TEEN HANDOUT:

RELAXATION SKILLS TIPS

Boston Children's Hospital
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Anxiety Skill 2

How Can Relaxation Skills Help Me?

- Muscle tension is often associated with anxiety. Think about clenching your pen or pencil while taking a test. Your muscles are tight and you are likely feeling stressed. If you have anxiety, you may experience shoulder tension, stomachaches, headaches, and other physical symptoms.
- This is because the mind and the body are connected: calmer body, calmer mind. Learning to practice relaxation can help your calm your body, reduce anxiety, improve sleep, and experience many other benefits.
- Practice relaxation skills regularly during times of low anxiety so that you are better able to use the skills when you 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 can do them at home, school, or in public. Most relaxation skills can be done quickly and without anyone noticing.

Common Teen Concerns

The relaxation skills are too hard.

Relaxation skills may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first. Practicing regularly helps make the skills feel easier and more comfortable. Taking the time to figure out which skills (and methods of practicing the skills) you prefer will also be helpful. Ask a support person for help if you need it.

I can't get into the habit of practicing regularly.

Relaxation practice should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into your daily routine. For example, can you practice for a few minutes on the way home from school or use an app on your phone before getting ready for bed? Set a specific goal for regular practice (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward you can earn for reaching it. These skills gets easier the more you do them. Rememberthat this is one way you can gain control over your anxiety.



Relaxation practice is boring and/or strange.

What could make it more appealing? Do you prefer a certain skill over others? Do you want to use technology in your practice (e.g., relaxation phone apps, guided imagery videos, etc.)? Would you be more interested in an active practice like yoga? Keep trying new things until you find something that is enjoyable and comfortable.

TEEN HANDOUT:

THINKING TRAPS

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Anxiety Skill 3

What Are Thinking Traps?

- **Thinking Traps** are ways of thinking that increase anxiety, worry, and stress. They often involve jumping to conclusions, guessing that things will go badly in the future, and making connections that might not really make sense.
- Here are **4 Common Thinking Traps** that are often connected to anxiety. Read this guide and see if you can come up with more examples of thinking traps that apply to your life.

Here's How to Decrease Thinking Traps

Here are some questions to help you think in more positive ways:

1. **What are the facts? What is the likelihood that what you're worrying about will happen?** Often there is very little evidence that the things we are worried about will actually happen! Try to look at the facts to think more realistically and begin empowering yourself to notice that you are capable of facing your fears.
2. **What would you tell a friend in this situation?** Focusing on helping a peer may help you with perspective taking and problem solving. This strategy can help you feel calmer and more positive about the worry.
3. **What can you do to solve your problem or take your mind off the worry?** If possible, take concrete steps to solve the problem. If that's not possible, use relaxation or other coping skills (Anxiety Skill 2) to reduce your anxiety and take your mind off things.

FORTUNE TELLING

Predicting that bad things will happen in the future.
People with anxiety often spend a lot of time imagining bad things they fear will happen in the future.

Fortune Telling Example: "This is the longest car ride ever. We're going to get stuck in traffic and miss the whole soccer tournament. Or we'll get into an accident! Ugh, this is so stressful!"

CATASTROPHIZING

Making little problems or worries seem like big problems.
When we catastrophize, we make a big deal out of our worries, even when they might actually be pretty small.

Catastrophizing Example: "I'm feeling nervous about my learner's permit test. I'm going to get all the questions wrong and never be able to drive! I should tell my mom I'm sick."

OVERGENERALIZATION

Assuming that because we were worried or nervous in one situation, we will feel like that again.
When we overgeneralize, we ignore the unique facts about a situation.

Overgeneralization Example: "Madison laughed when I tripped in the cafeteria that one time. She's going to keep making fun of me and get other people to start doing it. Should I stop hanging out with her?"

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

Seeing things as "all good" or "all bad."
When we use all-or-nothing thinking, we ignore the fact that many situations are somewhere in between and have both positive *and* negative aspects.

All-or-Nothing Thinking Example: "I got an '86' on my math exam; 7 problems wrong. I'm an idiot! Will my grade go down? What if my parents are disappointed?"

TEEN WORKSHEET:

THINKING TRAP PRACTICE

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Anxiety Skill 3

Here's an example of how to use your new skills to deal with a Catastrophizing Thinking Trap:



"I'm feeling nervous about my learner's permit test. I'm going to get all the questions wrong and never be able to drive! I should tell my mom I'm sick."

What are the Facts?	"I read the manual tons of times and took the practice test. My parents quizzed me and said I know my stuff."
What Would I Say to a Friend?	"You've studied hard, it's going to go great!"
What can I do to take my mind off things?	"I'm going to go watch some funny YouTube videos to forget about this for a little while."

FORTUNE TELLING

"This is the longest car ride ever. We're going to get stuck in traffic and miss the whole soccer tournament. Or we'll get into an accident! Ugh, this is so stressful!"

What are the Facts?	
What would I say to a friend?	
What can I do to take my mind off things?	

OVERGENERALIZATION

"Madison laughed when I tripped in the cafeteria that one time. She's going to keep making fun of me and get other people to start doing it. Should I stop hanging out with her?"

What are the facts?	
What would I say to a friend?	
What can I do to take my mind off things?	

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

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What are the facts?	
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How Can Understanding Thinking Traps Help Me?

- When people experience worry and anxiety, they often think about their present situation and things that might happen in the future in negative ways.
- By learning about thinking traps (i.e., ways of thinking that make us feel worried, stuck, or upset), you can start paying more attention to the ways you talk and think about anxiety.
- Once you have practice noticing thinking traps, you can take those thinking trap statements and make them more positive and realistic.
- Learning how to talk about anxiety in realistic and self-esteem boosting ways can help you feel more confident and capable when facing stressful situations.

Common Teen Concerns

Some of the thinking traps are hard to understand.

If a particular type of thinking trap is challenging for you, ask parents or friends for help brainstorming additional examples that might make it clearer. Thinking about ways your anxiety impacts your interests or activities (e.g., favorite sport or movie) can be very useful. For example, if you notice yourself stressing a lot during your after school club meetings, you may be falling into thinking traps. Can you notice what thoughts come up, then see if you can gently challenge them? For example, instead of thinking "No one liked my idea about the fundraiser. I bet no one likes me and I'll get kicked out this club," you could say something like the following: "People in this club like me and my ideas so much that I got voted secretary. Just because they didn't like that one fundraiser idea, doesn't mean they're rejecting me." If you struggle to separate the thinking traps into different categories, just focus on noticing worry-increasing thoughts in general and changing them. For example, call them "worry thoughts" or using your "worry brain." You can still improve your thinking this way.

Changing negative thinking is very hard for me.

Negative thoughts are often automatic, like a habit. Becoming a more positive thinker requires breaking this habit. It takes a lot of practice to make a change like this! Start with more fun and playful topics if jumping right into your own particular style of anxious thinking feels overwhelming. Practice on a regular basis for a few minutes at a time (daily if you can manage it) to start forming a new habit of positive thinking. If you are still having a difficult time, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.