

Managing Stress Healthfully: Muscle Relaxation

Parent Activity

Overview

Parents will practice progressive muscle relaxation, an easy-to-do stress management technique that they can do anywhere and anytime.

Head Start Parent and Family Engagement (PFE) Outcomes:

- #1 Family Well-being
- #2 Positive Parent-Child Relationships
- #4 Families as Learners
- #6 Family Connections to Peers and Community

Supplies

Quiet environment

Steps

Pre-Activity Discussion: Stress can keep us alert, motivated, and ready to avoid danger. Stress becomes negative when a person faces continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between stressors. As a result, the person becomes overworked, and stress-related tension builds.

An easy-to-use technique you can try when you have stress is called progressive muscle relaxation. Muscle tension is one of the most common physical signs of stress. Doing this exercise regularly will help you to lower your overall tension and stress levels, and help you relax when you are feeling anxious. It can also help reduce physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches, as well as improve your sleep.

Post-Activity Discussion:

Ask: How do you feel? What observations do you have about how your muscles and body feel before, during, and after each part was tensed then relaxed? Do you think this is something you can try on your own when you feel stress?

Activity Instructions

1. To get started, have parents sit comfortably, close their eyes, and let all of their muscles completely relax.
2. Tell parents to take a slow, deep breath while they squeeze all of the muscles in their legs and feet. Squeeze as hard as possible without causing pain and hold for 5 seconds. Make the muscle tension deliberate, yet gentle. If anyone has problems with pulled muscles, broken bones, or any medical issues that would hinder physical activity, have them consult with a doctor before trying this.
3. Next, tell parents to breathe out as they quickly relax their tensed leg and foot muscles letting all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. The muscles will become loose and limp, as the tension flows out.
4. Have parents focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This is the most important part of the whole exercise.
5. Repeat steps 2-4 three more times, focusing on a different part of the body each time.
 - Round 2: Stomach and chest
 - Round 3: Arms, shoulders, and neck
 - Round 4: Face