

# **Relaxation Enhancement Therapist Manual**

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**VA Medical Center, New Orleans  
Trauma Recovery Program  
2006**



**A product of the Department of Veterans Affairs South Central  
(VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education & Clinical Center  
(MIRECC)**

## **Acknowledgements**

The development of this manual was supported by a Clinical Education grant from the South Central (VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC). We thank the MIRECC for their continued support in disseminating this manual. For additional copies, contact Dr. Michael Kauth at [Michael.kauth@med.va.gov](mailto:Michael.kauth@med.va.gov).

## Background and Development of the Relaxation Enhancement (RE) Manual

Past research demonstrates that relaxation techniques are efficacious for decreasing anxiety and fear in patients with Anxiety disorders<sup>1</sup>. These techniques are often included as part of treatment protocols for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>2,3</sup> To date little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of relaxation techniques beyond the therapeutic environment.<sup>4</sup>

Practice wisdom supports our belief that veterans in group treatment for PTSD do not adhere to the prescribed relaxation strategies outside of the therapeutic environment for a variety of reasons: for example understanding rationale for using relaxation techniques, salience of the materials presented, and patient motivation. Our goal is to improve veteran compliance with this treatment tool.

There are several variables that explain why veterans do not practice relaxation strategies once they leave the group session:

- 1). Limited understanding of the role relaxation techniques play in helping them achieve treatment goals
- 2). Poor salience of the stimulus materials presented (e.g., stranger's voice, using a taped relaxation strategy)
- 3). Availability of equipment to practice relaxation outside of the group session
- 4). Lack of a specific plan regarding how and when to apply these strategies
- 5). Lack of positive feedback when strategies are appropriately applied and little opportunity to problem solve when difficulties arise.

To target these potential treatment barriers we developed and implemented a comprehensive *Relaxation Enhancement (RE)* protocol. The RE protocol includes: 1). a standard rationale for using relaxation

techniques that is discussed in group and a copy provided to the patients for reference based on various writings of experts in the field of anxiety and PTSD<sup>2,3,5,6</sup>; 2). relaxation practices<sup>2,5,6</sup> taught in session and conducted by the group leader, rather than via a tape recording. 3). audiocassette or compact disc recordings of these practices made available to the patient to ensure the proper equipment is available for their use; 4). a strategy for listening to the tapes outlined with each patient, including time of day, number of practices per week, and potential barriers to practicing the techniques outside of group treatment. Barriers encountered by the patients are discussed in the group. 5) a Relaxation Log/wallet card used to reinforce improvement in anxiety and tension by the veteran and to track use of the strategies for the group leader.

#### References:

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2. Foa, E. B., Rothbaum, B. O. (2001). *Treating the trauma of rape: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD*. Guilford Press: New York.
3. Barlow, D. H. (2002). *Anxiety and its disorders: The nature and treatment of anxiety and panic*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Guilford Press: New York.
4. Taylor, S., Thordarson, D. S., Maxfield, L., Fedoroff, I. C., Lovell, K., Ogrodniczuk, J. (2003). Comparative efficacy, speed, and adverse effects of three PTSD treatments: Exposure therapy, EMDR, and relaxation training. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 71, 330-338.
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## Group Structure and Content

The RE group consists of four 50-minute sessions held once weekly. The first 25 minutes of each session is psychoeducational. This format allows the therapist to enhance salience and motivation. Group content is based on a compilation of techniques, drawn from the writings of experts working in the field. The references for these books are listed above. We suggest that clinicians use these references for additional understanding of the anxiety response and relaxation techniques.

Some portions of the patient manual are purposely left blank. Encourage your patients to use this space to take notes on the information being presented didactically.

The second portion of the RE group is devoted to learning and practicing one of four relaxation techniques, each proven efficacious in the reduction of anxiety. Inclusion of four different techniques maximizes exposure to a variety of relaxation methods.

These techniques include, calm breathing<sup>2</sup> (session 1), deep muscle relaxation<sup>2</sup> (session 1), visualization<sup>5</sup> (session2)\*, self-guided imagery<sup>5</sup> (session 3) and grounding, introduced during the practice portion of session 4.

Assignment of the Relaxation Log (RL) is an important component of the RE protocol. The rationale and importance of the Log is explained during the first session and reinforced during each of the remaining sessions. Patients are informed that we will discuss log entries during each of the remaining group sessions.

The authors of this manual used a wallet size Relaxation Log (RL), to increase the likelihood that patients will use the log and bring them to group each week. The content and format of the card is below. Because our group was held on a Wednesday, the log week began on this day. In

session, patients would mark with an X the relaxation techniques practiced in session. They were then instructed to place an X on any day additional relaxation techniques were practiced outside of session to track their adherence to the protocol.

	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.
Calm Breathing							
Deep Muscle							
Visualization							
Self guided-imagery							

\* Of note, in the source reference<sup>5</sup> Visualization is titled Self-Hypnosis and Self Guided Imagery is Sunlight Meditation. The names were changed for this manual, due to the lengthy explanation required in groups when the term Hypnosis was used. The authors of this manual felt that changing the name would cut down on the discussion time in session and ease patient biases against hypnosis. No changes to the technique or explanation of the technique were made.

