

Guided Relaxation for Special Needs Kids

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Children with special needs don't have it easy and they are often stressed as they struggle to 'fit in' and control their emotions. While relaxation skills are important for all children, they can dramatically improve the life of special needs children, helping them to calm and relax themselves.

It's very important to practice relaxation in a fun, imaginative way. The last thing you want your child to think is that relaxation is "just one more thing to do." After all, relaxation is not so much doing as it is an *undoing*, or a letting go. If you imagine that you are relaxed, your tension is likely to abate and your muscles will relax. In contrast, if you try to *will* yourself to become relaxed, you are likely to become tense. Still, the ability to let go and relax will improve with practice. A daily routine of self-calming exercises is important in order that children learn to relax and quiet themselves whenever they have a need to do so. At first, have children practice relaxation exercises when they are not upset or overly anxious. It's best to practice them at least once and preferably twice a day. In order for children to relax when they encounter stressful situations, the relaxation response needs to become second nature.

Children are wonderfully receptive to guided relaxation. It often helps if children are first taught to tense and then relax each of the muscle groups, a technique known as progressive relaxation. By first tensing their muscles, children are able to feel and understand the contrasting feeling of relaxation. Practice in a number of fun ways: tensing and relaxing muscles by making fists, holding the eyebrows up before relaxing them, or curling up in a ball before releasing and relaxing the entire body. Once your child is able to relax without first tensing the muscle groups, you may wish to try the following guided relaxation routine, *Heavy and Relaxed*. Remember, children like repetition and it will help them to become more comfortable and secure with the movements if you repeat a routine that is effective and that they find enjoyable.

Tip: Review or reword the body parts that your child may be unfamiliar with, such as palm, sole, nostril, buttock, groin, or collarbone. (Lightly touching the part of the body that your child is directed to relax is a great way for your child to learn the names for all the various body parts.)

Heavy and Relaxed
Excerpt from The Floppy Sleep Game Book

Directions:

Lie down on your back. Wiggle or move your body to make it comfortable. Now be still and close your eyes. Allow your feet to fall slightly apart and turn your palms upward.

Feel your right hand. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, the palm and the back of your hand. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole right hand.

(With younger children add, Good-night hand.)

Feel your right arm. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm and shoulder. Take a deep breath in and as your breathe out, relax your whole right arm.

(With younger children add, Good-night arm.)

Feel your left hand. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, the palm and the back of your hand. Take a deep breath in and as your breathe out, relax your whole left hand.

(With younger children add, Good-night hand.)

Feel your left arm. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm and shoulder. Take a deep breath in and as your breathe out, relax your whole left arm.

(With younger children add, Good-night arm.)

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Feel your right foot. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, bottom of your foot, top of the foot and heel. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole right foot.

(With younger children add, Good-night foot.)

Feel your right leg. It is heavy and relaxed. (With younger children add, Good-night leg.)

Feel your left foot. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, bottom of your foot, top of the foot and heel. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole left foot.

(With younger children add, Good-night foot.)

Feel your left leg. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your ankle, calf, shin, knee, thigh, and hip. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole left leg.

(With younger children add, Good-night leg.)

Take another breath in and as you breathe out, relax your right buttock and your left buttock. Feel your lower back. It is heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole lower back.

(With younger children add, Good-night back.)

Feel your shoulders. They are heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your shoulders.

(With younger children add, Good-night shoulders.)

Feel your neck. It is heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your neck.

(With younger children add, Good-night neck.)

Feel your head. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the back of your head, the top of your head, your forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right cheek, left cheek, right nostril, left nostril, upper lip, lower lip, and chin. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole head.

(With younger children add, Good-night head.)

Feel the front of your body. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your throat, right collar bone, left collar bone, right side of chest, left side of chest, the belly, the right groin, left groin. Breathe in and as you breathe out, relax the front of your whole body.

(With younger children add, Good-night body.)

Feel your arms and legs. I feel my arms and legs and they are heavy and relaxed. Relax your whole right leg, your whole left leg, your whole right arm, your whole left arm. Breathe in and as you breathe out, relax your arms and legs completely.

(With younger children add, Good-night arms and leg.)

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.