

An illustration of a therapist and a child in a therapy room. The therapist, a woman with short dark hair, is kneeling on the left, looking towards the child. The child, a boy with short dark hair, is kneeling on the right, holding a large brown teddy bear. In the background, there are two framed pictures on the wall: one with abstract shapes and another with a play button icon. In the foreground, there is a stack of folded light green towels on the left and a green ball with white lines on the right.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) for Kids: Therapy Resources for Ages 5–8

A comprehensive collection of professional resources for pediatric therapists and clinicians teaching Progressive Muscle Relaxation techniques to children ages 5-8. These evidence-based tools include quick-reference guides, detailed scripts, and parent handouts designed to help children recognize and release physical tension, manage stress, and develop self-regulation skills.

Handout 1: Therapist Cheat Sheet (Quick Reference)

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) for Kids

(Ages 5–8, Therapist Guide)

Goal

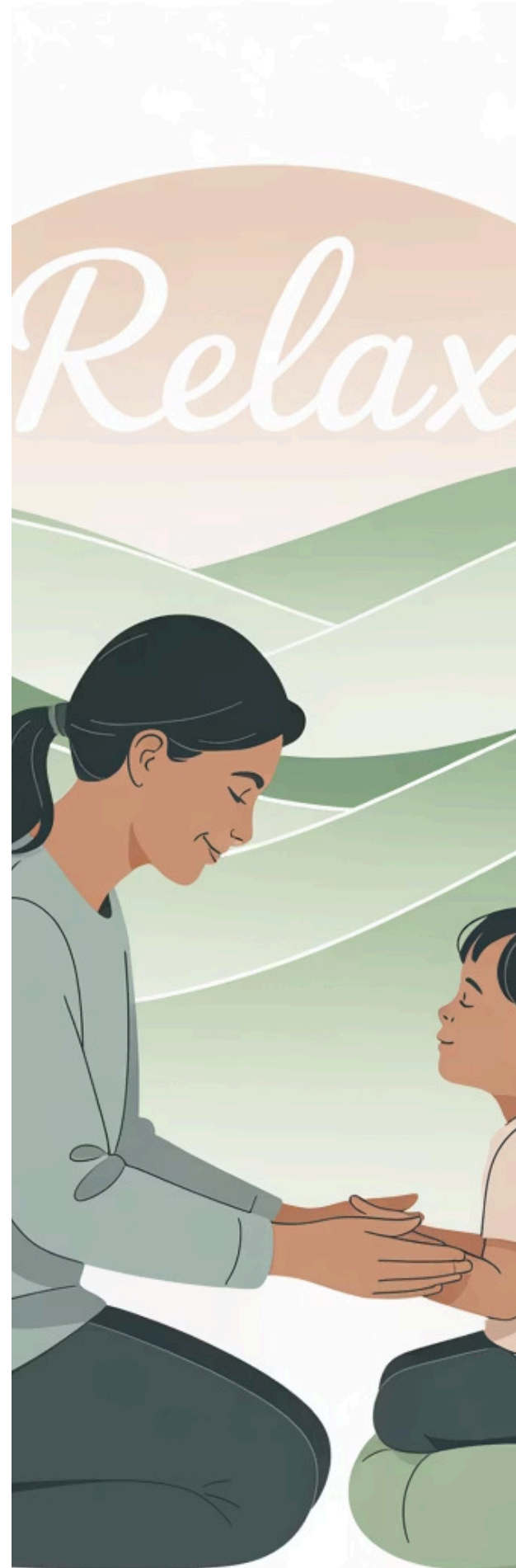
Teach children to notice and release muscle tension.

Length

6–7 minutes

Format

2–3 squeeze-and-release cycles per muscle group, ~3 seconds each.



Sequence with Sample Cues



Hands

"Make gentle fists... hold... 3, 2, 1... now open and relax."



Arms

"Make your arms strong... hold... now drop them soft and heavy."



Shoulders

"Lift up to your ears... hold... now let them rest."



Face

"Scrunch your face gently... hold... now let it soften and smooth."



Belly

"Pull your belly in slightly... hold... now let it soften. Breathe in... and out."



Toes

"Curl your toes down... hold... now wiggle and relax."

The sequence follows a logical progression from upper to lower body, helping children systematically identify and release tension throughout their entire body. This order makes the practice easier to remember and implement consistently across sessions.

