

RELAXATION RESPONSE INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN

The Relaxation Response can be elicited with two steps practiced once or twice each day. Length of practice should be based on age, attention span, emotional maturity, motivation and other factors. Two to five minutes once per day would be appropriate for young children and length of time can be extended up to 20 minutes two times per day for adults.

These are the two steps:

1. Repetition of a special word, phrase, prayer, sound or muscular activity that is synchronized with slow breathing
2. Refocus on the repetition whenever other thoughts intrude

Research shows that the effectiveness of the Relaxation Response is enhanced when the repeated phrase has personal meaning. Therefore, collaborate with the child in selecting a "special word" or phrase. For young children, the phrase could consist of the name of a teddy bear or other calming or reassuring subject.

A two-syllable word or phrase is easiest for young children to synchronize with breathing. The first half of the word or phrase is repeated silently during the in-breath and the second half is repeated during the out-breath. Some examples are:

- Re-laxed
- Be calm
- Feel good
- Stay calm
- Peace-ful
- O-kay
- Calm down
- Ha-ppy
- Be strong
- I can
- Be cool

RESOURCES FOR MANAGING CHILDREN'S MEDIA EXPOSURE

www.aap.org Web site of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Offers guidelines on appropriate media for children. Select "Children's Health Topics," such as "Internet/Media Use."

www.apa.org Web site of the American Psychological Association. Select "Kids and the Media" for information on effects of television and media on children.

www.cmcch Web site of the Center on Media and Child Health that contains useful suggestions and tips for parents to manage children's media exposure.

www.common sense media.org One stop web site for reviews and ratings of movies, television and video games for content and age-appropriateness.

www.controlyourtv.org Web site of The National Cable and Telecommunications Association. Offers personalized instructions on how to configure parental controls on TV and Cable equipment.

www.esrb.org/ratings Videogame rating system of the Entertainment Software Rating Board.

www.kff.org Web site of the Kaiser Family Foundation, dedicated to providing information on health care issues to professionals and the general public. See article entitled "The Effects of Electronic Media on Children Ages Zero to Six: A History of Research."

www.kid-in-mind.com Detailed movie ratings in three content areas: violence/gore, profanity, sex/nudity

www.mpa.org Movie rating system by the Motion Picture Association of America.

www.tvguidelines.org Television program rating system by the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board. Free download of brochure, "Navigating Your Way through the TV Parental Guidelines and V-Chip."

ALTERNATIVE-MEDICINE APPROACHES

There are some interesting alternative-medicine approaches that are applicable to anxiety disorders. Some are widely used in Europe, where they have a long history of use by medical doctors. Herbal preparations, for example, are regulated as medicines in Germany and France, where they are manufactured with strict quality controls. In those countries, medical training includes these forms of treatment.

In contrast, American medical practice has been slow to recognize the value of alternative or "natural" treatments, and many physicians are skeptical about their usefulness. Yet this is changing: Approximately one-third of the 141 medical schools in the United States have introduced some form of alternative or complementary medicine in their curriculums. Forty-six (46) medical schools are members of the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine, established in 2000 to promote alternative medicine approaches. Let us look at some of these alternative-medical approaches as they apply to children's anxiety.

Herbal Therapy

Herbs have been valued as remedies for nervousness, insomnia, and other anxiety symptoms since ancient times. Modern medical science, however, has only recently acknowledged their medicinal properties. Nevertheless, there has been a growing contemporary interest in herbs as part of a natural approach to health care, especially in response to dissatisfaction with the side effects of prescription drugs. The following brief review of herbs for anxiety is intended to orient readers to this option for children.

The popularity of herbs has increased in part due to media coverage. In addition, health care in the United States is shifting to incorporate self-education and self-care. Herbal medicine seems to fit naturally into this new paradigm.

One problem with herbal preparations is that at present the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not regulate them or consider them medicines. As a result, no official quality standards exist for herbs in the United States, and they must be sold as "supplements." Furthermore, current law prevents the labeling of herbs as capable of treating or preventing diseases or symptoms, although manufacturers can claim that their products enhance well-being or that they support or help improve body functions, so long as the claims are supported by scientific evidence.

Research in support of herbs for anxiety treatment is growing, but studies involving children are limited. Therefore, parents and others considering the use of herbs with children are advised to consult with knowledgeable professionals. This generally means

naturopathic physicians (NDs) and alternative health-care professionals. Also, self-education about herbs for anxiety in children is recommended. As a general rule, herbal remedies should not be combined with prescription drugs because of potentially adverse interaction effects.

