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MAINTAINING HEALTH THROUGH RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Abstract

Our school is participating in the national project Slovenian healthy school network.

We live in a time when everything happens fast. We have a constant feeling of time running out and not making the most of every single moment. Even when we do take time for ourselves, we feel the need to make the most out of every moment, which leads to even more stress.

I wanted to inform 6th to 9th -grade students about the importance of everyday relaxation for mental and physical health. I showed them various relaxation techniques in the hope that everyone finds what works for them.

Keywords: relaxation techniques, partial relaxation, gradual muscle relaxation, visualization, counting relaxation.

INTRODUCTION

In this school year, our school joined the Slovenian healthy school network. At the mentors' training, I was again introduced to the importance of preventing stress and caring for a more relaxed working day.

We live in a time when everything happens fast. We constantly have the feeling that every minute is precious and that every moment must be wisely used. Due to the constant lack of time, we want to make the best use of the time we take for ourselves. Sometimes these minutes put us in even more stress.

I wanted to inform 6th to 9th -grade students about the importance of everyday relaxation for mental and physical health. I showed them various relaxation techniques in the hope that everyone finds what works for them.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Partial relaxation

We started learning to relax with a technique called partial relaxation. I became acquainted with this method of relaxation at a seminar for teachers in the healthy schools project in Ljubljana.

Students first learn to consciously relax their whole body and each part of the body.

They do the exercise in pairs. The first classmate holds his classmate's left hand and the classmate tries to relax it completely so that he shifts his hand's weight to that of the first classmate. If he has relaxed completely, his hand will fall freely on his leg when it is released after a certain time. The exercise is repeated until the activity succeeds. We do the exercise with the other hand and then the classmates switch roles.

Gradual muscle relaxation or progressive muscle relaxation

We continue with a method called gradual muscle relaxation or progressive muscle relaxation.

During this exercise, we systematically relax individual muscle groups by tensing and then releasing only a certain muscle group, the other muscles remain relaxed. We pay attention to the feeling of tension, followed by relaxation (Adamič, Pavlovič, 2000, p. 14). Once we master the exercise, we will be able to tense only those muscles that are necessary for a certain activity. In our body, we will be able to recognize the contraction of muscles in a certain part of the body and also relax it. In this way, we will be able to avoid many disease states (Zagorc, 2003, p. 31).

We start relaxing by sitting comfortably in a chair, resting our hands in our lap, straightening our back, and breathing in a relaxed manner. We close our eyes and take a few deep breaths. Breathing is then calmed down and we continue to breathe in a relaxed manner through the diaphragm all the time (Dust, 2015, pp. 60-61). We focus on ourselves and our bodies. We focus on the sensations in the muscles. We let our thoughts wander freely. Once we have mastered this relaxation technique, we will have no problem directing our attention to a particular muscle group (Adamič, Pavlovič, 2000, p. 14).

We turn our thoughts to our palms.

We raise our hands towards ourselves and clench our fists for five seconds, then release them. We count to ten and repeat the exercise. We breathe in a relaxed manner all the time, evenly, we do not hold our breath while tensing our muscles. We pay attention to how the palms and entire forearms are relaxed.

In our mind we travel along the upper arms, which we press hard against the back of the chair and keep the tension in the muscles for five seconds, relax and count to ten, then repeat the exercise. Breathing is relaxed. We become aware of the feeling of relaxation in our arms.

We wrinkle our forehead by raising our eyebrows high. We hold for five seconds and relax for ten seconds, then repeat the exercise. We observe the difference between tense and relaxed forehead.

Focus on the lower part of the forehead by pushing the eyebrows as far down as possible or by frowning. Only the muscles of the lower forehead are tense. The remaining muscles of the face and body remain relaxed. We hold the muscles tense for five seconds, relaxed for ten seconds and we repeat the exercise. We are aware that our forehead is relaxed.

We turn our attention to the eyes by squeezing them shut for five seconds, letting go for ten seconds, and repeating the exercise. Make sure the squeezing is not painful.

In our minds, we go to our lips. We squeeze them tightly without squeezing the teeth or the jaw. Hold tense for five seconds and release for ten seconds. Then repeat the exercise. Breathing is calm at all times.

Then we focus on the jaw. We squeeze the jaws tightly together, push the corners of the mouth towards the ears, and show our teeth as if laughing. The muscles are tense again for five seconds and relaxed for ten seconds. We repeat the exercise.

Then we pay attention to the neck, pushing the chin slowly and carefully towards the chest. We do not touch the chest with the chin. We hold the tension for five seconds and then relax and look straight ahead and repeat the exercise. We breathe calmly all the time.

We focus on the shoulders, lifting them towards the ears as if we wanted to touch them. The muscles are tense for five seconds, then relaxed for ten seconds and then the exercise is repeated. We become aware of the feeling of relaxation throughout the neck.

Focusing on the chest we inhale vigorously and hold our breath. The tension is rising. We hold our breath for five seconds and relax for ten seconds. Then we repeat the exercise.

Pushing the abdominal muscles as far inward as possible we breathe into the chest. After five seconds, release the tension and repeat the exercise after ten seconds.

