Active Relaxation

Most people are not aware that when they are upset or agitated, one or more of their muscle groups are tense, and their breathing is rapid and shallow. If we can learn to control our muscle tension and our breathing, we can teach our bodies to stay relatively calm and relaxed even in upsetting situations. The following is a procedure for achieving relaxation quickly. By practicing every day, within two to three weeks, you will be able to relax your body by simply saying, "Relax," to yourself in real life situations with your child and in other stressful situations as well.

1. Get comfortable in your chair. Place your arms on the arms of the chair. Close your eyes and keep them closed throughout the entire exercise.

2. Become aware of the various muscle groups in your body (e.g., hands and arms; face, neck and shoulders; chest and stomach; hips, legs, and feet).

3. Bend your arms at the elbow. Then, make a tight fist with both hands while tightening biceps and forearms. Hold for 5 seconds. Pay attention to the tension. Then relax. Pay attention to the relaxation.

4. Tense your entire face and shoulders, tightly shut your eyes and wrinkle your forehead, pull the corners of your mouth towards your ears, tighten your neck and hunch your shoulders. Hold for 5 seconds. Pay attention to the tension. Relax. Pay attention to the relaxation.

5. Take in a deep breath and arch your back. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Now relax. Take in another deep breath and press out your stomach. Hold…… and relax.

6. Raise your feet off the floor while keeping your knees straight. Pull your feet and toes back toward your face and tighten the muscles in your shins. Hold…and relax. Now, curl your toes down toward the floor, tighten your calves, thighs and buttocks and hold……and relax.

7. Scan each muscle group in your mind and relax any tense muscles.

8. Now, become aware of your breathing. Slow your breathing down as you breathe in and out, in and out.

9. With your next deep breath, count slowly from 1 to 5 as you breathe in and count from 6 to 10 as you breathe out. Your stomach should expand and deflate with each breath.

10. Repeat this deep, slow, breathing…in and out…in and out… Stop when you are feeling deeply relaxed.

11. Say the word, "Relax" to yourself approximately 20 times every time you exhale.

12. Now, gradually let your breathing return to normal and open your eyes.