PARENT HANDOUT:

RELAXATION SKILLS TIPS

Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™

Anxiety Skill 2

HOW CAN RELAXATION SKILLS HELP MY FAMILY?

- Muscle tension is often associated with anxiety. Think about yourself clenching the steering wheel while stuck in traffic. Your muscles are tight and you are likely feeling stressed. Similarly, children with anxiety can experience shoulder tension, stomachaches, headaches, and other physical symptoms.
- This is because the mind and the body are connected. When children who are anxious or feeling some other negative emotion learn to practice relaxation, they find that they can calm their bodies, reduce anxiety, improve their sleep, and experience many other benefits.
- Your child needs to practice relaxation skills regularly during times of low anxiety so that they are better able to use the skills when they need them during times of higher anxiety. You can't use a skill well in "the game" if you don't practice!
- Relaxation skills are "portable." Your child can do them at home, school, or in public. Most relaxation skills can be done quickly and without anyone noticing.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS



My child thinks this is too hard.
Relaxation skills may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first. Practicing regularly helps make the skills feel easier and more comfortable. Figuring out which skills (and methods of practicing the skills) your child prefers will also be helpful. Try out the different strategies we suggest, and see which ones work best for your family.

My child doesn't want to practice regularly.
Relaxation practice should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into the daily routine. For example, can they practice for a few minutes on the way home from school or use an app on their phone before getting ready for bed? Together, set a specific goal for regular practice (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward your child can earn for reaching it. Remind your child that this skill gets easier the more they do it, and that this is one way they can be in control of their anxiety.

My child thinks relaxation practice is boring or strange.
Ask specific questions to find out what could make it more appealing. Do they prefer a certain skill over others? Do they want to use technology in their practice (e.g., relaxation phone apps, guided imagery videos, etc.)? Would they be more interested in an active practice like yoga? Encourage them to keep trying new things until they find something that is enjoyable and comfortable.

My child can never use the skills in the moment to manage their anxiety.
If you are in a situation with your child where they could use a relaxation skill but are not doing so, give a gentle reminder to encourage them and then model the skill yourself. Talk with your child about times when relaxation skills can be helpful (e.g., deep breathing before a test) and set a goal with them to try to use that skill in that specific situation for a reasonable amount of times for the next week.