Herbs in the form of tea are generally mild and safe for children. Chamomile tea (or tea blends based on chamomile), for example, is appropriate for calming children and inducing sleep. Chamomile is one of the most widely used herbs for relaxation, and it works by calming the soft muscle tissues. When my own children were young, I sometimes used a chamomile blend as a warm, soothing drink when they had difficulty falling asleep. I created a calming ritual in which I took the tea to them in their special cups and talked with them in bed while they sipped. Perhaps the combination of reassuring attention and the calming effect of the herb was responsible for the positive effect.

Other herbs that have been used with children include St. John's wort, hops, passionflower, skullcap, valerian, and oat straw. The choice of herbs will usually depend on what symptoms are targeted. For example, St. John's wort is typically used for daytime calming, while valerian is used as a sedative for sleep. In addition, some practical considerations may be involved. For example, children can be picky about what they will eat or drink, and the taste of an herbal tea may determine whether it will be tolerated. Chamomile, kava, St. John's wort, and passionflower have mild tastes that are acceptable to most children.

Brief descriptions of the herbs used in anxiety treatment are included below. They can be used with children, observing the cautions and considerations mentioned above.

St. John's wort—A perennial plant (*wort* means “plant”) with a twenty-four-hundred-year history of use for anxiety, sleep disturbances, and worry. Hippocrates recommended St. John's wort for “nervous unrest.” The herb apparently enhances three key neurotransmitters—serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine—and it has also been shown to be effective for depression. It has an exceptional safety record confirmed by many studies.

Kava—Approved by English, German, Swiss, and other European health boards for treating anxiety and insomnia. Kava is a member of the pepper-tree family. It is native to Fiji, Samoa, and other South Pacific islands, where it is made into a beverage and exported as a natural tranquilizer. Researchers are not yet sure how kava reduces anxiety symptoms, but one theory is that it has a soothing effect on the amygdala—the brain's alarm center. Studies have shown kava to be effective with anxiety disorders such as GAD, social phobia, specific phobias, and agoraphobia.

Valerian—The most widely used herbal sedative in Europe, where over one hundred valerian preparations are sold in pharmacies. Its popularity is growing worldwide as a

treatment for anxiety and insomnia. Valerian was even popular in the United States as a sedative until it was replaced by synthetic drugs after World War II. Like St. John's wort, valerian has a long history of safety.

California poppy—From the same family as opiates but having no narcotic properties, this herb has been used for its ability to induce sleep, relieve nervous tension, and reduce mild anxiety. It's considered safe enough for use with children when used as directed on the label for the appropriate age group.

Hops—Approved in Europe for anxiety, restlessness, and sleep disturbances. When combined with valerian, it can promote and improve sleep quality.

Passionflower—A native North American flower popular for reducing nervous tension. In Europe, passionflower is combined with valerian root as a remedy for insomnia, anxiety, and irritability.

Homeopathy

Like herbal therapy, homeopathy is an alternative healing science that often uses natural plant remedies. One crucial difference, however, is that homeopathy involves carefully prepared and administered substances that may have adverse effects in large quantities but that stimulate self-healing and balance in very minute dosages. Another difference is that homeopathic medicines are defined and regulated as drugs by the FDA.

Homeopathic remedies are prepared through a process called *potentization*—a series of systematic dilutions and “succussions” (forceful shaking actions). This procedure reportedly removes all risk of chemical toxicity while activating a remedy substance and enabling it to affect the body therapeutically. The first step in producing a homeopathic remedy is to make a pure extract from the therapeutic substance. The extract is then put through a measured series of dilutions, alternating with succussions, until the desired potency is reached.

Homeopathic potencies are designated by the combination of a number and a letter (for example, 6X or 30C). The number refers to the number of dilution steps used to prepare the remedy. The letter refers to the proportions used in each dilution of the series (the Roman numeral *X* means 10 and indicates a 1-in-10 proportion, and the Roman numeral *C* means 100, indicating a 1-in-100 proportion), as well as the number of succussions the vial of solution has undergone in each successive stage. Pellets, tablets, or powders are then medicated with the potentized liquid, or drops of the remedy are taken in liquid form.

Paradoxically, potency increases the more a substance is diluted. Higher potencies of homeopathic remedies (anything higher than 12C) have been diluted past the point where molecules of the original substance would be measurable in the solution. This fact is a

major stumbling block for skeptics when it comes to understanding homeopathy. Homeopathic remedies often do work, and the *effects* can be measured, but is unclear why or how.