Best Practices for PMR Facilitation

Voice and Approach

- Use a calm, steady, soft voice throughout the entire session
- Maintain consistent pacing with predictable pauses
- Model relaxed breathing and body language
- Keep instructions concrete and age-appropriate
- Use a gentle, encouraging tone rather than directive

Managing Responses

- Normalize giggles – "Sometimes our bodies feel funny when we try something new"
- Acknowledge all observations without judgment
- Use modeling if child struggles with specific movements
- Repeat consistently across sessions to build comfort and familiarity
- Celebrate small successes and improvements in body awareness

Staying consistent is what makes PMR work. Kids do best when you use the same words and follow the same steps every time. This predictability helps their brain learn to connect the relaxation feeling with the specific actions. Eventually, kids can start using PMR on their own when they notice their body feeling tense.

- ☐ The familiarity of the routine itself becomes comforting to children, particularly those with anxiety or sensory processing differences. Resist the urge to vary the sequence significantly between sessions, especially during the learning phase.

When Not to Use PMR with Children

Acute Distress

During panic attacks, meltdowns, or shutdowns when cognitive processing is limited

Physical Contraindications

After recent injuries or muscle strain that could be exacerbated by tension

Refusal or Distress

If child refuses or shows signs of increased anxiety during practice

Severe Dissociation

Without appropriate clinical support for children with dissociative symptoms

Signs to Pause or Modify Practice

Be alert to these indicators that PMR may not be appropriate in the moment:

- Increased agitation or distress during practice
- Hyperventilation or difficulty breathing
- Complaints of pain or discomfort
- Inability to follow simple instructions
- Excessive giggling that cannot be redirected
- Signs of dissociation (blank stare, unresponsiveness)
- Verbal expressions of fear or discomfort
- Heightened startle response during practice

Teach PMR when kids are already calm and relaxed first. Only use it to help with mild stress after they've gotten good at it. Don't try PMR during meltdowns or big upsets until the child has practiced it plenty when they're feeling okay.

Adaptations for Special Populations

ADHD

- Shorten overall session to 3–5 minutes
- Allow movement between muscle groups
- Schedule after physical play when body is ready for calm
- Use more animated voice modulation to maintain engagement
- Incorporate visual timers to show progress through sequence

Anxiety

- Start in consistently calm states, not during worry episodes
- Offer choice about which muscle groups to include
- Begin with only 3 muscle groups and gradually expand
- Use predictable language cues that become familiar
- Emphasize the physical sensations rather than emotional states

Trauma History

- Use "firm" instead of "tight" to describe muscle tension
- Emphasize child's control and safety throughout
- Allow practice with stuffed animal before self-application
- Avoid language related to restraint or immobility
- Include frequent reminders that they can stop anytime

Autism

- Keep sequence absolutely identical between sessions
- Use concrete language without metaphors
- Allow stimming between muscle groups if needed
- Model alongside child rather than observing
- Incorporate special interests into relaxation narrative

Sensory Considerations

Kids with sensory differences might need some changes to make PMR work better for them:

- **Kids who crave sensation:** Use firmer pressure when tensing; add weight like a weighted stuffed animal during the relaxing parts
- **Kids who avoid sensation:** Keep the room calm and quiet; use softer words and don't hold tension as long
- **Kids sensitive to movement:** Let them sit or lie down instead of standing; skip any head movements
- **Kids who don't like being touched:** Start with hands and feet before moving to belly or face areas


Handout 2: Therapist Script (Detailed, Full Version)

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Children

(Therapist Script — Ages 5–8, 1:1, ~7 minutes)

This script gives you everything you need to run PMR sessions with young kids. The words are chosen to work well for ages 5-8, keeping in mind how long they can pay attention and what they understand.

You should learn this script by heart rather than reading it word-for-word during sessions. Practice it until it feels natural so you can focus on connecting with the child while still doing the technique correctly. The timing suggestions help you know how long to spend on each part.

-  This script has been field-tested with many children in outpatient mental health and school-based settings, with modifications made based on clinical outcomes and child feedback.

Introduction Script (~1 min)

"Sometimes our bodies hold tension when we're worried, excited, or frustrated. Today we're going to practice helping your muscles tighten and relax so your body can feel calm and safe.

