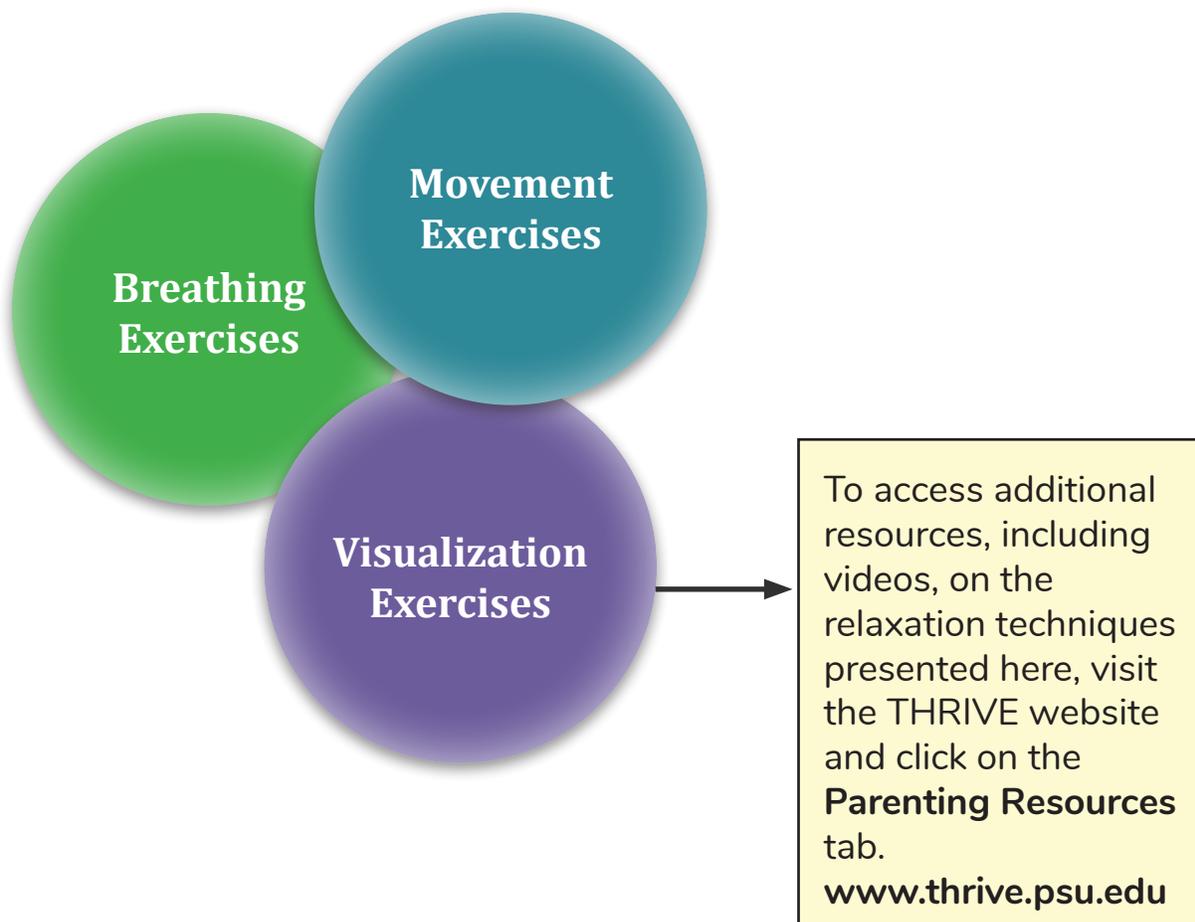


RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

There are many strategies you can use to calm down when experiencing stress, such as using relaxation techniques. Relaxation techniques help to do the following:

- » Lower heart rate and reduce blood pressure
- » Slow breathing and alleviate tension in muscles
- » Decrease stress hormone levels
- » Diminish feelings of anger and frustration
- » Strengthen feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence

A variety of relaxation techniques exist, but, generally, they can be grouped into three categories: breathing exercises, movement exercises, and visualization exercises.



BREATHE TO THRIVE

BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises draw attention to how the body takes in and releases oxygen. Often, people engage in shallow breathing, which restricts the diaphragm and results in important blood vessels not getting enough air. This can cause shortness of breath and feelings of anxiety⁸. Deep breathing, also known as controlled breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, or belly breathing, fills the lungs with air upon breathing in and empties the lungs of carbon dioxide upon breathing out, which helps calm the body.

