

Counselling Services

LET'S RELAX

Knowing how to decrease tension and relax is almost an essential in the craziness of modern living. For many students this becomes even more crucial around assessment deadlines and examination periods. Here's a simple procedure for you to train yourself to become more physically relaxed and in turn, mentally and emotionally calm. We invite you to try it.

Keep your eyes open for now. The first thing I would like you to do is to understand how it feels to be tense. Clench your hands into fists; squeeze them as hard as you can, feel how tense they are. This is tension and we may say our arms feel tense. Count to 5 as we squeeze them as hard as we can, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, now let go. Feel the tension leave your arms. It feels good, doesn't it? This is how it feels to be relaxed.

To teach you one way to relax we are simply going to use this procedure going through various muscle groups of your body. When I tell you to tighten a certain part of your body, I would like you to concentrate on how that feels when it is tense and compare it with the relaxed feeling that comes when you let go. Gradually, as you work through the various muscles you become more and more relaxed.

First find a comfortable place to lie down or recline in an easy chair, somewhere you will not be disturbed. Check your clothing is not tight ... loosen them if necessary ... take off your shoes, watch and spectacles. Be sure your posture is symmetrical; on your back, legs and arms uncrossed. Now let's begin. Keeping the rest of your body relaxed, wrinkle up your forehead as tight as you can. Feel the tension. Hold it 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Relax, let it go. Experience the relaxing feeling. Take a deep breath, hold it, and now let it go slowly. Repeat this procedure and enjoy the feeling of relaxation in your forehead ... calm peaceful and easy. Now close your eyes as tightly as you can. Make them tighter and tighter. Keep all the rest of your body relaxed. Feel the tension. Hold it, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Relax, let them go. Experience the relaxing feeling. Take a deep breath, hold it, and now let it go slowly. Repeat this procedure and enjoy the feeling of relaxation around your eyes ... peacefully resting, easy, calm and relaxed.

Using this procedure systematically go through tensing and relaxing the following muscle groups in order:

- Your lips, cheeks and lower jaw together.
- Your neck by trying to touch your chest with your chin and at the same time resisting.

OK, now think about your forehead, your eyes, cheek muscles, lips, lower jaw and neck. If there is any tension remaining, go back and repeat the procedure on that part. When you have done this take a deep breath, hold it, then let it go slowly, blowing all tension out of your whole body. Concentrate on the relaxed feeling you have generally in your face. Enjoy the relaxed and comfortable, calm and peaceful feeling in your face as you let go more and more, becoming deeply relaxed.

Now keeping your face, neck and shoulders relaxed, arch your back focussing your attention on the feeling of tension in your chest. Hold it 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Relax, let it go. Experience the relaxing feeling. Take a deep breath, hold it, and now let it go slowly. Repeat this procedure and enjoy the feeling of relaxation as you let your chest muscles go easy, relaxed and resting. Smooth, gentle, regular breathing.

Now stretch your arms out by your sides and press your hands into the floor, down as hard as they will go putting tension on your shoulders ... and repeat the above procedure of tensing and relaxing. Now while your face, chest and shoulder muscles stay limp, make each hand a clenched fist and concentrate on the tension in your hands and forearms. Repeat the procedure of tensing and relaxing. Now let your arms flop at your sides and relax them completely. Check your face, neck and chest muscles. Make sure they are still relaxed. If not, let them go again. Soon

LET'S RELAX (cont.)

you will be able to tell when you have tension in any part of your body, and you will learn that you can always relax and let go of the tension that you may find in any or all parts of your body.

Using the above procedure continue to relax the remaining muscles. They are:

- Your stomach - by trying to make your stomach touch your backbone.
- Your thighs - by simply tensing the muscles.
- Your calf muscles - by pointing your toes and feet out.
- Your ankles and feet - by pointing your toes and feet back towards your shins.
- Your toes - by curling them up.
- Your both legs and feet fully.

Now check back to see if any tension has crept in ... your face ... your neck ... your shoulders ... your chest ... your stomach ... your arms and hands ... your legs, feet and toes. If there is any tension, rid yourself of it by tensing, holding and letting go. Concentrate and enjoy that calm, peaceful at ease feeling that goes with total relaxation. This feeling can be heightened by imagining pleasant, peaceful scenes such as relaxing on the beach, or in the country, or up in the mountains, or in a warm bath - whatever turns you on (or should we say off). Try to imagine it as vividly as possible. It will help you to let go, relax and take it easy and enjoy it.

The next time you begin to feel upset, remember how you feel when relaxed. When you want to relax, think about your forehead muscles, take a deep breath and let go all the tension you found in your forehead. Then go onto the other muscle groups in the same manner. Letting go helps you feel more peaceful and calm - so, if you do get worked up, anxious, upset, and angry or whatever, relax, let go, and listen to the music.

QUT Counselling Services offers professional assistance with this and other issues

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