There's no perfect way to do this just follow along and notice what your body feels like. Let's sit back, place your feet flat on the floor, and rest your arms at your sides. If it feels okay, close your eyes or look down softly.

Take a slow, gentle breath in... and out. Good are you ready?"

Key Elements of an Effective Introduction

Setting Expectations

The introduction tells kids what to expect while making it clear there's no wrong way to do it. This helps them relax about "doing it right" and focus on their own experience instead of trying to impress you.

Physical Preparation

Helping the child get settled in a comfortable position with clear directions about where to put their feet and arms gets their body ready and helps them tune into how they feel. Letting them choose whether to close their eyes respects what feels comfortable while encouraging them to focus inward.

During the Introduction, Keep in Mind:

- Let your voice get slower and softer as you talk - this shows them how to calm down
- Watch for signs they're uncomfortable or not into it, and adjust as needed
- Let them move around to get comfortable instead of correcting their position
- Use simpler or more complex words depending on the child, but keep the main ideas

The introduction helps kids understand that feeling tense is normal and that they can learn to change it. This builds their sense of control and helps them manage their feelings both during PMR and in everyday life.

Progressive Sequence: Hands and Arms (~2 min)

Hands and Arms — Gentle Fists (3 cycles)

Make gentle fists, like you're holding something special. Squeeze softly... hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Now open your hands and relax. Wiggle your fingers. **Notice how your hands feel now.**" (*Pause 3 sec*)

"Let's try again — squeeze a little tighter... hold... and release. **Feel the difference between tight and loose.**" (*Pause 3 sec*)

"Last one — squeeze, hold... and let it go. **What do you notice about your hands?**" **Therapist cue:** "Nice job — your hands are learning to relax."

Why start with the hands?

- Starting with hands works well because:
- Kids can see their hands, so they can watch what's happening
- Children this age are good at controlling their hand muscles
- Hand muscles connect to the body's calming system
- "Holding something special" feels gentle and interesting to kids



The hand sequence teaches the basic pattern of PMR: squeeze, hold, let go, and notice. Doing it three times helps kids get better at feeling the difference between tight and relaxed muscles.

What to Watch For

Look for signs the child is squeezing too hard (white knuckles) - this might mean they're worried about doing it "right." Just remind them to use a gentle squeeze. If you notice one hand doing something different than the other, it might be worth noting for developmental reasons.

Developmental Considerations

Younger kids (ages 5-6) often need concrete examples like "Squeeze like you're holding a small egg without breaking it." Older kids (ages 7-8) can usually follow the regular directions without needing extra comparisons.

Progressive Sequence: Arms (~1 min)

Arms — Strong and Soft (2 cycles)

"Bend your elbows and make your arms strong, like you're showing muscles. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Let your arms drop soft and heavy. **Feel how heavy and relaxed they are.**" (*Pause 3 sec*)

"One more time — squeeze... hold... and relax. **Notice that soft, heavy feeling.**" **Therapist cue:** "Great work." "Good Letting Go."

Clinical Rationale

The arm sequence builds naturally from the hands, helping kids notice more of their body. What makes this work well:

- Using bigger muscles gives kids stronger sensations to notice
- "Showing muscles" is fun and makes sense to kids this age
- Learning words like "strong" and "soft and heavy" helps them describe how their body feels
- Two rounds keeps it interesting without being too much



The arm sequence teaches kids that muscles can be both "strong" and "soft" — helping them see that both feelings are useful and that they can choose to switch between them.

Common Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Therapeutic Response
Child uses excessive force	Model "just enough" tension; emphasize "strong" not "tight"
Difficulty releasing tension	Use cue: "Let your arms be heavy like they want to melt"
Distracted or loses place	Gently touch your own arms as a visual reminder of the current focus area
Motor planning difficulties	Directly model the movement and invite mirroring

The therapist cue "Good letting go" emphasizes that releasing is what we're aiming for - kids learn that the point isn't making muscles tight, but being able to let them relax when they want to.

Progressive Sequence: Shoulders (~1 min)



Shoulders — Up and Down (3 cycles)

"Lift your shoulders up to your ears. Hold... 3, 2, 1..."

