Improving Relaxation and Control of Anxiety

TI 024 - Thematic

By

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# Improving Relaxation and Control of Anxiety

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IMPROVING RELAXATION AND CONTROL OF ANXIETY

Anxiety Management Training TI024

By Michael Slavit

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General Considerations

Anxiety Management Training is a life skill workshop. It is a structured learning experience, run in a group format. The basic premise of Anxiety Management Training is that a person cannot be both relaxed and anxious at the same time. A primary focus of the workshop, then, is to train clients to relax. The relaxation response reciprocally inhibits the response of anxiety.

The use of imagery is also a major component of Anxiety Management Training. Imagery is used in a variety of behavior therapy techniques. These techniques can be said to fall along a continuum, depending upon how much anxiety is evoked in the client. At the high-anxiety end of the continuum are “flooding” techniques, such as implosive therapy, in which a high anxiety response is elicited. At the low-anxiety end of the continuum is systematic desensitization (Wolpe), in which the client’s relaxed state is maintained as successively more salient anxiety-provoking stimuli are presented.

When Suinn and Richardson first devised Anxiety Management Training at Colorado State University in 1971, they used “flooding” techniques and an automated teaching model, using tapes. When the Anxiety Management Training model was revised at American University by McCarthy (1973), a trainer was substituted for tapes, and the “flooding” technique was abandoned in favor of a systematic desensitization model. Imagery is first used to help the participants to deepen the sense of relaxation that they derive from the progressive muscle relaxation exercises. Then, the muscle relaxation exercises are gradually faded out and replaced by the use of imagery. Eventually, the members can relax themselves quickly and naturally, using imagery as their primary tool.
Problems Amenable to Improvement through Relaxation

The following problems are amendable to improvement through relaxation Techniques:

(1) Complaints of generalized anxiety

(2) Somatic complaints
   a. headaches
   b. general tension
   c. stomach problems may or may not be helped by Anxiety Management Training.
   d. restlessness
   e. fidgeting
   f. rapid walking, talking, or eating
   g. tics
   h. poor concentration
   i. backaches or stiff neck
   j. fatigue
   k. shortness of breath
   l. “butterflies”

(3) Complaint of anxiety that does inhibit performance and cause discomfort, but which is not severe enough to be labeled a phobia (e.g.: mild test anxiety, mild speech anxiety)

(4) Free-floating anxiety

(5) Desire to learn to relax better

(6) Sleep problems

Screening

Clients for Anxiety management Training should be screened; the screening should be for the following purposes:

1. To build up client expectations of the efficacy of the workshop;
2. To screen out clients who are suffering from phobias (more individualized behavioral techniques are usually necessary to successfully deal with phobic disorders);
3. To establish the contract for each group member to attend each session: to be on time and to do the practice work between sessions.

The group may be heterogeneous with regard to types of problems. There is no minimum number of clients, but a maximum of 12 should be observed.
Time and Location

The workshop is run for 4 sessions of 1 1/2 to 2 hours each. It should be held in a comfortable room where clients can either recline on pillows or in very comfortable chairs. The room must be quiet and free from distractions, and the lights should be able to be dimmed or turned off.
Session I

Materials:
Appendix A,
Appendix E

A. Purposes
(1) To set the expectation for success by the participants in the workshop;
(2) To introduce the theory of relaxation; and
(3) To teach the participants to experience a full, deep sense of relaxation, using the progressive relaxation exercises.

B. Procedure
1. Introduction and Background (30-45 minutes)
Begin by asking everyone present to introduce themselves by first names, and to state his or her goal for the group. Re-emphasize the client contract for the group, which is to attend each session, to be on time, and to do the practice work between sessions. Explain that the workshop is a skill-building experience in a group format; that it is not a therapy group in the sense that it will not require “heavy confrontation” or the sharing of “deep secrets”; and that each person may share whatever he or she feels will enable the trainer to provide a quality learning experience. The need for confidentiality should be mentioned.

