PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

This strategy is suggested in the 14-16 BrainWaves lessons: **Managing stress** and **Building healthy sleep habits**

About progressive muscle relaxation

Developed by American physician Edmund Jacobson in the 1920s, progressive muscle relaxation is a widely used technique shown to reduce anxiety and tension, as well as improve cognitive function and sleep. Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body. Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing, then relaxing, each muscle group in turn and promotes a strong feeling of physiological relaxation.

The scientific evidence behind progressive muscle relaxation

Research in adults indicates this technique is a beneficial tool for mental health promotion, showing that anxiety, depression, stress, sense of coherence, health related quality of life, and sense of well-being were better managed in those practising progressive muscle relaxation:

- Merakou, K. et al., (2019) The Effect of Progressive Muscle Relaxation on Emotional Competence: Depression-Anxiety-Stress, Sense of Coherence, Health-Related Quality of Life, and Well-Being of Unemployed People in Greece: An Intervention Study. EXPLORE, 15:1, 38-46, DOI: 10.1016/j.explore.2018.08.001

Evidence from a randomised-controlled trial also suggests a reduction in perceived stress and state anxiety, increased levels of relaxation, and decreased heart rate and stress biomarkers, after a single 20-minute session of progressive muscle relaxation in university students.

- Pawlow, L. and Jones, G. (2005) The Impact of Abbreviated Progressive Muscle Relaxation of Salivary Cortisol and Salivary Immunoglobulin A (sIgA). Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback, 30:4, DOI: 10,1007/s10484-005-8423-2

Further reading

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This article from NHS MindWell walks you through a progressive muscle relaxation exercise: https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/myself/looking-after-your-wellbeing/take-time-to-relax/%e2%80%8bprogressive-muscular-relaxation-pgmr/

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