

Tip Sheets

Relaxation Techniques for Child Care Providers

The Need for Relaxation

Stress is an aspect of every profession, including the field of early care and education. Child care providers working with young children experience



many rewards, but their jobs are also physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding. The field requires patience, creativity, leadership skills, and an endless supply of compassion and energy, as well as the ability to nurture, motivate, teach, and influence young children.

Stress is routinely at the top of the list of reasons for sleep problems. It contributes to physical tension throughout the body making it difficult to fall asleep, while anxiety and worry create racing thoughts that make it difficult to quiet the mind. Relaxation techniques are helpful in promoting sound and restful sleep, managing stress, limiting fatigue during the day, improving cardiovascular function, and lowering blood pressure.

Relaxation Techniques

Try the following techniques and strategies to help facilitate relaxation.

Toe Tensing

By alternately tensing and relaxing your toes you actually draw tension from the rest of the body.

- Lie on your back and close your eyes.
- Sense your toes.

- Pull all 10 toes back toward your face.
- Count to 10 slowly.
- Now relax your toes. Count to 10 slowly.
- Now repeat the above cycle 10 times.

Breathing

Close your eyes and turn all of your attention to noticing your breathing pattern. Feel the air enter and leave your nose and mouth. Picture the flow of air as it passes through your mouth, airway, and down into your stomach and back out again. Survey your body for areas of tension. As you exhale, feel the tension leave that part of your body. Visualize your breath reaching your forehead, neck, shoulders, arms, etc. Release the tension as you exhale. If your mind wanders, let that worry or thought go and gently redirect your attention back to your breath.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing allows the rest of your body to relax itself and get everything into synchrony.

- Lie on your back, and slowly relax your body.
- Begin to inhale slowly through your nose. Fill the lower part of your chest first, then the middle and top part of your chest and lungs. Do this slowly, over 8 to 10 seconds.
- Hold your breath for a second or two.
- Then quietly and easily relax and let the air out.
- Wait a few seconds and repeat this cycle.
- If you find yourself getting dizzy, slow down.
- You can also imagine yourself in a peaceful situation such as on a warm, gentle ocean. Imagine that you rise on the gentle swells of the water as you inhale and sink down into the waves as you exhale.

- You can continue this breathing technique for as long as you like until you fall asleep.

Guided Imagery

Visualizing yourself in a peaceful setting can help calm your mind and lower stress levels.

- Lie on your back with your eyes closed.
- Imagine yourself in a favorite, peaceful place, such as a sunny beach with ocean breezes, swinging in a hammock in the mountains, or in your own backyard. Any place that you find peaceful and relaxing is okay.
- Imagine you are there. See and feel your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the flowers or the barbecue, feel the warmth of the sun and any other sensations that you find.
- Relax and enjoy it.

You can return to this place any night you need to. As you use this place more and more, you will find it easier to fall asleep as this imagery becomes a sleep conditioner.

Counting

Close your eyes and relax. Count backwards slowly from 100 to zero. Visualize the numbers being written slowly and carefully on a staircase with the numbers descending from the steps. Continue until you fall asleep.

Floating

Imagine that you are floating on air. Visualize yourself floating like a falling leaf or snowflake. The lower you float the calmer you will feel.

Thought-Stopping

If you find yourself, for example, thinking about the parent that has been difficult and pondering every detail about talk to them tomorrow, order yourself to "Stop!" The word "Stop!" forces you to shift your attention, leading you away from the thought that is preoccupying you. Thought-stopping also

reminds you that you have control. This awareness can lead to more self-assuring and self-accepting thoughts that are more helpful for going to sleep.

Reverse Psychology

Worrying about the fact that you need to sleep can actually keep you awake. Try reversing this thought pattern by telling yourself that you must stay awake as long as possible. Concentrate on keeping your eyes open. This technique can actually help you become sleepy naturally.

Conclusion



Being an early care and education professional is an amazing, important, and impactful profession. Do little things each day

to take care of yourself because you are important! Taking time to think about yourself will boost your self confidence and trust in your own abilities. This is a necessity when you have one of the most important jobs in the world. Celebrate yourself and the important work that you do!

Additional Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children

<https://www.naeyc.org>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

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