

Basic Training for Relaxation

Understanding Stress

Before we can recognize the importance relaxation plays in helping us to keep functioning at our peak, some basic relaxation training is necessary.

Materials:

- Large rubber bands
- Paper and pencils
- “Basic Training” activity pages
- “Stressed or Relaxed” activity pages



Objectives:

1. Students will list three reasons for practicing relaxation skills.
2. Students will experience the difference between tension and relaxation.
3. Students will describe the sensation of muscle tension and relaxation.
4. Students will create similes to demonstrate the concepts of tension and relaxation.

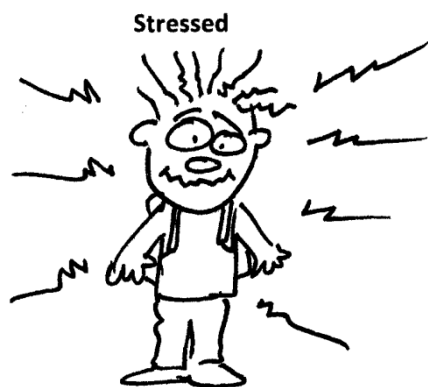
Procedure:

1. Write the word “tense” on the board so that it reflects the feeling of tension. (**TENSE**) Say, “If tense looks like this, show me on your paper what relaxed looks like.” Share student responses.
2. Say, “Our bodies can also be tense or relaxed. Tense muscles restrict the flow of oxygen to our brain which may inhibit our ability to think our best. Think for a moment about what causes you to be tense; then write your answers on the “Basic Training” activity page.” After students have finished, share responses.
3. Hand a rubber band to each student, or use one large rubber band to demonstrate for the class.
4. Say, “All stress isn’t bad. Let’s use a rubber band to demonstrate. If we never put any stretch or stress on the rubber band, what would be the result?” (Answer: The rubber band could not be used or could not do the work it is made to do.) “The same thing is true of our bodies. If no stress is ever experienced, we cannot stretch to reach our potential. **Eustress** is the name given to stress that allows us to acquire new skills and meet new challenges. It is the adrenalin rush that energizes us.”
5. Say, “Think about any times that stress has enhanced your performance. Write them on your activity page.”
6. Stretch the rubber band very tight. Say, “When we stretch the rubber band beyond the point of its elasticity, what might happen?” (Possible answers: It might snap; it might hold for a while and then break; it might not work well.) “Long-term, continuous stress can be hazardous to your health. **Distress** is the name given to the stress that can interfere with our best performance both mentally and physically.”

7. Say, *“Think about any times when stress has negatively affected your performance. Write them on your activity page and then take a moment to share your negative and positive stress examples with a partner.”*
8. Conduct the following experiment:

Say, *“The first step in reducing the negative effects of stress on the body is to develop the ability to feel the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. Everybody stand and hold your arms straight in front of you. As I count to ten, slowly begin to tense and tighten all of the muscles from your fists to your shoulder. Clench your fists and tighten the muscles harder and harder until I reach 10.”*

 - Count slowly from one to 10.
 - Stop periodically and focus attention on how the tension level feels.
 - At ten, hold for a few moments. Emphasize the state of muscle distress, and then have the students slowly relax the tension to the count of ten.
 - Say, *“You have just experienced the difference between tension and relaxation.”*
 - Discuss: *“How did the two compare? What do you think might happen if your body was kept in a continuous state of distress?”*
 - Create a list of class responses. Ask students to write the responses on their “Basic Training” activity page as you write them on chart paper or SMART Board™.
 - When the list is completed, direct students to place a check beside each of the effects that they might have personally experienced. (Possible answers: Physical – headaches, stomachaches, backaches, ulcers, heart attacks, high blood pressure. Mental – nervousness, nail biting, overeating, ticks, lack of concentration, depression, hyperactivity).
9. Say, *“One creative tool for making comparisons is the simile. Let’s create similes of our own for tension and relaxation.”*



Example: As tense as . . .
a bolt of electricity

As relaxed as . . .
an overcooked strand of spaghetti



Basic Training Activity Page

Understanding Stress

1. If tense looks like this, *Tense* what does the word *relaxed* look like? Write it on the line below.

2. What causes you to be tense? Write your responses in the chart below.

3. Name any occasions when stress has positively affected your performance. (**Eustress**)

4. Name any occasions when stress has negatively affected your performance. (**Distress**)

5. List consequences of living in a continuous state of distress.

6. Write similes for tense and relaxed on the lines below.

As Tense as...	As Relaxed as...