



9 REST

Small children have the ability to relax and release their body and mind and rest calmly. They possess a natural ability for good and relaxing breathing. Children who struggle to relax may find it difficult to concentrate on, for example, playing. A tense body is also a burden on the mind.

How can you tell that children are feeling tense? What kinds of relaxation exercises do you use with children? How do you relax with your family?


Relaxing moments

Rest and sufficient sleep are essential to growth and wellbeing and must be part of children's daily rhythm. The developing and growing brain needs enough sleep to recover from the stresses of the day. A rested brain, body and mind improve children's concentration and learning and ensure that they have the energy to play and be happy and active. Sufficiently rested children are also more patient and can cope better with failures and different emotions. Even a short moment of rest and unwinding gives children an opportunity to experience a release from noise, social load or potential rush.

Play and exercise offer other kinds of relaxation methods, particularly for children who find it difficult to unwind. Constant interruptions of children's play may cause general disorder, short attention spans and fatigue. The same may be the case if the adults who look after the children change constantly. A difficult life situation or inadequate relaxation skills may also make it more difficult to unwind. However, it is possible to practise these skills with children.

At home, parents can create a moment of relaxation and respite by just switching off the TV or the computer.

Children need idle time and restful moments to allow their brain to develop. Practical exercises can also be used to help with relaxation. Idle time strengthens children's creativity. Adults can help children come up with familiar and safe mental images, which can then be used to create a restful moment and a tranquil mind. The mental image could be, for example, a memory of a trip to the beach in the summer and the feel of warm sand on the skin. Children can also try different exercises such as practising to tense and relax their muscles and to recognise how it feels when your body is relaxed. Massaging and learn stroking also promote relaxation.



HOW DO YOU
HELP PARENTS
WHOSE CHILDREN
HAVE SLEEPING
DIFFICULTIES?

During sleep, the body and brain recuperate and recharge. The brain also needs sleep to develop. Sufficient sleep is important for the development of learning, memory, growth and emotional life. Dreaming is important for the balanced development of children's emotional life.
(Markku Partinen 2014)

HOW COULD
RELAXATION EXERCISES
BE INCORPORATED INTO
THE CHILDREN'S DAY
IN DAY CARE?

Hugging, stroking and cuddling children, massaging them and making pleasant sounds – humming, chatting, singing and laughing – strengthen the mutual feeling of care. The aim of caressing someone is to adjust their stress to a level that is ideal for experiencing a connection.

(Sajaniemi & Mäkelä 2014)

WHAT KINDS OF
VOLUNTARY QUIET
NOOKS DOES YOUR DAY
CARE CENTRE PROVIDE?

HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE
THAT A CHILD IS
FEELING STRESSED?

Children's stress

Periodic pressures and stress are an unavoidable part of life. However, there should be a correct balance between stress and relaxation. In day care, children find different transitions and situations in which they must wait unoccupied for long periods of time stressful. Children also find it stressful, if the adults who look after them change constantly; days are fragmented; the daily rhythm is disjointed, or it is noisy. Children also become more stressed if the day care group is too large. A well-working and systematic team, anticipation, sufficient rest and the opportunity to unwind reduce children's stress levels.

Often people feel stress, when they are faced with demands that are greater than their resources or when their coping strategies and self-esteem are put to the test. There are many situations in children's life, which can put children under excess stress and demand them to adjust whilst they are expected to learn new things. Children are sensitive to adults' stress, rush and tiredness. One of the key tasks for adults is to filter the outside stimuli so that children feel safe. Safe and engaged adults significantly lower the stress children experience. It is important to ensure in day care centres that all children have opportunities during the day for quiet moments and unwinding, by themselves as well.

Relaxation

Rest and relaxation are connected to unwinding and taking a break. At its simplest, relaxation means just being quiet and doing nothing special.

Relaxation refreshes the mind and body, improves stress tolerance and reduces anxiety. Relaxation also helps the mind unwind, makes you feel more balanced, improves concentration and performance and reduces vexation. Thus, relaxation works almost as body and mind maintenance. Reading out loud with children offers them an opportunity to relax and improves intimacy between adults and children. Rest, relaxation and quiet moments strengthen children's mental health, promote pleasant atmosphere and ensure that daily life runs more smoothly for adults and children.

