

Building Strong Families

Activities and Tips to Manage Stress

Activities

1. Calming Sounds

Play some calming music (like nature sounds, instrumental music, or any music that relaxes you). You can try several different kinds. Focus on a positive thing in your life for ten minutes.

Or play a relaxation tape. In many tapes, a narrator leads a person to visualize or see things.

2. Relaxation Vacation

Sit quietly so that you are comfortable, with both feet on the ground. Close your eyes. Think about being in a quiet place that you would like to visit. (For example, it might be a meadow, a mountain, a garden, the beach, the ocean, or a lake). You can feel the warm sun shine down on you. A cool breeze blows as you sit in the soft grass or on the sandy beach.

As you sit there quietly, enjoy the sounds. You can hear the wind blowing through the trees, the surf, the birds, and so on. Notice all the smells around you. Try to feel all of your senses while you are on your vacation: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

3. Focus on Breathing

Stand so that you are comfortable. Take a deep breath in, and let it out slowly. As you breathe out, relax from the top of your head to the bottom of your toes. Then focus on each part of your body as you move from head to toe. Relax your head, neck, shoulders, abdomen, legs, and feet. This activity is quick and easy. You can do it anywhere.

4. Breathing Relaxation

When you notice that you are under stress, try this: Blink your eyes once or twice. Then take deep breaths to calm yourself. Repeat this exercise several times. As you do it, say to yourself, “I feel [*as you breathe in*] relaxed [*as you breathe out*].”

5. Hot Air Balloons

Cup your hands together and blow deep breaths into them. As you do this, count to 10 and let your hands expand like a balloon. Keep blowing and counting until your balloon has gotten as large as it can and explodes.

6. Muscle Tensing and Relaxing

NOTE: If you have diabetes, high or low blood pressure, hypoglycemia, or a heart condition, check with your doctor before you do this exercise.

Take turns between tensing the muscles and relaxing them. Squeeze your hands into tight fists. Then release and relax your fingers. Repeat 5 times. Tense your arms and release. Tense your leg muscles and release. Repeat the activity with different muscle groups in your body.

Bulldog Face is a quick exercise you can do. Tighten your face muscles. Try to look like an upset bulldog. Once you feel the tension in your face, stop. Now relax your face and let the tension go.

7. Talking to Ourselves

What we tell ourselves can add to stress. Our self-talk can also affect what the body does. Often we can talk ourselves into feeling angry or depressed.

Here is an example of negative self-talk:

“I am such a pig! My eating is all out of control. I’ll never lose any weight at this rate. No wonder nobody likes me.”

Here is an example of more positive self-talk:

“Wait! I’m in control here. So I ate a little too much. That’s in the past. All I can do is keep on my exercise program and watch my eating when I’m upset. Nobody judges me by my weight. I’m a good person.”

8. STOP That Thought

Sometimes people say negative statements over and over to themselves. Then they get tenser and more upset each time they repeat the statements. One way to stop these thoughts is to yell, “STOP!” and picture a big red stop sign.

Yell it out loud if you can. As you do this more and more, you may just be able to yell it inside your head. Or you may just picture the stop sign.

After you’ve stopped, replace the negative thoughts with positive thoughts. You may try to picture a comforting place (like a beach or special room) to start thinking more positive thoughts.

Here is an example:

Your mind says: “I’m so fat. I’m so fat. I’m so fat.”

Yell, “STOP!” and picture your stop sign.

Replace the “I’m so fat” statement with something like “I’m a good person.”

For more information

Most libraries and bookstores have books, tapes, and videos that can help you. Ask librarians or clerks to suggest some.

The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook (Martha Davis, Elizabeth Eshelman, Matthew McKay. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: Oakland, CA, 1998) has exercises and plans to change the way you think about and react to stress.

Your local hospital, YMCA, or gym may offer classes (like yoga, stretching, etc.) to help you manage stress.

Tips to Reduce or Prevent Stress

- Practice saying “no.” Don’t let others control your time.
- Ask other family members to share household jobs.
- Value yourself. Don’t wait for others to approve of you.
- Live in the present. Don’t relive the past, and don’t worry about the future.
- Be flexible. Forget about being perfect.
- Plan to have fun and relax every day.
- Focus on what you have done, not on what you haven’t done.
- Practice changing negative thoughts into positive ones.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy meals, exercise often, and get enough sleep.
- Tell others what you need and want.
- Try to find a reason to laugh every day.
- Surround yourself with cheerful, positive people.
- Make friends with people who will help you and support you.
- Find ways to exercise and be active. (For example, you can take the stairs and park further from work. You can walk with your children while talking about their day.)
- Break a big job into smaller, easier jobs. Celebrate small successes.
- Use a family calendar to keep track of events, plans, and due dates.