"Drop your shoulders slowly and rest. **Feel them sink down and relax.**" (*Pause*)

"Again — up, hold... and relax. **Notice how they drop and feel loose.**"

"One more time — up to your ears... hold... and drop. **Feel how relaxed your shoulders are now!**"

That was perfect.

Clinical Rationale

The shoulder sequence helps with a main place where kids hold stress and worry:

- Even young kids often carry tension in their shoulders when stressed
- The movement is clear and easy to do without complicated directions
- Letting go of shoulder tension usually feels really good and noticeable
- It continues the same pattern kids learned with their hands and arms

The therapist cue "That was perfect" intentionally avoids being too specific, giving encouragement without making the child feel like they need to perform correctly. This helps kids stay motivated from within and shows them that however they did it was just right.

Many kids feel the biggest relief during the shoulder part, which makes this section really important. Pay attention to how your child responds here - it can tell you a lot about where they hold stress in their everyday life.

What Happens in the Body

Shoulder tension connects directly to how the body responds to stress. When kids release shoulder tension:

- Breathing gets deeper naturally as tight muscles loosen up
- Blood flows better to the head and neck
- The body's calming system gets activated
- Their whole posture often gets better, which helps them feel more relaxed

Progressive Sequence: Face (~1 min)

😊 Face — Gentle Scrunch (2 cycles)

"Make a tiny scrunch in your face — squeeze your eyes, nose, and mouth gently. Hold... 3, 2, 1..."

"Now relax your face and let it get soft and smooth. Your face looks calm or (**Notice how calm your face feels.**)" (*Pause*)

"Try one more — scrunch... and release. **Feel how smooth and peaceful it is now.**"

Good job!



Facial Awareness

Children often hold significant tension in facial muscles without awareness. The "scrunch" helps them identify these subtle tension patterns.



Emotional Regulation

Facial expressions directly influence emotional experience through proprioceptive feedback. Releasing facial tension can interrupt negative emotional cycles.



Social Mirroring

The therapist's observation reinforces the connection between facial relaxation and appearing calm to others, supporting social-emotional development.

Clinical Considerations

The face sequence requires special attention to several factors:

- **Intensity modulation:** The word "tiny" and "gently" are deliberate to prevent excessive facial tension
- **Social comfort:** Some children may feel self-conscious about facial expressions; normalize with modeling
- **Cultural factors:** Be aware that facial expression norms vary across cultures and families
- **Sensory sensitivity:** Children with facial tactile sensitivity may need modified instructions

When you say "Your face looks calm now," it helps kids connect how they feel inside with how they look outside. This teaches them how feelings show up on their face, which helps them understand emotions better both in therapy and everywhere else.

Getting Started with PMR

To make this work well for your young clients, here's what I've found helpful:

Before you begin: Take time to go through all the materials yourself first. Practice the script out loud until it feels natural coming from you—kids can tell when something feels rehearsed or forced.

In your first sessions: Start with the detailed script (Handout 2). It gives you the full language and pacing, which helps you find your rhythm with each child.

As you get comfortable: Shift to using the cheat sheet (Handout 1) as your guide. You'll know the flow by then and can adapt your language to match each child's personality and needs.

Bringing families in: Once a child has gotten the hang of PMR in your office and seems engaged with it, introduce the parent guide (Handout 3). This works best when the child already feels confident with the technique. Have the Parent practice the abbreviated version with you, or conversely make a recorded script with your voice the parent can play for the child at home with them in the room.

Staying connected: Check in regularly with parents about how home practice is going. What's working? What feels tricky? Their insights will help you adjust your approach.

Keeping it fresh: Circle back to PMR throughout your work together. Like any skill, it benefits from reinforcement, and kids often discover new aspects of the technique as they grow.

These materials are grounded in research on what actually works with young children. The consistent approach across all three handouts helps kids feel secure as they practice both with you and at home.

Progressive Sequence: Belly (~1 min)



Belly — Balloon Squeeze (2 cycles)

"Pretend there's a soft balloon in your belly. Give it a gentle hug by pulling your belly button in slightly. Hold... 3, 2, 1..."