## **Session 1: Outline**

### **DIDACTIC:**

- I. Discuss the definition of Stress based on Handout.
- II. Discuss how managing stress is especially important for veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD due to characteristics/risk factors such as gender, race, age, and psychiatric illness.
  - A. P T *Stress* D
  - B. Use the analogy of the body as an engine
  - C. Short and long term consequences of unchecked anxiety
- III. Discuss an overview of how this group will address managing stress
  - A. Understanding
  - B. Using the SUDs to increase awareness
  - C. Relaxation Techniques
- IV. Discuss the format of the group including the importance of between session practices. The Relaxation Log is used to record these practices.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION:**

- I. Have patients share a SUDs level verbally.
- II. Teach Calm Breathing; have patients choose a soothing word and write it on the handout.
- III. Give Rationale for Deep Muscle Relaxation (DMR).
- IV. Practice Deep Muscle Relaxation.
- V. Have patients give you a SUDs rating aloud.
- VI. Have patients complete a Relaxation Log by putting a mark in the Calm breathing and DMR boxes for that day.

## SESSION 1

### Group Purpose.

To increase patient understanding of anxiety and introduce anxiety reduction through lecture and practice application of relaxation techniques.

### Defining stress.

Stress= tension, hassle, worry, strain, nervousness, ANXIETY

Anxiety affects 3 areas:

1. Physiological—heart palpitations, rapid breathing, muscle tension, sweating, trembling
2. Psychological—apprehension or uneasiness
3. Behavioral—inability to act, express yourself or cope with daily situations

This Stress Management group will focus primarily on reducing the physiological manifestations of Anxiety. However, we will discuss psychological and behavioral areas, and these will be addressed later in other PTSD groups. The good news is that decreasing the physiological aspects of anxiety will help to reduce the psychological and behavioral.

### Why Manage Stress?

What does P.T.S.D. stand for? Posttraumatic STRESS disorder—

PTSD is an Anxiety Disorder, meaning that stress/anxiety is a component of it. While Anxiety is an inevitable part of life, there is a difference between worry and nervousness and an anxiety disorder. Most times it is appropriate and reasonable to experience some anxiety. If you didn't, something would be wrong. Anxiety propels us to action.

Anxiety disorders (e.g., Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive, or Panic Disorder) are different than normal anxiety in that 1) the anxiety is more intense and, 2) it persists for longer periods or is more frequent. This type of anxiety may lead to Avoidance, which thereby constricts your life.



**Our body is our engine.**

Imagine your body as an engine that idles high. When an engine idles high, what happens to it? (encourage veterans to answer). Yes, it burns out faster; there are more problems. So if our body is an engine what will happen to it? (veterans answer)-- it also has more wear and tear/problems.

What if you were able to turn off or lower the idle of that engine for 20-30 minutes a day? What would happen over the course of the life of that engine? (veterans answer). Yes, the life of the engine would be extended. If we can reduce the wear and tear on our bodies, they will perform better and may last longer. If we don't try to control our stress reactions, what might happen?...

**The Short and Long of It.**

There are many long and short-term consequences of unchecked anxiety:

Consequences	Short Term	Long Term
Physical	Headaches, muscle tension, nervousness, sweaty palms, trembling, shortness of breath, stomach pain, GI distress	Heart problems, hypertension, high blood pressure, ulcers
Emotional	Apprehension, fear	Isolation from others, loneliness, depression
Behavioral	Avoidance of situations that increase anxiety	Restricted activity, limited enjoyment

While there is some stress in our lives that we can not control, we can learn to reduce the stress response related to PTSD.

### **How will this group help me?**

This group will teach you about all aspects of stress and anxiety. Equally as important, it will teach you to reduce your body-engine's idle through inducing relaxation. Relaxation is the key to reducing your body's stress level and making it perform better and maybe even last longer.

You will learn 3 different Relaxation Techniques that you can use to combat stress: Deep Muscle Relaxation, Visualization, and Self-guided imagery. In addition, you will master a technique called Calm Breathing. This technique will be the center of the other techniques and can also be used on its own to reduce acute, in the moment, anxiety.

### **SUDs**

SUDs is an acronym that stands for Subjective Units of Distress Scale.

Subjective = Personal, Your own

Units = Comparison

Distress = Upset

Scale = Measurement; a way to communicate

The SUDs range from 0 to 10. A SUDs of 0 indicates no distress and 10 is the most distress you have ever felt. For many of you, the most upset, discomfort, or distress you have ever felt may have been while you were in combat. Can everyone remember what it felt like to be a 10/10 on the SUDs scale? (Most patients will easily recall being a 10/10). A 10 should be something that you *rarely* experience.

