

Basic Relaxation and Cognitive Strategies

This is a summary sheet that gives you a few techniques you can start to use. On this page is a simple relaxation sequence and the reverse page lists some cognitive strategies. Pick a few and try them so you can get a feel for what works best for you.

Sample Relaxation Sequence

1. Find a quiet relaxing place free from noise and distractions.
2. Sit in a comfortable chair.
3. Take 10 deep breaths, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly.
4. Touch your neck to your chest and slowly roll your head clockwise 3 times. Then roll your head counter-clockwise 3 times
5. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears, hold them there and drop slowly to a relaxed position. Repeat 3 times.
6. Stretch your arms high up into the air, drop slowly to stretch them out to the side and then slowly return them to your side. Repeat 3 times.
7. Lift your right arm in the air and slowly turn it in a big circle, close to your side. Repeat 3 times then repeat entire sequence with left arm.
8. Still sitting, reach over and touch your toes, repeat 3 times.
9. Stretch your right leg and hold it out for several seconds before slowly dropping it to the floor. Repeat 3 times then repeat entire sequence with left leg.
10. Turn your right ankle in a big circle slowly. Repeat 3 times then repeat entire sequence with left ankle.
11. Place feet firmly back on the floor and take 10 deep breaths, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly.

Cognitive Techniques

Thought-stopping

Thought-stopping involves remaining aware of negative thoughts about performance and stopping them as soon as you are aware of them. Example: You realize that you are thinking, “I have a feeling I am really going to mess up this test” and start to think about the potential negative response of your parents. As soon as you are aware you are thinking something negative (unless it is constructive) stop the thought. Stopping the thought will then help to stop the accompanying feeling (anxiety).

Thought replacement

Thought replacement involves replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. It is often a good technique for helping to stop negative thoughts. For example, when you realize you are having negative thoughts, such as in the example above, you replace it with a positive one in the same scenario: “I am feeling confident about my test. When I studied I remembered a lot of the material and I am going to now show what I know.” When you replace this thought, you then have a feeling that is consistent with the positive thought, such as confidence or increased calm.

Problem solving

Prior to a stressful situation, or one that has caused problems in the past, think about what problems may arise. Plan ahead which technique you will use to combat the problem if it arises. Be confident that even if a problem arises you will easily be able to handle it as you planned, “I’ve thought it through and have a plan so I will stay calm and be able to handle whatever comes up.” Again your feelings are then more likely to match your state of mind.