"Now let your belly soften and relax. Breathe in... and out. **Notice how soft and calm your belly feels.**" (*Pause 3 sec*)

"Try one more — gentle squeeze... and release. **Pay attention to that soft, relaxed feeling.**"

Clinical Rationale

The belly sequence helps with a main area where kids feel anxiety and stress in their body:

- Focusing on the center of their body helps them feel grounded
- The balloon idea makes something hard to understand easier to picture
- Connecting breathing with relaxing gives them a tool they can use anywhere
- Learning to notice their belly helps kids get better at feeling what's happening inside their body



The belly sequence is especially helpful for anxious kids who get stomachaches, feel sick to their stomach, or have other tummy troubles when they're stressed. Learning to notice and relax their belly muscles gives them a way to help with these common body reactions to stress.

Physiological Benefits

This component of PMR offers specific physiological advantages:

- Promotes diaphragmatic breathing patterns that counteract the shallow chest breathing associated with anxiety
- Encourages parasympathetic nervous system activation through engagement of the vagus nerve
- Improves interoceptive awareness, helping children recognize internal body states
- Creates a mind-body connection between conscious attention and autonomic functions

The therapist cue "That's how we calm the belly" clearly links what they just did with the calming result, helping kids understand that their actions can make them feel better. This builds their ability to manage their own feelings and reactions.

Progressive Sequence: Toes and Feet (~1 min)

Toes and Feet — Curl and Rest (2 cycles)

"Curl your toes down tight, like you're pressing into the floor. Hold... 3, 2, 1..."

"Now let your toes loosen and rest. **Feel how loose and wiggly they are.**" (*Pause*)

"One more — curl... and relax. **Notice how your feet feel now — soft and comfortable.**"

Clinical Rationale

Concluding with the toes and feet completes the body scan and offers several therapeutic advantages:

- Creates a sense of completion by addressing the full body
- The distal location helps with body boundary awareness
- Foot tension is often overlooked but significant in stress response
- The wiggling movement adds a playful element to conclude the practice

Developmental Considerations

The toe sequence supports important developmental processes:

- Reinforces body mapping and spatial awareness
- Practices fine motor control in lower extremities
- Develops awareness of often-neglected body parts
- Supports bilateral integration through symmetrical movement

The therapist cue "Nice — your feet know how to rest" talks about body parts like they have their own thoughts, which fits with how kids this age think about the world. This helps children think of their body as having different parts that can learn and do what they want them to do.

For kids who have trouble calming down or falling asleep at bedtime, the foot part often becomes their favorite thing to practice on their own. Many kids end up using just this part when they're trying to fall asleep, making it a really useful skill for home.

Final Check-In (~1 min)

"Take a quiet moment to notice your whole body. Does anything feel softer, warmer, lighter, heavier, or calmer?"

Whatever you notice is okay. You did such a good job giving your body a little time to rest."

Therapist cue: "I can see you worked hard — your body practiced relaxing beautifully."

Clinical Purpose of the Final Check-In



Body Awareness

Prompts integration of the full-body experience and promotes interoceptive awareness of subtle physical changes



Reflection

Encourages metacognition about the relaxation process and its effects on physical and emotional states



Reinforcement

Validates the child's effort and participation, reinforcing the value of the practice regardless of perceived success



Transfer

Bridges the formal practice to everyday awareness by drawing attention to relaxation sensations that can be recognized later

Language Considerations

The check-in words are chosen carefully to help with therapy goals:

- Giving different feeling options (softer, warmer, lighter, heavier, calmer) shows that all experiences are valid
- Saying "whatever you notice is okay" takes away pressure to feel certain things
- Praising their effort instead of results keeps kids motivated from within
- Talking about "giving your body time to rest" makes relaxation feel like something nice they're doing for themselves

This final moment helps kids remember what they learned and makes them feel good about PMR. It also tells you how well the child can notice and describe what's happening in their body.

Handout 3: Full Script


Therapist Script: Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Children *Adjust cycles and time as necessary*

Introduction (1 minute) "Sometimes our bodies hold on to tension when we're worried, excited, or frustrated. Today, we're going to practice helping your muscles tighten and relax so your body can feel calm and safe."

There's no perfect way to do this — just follow along and notice what your body feels like. Let's sit back, place your feet on the floor, and rest your arms by your sides. If it feels okay, close your eyes or look down softly.


Take a slow breath in... and out. Great — you're ready."

