

Relaxation Response

The MGH Relaxation Response was a truly wonderful opportunity for Hanover to start building a more targeted system of intervention around the extremely high levels of stress and anxiety our kids (and adults in our schools) present with daily. It offered real strategies and techniques for us to think about stress reduction as it pertains to both our own lives, and the lives of the kids we work with. Since attending these trainings, I have been using the tools I have learned in many ways, and I would like to share some of those with you.

As we all know, state-wide testing can be a very stressful time for kids, and this year was no different. Using the Chair Yoga we learned, I was able to teach the kids in all fourth grade classrooms and most third grade classrooms an explicit strategy for relaxation before and during testing. We posted visuals in every classroom of the strategies, and many students reported that they used the strategies, and that they helped. Classroom teachers also reported seeing children use the strategies.

In individual counseling, I work with a number of students with very high levels of anxiety. With a handful of these students, we have been working our way through many of the different breathing and relaxation exercises on the CD we received from the training, and have been rating each activity based on what works for them. The students have been reporting using the exercises, and having felt an overall reduced level of stress.

The training also involved teaching us a number of “minis,” or quick, short versions of relaxation techniques. These are perfect for use in the classroom, and kids and teachers alike love them. One of the most useful minis has been square breathing. I have found many kids really enjoy this technique, and find it useful in helping them take a momentary break to relax. In fact, one fourth grade classroom is using this or another mini before every assessment in the classroom, since there were so many children experiencing test anxiety. That has helped to normalize the use of these strategies, and incorporate it into everyday life.

Moving forward, Maura Dowling, our school nurse, and I have talked about how we would like to build a small toolbox of these strategies to teach in every classroom in the beginning of the year. It is our hope that if everyone knows them and is teaching them, we can reduce some of the overall stress levels for our kids and ourselves.

It has been extremely rewarding to use these strategies, and watch them work for kids. I am so grateful for the training we received, and hope we can continue to build on it!

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