In our minds, we go to our legs and squeeze our knees tightly together. The thighs are taut. Breathing is calm. The tension is released after five seconds. We relax for ten seconds and then repeat the exercise.

Finally, we turn our attention to the lower part of the legs and feet. Stretch your legs slightly forward. Lift your toes off the ground and pull them towards your knees. We feel the tension in the calf muscles. After five seconds, relax the muscles and repeat the exercise after ten seconds.

Towards the end of the method, we become aware of feelings of relaxation throughout the body by traveling in our mind from the head, neck, chest, abdomen, pelvis, and legs to the toes. We breathe in a relaxed manner. If we feel any tension, we try to remove it. Take three

deep breaths and exhale. We move with our fingers and toes. In our minds, we count back from five to one and when we say the last number, we slowly open our eyes. Our breathing is still calm. Individual muscles and the whole body are now relaxed. We feel peace and harmony. We are aware of our inner strength and life energy. We trust ourselves. In the mind, we count back from five to one and when we say the last number, we slowly open our eyes (Prah, 2015, pp. 60 - 63; Adamič, Pavlovič, 2000, pp. 14-16).

Visualization and sensitization

Physical and mental tension can also be reduced by the power of thought imagining a pleasant place from nature, listening to pleasant music, envisioning oneself as a successful person at work, as a good parent, partner, etc. (Tušak, Blatnik, 2017, pp. 222 - 225).

In our minds, we can imagine everything that calms us down. Let your imagination run wild. We don't bother with what we have to imagine. It is only important that our thoughts are positive and relaxing (Prah, 2015, p. 74). If we want to make our visualization as experiential as possible, we must include as much of our senses as possible in addition to visual information (Tušak, Blatnik, 2017, p. 222).

We start the exercise by first concentrating on breathing. In our minds, we check the whole body and release any tension we feel. We can imagine that all the tension and negative thoughts gather in the lungs and are removed from the body by exhalation. Then we travel with our thoughts to a safe place where we can be calm. We observe the place by painting as many pleasant impressions as possible about it. When we finish the exercise, we move our thoughts back into space and take a stand, I am here now (Prah, 2015, pp. 74 - 78).

We first did a visualization of a safe place, a visualization of the beach, and a visualization of a meadow with the students. I did the exercise in two ways, by reading the text to the students myself and by using a CD, which included music in addition to the text.

I also introduced the students to the techniques we can use to help ourselves when we are in a hurry. These are quick ways of relaxation that students can use before written and oral assessments and presentations, but also when dealing with difficult relationships, conflict situations, etc.

Rapid muscle relaxation

In this exercise, we systematically tense one muscle group after another and then relax it. The exercise can be performed sitting or lying down. First, sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths and exhale. This is followed by a deep breath through the nose and holding the air for ten to twenty seconds. We have all the muscles from head to toe as tense as possible all the time. We resist with all our might against the ground below us. Then we exhale through the mouth and relax the whole body (Dust, 2015, pp. 79 - 80).

Relaxation of inactive muscles

Nowadays, it often happens that our muscles are tense even though they are not active. In this way, we waste energy unnecessarily, increase tension in our body, and all this often leads to muscle contractions. If we learn relaxation techniques, we will be able to distinguish between the feeling of tense and relaxed muscles. When we detect tension in a certain part of the body, we will be able to alleviate this tension and thus contribute to reducing stress or exhaustion. We can also help ourselves by using the password of relaxation, which brings feelings of softness and calmness into our bodies. We design the password ourselves in such a way that it will connect us with relaxation, peace, and a state of carefreeness (Prah, 2015, pp. 79 - 80).

Relaxation by counting

We do the exercise by counting from one to ten. With each number, we imagine that the body is calmer. Take a few deep breaths and exhale (Dust, 2015, pp. 79 - 80).

At one and two we imagine how the hands and palms become heavier, at three and four we move our thoughts to the face which is becoming more and more relaxed, five and six relax the muscles of the abdomen, chest and back, seven and eight bring relaxation to legs and feet, at nine and ten the whole body is relaxed (Prah, 2015, pp. 79 - 80).

CONCLUSION

Students have mastered individual relaxation techniques quickly. Some had a little more difficulty concentrating and following instructions. I realized that students are very disturbed by their surroundings. It took a lot of effort to get the students to focus on themselves.

The visualization, which was guided via a CD, lasted 10 minutes. Students in 6th grade found the exercise too long and individual students began to get bored while relaxing. I then did the exercise with the younger students for only five minutes, so I read the text to them myself. I conclude from this that students in 6th grade are not yet able to follow the instructions together for so long.

The most motivated for all the relaxation techniques were the students in the ninth grade who asked me to do the relaxation exercises many a time. At first, I thought it was probably because they wanted to avoid dealing with new matter. However, after a month, I realized that was not the case. When we were doing the visualization at the end of the lesson and the school bell rang, we continued the release. The students were in no hurry.

It also happened that one student was unable to follow the instructions and thus disturbed the concentration of the others. At the end of the technique, several students were angry at him.

I am very satisfied with the set work because I think I showed the students how their days could be more relaxed despite the burdens that a working day brings.

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