

Stress tip sheet

A guide for helping kids

Feelings of stress are a normal part of life! Most people will experience some stress and worry during their day and the same goes for kids. When something unexpected happens, your child might feel upset or stressed. This is a great "teaching moment" to practice self-regulation which is an important life skill. We know that being a parent is a journey of both deep love and significant stress, and we want you to know that **this is totally normal**. When you find your own center, you become the steady "adult in their corner" that every child needs to thrive. The following exercises use **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** to help you and your child move from reaction to reflection in moments of "big feelings".

Step 1: Find Your Calm Before trying a calming script with your child, take a moment for yourself: staying grounded yourself is also vital for your whole family. It is putting on your own "oxygen mask" before helping others! You can even narrate what you are doing out loud if your child is with you so they can see you modeling a calming strategy.

1. **Touch the Ground:** Sit or stand still and think about how your feet feel on the floor.
2. **Tense & Breathe:** Breathe in and squeeze your hand into a fist for 5–10 seconds, then release.
3. **Release Quickly:** Breathe out fast and let the tension drop away instantly.
4. **Notice the Change:** Intentionally relax and feel the difference between a "tight" and "soft" feeling in your body. Notice where you felt the most tension.

Step 2: Guide Your Child Now that you are feeling calm and relaxed, help your child to do the same. When guiding your child, use a warm friendly tone and imagery that feels safe and familiar to your child. Remember, there is no "right way" to do this—honor your child's unique rhythm and your own family's culture. Here are a few playful scripts to inspire your creativity. Make them your own!

Sour Lemon: "Imagine you're holding a big, yellow lemon in your hand. As you breathe in, squeeze that lemon with all your might! Can you feel how tight your hand and arm feel? Can you breathe in through your nose and smell the lemon? Now, breathe out and let your hand go soft. See how your hand feels now that it's relaxed? Let's try it with the other hand".

Tall Tree: "Let's pretend we are trees reaching for the sky. Take a big breath in and stretch your arms way up high! Try to reach your shoulders toward the sun. As you breathe out, let your arms and shoulders soften and fall back down like leaves. Can you feel the wind on your fingers as you stretch?"

Facing the Sun: "The sun is very bright and feels warm on your face. Take a deep breath in and close your eyes tight. Wrinkle your nose and scrunch up your mouth as tight as you can. Stretch your face up toward the sun. Can you feel it warming your cheeks and face? When you're ready, breathe out, relax your face, and look down softly at the green grass".

Rock vs. Pillow: "Put your hands on your belly. Feel it move like a balloon filling up when you breathe in and getting soft when you breathe out. Now, let's make your belly as hard as a rock! Breathe in and squeeze those tummy muscles tight. Now, breathe out and make it soft like a fluffy pillow."

Toes in the Sand: "Imagine we are lying on a warm beach. Pretend you're curling your toes deep into some warm, squishy sand. Squish them down as far as they can go! As you breathe out, let your toes go soft and imagine all the little grains of sand falling away. Let's try to go even deeper this time".

Why it Works By modeling and practicing moments of calm with your child, you are helping build **resilience** and teaching them that slowing down and seeking support is healthy. This relationship-based approach honors your child as they are while giving them the tools to reach their full potential.