



Stress Management: Relaxation Technique— Mental Rehearsal

Humans are unique—we can have physical and mental stress by worrying about an event that has not yet occurred. This type of worry is called “anticipatory stress” and can plague children starting at a very young age. The physiological consequences of this type of stress, when chronic and/or extreme, can be detrimental to our children’s (and our own!) health.

An example of anticipatory stress would be when your child worries about a test at school. They are prepared, they have studied, and they know the material. But they are so worried about taking the test that they do not perform well. Another example is a child who can’t sleep because they are worried about flying on a plane for the first time. Or about getting a cavity filled.

*Anticipatory worry is real, and should not be made light of.
But there are things you can do to help your child, like using a mental rehearsal relaxation technique.*

There are different types of “guided imagination” relaxation techniques. Sometimes, all these techniques are lumped together and called “visualization”. But the term “visualization” can sometimes cause people to feel stress! Instead, think of this relaxation technique as a way to have a mental rehearsal.

Guided Imagination/Visualization = mental rehearsal

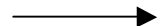
Mental Rehearsal:

- Promotes general relaxation
- Rehearses a specific behavior or experience/situation.
- Can create a sense of control over a future situation or behavior
- Can aid motivation
- Can decrease anxiety/anticipatory stress.
- Is kind of like daydreaming.

You might use Mental Rehearsal:

- To prepare for a test.
- Before the first day of school, or a new job.
- Before discussing a difficult topic with someone.
- To get ready for an athletic event.
- To prepare for a music performance.

NOTE: Guided Imagination is NOT about tricking your child to feel something that they don’t feel. It’s about helping them take a positive, in-control attitude. They still may feel





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scared or nervous about something. But you can help them feel like they can handle those feelings and the situation, and the behavior that the situation demands.

Sample Mental Rehearsal Script: This one is for daycare separation anxiety. But you can change it however you want. It is an example only.

Before you begin (or before you start with your child):

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position, your arms resting at your sides.
- You may want to try a mini “Relaxation Space” technique to relax and get ready. See the “Relaxation Space” tip sheet for details.
- Once you have relaxed a little, and are safely in your “relaxation space”, you can begin the Mental Rehearsal script.

The sample script:

If you are doing this with your child, start by giving positive, loving feedback to show that you are not judging them for their behaviors or worries. Rather, you are supporting and helping them. Start by saying:

- *“I want you to know how much I love you and how proud I am that you are my son/daughter. You are a terrific person and I love spending time with you!”*

Now, you can move into the daydream/rehearsal:

- Pretend that we are driving to school. We are in the car together, and you feel relaxed and calm.
- You look at me and smile: you can handle any situation that comes your way!
- You and I park the car and walk to your classroom. You are feeling happy and confident—this is going to be a good day!
- You look around the classroom and see a toy you’d like to play with. You see your teacher and say “hello” to her.
- You and I kiss and hug goodbye, and you wave to me as I walk to my car. You are calm and happy. We have a terrific goodbye, and you now go and play with your friends.

As with all relaxation techniques, do not attempt to teach this to your child during an episode of stress. Doing this could make things worse! Teach and practice relaxation techniques when you are calm and quiet together.

For more tips, or if you need more information or would like to talk to someone:

In Washington State: Call the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-HOPE

Outside of Washington State: contact your local Circle of Parents agency at

www.circleofparents.org