

Reframing for Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation Response

Simple breath-oriented technique which can be practiced most anywhere:

- Pick a focus word or phrase. (Benson suggests the words "one" or "calm", but any word you find restful will work well.)
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Relax your muscles.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word or phrase as you exhale.
- Continue this simple practice for ten to twenty minutes. Do not worry about how well you are doing. Try to concentrate on your breathing and your focus word. If other thoughts come to mind, gently direct your mind back towards your breathing.

Exercise

When choosing a specific form of exercise for stress management, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it take an hour or less a day?
- Is it possible to do easily and well without a great deal of mental effort?
- Do I enjoy it?
- If I persist in the activity, will I improve myself?
- Can I do it without criticizing myself?

You will be more likely to make a particular exercise format a habit if you can answer yes to the above questions in relation to that exercise.

RESTRUCTURING THOUGHTS

Look for characteristic patterns of cognitive distortions or dysfunctional beliefs.

- Do certain types of situations always tend to trigger certain negative or pressurizing thought patterns?
- Are you a "black and white" thinker when it comes to certain topics?
- Do you typically experience anger or sadness in response to stress?
- Think carefully about what sorts of thinking mistakes you might be making and write these findings down in your thought record under the Disputing column or field.

GUIDED IMAGERY

- Find a private calm space and make yourself comfortable.
- Take a few slow and deep breaths to center your attention and calm yourself.
- Close your eyes.

- Imagine yourself in a beautiful location, where everything is as you would ideally have it. Some people visualize a beach, a mountain, a forest, or a being in a favorite room sitting on a favorite chair.
- Imagine yourself becoming calm and relaxed. Alternatively, imagine yourself smiling, feeling happy and having a good time.
- Focus on the different sensory attributes present in your scene so as to make it more vivid in your mind. For instance, if you are imagining the beach, spend some time vividly imagining the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of the ocean, seaweed and salt spray, and the sound of the waves, wind and seagulls. The more you can invoke your senses, the more vivid the entire image will become.
- Remain within your scene, touring its various sensory aspects for five to ten minutes or until you feel relaxed.
- While relaxed, assure yourself that you can return to this place whenever you want or need to relax.
- Open your eyes again and then "rejoin your world."

RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Create a sense of quiet, stillness, and peace. Similarly, we spend a great deal of time either listening to (or vigorously trying to distract ourselves from) a myriad of thoughts that are rushing around in our minds. Practicing spirituality can give us a quiet respite from all of this rushing around. Time spent meditating, praying, or just appreciating what is around and within us in that given moment can allow space to detach from and find perspective on stressors, enhance our sense of awe at the amazing world that is around us, as well as give us time to gain some or all of the other positive benefits described next.

Give up control. Believing in something greater than ourselves allows us to realize that we aren't responsible for everything that happens in our lives. Bad things and good things will happen no matter what, through no fault (or through no specific effort) of our own. Spirituality can allow us to release (or at least decrease) the need to always blame ourselves for bad times and/or continuously scramble to achieve good outcomes.

Increase meaning. When those inevitable positive and negative events happen, spiritual practice can help us look for a way to think about those events in a meaningful way. Asking "What can I learn?" or "How can I grow stronger?" instead of asking "Why me?" when something bad happens can serve to decrease negative stress feelings and fuel constructive behavior. Similarly, feeling grateful when good things happen can help to spur us to "spread the wealth" and practice altruistic acts toward others.

HELPING OTHERS

Look for opportunities in your community to volunteer, mentor, lend your services or help another person or family. Not only will you help someone in need you'll feel better about yourself as well!

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

For more information and ideas go to <http://www.mentalhelp.net>.

REFERENCE

Adapted from "Reframing In Stressful Times: How To Change Your Thinking" presentation by Ann M. Bassoni, LCSW. For more information, contact Ann M. Bassoni, LCSW at Work + Life Connections, tel. (859) 257-9433 or ann.bassoni@uky.edu.