Sometimes, patients have a harder time remembering a time when they were not in any distress, or a 0/10. Try to think about a memory where you were perfectly relaxed, or a peace, even if it were for only a few moments. Can everyone remember what it feels like to be a 0? (Some patients may have to remember a time before they were in the military).

Please give a SUDs rating of how you are feeling right now. Think of the SUDs like a mental or emotional thermometer. When you take your body's temperature, it fluctuates from moment to moment, and so does the SUDs. How you feel now may be different from a minute ago, or a minute from now.

Patients should give you a SUDs rating for how they feel now. Write this down so that you can compare it to their ratings after the DMR.

### **Calm Breathing<sup>2</sup>.**

“Most of us realize that our breathing affects the way that we feel. For example, when we are upset people may tell us to take a deep breath and calm down. However, taking a deep breath often does not help. Instead, in order to calm down, we should take a normal breath and exhale slowly.”

For example, think of when you played hide and seek as a child. When the seeker would get close, what would happen? You would hold your breath until they passed, as you got ready to react or run. When you exhaled, this was part of the relief from the tension you built up. It is the exhale or breath out that is associated with relaxation, rather than the breath in.

Think of what happens when runners prepare for a race. They breathe heavily and jump up and down—increasing their oxygen to get ready to sprint down the lanes. In order to relax, we want to do the opposite of that. Instead of increasing the oxygen to our muscles, which is what happens when we take a deep breath, we want to decrease the amount of oxygen to our muscles, forcing them to relax.

In breathing retraining or calm breathing, we are going to learn to slow the RATE and AMOUNT of our breaths. We will learn to take NORMAL breaths in through our noses (decreasing the amount of oxygen) followed by long breaths out, and then slow down our breathing by holding after the exhale (slowing the rate). We also want to use a cue word for relaxation.

This cue word should be ONE word that you find relaxing. It should not be something that has other meaning, like “sleep” or “time out”. Common ones used are “calm”, “peace”, or “relax”. Or you can be more creative using imagery words such as “cloud” or “stream”.

Have a few patients share their word with the group and ask all patients to write their word down on their handout in the space provided.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: Calm Breathing**

#### **How can relaxation help me?**

Anxiety is a learned response.

Relaxation is a skill that counters the anxiety response.

But, it takes practice.

The GOAL of relaxation is to be awake while relaxed.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION: Deep Muscle Relaxation<sup>2</sup>**

Rationale: When people feel anxious they also become physiologically aroused. This may include hyperventilation, increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and muscle tension. This physical response, in turn, makes them more anxious.

The goal of Deep Muscle Relaxation is to increase awareness of tension while giving you a way to release it. Noticing the contrast between tension and relaxation is important to be able to dispel it.

We will be sequentially tensing and relaxing various muscle groups in the body. Each muscle should be tensed at a level of 50%-- you do not want to strain. If you have pain in any part of your body, just skip that muscle group, instead focusing on your breathing. We will hold the tension in each muscle group for 10 seconds and then hold the relaxation for 30 seconds (Foa et al., 1998).

For time reasons, we will only be doing each muscle group once. At home, when you practice, repeat with each muscle group twice, allowing for even greater relaxation of each body part.

Begin by uncrossing your legs and arms. Focus gently on a point in front of you, or if you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Just allow yourself to relax as much as possible, and focus on each muscle group as we proceed. Now focus your attention on ... (see list of muscle groups).

It also is helpful to make the following statements:

*Allow your muscles to relax*

*Notice the difference between tensing and relaxing.*

*Let go further and further.*

*Let yourself relax as much as you feel comfortable.*

*This is your time to relax; there is no need to hurry.*

*Notice any heaviness, tingling, or warmth in your muscles as they relax.*

## DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

- Clench fists
- Bend hands backward at wrists
- Flex biceps muscles
- Push shoulders back into chair
- Hunch shoulders up toward ears
- Tilt head to left shoulder
- Tilt head to right shoulder
- With head down, tuck chin toward chest
- Press head back against chair
- Breathe air in deeply through lungs, & hold for a few seconds
- Tense stomach by contracting muscles as if hit in the stomach
- Wrinkle up forehead and brow
- Close eyes tightly
- Open mouth wide
- Purse lips
- Bear down slightly on back teeth
- Arch back
- Stretch out right leg and bend toes back
- Stretch out left leg and bend toes back
- Stretch out right leg and point toes away from body
- Stretch out left leg and point toes away from body
- Curl up toes in shoes

After the DMR has been completed, have the patient complete the Relaxation Log (RL) for that day.

In order to help you see the benefits of relaxation and to communicate to us whether it is helping you, please fill out these relaxation logs (pass the RL out to the group). Since we practiced both CB and DMR in session, please put an X next to both of these on the card. This means that today you completed both exercises.

### ASSIGNMENT # 1

Give out DMR tapes/CD. Tell patients to practice as often as possible, but at least once over the next week. If possible ask patients to verbalize how many times they think they will be able to practice the technique and record this on sign in sheet. Have patients agree to complete the RL & return with it the next week.

