



# Disability Services

## Information Sheet

### Relaxation

Relaxation routines are a way to reduce tension and promote a calm state. Tension and agitation are common reactions in children responding to tiredness, negative feelings, stress or sensory overload. When practiced regularly, relaxation routines can be used to help children cope with these types of stress. When children are older they may be able to use a relaxation routine to cope with particular stressful situations.



### Feelings

Being anxious, sad, bored, and angry are valid and important feelings that everyone, including your child, experiences from time to time. Learning how to deal with these feelings is a vital part of your child's development. Learning relaxation is a gradual process that takes time, regular practice and a positive, caring approach.

### Stress

Your child may respond to stress and worries in a number of different ways:

- ▶ Heart beating faster
- ▶ Tense muscles
- ▶ Stomach feeling tight or sick
- ▶ Breathing faster
- ▶ Sweating more
- ▶ Finding it hard to fall asleep.

### What can you do

There are a number of different ways you can help your child relax and deal with their stress:

- ▶ Help them work out what is making them feel bad.
- ▶ Talk it through with them.
- ▶ Make sure they are getting enough sleep.
- ▶ Help them learn to relax.

There are many different types of ways to relax. The following relaxation plan focuses on structuring the environment and sharing time together with your child to help them learn the patterns for relaxation.

## Relaxation plan

### Time and Place

- ▶ Find a quiet place, one that is peaceful with minimal distractions.
- ▶ If necessary, screen off the area, for example by using a sheet over a clothes horse.
- ▶ Choose a consistent time and place each day to practice the relaxation routine.
- ▶ Initially your child may only participate for one to two minutes. As their tolerance and enjoyment develops, the length of time can be slowly increased.
- ▶ It is helpful to incorporate relaxation into your child's daily routine to help them experience and understand deep relaxation.



### Preparation

- ▶ Communicate with your child to let them know it is time to relax. Consistent language and communication cues are very important for effective learning.
- ▶ Communication methods include speaking, sign language and pictures. A combination is often successful.
- ▶ Relaxation could also be associated with one particular smell such as lavender or sandalwood. With consistent use the smell can become a 'sensory cue' for relaxation.

### Position

Your child can carry out their relaxation routine sitting in a chair or large bean bag but it's even better if they are lying down on the floor—on a sheep skin rug, foam mat, soft sleeping bag or even in bed.

### Calming effects

- ▶ Low lighting
- ▶ Soft voice
- ▶ Music for example classical, instrumental, nature sounds, relaxation, or gentle vocals
- ▶ Deep pressure touches such as massage, heavy blanket or light fabric lycra tube
- ▶ Slow rhythmical movement such as a rocking chair.



### More information

If you would like further information, please contact your local Disability Services office.

*Reference:* M Semuha, 1992, *Conditioned Relaxation*, Israeli Organisation for Teachers of the Autistic, Communication Vol 26 (3) December 1992