Progressive Sequence (6 minutes)


 **Hands and Arms — Gentle Fists** (3 cycles, ~1 min) "Make gentle fists, like you're holding something special. Squeeze softly... hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Now open your hands and relax. Wiggle your fingers. **Notice how your hands feel now.**" (Pause 3 sec)


"Let's try again — squeeze a little tighter... hold... and release. **Feel the difference between tight and loose.**" (Pause 3 sec)


"Last one — squeeze, hold... and let it go. **What do you notice about your hands?**" Therapist cue: "Nice job — your hands are learning to relax."


 **Upper Arms and Shoulders — Strong and Soft** (2 cycles, ~1 min) "Bend your elbows and make your arms strong, like you're showing muscles. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Let your arms drop soft and heavy. **Feel how heavy and relaxed they are.**" (Pause 3 sec)

"One more time — squeeze... hold... and relax. **Notice that soft, heavy feeling.**" **Therapist cue:**
"Great work."

 **Shoulders — Up and Down** (3 cycles, ~45 sec) "Lift your shoulders up to your ears. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Drop your shoulders slowly and rest. **Feel them sink down and relax.**" (Pause) "Again — up, hold... and relax. **Notice how they drop and feel loose.**" "One more time — up to your ears... hold... and drop. **Feel how relaxed your shoulders are now.**"

 **Face — Gentle Scrunch** (2 cycles, ~45 sec) "Make a tiny scrunch in your face — squeeze your eyes, nose, and mouth gently. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Now relax your face and let it get soft and smooth. **Notice how calm your face feels.**" (Pause) "Try one more — scrunch... and release. **Feel how smooth and peaceful it is now.**"

 **Belly — Balloon Squeeze** (2 cycles, ~45 sec) "Pretend there's a soft balloon in your belly. Give it a gentle hug by pulling your belly button in slightly. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Now let your belly soften and relax. Breathe in... and out. **Notice how soft and calm your belly feels.**" (Pause 3 sec) "Try one more — gentle squeeze... and release. **Pay attention to that soft, relaxed feeling.**"

 **Toes and Feet — Curl and Rest** (2 cycles, ~45 sec) "Curl your toes down tight, like you're pressing into the floor. Hold... 3, 2, 1..." "Now let your toes loosen and rest. **Feel how loose and wiggly they are.**" (Pause) "One more — curl... and relax. **Notice how your feet feel now — soft and comfortable.**"

Final Check-In (1 minute) "Take a moment to notice your whole body. Does it feel softer, lighter, heavier, warmer, or calmer?"

"Whatever you notice is okay. You did such a good job giving your body time to rest." **Therapist cue:** "Your body practiced relaxing beautifully today."

Handout 4: Parent Guide (Simplified At-Home Version)

Helping Kids Relax: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

(Ages 5–8, Parent Handout)

This simplified guide translates clinical practice into accessible language for parents and caregivers. It provides the essential components of PMR while acknowledging the realities of home implementation. The parent version maintains fidelity to the core therapeutic principles while removing clinical jargon and complex instructions.

Parents play a crucial role in reinforcing therapeutic techniques between sessions. This handout bridges the clinical-home gap, allowing for consistent practice that builds neural pathways more efficiently than weekly sessions alone. The language is deliberately warm and encouraging to reduce parent anxiety about "doing it right."

- ❑ Consider reviewing this handout with parents directly during a session or parent consultation to address questions and demonstrate key components before home implementation.

What Is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a simple way for kids to learn how their body feels when it's **tight** and when it's **relaxed**. Practicing helps kids calm down, fall asleep easier, and manage stress.

Why PMR Works for Children

Progressive Muscle Relaxation offers specific benefits for young children's developing nervous systems:

- Creates conscious awareness of muscle tension that often goes unnoticed
- Builds a vocabulary for physical sensations related to stress and calm
- Provides a concrete, sequential process that children can follow
- Teaches the fundamental skill of voluntary relaxation that supports emotional regulation
- Engages the body directly in the calming process, which is more effective than verbal instructions alone

Developmental Appropriateness

PMR aligns well with developmental characteristics of children ages 5-8:

- Concrete operations stage - children can follow sequential steps
- Developing body awareness and proprioception
- Increasing capacity for self-regulation
- Ability to follow multi-step instructions
- Enjoyment of mastering physical skills
- Benefit from consistent routines and predictability

Physiological Benefits

When children practice PMR regularly, they experience measurable physiological changes:



Reduced Heart Rate

PMR activates the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering heart rate and blood pressure.



