

◇ Chapter 13  
The Challenge of Change

Relationship Skills

## RELAX AND RELATE

Stress management can play a vital role in your relationships with others. You can't be your best for family, friends, and others who rely on you if you are suffering from too much stress.

When it comes to dealing with stress, the mind and the body are closely linked. Emotional stress can cause physical complaints, such as headaches, body aches, and even ulcers. On the other hand, learning to relax your body in times of stress can help ease the mental tension. A relaxation response can be learned by practicing exercises designed to help you overcome physical and emotional stress.

**Directions:** Try the relaxation exercises described below. Choose a time when you can be alone in quiet, familiar surroundings. Try to spend at least five minutes on each exercise. (If you are concerned about a time schedule, use a small timer set at five-minute intervals. Remember that worrying about time only makes you more tense.) Block all other concerns from your mind and concentrate only on each exercise. After trying the exercises at least three times, answer the questions at the end of this activity.

### The Stress Relievers



**Rub-a-Dub-Dub** Close your eyes. Imagine you are in a huge bathtub filled with soothing, warm water. You are sprawled in the water, enjoying the heat. The hot water gradually eases the tensions in your body.



**A Day at the Beach** Close your eyes. Imagine you are lying in the soft, warm sand of a quiet beach. The sun is shining brightly. The waves are lapping gently on the shore. Imagine someone is gradually covering you with a blanket of warm sand. First, sand is poured over your legs. Then your stomach, chest, and arms are covered. Imagine lying in the sun covered with the warm sand.



**A Breath of Fresh Air** Stand or sit up straight. Inhale deeply as you count slowly to four. Take in as much air as you can. Hold your breath for a slow count of four. Exhale, again counting slowly to four. Try to push all the air out of your lungs. With your lungs as empty as possible, slowly count once more to four. Repeat.



**Present Tense** Lie flat on the floor. Tense all the muscles in your left foot. Then relax them as completely as possible. Tense and relax the muscles of your left leg. Repeat with your right foot and leg. Continue with the muscles in each part of your body — arms, stomach, back, neck, and face. Then relax your entire body. Lie still and relaxed for a count of twenty. Repeat.

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### Evaluating the Results

1. Which of the exercises did you find most relaxing? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Which exercise did you find least effective? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Why do you think you are encouraged to try these exercises alone? How might the experience be different if you practiced them with a friend?

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4. Describe two instances from your experience when poor stress management contributed to negative feelings or actions between people.

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5. For the two instances you described in the last question, explain how they might have been better resolved if stress had been managed more effectively.

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