

Laura C. Strom, PsyD

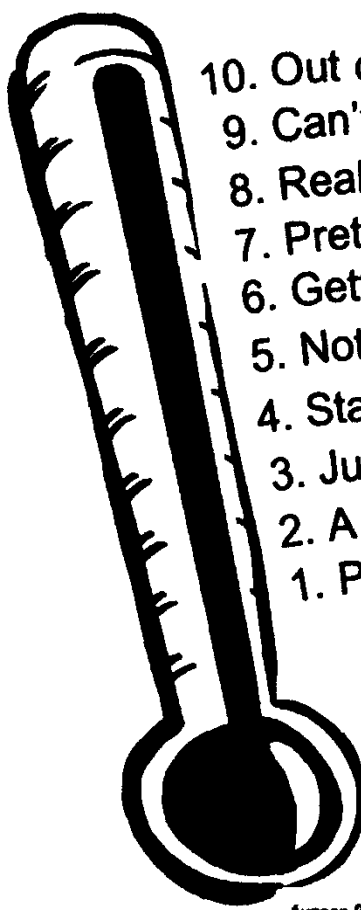
Trauma & Disabilities Specialist
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist LMFT49174
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Registered Play Therapist RPT 3178

Take Your Temperature!

Your name goes here!

Use this great Feeling Thermometer to monitor your mood!
Is it a 5 or more? Time to do something to bring it down.
Start with a long, slow, deep breath...

The _____ Thermometer



10. Out of Control! Ballistic!
9. Can't Handle It.
8. Really Tough.
7. Pretty Tough.
6. Getting Tough.
5. Not too Good.
4. Starting to Bother.
3. Just a Little Uneasy.
2. A Little Twinge.
1. Piece of Cake!

Aureen P. Wagner Ph.D. Copyright 2001

What are your tools to bring down your temperature?

Start with 1) Long Slow Deep Breathing, 2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation and 3) Guided Imagery. Now add your own: exercise, art, yoga, talk to a friend, take a bath, play with a pet, etc. List them here: 4) _____ 5) _____

6) _____ 7) _____

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3 Easy Steps to Cure Anxiety! *By Laura Strom*

Remember that old adage, take a deep breath when you're upset? It turns out those old wives knew what they were talking about because that's the number one way to shut down the body's anxiety response as it ratchets up.

Heightened anxiety, panic or even a fight or flight reaction are caused by chemical messengers from the brain telling the heart to beat stronger and faster, and to divert blood into your arms and legs so you can fight or run. That same reaction sharpens your eyesight and hearing, and takes blood away from non-essential systems like digestion often causing nausea.

When we are startled the first response is a gasp. That sharp intake of breath hyper-oxygenates the blood in your lungs allowing a better quality of blood to be immediately sent to your limbs so you are ready for action. Over time, heightened stress is associated with problems in every body system from causing acne and headaches to nausea, joint aches, acid reflux, chest pains and heart problems.

1) Long Slow Deep Breathing stops the physiological process of anxiety, panic and fight/flight.

Here's the trick. Sit up straight with your shoulders back to fully expand your lungs. Take a long slow deep breath. Then exhale twice as slow as the inhale, taking several seconds to do it. This is an important signal to your brain that the danger has passed. It interrupts the flow of chemical messengers telling the heart to beat faster, and allows blood to return to other systems and decrease to the extremities. *Your body cannot have a fear reaction at the same time it is relaxed. Commencing with long slow deep breaths informs the body danger is over and it is safe to relax.*

Many people also feel calmer when doing long slow deep breathing, but some do not. Luckily, progressive muscle relaxation works for everyone. It is a technique in which you tighten various muscle groups, holding each for a few seconds and then return to a relaxed state.

2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation works for 100% of people to relax them!

Start by pretending you are picking up two lemons. Now squeeze them as hard as you can. Tighten your hands, arms and chest muscles and hold this position for three seconds. Now relax your hands and arms and wait a few seconds before doing this at least two more times.

You can point your toes, squeeze your calves, thighs, and buttocks, focusing on tightening each area for three seconds, then relaxing it. Suck in your stomach, hold it, and then relax. Raise your shoulders towards your ears with your hands at your side, and then drop them down. Pretend you have a fly on your nose and you can only get it off by crinkling up your face, then relaxing your face. This last one may seem silly, but actually we hold a lot of tension and worry in our facial muscles and sometimes forget how to relax them. If you have injuries, skip those areas, or alter these exercises to something that is comfortable and relaxing for you.

Lastly, have a good stretch. Find a low backed chair, bring your arms over your head and allow your head, shoulders and arms to hang over the back of the chair. Find yourself looking at the wall behind you upside down. Come back up and then do this two more times. It is easy for kids to lean back over their school desks, and common for teachers to scold them for doing it! If you have trouble with mobility, simply stretch to the best of your ability.

3) Guided imagery really works!

Now try guided imagery and visualization. Take another slow breath and close your eyes while sitting or lying in a relaxed position. Imagine you're at a favorite place in nature, perhaps the beach, the redwoods, or on a mountain; make it as real as you can. Imagine the wind, the sun's warmth, and the smells. Take a few minutes when you are completely silent, eyes closed, to enjoy your sacred inner landscape.

These three techniques together –

1) Long Slow Deep Breathing 2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation and 3) Guided Imagery - are key components in relaxing the body, reducing stress and anxiety, and can be done at work, school, or even in bed. Try them next time you're awake at 2 am. Add a smile, and a laugh and you've got a recipe for relaxation and stress reduction!

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