

and risky behaviors while others suffer from more internalizing disorders like anxiety and depression.

Chapter 2 outlines a variety of easily used relaxation techniques including muscle relaxation, imagery and music. The role of positive self-talk techniques is also explored.

Chapter 3 provides a framework for using the intervention techniques discussed in a variety of settings including home, school and clinic. Several detailed case histories are also discussed.

RELAX.calm—Facilitator’s Guide explains how to use the *RELAX.calm* scripts as a treatment intervention or self-help tool.



RELAX

INTRODUCTION

RELAX.calm offers teens a toolbox of self-soothing relaxation skills including guided imagery, muscle relaxation and positive self-talk.

Today's adolescents worry more than most adults might suspect. Those of us in the "trenches" working with children and adolescents know that, although many young people do receive some type of adult professional help,¹ many are not receiving enough psychotherapy and many others are going undiagnosed. The traditional individual therapy approach cannot adequately deal with the large number of youth suffering from stress-related problems. Typically, only the most severe cases receive attention. The majority of teens who feel anxious or stressed are suffering through the experience the best they can. Others begin to use substances to find relief. Helping professionals understand the importance of aiding teens in developing techniques to help them deal with the stress in their lives. Stress presents as specific psycho-physiologic patterns occurring in children and teens, including anxiety, headaches, sleep-disturbance and attention problems.^{2,3} It is also a contributing factor for depression and substance abuse.

Stress is exacerbated when we feel no outlet for frustration and no sense of control. *RELAX.calm* (pronounced relax-dot-calm), gives teens a sense of control over stress by giving them a "tool box" of relaxation skills, such as guided imagery, muscle relaxation, and positive self-talk, that help them self-soothe. Teens come to realize with practice that they can release tension rather than allow it to increase.

We developed the *RELAX.calm* program as an intervention and prevention tool to help enhance the physical and emotional well-being of adolescents. The program can also be used as an adjunct treatment for a variety of emotional

problems along with traditional psychotherapy. *RELAX.calm* can be used by therapists, physicians, educators and parents in many different therapeutic settings, in schools, and at home.

As the following chapters discuss, the effectiveness of using relaxation strategies incorporating muscle relaxation, music, imagery and positive self-talk has been demonstrated in a broad range of scientific studies. For example, relaxation techniques have been shown to improve students' self-management skills, decrease state anxiety, increase social interaction skills, improve self-concept, increase attentiveness, reduce test anxiety, raise test scores and achievement, and establish a self-belief that they can be in control of their problems.^{4-5,6,7} In addition, numerous studies have shown the benefit of using these techniques to hasten healing from illness or injury and to manage anxiety related to particular treatments for illness.⁸ Those of us who use these techniques in our own practices know that they work. I've used the strategies outlined in *RELAX.calm* successfully with clients of all ages over the past 30 years. What I like most about these techniques is the generalization effect. I've had numerous children and adolescents stay in touch with me by e-mail and continue to report using their relaxation and positive self-talk list years after therapy ended. They feel empowered and have been able to apply the techniques learned in therapy years earlier to new problems and stressors in their lives. The case studies in Chapter 3 are compelling illustrations of the efficacy of using relaxation techniques to address a range of anxiety-related problems in children and adolescents.

In almost all cases, the relaxation techniques found in this book are eagerly learned by young people and easily administered. This valuable treatment and prevention tool is too often overlooked. Our hope is that if you are not using these strategies in your clinical practice, at home or in the classroom that you will give them a try.

The *RELAX.calm* program is intended to help teens:

- understand the negative effects of stress
- develop an awareness of muscle tension and relaxation
- identify stressors in their lives
- learn skills and techniques that will help them relax and reduce tension

Muscle relaxation, music, imagery and positive self-talk reduce test anxiety and raise test scores and achievement, and establish an internal locus of control.