PARENT HANDOUT:
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™



Anxiety Skill 2

WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION?

- Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called progressive muscle relaxation.
- Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing different muscle groups one at a time and then releasing them. An example is flexing your arm muscle, then relaxing it.
- Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

HERE'S HOW TO USE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION AT HOME

- Making relaxation a family activity can help your child feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- To set an example, when you can point out to your child times when you can use progressive muscle relaxation in your own life (e.g.. "I've been clenching the steering wheel the whole way home. I'm going to try to relax my muscles now to feel calmer."). If you notice your child looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try progressive muscle relaxation to see if it makes them feel better.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION PRACTICE

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script:

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to practice relaxing our muscles by squeezing them tight and then releasing them. Let's start with our legs. Stretch your legs out in front of you and point your toes. Hold your position and count to 5. Now relax your legs. Good job! Do that again. Stretch, hold for 5, and relax. Now make two fists like you are squeezing a lemon in each hand. Squeeze your lemons as tightly as you can to get the juice out for a count of 5. Now drop your lemons. Great job! Now repeat. Squeeze for 5 and drop. Let's next focus on our arms. Hold them out in front of you, stiff and straight for 5. Good. Now drop your arms to your sides like they are cooked, limp spaghetti. Now repeat. Stiff for 5 and then loose. Okay, now we're going to squeeze our stomach muscles as if we are trying to squeeze through a door. Hold them tight and count to 5! Now release. Great job. Repeat. Squeeze for 5 and release. Now we are going to scrunch up our faces like we are trying to get flies off our noses. Keep your face scrunched up for 5! Good. Release. Again, scrunch for 5 and release. For our last step we are going to hold our whole body as tight and scrunched up as we can. Tense all the parts and count to 5! Great job. Now release. Do that one last time. Tense for 5, now relax. Notice how good it feels to relax all your muscles. You can open your eyes."

Simon Says:

(best for younger children)

Turn progressive muscle relaxation into a game of Simon Says. Start with the caregiver as Simon and tell your child to tense different body parts ("Simon says scrunch your toes" or "Simon says flex your arm muscles"). Have your child release each part before moving on. Now let your child be Simon. Get creative and have fun!