**Note (3/25/19): The CD referenced in the above assignment is no longer available.**

## Session 2: Outline

I. Review Homework with patients including problems they may have had completing it.

### **DIDACTIC:**

I. What are your Stress triggers?

II. Have patients write down their physical and emotional signs of stress.

III. Relaxation versus Deep Relaxation.

IV. Discuss the 5 Roadblocks to doing relaxation techniques and potential ways to overcome these.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION:**

I. Have patients who are steady on their feet stand to do the Postural Suggestion. Patients who are not steady can do this from a seated position.

II. Visualization

- a. Have patients pick an image of a relaxing place.
- b. Practice the Visualization relaxation exercise.



## SESSION 2

**Review assignment #1.** Collect RL from each patient. What problems did patients encounter in doing the DMR or the log? Did they have any problems or concerns? Did they get better at it?

**What are your Stress triggers.?** Your stress triggers are your unique anxiety response. There are physical and emotional components to this.

Have patients discuss and write down what they are like when anxious. Discuss which problems come first?

### **Relaxation versus Deep Relaxation**

Many things are relaxing, watching television, playing on the computer, sitting on the front porch, and watching a sunset.

However, the type of relaxing that makes a difference in anxiety is Deep Relaxing. Deep relaxation refers to a distinct physiological state that is the exact opposite of the way your body reacts under stress or during an anxiety attack. The state of deep relaxation involves decreasing your heart rate, respiration rate, blood pressure, skeletal muscle tension, oxygen consumption, analytical thinking, skin resistance, and alpha wave activity in the brain.

Regular, daily practice of deep relaxation leads to being in a more relaxed state throughout the day – not just when actively practicing these techniques!

## **Benefits<sup>5</sup>.**

Research shows that practicing relaxation on a regular basis aids in the...

1. Reduction of general anxiety\*
2. Prevention of additional stressors
3. Increased energy and productivity
4. Improved concentration & memory\*
5. Reduction of insomnia & fatigue\*
6. Prevention of physical problems
7. Increased self-confidence
8. Increased availability of feelings\*

\*While all of these benefits will be helpful to you, 4 are specifically related to PTSD: nervousness, concentration problems, insomnia, and emotional numbing.

As with learning any skill, like driving a car or riding a bike, you do better if you practice on a regular basis. It can be difficult to actually do so. Let's talk about a few of the barriers you may face when you try to practice .

## **Problem Solving Roadblocks<sup>6</sup>.**

*I don't have the time to practice.*

Try giving yourself time to relax. Plan for it - pick a regular time each day to practice. Remember how this will help your PTSD symptoms, which may help motivate you to practice.

*There is no place to relax at home.*

Create a place to relax. Discuss with your family the importance of doing this so they can understand and help you achieve the goal of practicing. Let your family know when and where you will be doing the relaxing.

*This is slow & boring.*

Sometimes relaxing can feel slow and boring because you are used to feeling anxious. This does not mean that it isn't good for you —and doing this exercise will likely become easier and more enjoyable with practice.

*I feel more anxious when I relax.*

It is not uncommon to feel more anxious when you first start to practice Deep Relaxation. Relaxation takes practice. It may help for you to shorten the amount of time you are spending practicing relaxation and gradually work up to 20 - 30 minutes per day.

*I just don't have the drive to do it.*

With practice you will reap the benefits of relaxation and, in turn, feel more like practicing. In the meantime, remember to act "as if" you feel like doing it. Remember that this lack of drive is a part of your disorder and can be overcome.

### **Visualization.**

Visualization is just a narrowing of consciousness and is very relaxing.

During visualization, you will willingly suspend disbelief, just like when you become absorbed in a compelling movie, fantasy, or daydream.

As part of this technique, we will use positive self statements to alleviate anxiety and tension. These self-statements are introduced after you are in a state of Deep Relaxation.

Some individuals benefit more from visualization than others. One way to test how much you might benefit is through Postural Suggestion.

### **PRACTICE: Postural Suggestion<sup>5</sup>.**

Stand up and stretch both arms out in front of you at shoulder level. With your eyes closed, imagine a weight being tied onto your right arm as it strains to stay up.

Imagine a second weight being added, and a third. Feel the strain in your arm as it gets heavier and heavier, heavier and heavier.

Now imagine that a huge balloon filled with helium has been tied to your left arm and is tugging it up into the air...higher and higher...higher and higher.

Open your eyes and notice where your arms are relative to each other.

Most of your bodies will have moved at least a little in response to this imagery. If you do not notice any movement, practice a couple more times, if it still doesn't work, the other relaxation exercises you learn in this group may work better for you.

The positive suggestion used during Visualization today targets anxiety related to PTSD. However, any number of self-statements can be used.

Before we begin, choose a special place, a place of peace and serenity. It doesn't have to make sense; it can be lying warm in the snow. It can be a place you have never been or a place from your past, like your mother's kitchen. We are going to go down a staircase to this special place, where you feel warm and safe.

