

Making Changes in Routines

An individual with dual sensory impairments can become tense, frightened, or angry due to confusion, medical conditions, and unexpected change. Various strategies have been developed which can help an individual learn to relax his body. When relaxed, he is better able to position his body, to use his senses, and generally feel better.

It is important to teach ways of relaxing on a regular basis, just as you would any other motor skill. You should not wait until the individual is rigid or in a tantrum to work on relaxing.

Some of the following techniques may be helpful:

1. The individual can relax his body through deep breathing. (For infants and small children, this can be done by holding the child in your lap with his face against your chest. For older individuals, you can sit face to face.) Breathe deeply in and out of your mouth, exhaling so the individual can feel the force of the air. Do this as slowly as possible. It may also help to have the child feel your chest as you breathe, to feel how the lungs expand. (An older individual can feel your pulse to achieve the same results). After the demonstration, have the individual imitate the breathing and feel his own chest to match your breathing.
2. The individual can also relax his body by working on each body part separately until the whole body relaxes. You can start with arms and legs by gently shaking the limb until it relaxes. When the lower arm relaxes, move to the upper arm, then to the shoulder, etc. Be very careful to avoid injury of the joints. For individuals with physical impairments, consult the physician or therapist providing services before trying these suggestions to make sure you are moving the limbs properly.
3. The individual can also relax through massage. Deep, firm touch, moving from the head down the spine will help individuals with sleep difficulties. Individuals who become overstimulated easily may benefit from massage throughout the day to help them calm down and relax.

Note: A tickling type of touch will cause the child to become very excited and may cause inappropriate reflex movements in individuals with physical impairments.

Once the individual becomes familiar with these strategies, you will then be able to demonstrate them for the purpose of imitation during times of stress. The individual will know what to do and can adjust his body to match your breathing, muscle tone, or body posture.