

# **Anxiety Reducing Strategies for Young Children & Their Parents**

## **Breathing Techniques**

- Help child relax by slowing down their breathing
- Helps slow heart rate and switch off the body's stress response
- By reducing excessive anxiety, child is better able to listen, think and regain control of themselves

## **Deep Breathing**

- Deep breathing is an effective relaxation strategy because it is always available to children and takes minimal time to complete
- Instruct child to breathe through the nose and out through the mouth as well as expanding their abdomen
- Teach relaxation breathing by placing a sticker or stuffed animal on their belly and have them make it rise and fall as they breath

## **Bubble Blowing Technique**

- Using bubble solution and a wand, have your child blow out slowly and gently to create bubbles
- Wait a couple of seconds before blowing the next bubble
- Practice later without the bubble wand and pretend to blow out bubble together with your child

## **Blowing Out Birthday Candles**

- The child holds up one hand and together with an adult, counts their fingers and pretends they are birthday candles
- Slowly blow out each candle (finger) using a long breath out (3-5 seconds)
- The adult uses their hand as a visual cue to show how long the child blows by slowly moving it away from their body
- Inhale for a count of two and repeat till all candle are blown out

## **Blowing Up a Pretend Balloon**

- Take out an imaginary balloon from a pretend pocket and hold it up to the mouth (cupping hands to imitate a flat balloon)
- Take a deep slow breath in and slowly breathe out
- Move your hands slowly away from each other to show that the balloon is getting bigger
- Repeat 3-5 times
- When finished squeeze the air out the pretend balloon and return the deflated balloon back to the imaginary pocket
- This process ensures that the balloon is available to the child any time they need it

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation Techniques

- Techniques that involve progressively relaxing the body by having child focus their attention on different muscle groups
- Children learn the difference between a tense state and a relaxed state, and how to relax their body when they feel tense
- Older children and adults can follow a script or audiotape that guides them through relaxation training
- Younger children (3 or 4) can use “finger-plays”, simple tense and relax songs or activities

### **Sticky Hands**

- Pretend to apply glue to palms of hands
- Repeat while saying “glue, glue, glue”
- Press hands together with elbows up
- Repeat slowly saying “press, press, press”
- Open hands slowly pretending they are sticky
- Repeat 2-3 times

### **Spaghetti Arms**

- Make a fist and bring to chest (flexed arms)
- Bring shoulders up to ear and make a “squishy face” (tense) and count to 5
- Relax and release arms while saying spaghetti arms
- Repeat 3-5 times

### **Cloud Push**

- Place both hands on hips
- Take 1 arm & push up high towards the sky
- Pretend to push the clouds away by stretching your arm and saying “Push” with each stretch
- Do 3 pushes, then gradually float your arm back down towards your side
- Repeat steps with other arm
- Lastly, do cloud push with both arms at once clasped together (palms up)

## Using Yoga to Help Child Relax

- Yoga helps child develop become mindful of their breathing and aware of their body
- Yoga increases child's self-control
- Yoga techniques instill calmness and relaxation into daily routines
- Yoga postures can be paired with visuals such as pictures, figures or stuffed animals

### Examples of Yoga Positions for Children

#### Crocodile

Lie face down on the floor with arms at sides  
Lift head and chest off the floor  
hold 10-20 seconds

#### Dog

place hands and knees on floor  
Straighten arms & legs so that bottom is up  
Hold for 10-20 seconds

#### Mouse

kneel & sit back on hands  
Lower upper body to the floor until head touches the floor  
Place arms by sides  
Hold 10-20 seconds

## Relaxation Through Play

### *How does play help with my child's anxiety?*

- Provides child a chance to relax and have fun
- Provides child an opportunity to have control over their environment
- Enhances relationship with parent and builds security and trust
- Frees the child from anxious provoking demands & expectations

### *How does the parent play with their child?*

- Choose a "special play time" that can be done daily and without distractions
- Choose toys that promote imagination and role-playing (figurines, doll houses, dolls, castles, puppets, cars, trains, kitchen sets, etc.)
- Let the child lead the play and follow your child's lead
- Avoid directing, asking questions or interfering
- Show interest by being attentive and responsive to child's actions
- Narrate child's actions
- Reflect feelings when appropriate