### **PRACTICE: Visualization**<sup>5</sup>

Uncross your legs and arms and focus your eyes gently on a place in front of you. Take a normal breath in through your nose and hold, 2-3-4 and exhale. Do that again, through your nose, and hold 2-3-4 and exhale. Take another slow relaxing breath...and another... Even though your eyes are getting tired, keep them open a little longer and take another breath...and another... Your eyes are becoming heavier and heavier...let them close, as you take another relaxing breath.

Now you can begin to relax the muscles in your body. Let your legs begin to relax...let your legs begin to feel heavy...heavier and heavier as they relax. Your legs are heavier and heavier as they let go of the last bit of

muscle tension...Your legs are becoming more and more heavy and relaxed, heavy and relaxed...

Your arms, too, are becoming more and more heavy...heavier and heavier as they let go of the last bit of muscle tension. You can feel gravity pulling them down...You feel your arms growing heavier and heavier, more and more deeply relaxed. Your arms are letting go...letting go...letting go of tension as they become heavier and heavier...more and more deeply relaxed. Your arms and legs feel heavy, heavy, and relaxed... Your arms and legs feel totally relaxed as they let go of the last bit of muscle tension... more and more heavy and relaxed...

And your face, too, begins to relax. Your forehead is becoming smooth and relaxed. Your forehead is letting go of tension as it becomes more and more smooth and relaxed...And your cheeks too are becoming relaxed, smooth and relaxed. Your cheeks are relaxed and letting go of tension...your forehead and cheeks are totally relaxed...smooth and relaxed. And your jaw can now begin to relax...feeling more and more loose and relaxed. As your jaw becomes more and more deeply relaxed, feel the muscles letting go...and your lips beginning to part...and your jaw becoming more and more loose and relaxed.

Now your neck and shoulders can begin to relax. Your neck is loose and relaxed...your shoulders are relaxed and drooping...Feel your neck and shoulders becoming more and more deeply relaxed...so loose and relaxed....

Now, take another normal breath , and as you exhale let the relaxation spread into your chest and stomach and back....Take another breath and, as you exhale, feel yourself becoming calm and relaxed...calm and relaxed. Take another breath...and as you exhale, feel your chest and stomach and back become calm and relaxed...calm and relaxed.

Feel yourself drifting deeper and deeper...deeper and deeper...becoming more and more drowsy, peaceful, and calm. Drifting and drowsy...drowsy and drifting...drifting down, down, down into total relaxation...drifting deeper and deeper...deeper and deeper.

Now it's time to go to your special place...a place of safety and peace. Picture a stairway in front of you leading down to your special place. We will go down the stairway to this place, counting backward from ten to zero, and with each step become more and more deeply relaxed. In ten steps you will be there...feeling peaceful and safe as you move toward your special place. Now you grow more and more relaxed with each step. Ten...nine...eight (more and more relaxed)...seven...six...five...four (deeply relaxed)...three...two...one...zero.

With your eyes closed, look around your special place...see the shapes and colors...hear the sounds...feel the sensations of your special place...smell the smells of your special place. What is above you? Below you? Beside you?...See it...feel it...hear it...smell it...You can feel safe and calm in your special place, safe and calm.

Feel yourself drifting deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper...more and more drowsy, peaceful, and calm. You feel drowsy and drifting, drifting and drowsy...drifting down, down, down into total relaxation. You are so relaxed, peaceful and calm.

Now that you are relaxed, *you know that can go home tonight feeling relaxed and glad to be home, safe, and secure.* (**Repeat the italicized at least 3 times**).

Now, when you are ready, it is time to come back up...picture the staircase in front of you again. Begin walking over to it remembering to take in the sights, sounds, smells and feelings of your special place as you go. You are now at the bottom of the staircase and it is time to begin to come back up...to come all the way back, feeling alert, refreshed, and wide awake. In ten steps we'll be there.

Starting to come up now: one...two...three...four...more and more alert and aware...five...six...seven...more and more alert and awake ... eight ... nine...beginning to open your eyes...and ten...completely alert, refreshed, and wide awake. Alert, refreshed, and wide awake.

### **ASSIGNMENT # 2**

Tell patients to practice Visualization (second part of the CD/tape) as often a possible, but at least once over the next week. Have patients verbalize how many times they will practice the technique and record this on sign in sheet. Have patients agree to complete the RL & return with it the next week.

**Note (3/25/19): The CD referenced in the above assignment is no longer available.**

## Session 3: Outline

### I. Review Relaxation practice (assignment #2)

#### **DIDACTIC:**

#### I. Understanding Anxiety

- a. Where does anxiety stem from?
- b. Avoidance as a learned behavior
- c. Thoughts that fuel anxiety
- d. Bad habits that cause/worsen anxiety

#### II. 20 positive coping strategies for anxiety

- a. Physical & lifestyle
- b. Cognitive
- c. Emotional
- d. Spiritual/philosophical

#### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION:**

#### I. Describe the rationale for Guided-imagery

#### II. Teach Guided-imagery



## SESSION 3

**Review assignment #2.** What problems did patients encounter in doing Visualization or the log? Did they have any problems or concerns? Did they get better at it?

