

COPING KIT SKILLS: **Muscle Relaxation**

Helps with: Sleeping, Anxiety, Worries, Anger, Pain

What is it? Squeezing and then relaxing each muscle of your body from head to toe

What do I need? You really don't need any tools but yourself and a comfortable place to make this work! Some other things that may help:

- If you have any medical problems, talk to your doctor first about whether this is safe for you.
- A squeeze/stress ball
- A relaxation script or CD

See the Tips section to see how these items can help!

When do I use it?

- 2-3 times per day to relieve stress or to keep you calm and relaxed
- Do this anytime you are feeling nervous, stressed, angry, upset
- Use this before things that make you nervous (like getting a shot)
- Try this out before, during, or after long, uncomfortable situations like a long medical treatment

How do I do it?

1. Get into a comfortable position.
2. Start by taking 5-10 belly breaths.
3. Squeeze all of the muscles in your face - eyes, cheeks, nose, forehead - (scrunch up your face). Hold it tight and count to 10. Then let go of the tightness and feel the muscles in your face melt into relaxation.



4. Now do the same thing with each muscle in your body working your way down from your face:
 - a. Jaw (clench your teeth, bite down like you have a jawbreaker in your mouth)
 - b. Shoulders and Neck (lift your shoulders up to your ears)
 - c. Back (arch your back and try to touch your shoulders together)
 - d. Stomach (make your stomach hard like a rock)
 - e. Arms (lift your arms up to the ceiling or squeeze them against your body)
 - f. Hands (pretend you're are squeezing something tight in your hand)
 - g. Legs
 - h. Feet and toes
5. Imagine a nice feeling of warmth or heaviness moving through our body as you relax the muscles.
6. Notice the difference between how your body and muscles feel when they are tight and when they are loose and relaxed. Do you feel like a stiff robot when you are tight? Do you feel like an old, floppy stuffed animal or a wet, cooked string of spaghetti when you are loose and relaxed?

Tips:

- Use your stress ball each time you are supposed to make your muscles tight, especially when you are focusing on the muscles in your arms and hands or squeezing all the muscles in your body at the same time.
- If this is hard for you to do on your own, you can ask your mom or dad to lead you through a muscle relaxation exercise. Maybe you and your parents can put your heads together to imagine situations that can help you to tighten your muscles. For example, maybe pretending you have a jawbreaker in your mouth can help you to tighten your jaw. Or maybe pretending that you are a turtle and need to pull your head into your shell can help you to tighten your shoulders and neck.

How can this help me? The muscles in your body can all get very tight when you are stressed, worried, and angry. When you are in pain in one area of your body, you also may notice that the muscles in other areas of your body get tight. When you squeeze a muscle as tight as you can, and then let it go, it actually relaxes your muscle more than it was before. Your muscle actually does not have a choice – when you make a muscle tight and then let that tightness go, it has to relax. This is great because it gives us a little bit of control over the state of our bodies! After you tighten and relax your muscles, the muscle may feel warm and tingly afterwards which is just a sign that it is letting go of the tension and relaxing. When you do this to all the muscle groups in your body, your whole body will feel relaxed when you are done with this exercise! What's great about this is that relaxed muscles need less oxygen. So, when your muscles are relaxed, your breathing will slow down and your heart will beat slower. And this all works together to help you feel calm and relaxed.