Homeopathic remedies are usually selected based on a close match with the target symptoms, and unless otherwise specified by the physician, they can be taken according to instructions printed on the label. Some examples of homeopathic remedies for anxiety are:

Aconitum napellus—Used for acute anxiety, bad dreams, and sleep problems in children.

Pulsatilla—Children who express anxiety as insecurity and clinginess, with a need for constant support and comforting, may benefit from this remedy. Anxiety around the time of hormonal changes (puberty, menstrual periods) often is helped with *pulsatilla*.

Gelsemium—Feelings of weakness, trembling, or feeling “paralyzed by fear” suggest this remedy. It is considered helpful for test anxiety, a visit to the dentist, stage fright before a public performance or interview, or other stressful event.

Natrum muriaticum—Emotional sensitivity, self-protective shyness, and social phobia are indications for this remedy. Claustrophobia, anxiety at night (with fears of robbers or intruders), migraines, and insomnia may also be helped with the remedy.

Phosphorus—This remedy is prescribed for people who are openhearted, imaginative, excitable, easily startled, and full of intense and vivid fears. Also appropriate for some of the anxiety personality traits, such as a tendency to overextend oneself, suggestibility, habitual worry, and negative thinking.

Since homeopathic drug products must be chosen on a case-by-case basis, use of these remedies with children should be done only in consultation with a trained homeopathic physician. Homeopathic doctors can be located in local telephone directories (yellow pages) under “Naturopathic Physicians.” See also the Resources for professional organizations of alternative health-care providers.

Children

The Worried Child: Recognizing Anxiety in Children and Helping Them Heal by Paul Foxman

The 7 Habits of Happy Kids by Sean Covey

Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems by Richard Ferber

The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate by Susan Greenland

Yoga for Children: 200+ Yoga Poses, Breathing Exercises, and Meditations for Healthier, Happier, More Resilient Children by Lisa Flynn

Don't Pop Your Cork Mondays by Adolph Moser

Adolescents

Brainsorm; Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain by Daniel Siegel

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey

Yoga exercises for teens by Helen Purperhart

Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years by Karen Coburn

All ages

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from Nature Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv

The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap by Alvin Rosenfeld

ANXIETY RESOURCES AND WEB SITES

<http://faq.emetophobia.net/> (web site for emetophobia with valuable information)
www.adaa.org (informative website of Anxiety Disorders Association of America)
www.anxieties.com (self-help anxiety site associated with Reid Wilson, Ph.D.)
www.ASEBA.org (Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment)
www.bullies2buddies.com (Israel Kalman web site on bullying)
www.chaange.com (website for CHAANGE and LifeSkills programs)
www.creativetherapystore.com (therapy supplies and games)
www.drfoxman.com (Paul Foxman's website including speaking schedule and books)
www.freedomfromfear.org (informative non-profit anxiety organization)
www.friendsinfo.net (School-based anxiety prevention program called "Friends")
www.eegspectrum.org (neurofeedback information)
www.gaiam.com (yoga for children)
www.healsocialphobia.com (social phobia website)
www.heartmath.com (neurofeedback tools based on heart rate variability)
www.lsperson.com (Elaine Aron's site for "highly sensitive persons and children")
www.isnr.org (International Society for Neurofeedback and Research)
www.lighthouse-press.com (books and CDs for child anxiety therapy)
www.meditationandpsychotherapy.org (Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy)
www.naturopathic.org (American Association of Naturopathic Physicians)
www.nimh.nih.gov (National Institute of Mental Health has anxiety articles)
www.nutrition.gov (USDA website for food guide and nutrition information)
www.ocfoundation.org (Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation website)
www.responsiveclassroom.org (Info and research on Responsive Classroom practices)
www.rxlist.com (prescription drug reference with information on risks and benefits)
www.safeyouth.org (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center)
www.selectivemutism.org (Info on anxiety connection and treatment of selective mutism)
www.soundstrue.com (audiovisual materials)
www.stressfreakids.com (stress and anxiety management techniques in story format)
www.themindfulparent.org (mindfulness applied to parenting)
www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr (mindfulness-based stress reduction)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLEEP

DISCLAIMER: This list of suggestions is for your interest only and is not intended to be prescriptive for individuals. Information is compiled from a variety of sources. Discuss all treatments with your personal health care professional.