### Understanding Anxiety

#### Where does anxiety stem from?

Anxiety is an extreme version of an alarm reaction your body naturally goes through in response to a threat. The fight or flight response helps us to avoid threats of danger and ensure our survival. However, because you have been through a traumatic event, your fight or flight response may occur in situations that are realistically safe.

**1. Avoidance.** Avoidance is a learned behavior. Certain conditions (e.g., people, places, things, thoughts) make us nervous. We learn to associate anxiety with these things. When we avoid that condition, our anxiety decreases for a moment, and therefore we learn that avoiding the situation lessens anxiety in the short term.

This is how avoidance develops. In the short run, it is rewarding to avoid facing things that make us nervous. However, in the long run, avoidance will snowball-- That is, we have to avoid more and more to decrease our anxiety. Therefore, in the long run, avoidance reinforces and increases overall anxiety, prolonging PTSD and preventing necessary learning.

**2. Thoughts.** What you say to yourself can create and worsen anxiety. Much of anxiety is created by thoughts beginning with "What if..." (something bad happens). Using What if - anticipates the worst case scenario, and increases our anxiety.

**3. Bad Habits.** Stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine worsen anxiety. Most people have a tolerance to these substances and do not recognize the

impact they have on their anxiety until they give them up. If you have an Anxiety disorder, it may be worth it for you to quit using stimulants.

## 20 POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR ANXIETY.

It is important to use a comprehensive approach to overcoming anxiety. While this group focuses most on the physiological response to anxiety, it is important to acknowledge and try to incorporate other techniques that decrease anxiety. These include:

### PHYSICAL & LIFESTYLE

**Calm breathing**  
**Relaxation techniques**  
**Regular exercise**  
**Low stress diet**  
**Downtime**  
**Time management**  
**Sleep hygiene**

### COGNITIVE

**Countering negative thoughts**  
**Distraction**  
**Acceptance**  
**Tolerance**

### EMOTIONAL

**Social support**  
**Self-nurturing**  
**Good communication**  
**Assertiveness**  
**Recreational activities**  
**Humor**

### SPIRITUAL/PHILOSOPHICAL

**Working toward goals**  
**Positive philosophy**  
**Religious commitment**

The Relaxation Technique we are going to learn today uses Deep Relaxation to aid in improving confidence – or the cognitive aspect of anxiety. It is called Self-Guided-imagery.

Guided- imagery is a way of deliberately using imagery to modify your behavior, feelings, and internal physiological state.

Guided- imagery is used by athletes to help them achieve peak performance. For example, pro-baseball players visualize hitting the ball when the bases are loaded.

It also is used to treat a number of physical and mental problems. For example, it is used with cancer patients to visualize the chemotherapy targeting the cancer cells.

Guided- imagery is used to treat anxiety by placing you in a state of deep relaxation and then having you imagine improving your confidence in any number of situations (e.g., being in a crowded place, having a heart to heart talk, speaking up in groups).

What should you imagine???

- something you have been avoiding but want to do
- upcoming difficult situations
- an important event

We will start with Sunlight meditation and then add in Guided-imagery an important situation for those of you who want to try this. If you do not want to try to imagine an avoided situation, please continue to practice relaxing until this portion of the exercise is complete.

## **PRACTICE: Sunlight Meditation + Guided-imagery<sup>5</sup>**

Picture yourself in a safe, beautiful place outdoors. Now imagine that you feel a warm, gentle breeze blowing over your body. Overhead you can see a beautiful blue sky and some white clouds. Shining directly overhead is the sun.

Now imagine that you can feel the warmth and light from the sun directly above you. You can feel it shining down—in and through your entire body. You feel it beginning to relax and soothe every part of your body.

In a moment, concentrate this sunlight onto your right arm. Focus it there. Just experience the warmth and light from the sun penetrating the fingertips of your right hand. You can feel it soothing and relaxing your right hand. And in a moment it begins to spread from your right hand to your forearm...and then to your upper arm...and then to your shoulder. Feel the sunlight warming and soothing your entire right arm. You can feel it filling and soothing every muscle, tendon, and nerve in your right arm. And you feel your right arm—from the tips of your fingers to your shoulders—becoming completely relaxed. Warm, heavy and relaxed.

Now move the light from the sun to your left arm. Imagine it entering and soothing your left hand. And in a moment you can begin to feel it moving from your left hand up your left arm...soothing your forearm...and then your upper arm...moving all the way up to your shoulder. You're relaxing all the muscles, nerves, and tendons in your left arm...feeling the light penetrating and soothing your entire left arm. Just continue to let yourself drift deeper and deeper in to quietness and peace...feeling very safe, secure, and relaxed.