Deep Breathing

1. Find a quiet and comfortable spot;
2. Sit tall with your hand rested on your lower abdomen;
3. Close your eyes or glance downward;
4. Take a deep breath in through your nose;
5. Feel your diaphragm fully inflate with air;
6. Slowly release the air through your nose or mouth; and
7. Repeat as many times as you desire.

MOVEMENT EXERCISES

Movement exercises focus attention on the body and help individuals become more attuned to their bodily sensations and the connection that exists between the mind and body. Often, these exercises are practiced in conjunction with some type of deep breathing. Specific examples are listed in the table below and on the next page.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The objective of progressive muscle relaxation is to tighten and relax every muscle group in the body in a sequential order. Try the following steps:

1. Sit tall and comfortably place your hands on your lap;
2. Close your eyes or glance downward;
3. Tense the muscles in your feet for 5 seconds and then relax for 30 seconds;
4. Work your way up to your head tensing your muscles for 5 seconds and relaxing for 30 seconds;
5. Work your way from your head back to your feet; and
6. Repeat as many times as you desire.

BREATHE TO THRIVE

Yoga

* Like with any exercise program, you should consult your doctor prior to beginning. Also, the best way to avoid injuries and benefit the most from yoga is to do it with an experienced instructor.

Yoga is an activity that combines body movements with deep breathing and meditation. In addition to its calming effects, yoga also provides physical benefits, such as enhanced balance, flexibility, strength and stamina. If you are interested in trying yoga, here are a few basic poses:

1. Mountain Pose

- Stand up as straight as you can with your legs together (or slightly parted) and your hands at your sides.
- Relax your shoulders and distribute your weight evenly throughout your body.
- As you breathe in deeply, raise your arms out to the side until your hands are above your head with palms facing each other.
- Stretch your fingertips up toward the sky.



2. Seated twist with leg bent

- Sit up straight with your legs stretched out in front of you.
- Bend your left leg so that your left foot is next to your right knee.
- Bend your right arm so that your right elbow is against your left leg.
- Pushing against your leg, try to touch your right leg near the knee.
- Place your left hand on the floor behind you for support.
- Twist your backbone to the left and turn your head as you twist.



3. Upward facing dog

- Lie face down on the floor using your forearms and feet to prop your body up off the floor.
- Bend your arms upward until they are straight while also lowering your pelvis and thighs toward the ground.
- Arch your back and look up making sure to keep your arms and legs straight.
- Do not let your knees touch the ground.
- Place the tops of your feet on the ground.



Rhythmic Exercise

*These types of exercises can be very effective at reducing stress.

When engaging in these exercises, focus your attention on your movements and breathing.

You should check with your doctor before starting any rhythmic exercise program.

Rhythmic exercise includes activities, like running, walking, swimming, or cycling.

BREATHE TO THRIVE

VISUALIZATION EXERCISES

Visualization exercises, known as guided imagery, direct one's mind away from stressful thoughts by shifting one's focus to positive, calming circumstances; experiences; or aspirations. These exercises work well when done in a quiet location and when multiple senses (i.e., sight, sound, touch, smell and taste) are used. The example included in the table below is one way to engage in visualization.

Visualization Example

1. Imagine you are hiking in the woods;
2. See the sun setting behind the mountains in the distance;
3. Listen to the sound of the wildlife around you;
4. Feel the cool breeze against your skin;
5. Savor the smell of the evergreen trees around you; and
6. Enjoy the refreshing taste of cold water.

**Visualization exercises can also help children cope!
Try these relaxation techniques with your child!**

Movement exercises will need to be modified, so they are appropriate and safe for children, and visualization exercises will need to be modified, so they are relevant and engaging. The table below lists two examples of visualization exercises that parents can try with their children.

Instant Vacation

1. Help your children identify their favorite family vacation spot;
2. Have them close their eyes and practice deep breathing;
3. Have them verbally describe what they see, hear, feel, smell and taste;
4. Guide their thoughts and images as necessary to help them stay focused and calm.

Breathing Smiles

1. Have your children sit or lie in a comfortable position;
2. Work with them to practice deep breathing for a minute or two;
3. Transition into the visualization exercise by having them imagine that the next breath they breathe in is in the shape of a smile;
4. Instruct them to send the smile up to their head and to feel their whole head smiling;
5. Continue to do this for the neck, shoulders, arms, back, chest, stomach, and legs.