

Teaching relaxation techniques

Dimension: Self-efficacy

Strategy type: Pupil / Group / Class

Description: Introduce pupils to a range of activities to support relaxation and also to learn about signs of stress and anxiety.

Outcome: Pupils gain knowledge of a range of strategies to use to manage times of dysregulation.

Objective

To enable children to use relaxation techniques to help with self-regulation.

Resources needed

Bubble blowing products

Background

Children should develop self-regulation in order to build their self-efficacy. Self-regulation is the ability to adjust feelings, actions and thoughts, particularly when handling difficult situations. If children are more able to self-regulate, they will be able to handle disappointments and frustrations more easily (Best Start Resource Centre, 2017).

From birth children are supported to self-regulate by their caregivers who actively intervene to remove distress, fear and frustration. As children grow they become more able to inhibit their behaviours when required. People who can regulate their emotional responses are more able to deal with stressful events and are less likely to be overwhelmed. They are able to shift their attention or focus onto more positive concepts or other means of coping (Eisenberg and Sulik, 2012). Self-regulated people often have more energy and are able to be alert or calm in situations around them. They are usually able to deal better with disappointments and upsets that life throws at them. They can also focus on goals about what they want and how to get it.

Description of strategy

Children should be supported to understand what anxiety might feel and look like. During class discussions, children can reflect on times when they were worried; their examples can be backed-up by adults giving examples of their own. Children could be asked to recall how their bodies felt when they were worried, e.g. butterflies in the stomach, sore head, etc., and also what they were thinking, e.g. wanting to run away or hide, not being able to think clearly at all.

There is a wide range of deep breathing relaxation techniques that children can learn to support their self-regulation. These techniques should be practised when the child is not upset or worried so they can easily be put into place when necessary. Examples of relaxation techniques include:

Blowing bubbles: This activity can help to relax children as they have to learn to blow gently in order to stop the bubbles bursting. It can obviously be practised with real bubbles but children can also be encouraged to imagine that they are pretending to blow bubbles. The activity can be used at times when children need to self-regulate without needing to draw attention to themselves.

Teaching relaxation techniques

Pretend to blow up a balloon: Children can pretend to blow up a balloon in their bellies. As they take a slow, deep breath in, their belly will inflate like a balloon; as they breathe out slowly their belly deflates. Children will need to be guided on how long they should breathe in and breathe out for. It is useful to practise this in different positions (lying down, standing up, sitting down) so that children can find out if they prefer a certain position. It also makes them aware that they can use this technique wherever they are (in bed, in a classroom, standing in the queue at lunch time).

Blowing out candles: Children breathe in through their noses for a count of 5 and then blow out of their mouths as if they are blowing out a candle. Remind them to breathe out slowly as they don't want to blow the candles over.

Another resource that can be used to support children with relaxation techniques is Relax Kids: www.relaxkids.com.

What would success look like?

Children are able to use relaxation techniques as part of self-regulation, either independently or with the support of an adult.