. Now relax, feel the tension leave your face.

- Stomach -

Tense your chest and stomach by taking in a deep breath and holding it, while making your stomach firm. Tense the the muscle of your chest and stomach. Hold it. Now relax your stomach and take a deep breath in... and out. Let's take one more big breath in and hold it. Keep your chest tight and your stomach firm. Now breathe out and feel your stomach and chest relax as you exhale.

- Legs and Feet -

Notice how good it feels to have relaxed muscles... now think about your legs and feet. Pretend that it just rained and there's a big mud puddle. Press your feet into the floor like you're sticking your bare feet in the warm, wet mud. Stick your toes deep in the mud... as far as they can go... good, now relax your toes. Take a few breaths. Stick your toes in the mud again...deeper into the mud, feeling it squish around your toes...now relax.

Notice how relaxed your whole body feels after all the tightening and relaxing of muscles. Continue to let all your muscle relax and focus on your breathing.

Now that you know how this skill works, when are times you could use it? What about when people treat you unfairly because of your race?