And, gently now, take the light from the sun and move it over to your right leg. Allow it to move from the tips of your toes all the way up your right leg to the hip joint. Feel the warmth as the sunlight moves up through your right leg, from your right foot to your right calf...and then to your

right knee...and then to your right thigh...and finally to your right hip bone. Just feel the sunlight penetrating and soothing every muscle, tendon, and nerve in your right leg and hip. Your entire right leg is feeling completely warm and relaxed.

And in a moment, feel the sunlight move to your left leg. Allow it to move from your left foot up through your entire left leg to your hip bone. Feel it soothing and relaxing your left ankle...then your calf...and then your knee...and then soothing all the muscles in your thigh...and finally moving up into your hip. You can feel the sunlight penetrating every muscle, tendon, and nerve in your entire left leg. And in a moment you find your left leg feeling completely relaxed.

And now move the light from the sun into your stomach area. Just feel it warming and soothing every organ in the lower part of your body. Just feel the pressures and tensions of the day draining away from you...as your stomach and lower abdomen relax completely. Feel your stomach and lower abdomen becoming very relaxed.

Now take the light from the sun and move it into your chest area. Let it soothe and comfort that area. Just feel it streaming into your chest. You're feeling relaxation...peace ...and comfort throughout your entire chest...feeling your chest becoming very relaxed and your breathing becoming easy.

Now, in a moment, bring the light from the sun down through the top of your head. Imagine it soothing and comforting the top of your head...and then the area around your eyes...and then your jaw. And in a moment, feel the warm, soothing sensations of the sunlight moving down into your neck, relaxing and releasing every tight muscle in your neck. And in a while you can feel your neck completely relaxing. Your head and neck are becoming completely relaxed.

And now let the sunlight move down your spine, down through your spine all the way to your tailbone...let it move down through your spine all the way to your tailbone. And then imagine the light moving out from your spine into every nerve of your body. Feel the sunlight moving into every nerve of your body, healing and relaxing. Feel yourself entering into a very deep state of peace.

Just allow yourself to drift deeper and deeper into quietness and peace...becoming more and more relaxed. In a moment you can feel the sunlight relaxing and soothing every single cell in your body. Every single cell in your body is becoming very relaxed. And you feel yourself becoming very deeply relaxed...very much at peace.

Continue to relax, while taking a few moments to imagine the situation that you want to visualize.

See yourself starting the situation and engaging fully in it. Picture yourself going through the situation with confidence and completing it successfully. Imagine how you'll feel when you have successfully reached this goal. See yourself fully involved ...doing what you want to do...feeling calm, comfortable, and confident...(Allow about one minute to visualize.)

You know that there is no longer any need to avoid this situation or to feel anxious in it. You can find yourself in this situation feeling calm, safe, and assured. As you enter this situation, your breathing is calm and regular and all of your muscles are fully relaxed. It's truly easy to enter this situation and it feels just fine. You experience a sensation of relaxation all over...

Picture yourself reaching your goal, and feeling proud of yourself for it. You're feeling confident that you can handle this situation every time you return to it. It feels great to have the freedom to enter this situation...to have fully achieved your goal...to have fully left the past behind...to be able to do what you want. Your life is enlarged by your success.

You can be calm and at ease whenever you're in this particular situation.... Comfortable...easy...calm...you've gained the mastery of yourself you've wanted all along. You can enjoy life fully ...knowing that you feel safe and confident whenever you enter this particular situation.

Now take a few minutes once again to imagine yourself handling the situation in just the way you would like... Notice what you're doing...(15 seconds or more) ...

How you would think, act, and feel, having achieved your goal with this particular situation...( a few more seconds)

Okay, great. Now when you are done, slowly open your eyes, feeling calm, confident, alert and relaxed.

### **ASSIGNMENT # 3**

Tell patients to practice any one of the three relaxation techniques learned in session as often as possible, but at least once over the next week. Have patients verbalize how many times they will practice the technique and record this on sign in sheet. Have patients agree to complete the RL & return with it the next week.

## Session 4: Outline

### I. Review Relaxation assignment #3

#### DIDACTIC:

##### I. Grounding

- a. What is Grounding?
- b. What does it do?
- c. Describe the three types of Grounding --
  1. Mental
  2. Physical
  3. Soothing

##### II. How to make sure Grounding works for you (done after the Practical Application)

#### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

##### I. Describe each type of grounding in detail giving examples

##### II. Lead patients through an abbreviated Mental, Physical and Soothing Grounding (return to Didactic II above)

**TERMINATION:** Remind patients to practice the Relaxation techniques that they have learned, including CB, DMR, Visualization, and Guided-imagery. Remind them why it is important to them and thank them for their participation in the group.



## SESSION 4

### Grounding

What is Grounding? Grounding is a way to detach from emotional pain. Also called centering, looking outward, distraction, or healthy detachment, it works by focusing outward on the world, rather than inward on the self.