Improved Breathing

Relaxed muscles around the chest and abdomen allow for deeper, more efficient breathing patterns.



Decreased Stress Hormones

Regular practice reduces circulating cortisol and adrenaline levels associated with chronic stress.



Enhanced Sleep Quality

Physical relaxation helps children fall asleep faster and experience more restorative sleep cycles.

Quick Parent Script (3–5 minutes)

Simple Step-by-Step Guide for Home Practice

1. Hands

"Squeeze your fists real tight!... hold for 3... now open and relax."Great job!

2. Shoulders

"Lift them up high... hold for 3... now let them drop low."Good job!

3. Face

"Scrunch your face like a shruken raisin... hold for 3... now soften and let your face melt." Good job!

4. Belly

"Pull your belly in gently... hold for 3... now relaxand let it go. Take a breath."How does it feel? Good job!

5. Toes

"Curl your toes... hold for 3... now wiggle them loose." DOes it feel nice? How does your body feel?

(Tip: You don't have to use all the steps — even 2–3 helps!)

You can repeat these up to 3 times. Check in with how your childs body feels while tensing and releasing. Vary time by age and tolerance.

Tips for Parents



Timing

Keep it short (3–5 minutes). PMR works best as part of a **bedtime routine** when children are already winding down. Consistency at the same time each day helps build the relaxation response.



Reactions

Don't worry if they giggle - that's totally normal. Many children find the body sensations unusual or funny at first. This doesn't mean it isn't working; laughter often releases tension and builds comfort with the practice.



Modeling

Do it **with your child** to model calmness. Children learn more from watching you than from verbal instructions. When they see you relax, they understand it's safe and beneficial.



When to Practice

Don't try during a meltdown — wait until they're calmer. PMR is a skill that needs to be learned during regulated states before it can be used during distress. Start with calm moments.



Partial Success

Partial practice still helps. Even if your child only completes one or two muscle groups, they're still building important body awareness and relaxation skills. Celebrate small successes!

Be creative with this script the more fun the better!

Setting Up for Success at Home

What Helps

- Turn down the lights to help your child's body get ready to relax
- Find a comfy spot—couch, bed, or even the floor with pillows
- Keep it quiet, or use soft background sounds if that feels better
- Try to use the same spot each time so your child knows what to expect
- Make sure the room feels good—not too hot or cold

What Gets in the Way

- Brothers and sisters popping in or being loud nearby
- Phones buzzing or TV sounds in the background
- Rushing through it when you're trying to get everyone to bed
- Your own stress coming through in your voice (kids pick up on this!)
- Doing it randomly instead of making it part of your routine

Understanding Progress

PMR works on the inside first, so you might not see dramatic changes right away. Here's what to watch for as your child develops these skills:



Bedtime Request

Your child asks to do PMR before sleep. This means they've connected the practice with feeling good and want to use it on their own.



Self-Initiation

Your child uses PMR when they're upset or stressed without you suggesting it. This is exactly what we're hoping for—they're taking the skill and making it their own.



Physical Improvements

You notice better sleep, fewer complaints about stomachaches or headaches. Their body is learning to relax even when they're not actively practicing.



Body Awareness

Your child starts saying things like "My shoulders feel tight" or "I need to relax my hands." They're becoming their own body detective and knowing what they need.

Tracking Progress

Parents can monitor their child's progress with PMR using these simple observation strategies:

What to Look for Right Away

- Your child's muscles look more relaxed during practice
- Their breathing becomes slower and deeper
- Less fidgeting and moving around
- Their face looks softer and less tense after practice
- They speak more quietly or sound calmer

What You'll Notice Over Time

- Your child handles tough situations with less emotional overwhelm
- They seem less anxious during everyday activities
- Transitions and changes don't throw them off as much
- Fewer complaints about headaches, stomachaches, or feeling "weird"
- They can better tell you how their body feels ("My shoulders are tight" or "I feel calm")

Keep in Mind

Progress isn't always steady—your child might do really well for a while, then seem to go backward, especially during stressful times or big changes. This is completely normal. The key is sticking with it over time.

Let your child's therapist know how PMR is going at home. Share what you're noticing—both the good days and the tough ones. This helps them adjust their approach to work better for your specific child.