- Relaxing ambiance at nighttime (e.g. dim lighting)
- Establish a consistent sleep cycle 7 days a week
- Make sleep a priority and avoid temptation to stay up late
- No television within one hour of sleep (too stimulating)
- Warm bath (or foot bath): 92-97 degrees F (see also aromatherapy below)
- Avoid daytime naps if difficulty falling asleep at night
- Use bed only for sleep
- Quality sleep requires a good mattress that provides comfort and support
- Regular exercise aids sleep (but not within two hours of bedtime)
- Relaxing activity (reading, gentle music, breathing exercise) before bedtime
- If wake up and can't resume sleep, get up and do something (go to bathroom, drink water or herb tea, read) until fatigue induces sleep
- Food considerations: avoid over-eating and stimulants (chocolate, sodas, black tea, coffee ice cream or chemical additives that increase heart rate) before bed. "Good foods" for sleep include tea with chamomile (e.g. "Sleepytime Tea") and "Horlick's Hot Malted Milk" (verified by research)
- Herbs for sleep: valerian root (tincture—one dropper in water, capsule, or tea—one teaspoon in water steeped for 10 minutes), hops (tea with or without valerian), ladslypper (tea, mood elevator, induces sleep), other tea combinations (chamomile, passion flower, catnip, skullcap, lime flower, cowslip flower), herbs with relaxant properties (anise, balm, cayenne pepper, dill, heather, marjoram, poppyseed, lemon, verbena, California poppy, rosemary, peppermint, gotu kola)
- Aromatherapy: chamomile (6 drops) or lavender oil (6 drops) or blossom (5 drops) added to warm bath. Steep a combination of valerian root, lime blossom, and chamomile in boiling water for 10 minutes and add to warm bath.
- Massage: gentle stroking and kneading of body or just feet, massage oil with lavender and chamomile

MANAGING TEST ANXIETY

Test anxiety is a specific phobia whose symptoms interfere with concentration, problem solving and creative thinking. Symptoms can include excessive or unreasonable fear, tension, apprehension and somatic arousal before, during or after an examination. In most cases, test anxiety is associated with excessive concerns about performance as well as “fear of anxiety symptoms.” Avoiding tests is usually not a realistic coping option. Test anxiety varies in intensity from normal (experienced by most people but does not impair performance) to a debilitating anxiety disorder.

Before tests:

- Prepare and study in advance
- Develop good study skills
- Make and use flash cards
- Take good notes
- Make outlines and summaries
- Participate in study groups
- Use school resource centers if available for study tips, tutoring and other supports
- Learn and practice relaxation skills
- Develop a healthy life-style including proper diet, exercise and adequate sleep
- Visualize yourself doing well on tests
- Practice positive self-talk regarding the test
- Avoid talking about exams immediately before test taking if it raises anxiety level
- Be familiar with test time and location
- Limit worrying to a pre-determined “worry time” and say “not now” at other times
- Prepare the night before and collect any items you will need to take to the exam

During tests:

- Sit where you will have minimum distractions
- Carefully read any test instructions
- Scan the test and plan your approach
- Move on from difficult items instead of losing valuable time or going blank
- Focus on the test and stay in the here-and-now
- Avoid comparing yourself to other people’s progress
- Use relaxation skills to counteract tension or worry

Special accommodations for severe cases:

- Extra time to complete tests
- Alternative locations for test taking to minimize distractions and reduce anxiety
- Alternative assessment methods, such as written essays or take home exams
- Tutoring in weak subject areas

EXERCISE: POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

An affirmation is a positive self-statement that can improve mood and, some believe, increase the probability of having positive experiences and outcomes. The use of positive affirmations is based on the idea that we are affected emotionally by our thoughts and that we can actualize what we believe. Affirmations seem to be most effective as complete sentences containing the following four components:

1. Present tense
2. Action verb
3. Self reference ("I")
4. Realistically positive

Begin by identifying a key word that represents an important personal goal, such as being more "relaxed," "flexible," "trusting," "serene," "confident," etc. It may help to use a key word that represents the opposite of the problem thought or belief. For example, "trust" and "optimism" are opposites to "worry." Then, build an affirmation around the key positive word. For example, the word "trust" could be the core for the following affirmation: *"I trust deeply that everything will be OK."*

An affirmation creates an internal tension between what is presently untrue and what could be true. The natural tendency is to resolve such tension, with two possible outcomes: we stop saying the affirmation (we give up because it is not yet true) or through consistent repetition we create a new truth.