### What does it do?

Grounding is an anchor to the present. When focusing on the here and now, it is impossible to focus on painful memories from the past or worries about the future. Many people with PTSD move back and forth from between being overwhelmed by emotion or having too little of it (being emotionally numb). When using grounding, you learn to bring yourself into balance when emotions are overwhelming, by placing yourself at a healthy distance from these emotions.

### Overview:

- Grounding can be done anytime and anywhere.
- Grounding can be used when you are faced with negative feelings.
- Keep your eyes open and turn the room light on during grounding.
- Rate your mood before and after each grounding (SUDS 0-10 = worst)
  - **Go over SUDS (see handout) as a review.**
- No talking about negative feelings during grounding.
- Stay neutral—do not make judgments during grounding. For example if you are describing a room—do not say, “the room is beige, I hate beige.”
- Focus on the present, not the past or future.

### Three types of Grounding: Mental, Physical, and Soothing

1. Mental Grounding: Focusing your mind.
2. Physical Grounding: Focusing your senses.
3. Soothing: Talking to yourself in a very kind way.

### MENTAL GROUNDING:

Play categories with yourself—e.g., name football quarterbacks, jazz musicians, types of dogs, TV shows, songs, or cities

Describe your environment in detail

Describe an activity in detail—describe how to make red beans & rice. First you buy the following ingredients... Maybe describe a food that is comforting for you

Use a safety statement: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am located in \_\_\_\_\_. The date is \_\_\_\_\_.”

### PHYSICAL GROUNDING:

Run cool water over your hands.

Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.

Touch various objects around you and describe them to yourself.

Dig your heels into the floor.

Carry a grounding object in your pocket (a rock, ring, piece of cloth).

Stretch your muscles.

### SOOTHING GROUDING:

Say kind statements to yourself, such as, “I am a good person. I will get thought this. All things pass.”

Think of favorites or something to look forward to next week (e.g., your favorite color, food, season, time of day or going to a movie, seeing a friend).

Picture people you care about (imaginary or have a photograph available). Remember a safe place (describe a place you find very soothing—this can be the safe place you use for the other relaxation exercises)

Say a coping statement: “I can handle this. This feeling will pass.”

### **How to make sure Grounding works for you...**

- ✓ Practice as often as possible.
- ✓ Practice faster.
- ✓ Try Grounding for a LONG time (and repeat, repeat, repeat).
- ✓ Make an index card.
- ✓ Prepare in advance.
- ✓ Start Grounding early in the negative mood cycle.
- ✓ Think about why Grounding works – why might it be that by focusing on the external world you become more aware of an inner peacefulness. Note which methods work best for you and use them.
- ✓ Don't give up!!!

### **PRACTICE: Mental Grounding<sup>6</sup>**

For this Grounding exercise we are going to describe our environment in detail, using all of our senses. We will describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers and the temperature. Lead patients through describing the room silently to themselves. Remind them not to judge the room, but to simply describe it to themselves. Look around the room. What is above you? What is the ceiling made of? How do you think it would feel to the touch? How many light sources are there in the room? How many windows? What color is the floor? What is it made of? How does it feel to touch it? What is on the walls? What colors do you see there? Read anything printed backward and notice each letter or number. What shapes are on the walls? How many different shapes? How many chairs are in the room? Tables? Other furniture? What are the chairs made of? What are the tables made of? How does each part feel to the touch- hot, cold, rough, smooth? Is there any smell to the room? Notice it. How warm

or cold is the room? Do you hear any air movement? -From where? Do you hear any other sounds? Where are they coming from?

*Note: Continue with other questions to tailor other questions to your specific room. Ask questions about the patients' experience of the Grounding exercise.*

## Termination

During the last month, you learned about stress and anxiety, the impact it has on your life, and ways to reduce and cope with it.

It is our hope that you will continue to use the calm breathing, relaxation techniques, and grounding to cope with anxiety and stress.

Please keep this manual and refer back to it, to review what you have learned in Stress Management.

Thank you for attending the STRESS LESS groups—we have enjoyed working with you.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT GROUP

1. How problematic is anxiety for you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely

2. Overall, how USEFUL was the Stress Management group?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely

3. In general, how SATISFIED are you with the Stress Management group?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely

4. If you decided to use the exercises presented in group, how confident are you that they would be helpful?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely

5. Do you intend to use any of the relaxation strategies taught? Yes      No

## STRESS MANAGEMENT GROUP

**Not everyone is able to practice the exercises that were introduced.**

1. On average, how many times per week did you practice the Calm Breathing Exercise?

I was not able to practice at all (**skip to question 3**)  
 less than once per week (continue)  
 1-2 times per week (continue)  
 3-4 times per week (continue)  
 daily (continue)

2. How effective was this technique to cope with anxiety?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely

3. On average, how many times per week did you practice one of the Relaxation Techniques (Deep Muscle, Self-Hypnosis, Imagery)?

I was not able to practice at all (**skip to question 5**)  
 less than once per week (continue)  
 1-2 times per week (continue)  
 3-4 times per week (continue)  
 daily (continue)

4. How effective were these techniques to cope with anxiety?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Extremely