

# HELPING *your* TEEN *to* CALM THEIR MIND *and* BODY

Getting teens to slow down can be a challenge in today's fast-paced digital world, and being told to "just relax" can make an anxious teen feel worse. But you can turn those words, "just relax," into a powerful tool for your teen by teaching them the skills to do that. When a teen learns ways to calm down and think more clearly, they will be better able to manage their stress and life's challenges.

Actively relaxing does not mean using a distraction, like watching TV or scrolling through social media, to "zone out." It means taking intentional steps to bring the mind and body into a more relaxed state. Making regular time for relaxation can help make life a little easier for your whole family.



## How you can help

**Encourage practice.** It is common for a teen to try a relaxation exercise once and report that it wasn't helpful. As with any new skills, relaxation exercises need to be practised before they start to feel more natural. Encourage your teen to try each exercise a few times.

**Practise with them.** Your teen may also prefer to try relaxation exercises with someone other than you, like another trusted adult or a friend, and that's okay.

**Get creative together.** Try different ways to relax. The important thing is that your teen feels empowered and knows they have many different tools to draw from.

**REMEMBER:** The way you manage stress yourself has a big influence on your teen.



## Relaxation exercises for your teen to try

### Breathing exercises

When we are anxious, we take short and shallow breaths in our upper chest, which can make us feel even more anxious. Research shows that breathing more slowly and deeply is one of the quickest ways to manage stress and calm ourselves. Teach your teen to take deep, slow breaths when they're feeling anxious. Just a few deep breaths can provide an instant calming effect that can help reduce stress. To find out more, see the EASE 8-12 student resource [Breathing Exercises to Calm Your Mind and Body](#).

### Progressive muscle relaxation

Stress and anxiety can cause our muscles to tighten in places like our shoulders, neck and jaw. And it's a feedback loop: the tighter these muscles feel, the more stressed out we feel. Letting go of that tension through progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) can be a simple way to let go of stress. PMR involves tensing and relaxing one group of muscles at a time. By the time your teen is done, all of their muscles should be relaxed. You can find guided PMR exercises on many free videos and phone apps, and on websites like [Anxiety Canada](#).



## Mindfulness meditation

Learning how to slow down through mindfulness-based exercises or meditation can help us both physically and emotionally. These practices are meant to help clear our minds of unwanted thoughts and encourage us to focus on the present moment. This can bring us into a more relaxed state. Many short guided meditations and mindfulness exercises are available on free apps like [Breathr](#) and the web page [Guided Mindfulness Meditations](#) by Dr. Vo, both from Kelty Mental Health. Pediatrician Dr. Dzung X. Vo has also written a book for teens, called [The Mindful Teen](#).

## Guided imagery

Have you ever closed your eyes and imagined yourself lying on a warm sandy beach, or somewhere familiar where you feel calm and safe? Using imagery (or visualization) can be a powerful tool for letting go of physical and mental tension. Most people prefer to have a voice guiding them through a visualization. Many free audio and video resources are available, including these [audio meditations](#) from AboutKidsHealth.

## Yoga and gentle stretching

Yoga and gentle stretching exercises offer many physical and mental health benefits, such as improved posture, greater flexibility and a sense of inner calm. Stretching and moving can trigger “feel-good” chemicals in your teen’s brain that can make them feel better. Maybe you can attend a yoga class with your teen or use some free online yoga or gentle stretch videos, like [Yoga for Teens](#).

## Other soothing tools for teens (and for you)

- Playing music or a podcast
- Using squishy balls, worry rings and fidget gadgets – reduce tension and channel stress into something physical
- Writing or drawing worries – get them out of their head and see things more objectively
- Sleeping with weighted blankets – the extra weight on the body can release the “happy chemical” (serotonin) in the brain, and can sometimes help with sleep
- Pampering with a bath or shower, or rubbing a scented lotion on their hands
- Doing whatever brings your teen joy or purpose (like baking, crafting or volunteering) – contributing to the community can be especially good for mental health



To access more resources, go to [www.healthymindsbc.gov.bc.ca/8-12-resources](http://www.healthymindsbc.gov.bc.ca/8-12-resources).



Everyday  
Anxiety  
Strategies for  
Educators