



the institute for *girls'* development  
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## **"I'm Stressed!" Tools for Chillin' Out in Busy Times**

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Ever feel like there just isn't enough time in the day?  
Wonder when you can take a breath in the middle of the achievement frenzy?  
Does it take caffeine to keep your motor running?

We live in a time of great opportunity and enormous stress. As we reach for our dreams, it's important to find ways to calm, de-stress, and appreciate the present. It can be helpful to rate our stress levels on a 0 – 10 scale: 0 means "no stress at all" and 10 means "the most stress ever!" Our stress levels change throughout the day, the week, the month. When we include "de-stressing activities" in our lifestyle, we are helping our bodies and minds to function at their best & healthiest. De-stressing techniques provide many benefits, including a sense of well-being.

Different strategies work best for different people. Find the things that work best for you – activities you can enjoy! Practice them for 5 – 15 minutes a day. Practice them several times a day if you can. De-stressing doesn't require a week at the spa or a week off from school. Really. Research shows the best stress reducers are the ones that are part of our daily lives. So, discover the relaxation strategies you love. And enjoy them everyday!

Here are some tips to help you figure out what works for you.

Enjoy laughter.

Talk to a trusted friend or mentor.

Do something physically vigorous (like shooting hoops, swimming, running, walking)

Do something physically relaxing (like yoga, a hot bubble bath or breathing exercises).

Get creative. Write. Draw.

Practice a positive mindset.

Try taking a vacation from your mind (Read more in the October Institute Newsletter article by Dr. Abi Blakeslee):

1. **Grounding:** It's amazing what 30 seconds of sensing gravity can do. The next time you feel charged up or stressed out, see if you can feel the weight of your feet contacting the ground. Notice if you can feel the way your feet contact the ground. Are there places that are heavier? Are there places that feel light? Take some time feeling this. Notice what else might happen in your body. Do you find yourself taking a deeper breath automatically? Do you feel any more relaxed or connected? Do you feel any calmer? If so, bring your attention to where you feel more relaxed. Often this will bring a wave of more relaxation.
2. **Breathing:** There are many ancient breathing techniques that can promote health and relaxation. Sometimes in the heat of the moment taking a big breath and focusing on blowing out your frustration on the out breath can help your body calm down. Another effective way to use breath is to "do nothing" with it: simply stop and observe it. Have you ever noticed that there are four parts to each breath? There's the inhale, the pause at the top, the exhale, and the pause at the bottom. Try becoming aware of this for even just a minute. As you follow it, does it change on its own? If it does can you describe to yourself where in the four parts it has changed? Actually, it usually gets more relaxed as you become present. If you find there is no significant change, try grounding and following your breath for a few more minutes. Check to see if you feel any more relaxed or connected anywhere in your body.
3. **Orienting:** In a stressful situation we might have strong feelings or be holding a lot of tension in our bodies. It might feel like you're tight all over or sometimes as if you're vibrating like a string. One thing that can be helpful is to take a break from focusing on these sensations or the situation at hand. Try taking a break by orienting, or looking around, at your present environment. See if you can find something pleasant to look at, even if it's just a few moments. Focus on the lights and the color. Often focusing outside ourselves will bring down our stress levels. See what happens if you let your eyes take in the image of something you like. Does your body may relax a little more? Orienting can be used anywhere - at home, at school, on the playing field or in the library. Once you orient, come back to notice if you feel any different in your body. Notice calm or more relaxed breathing.
4. **Containing:** Hugs can sometimes help when we are stressed. And, even though it's nice to have someone else to help contain us with the help of a hug, we can also do it ourselves. The next time you feel tight in your chest or butterflies in your stomach, try putting your own hand there. Your body may like light touch or more firm touch better. Experiment with what pressure feels best to you. Pay attention to the feeling of your hand. Wait for about thirty seconds to a minute. Does anything change? Did you take a deeper breath? Did the tightness move from your chest into your shoulders where it is not so overwhelming? Do you feel the release of stress through some heat, tingling, or shakiness? As you feel contained is there anywhere in your body that feels more relaxed?

**ENJOY FINDING THE BEST WAY FOR YOU TO DE-STRESS!**