It would be important to discuss at child health clinics and day care centres the importance of sufficient sleep and rest for children. It also provides parents with valuable time for themselves. Child health clinics offer opportunities for discussing parents' coping or potential tiredness and fatigue. Becoming heard and empathetic discussions can ease parents' load and support the everyday coping of families with children.

The ABC of relaxation exercises

- Take into account that for at least some children keeping their eyes closed can be difficult and scary.
- Discuss with the children what is about to happen and why. Consider with the kids
 - * what you can do if you want to rest and relax
 - * how you can relax
 - * what silence and relaxation feel like, and where in the body you can feel them.
- Consider in advance what to do if a friend or something else prevents a child from relaxing.
- Find a safe, calming space, place and environment.
- Think about the timing and group size in advance.
- Make sure the children have warm socks and blankets. People often feel shivery when they try and relax, and warmth is important.
- Ensure that the atmosphere in the room is safe.
- Be patient with the children.

Practise relaxation with children

THROUGH TOUCH

- You can massage and press a child gently and reassuringly. The touch needs to be firm enough, so it does not tickle. The effect can be boosted with imagination. For children who do not enjoy the touch of a hand, you could use a soft glove, which radiates tranquillity and affability. You can also use a ball, a paint brush or a feather to stroke and touch. Background music or a calming adult voice can also be added to the relaxation session.

THROUGH IMAGINATION

- Familiar and safe mental images create a calm feel to the whole being in just moments.

BY GIVING THEM A SOFT TOY.

- Children can place a soft toy on their chest and by observing the toy, they can sense the rhythm of their breath become calmer.

BY PROVIDING QUIET ALONE TIME

- A light cloth as a blanket on the face has a calming effect and tells others that you are resting.

THROUGH DIFFERENT RELAXATION EXERCISES OR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Children can be taught to observe the calming effect of breath by asking them to first jump up and down to increase their heart rate and then instructing them to come to a standstill to allow their breathing to slow down again.

Signs of stress in children

- Increased irritability
- Restlessness.

Children's stress is alleviated when adults

- cuddle and hug them.
- cherish their successes.
- teach them how to calm down and relax.
- show acceptance and enjoy their company.
- show gentleness, intimacy and playfulness.
- remember humour.
- have pedagogic sensitivity.



Cooperation with parents

Utilise the Hand of Mental Health Poster and discuss the need for sufficient sleep for children and adults.



CAT GOES MEOW, MEOW, MEOW

Tuuli Paasolainen

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has two measures, each with a D chord above it. The lyrics are: '1. Cat goes meow, meow, meow.' and 'Cat goes meow, meow, meow.' The second staff has three measures with chords D, A7, and D above them. The lyrics are: 'Cat goes,' 'cat goes meow,' and 'meow, meow.' The piece ends with a double bar line.

	BODY INSTRUMENTS:	RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS:
1. Cat goes meow, meow, meow Cat goes meow, meow, meow Cat goes, cat goes meow, meow, meow.	(Stroking cheeks)	Maracas
2. Doggy woof, woof, woof Doggy woof, woof, woof Dog-gy, doggy woof, woof, woof	(Clapping hands)	Claves
3. Horsey ne-e-eigh Horsey ne-e-eigh Hor-sey, horsey ne-e-eigh	(Clapping knees)	Wooden agogo
4. Sheep goes baa, baa, baa Sheep goes baa, baa, baa Sheep goes, sheep goes baa, baa, baa	(Arms crossed and stroking arms)	Tambourine/bells
5. Piggy oink, oink, oink Piggy oink, oink, oink Pig-gy, piggy oink, oink, oink	(Drumming chest)	Guiro/ wooden agogo
6. Bear goes growl, growl, growl. Bear goes growl, growl, growl. Bear goes, bear goes growl, growl, growl,	(Stomping feet)	Drums

Tuuli Paasolainen Translation: Aino Kattelus

Children choose which animal they wish to be, and adults stroke them during the song. Or in a group, one child at a time chooses an animal they wish to be, and the others stroke and pat the child whilst singing the verse for that animal.

When the song is short and has few words and plenty of repetition, every child has the chance to take part and experience the feeling of success and being part of an activity and group. This leaves children feeling satisfied, encouraged and inspired. The group's interaction strengthens when all the children in the group

participate in the activity, even those who are only just learning to speak and use spoken language. The song also provides an opportunity to come up with new ideas and words for the song.

Children receive attention through the other children's touch, whilst the others learn to show empathy. This song is well suited to calming children down after an outburst of emotion or when it is time to go to bed.

(Paasolainen, T. 2009. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo, Laula lelut laatikkoon. 2016)



Mental image relaxation

You can use mattresses, pillows and blankets to add cosiness. Children choose a comfortable and safe spot on the floor. They are encouraged to calm down and asked to find their favourite position in which they like to fall asleep at night. Then everyone listens to the mental image relaxation: You are on a beach; the balmy sea breeze is warm on your face, and you can hear the waves crashing in the sea. You see a forest by the beach and decide to go and explore. The forest is filled with beautiful bird song and fresh smells. You step in a puddle by accident but that's okay. You see pretty stones under a spruce tree and collect a few. You run back to the beach and go and dip your feet in the water. The sun shines warmly, and you are feeling good. The children get to imagine what the environment described by an adult looks like. After the relaxation exercise, the group discusses: the smells in the forest and on the beach; the sounds they could hear; the feel of the sand under their feet, and where the children put the stones they had collected.



Lying down and relaxing on the floor

To start with, one child lies down on the floor; then, the next one lies down with his/her head on the first child's tummy. The children lie on the floor one by one each with their head on the previous child's tummy, forming an interesting pattern on the floor.



Patterns on the back

Children sit in a row and massage each other's backs. They massage their friend's back and shoulders carefully and gently under the instructs of an adult. They can also draw patterns on their friend's back: circles, hearts, squares, letters. The aim is to offer children a peaceful moment amid their busy day.



Let's look at art: Nap

This artwork is by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt. It is called *Nap* and was painted around 1917 with oil paints on canvas. The size of the painting is 36 x 28 cm.

Many of Venny's paintings feature children. She often painted her own children, and this painting also depicts one of them. This artwork has a peaceful and tranquil feel to it. The child must have been playing outside for a long time, and maybe he has closed his eyes for a moment whilst waiting for something. Where could the child taking a nap be sitting? Has he been on his way inside and then fallen asleep on the porch next to the red flower by chance? Or is that maybe his favourite place, where he often goes for a nap?

Strange things happen in dreams. Many familiar things can go all higgledy-piggledy. When we are dreaming, the events feel real, but when we wake up, we may not even remember what we were dreaming about. What kind of a dream do you think the boy is having? Or is he maybe just daydreaming about something and keeping his eyes closed whilst resting?

Where is your best place to sleep? Have you ever slept outside? How does it feel to sleep out in the open air?

- How does it feel when you are really tired?
- How does it feel when you fall asleep?
- How does it feel when you have enjoyed a really restful and deep, long sleep?
- What is the most comfortable place to sleep? And why?
- What do you need to have for a good night's sleep?
- Where is the strangest place you have slept?
- What happens and how does it feel if you have not had enough sleep?
- What is a pleasant place to rest and relax?
- What is a pleasant dream like?



Let's draw!

You can draw just about anywhere! You can draw outside or standing up if you have a solid surface. Many children enjoy drawing whilst lying down. All you need is good paper and pens such as pencils, crayons or felt tips.

At first, the group discusses what is a good place and time to sleep and what the children need in order to sleep well. The group then considers whether there could be tricks or techniques for dreaming sweet and pleasant dreams, and everyone tries to remember their nice dreams.

Then, they draw a dream catcher – a machine that can collect and save fun and wonderful dreams and allows us to choose a specific one before going to bed.