2. The next step is to set up a “buddy system.” Each pair of group members should be encouraged to check with one another between sessions to help each other with the practice work.
Explain that the purpose of this system is encouragement and monitoring—not policing.
3. Explain the theory and technique of relaxation:

   a. The basic premise is that a person cannot be both relaxed and anxious at the same time.

   b. Relaxation is a SKILL, which can be LEARNED.

   c. We can learn to generalize the skill of relaxation to real-life situations by use of “fading” and “shaping.” We shape our behavior to be closer and closer to relaxation in a real-life situation by gradually fading the use of the helpful props (dimly-lighted room, pillows, trainer's soothing voice, etc.).

   d. Our goal is to successfully monitor and control anxiety.

   e. Give some clinical and personal examples of the use of relaxation techniques (e.g.: natural childbirth; reduction of dental pain; speaking before large audiences).

   f. Be prepared to answer questions concerning the similarities and differences between Anxiety Management and such techniques as hypnosis, desensitization, yoga, and meditation. Stress the concept that in Anxiety Management Training the individual retains control over himself or herself.

4. Relaxation Exercises (30-45 minutes)

Ask the clients to recline in such a way as to maximize relaxation. Stress the need to arrange back, neck, and head in a comfortable, alligned position. Be sure to ask that contact lenses be removed, if necessary. Eyeglasses being removed is desirable, but not as necessary. Dim the lights and lead the group through a series of exercises. Ask the group to first tense and then relax several muscle groups of the body. Stress repeatedly that the goal is to teach our bodies the difference between feelings of tension and of relaxation.

Tense and relax each muscle group two or three times. Ask the clients to think the words “calm” and “serene” as they inhale and exhale. The specific techniques for relaxing the group, which if possible should be learned from an experienced trainer through observation, discussion, and supervised practice, are described in detail below:
“Now recline in your chair or on your pillow in a comfortable position, making sure that your head, neck, and back are in a comfortable, aligned position. Let’s start by taking a few deep breaths. As you inhale, think the word ‘calm’, as you exhale, think the word ‘serene.’ Now, we’re going to introduce tension into certain parts of the body, and then we’re going to let the tension go, paying close attention to the difference between the tension and relaxation. Our goal is to teach our bodies to relax by learning the difference between these feelings.

“Let’s start with the right hand. Make your right hand into a fist. Pay close attention to the feeling of tightness and tension in your fist...hold it (pause...2 to 5 seconds) and relax. Notice the difference between the feelings of tension and relaxation (pause... 5 to 8 seconds). Again, make your right hand into a fist...hold it...and relax. As you inhale, think the word calm; as you exhale, think serene. (pause) Stretch your fingers out wide, then let them fall into a natural, relaxed position. Notice the difference between the feelings of tension and relaxation.

“We should be learning how much tension we have to introduce into our system in order for us to really feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Now, make your right hand into a fist, then bend your hand down to the wrist, putting tension into your forearm as well. Pay attention to the tight, uncomfortable feeling in your forearm...hold it...and relax. Picture the tension flowing down your arm, through the wrist, and out through your fingertips. Again, make your right hand into a fist, and bend at the wrist putting the tension into your forearm...hold it, and relax. As you inhale, think the word calm; as you exhale, think serene.

“Now, make your right hand into a fist...bend at the wrist, putting the tension into your forearm, and now straighten out your arm and put the tension all the way up to your shoulder. Hold it...and relax. Pay attention to the difference between tension and relaxation. Once more, make your right hand into a fist...bend at the wrist, putting tension into the forearm...then straighten out your arm and put tension all the way to the shoulder. Notice the part of your arm that feels the most tense: that’s the part that will feel the most relaxed. Hold it...and relax. Stretch your fingers out wide, then let them fall into a natural, relaxed position. Picture the tension draining down your arm...through the elbow, forearm, and
wrist, and out through your fingertips. As you inhale, think calm; as you exhale, think serene.

“Now let’s do the left side.

(Use the same directions used for the LEFT hand and arm that were used for the RIGHT side.).

“Let’s relax the shoulders. First, put some tension in by hunching up your shoulders as though you’re trying to place them on either side of your ears. Hold it...and relax. Let your shoulders sink down, down, as low as they want to go. Notice the difference between the feelings of tension and of relaxation. Again, hunch up your shoulders until you can feel some tension... hold it...and relax, letting your shoulders sink down, relaxing you still further. The breathing is important.

“Notice the way your hands, arms, and shoulders feel. If there is a feeling of heaviness, concentrate on that feeling, and allow it to spread gently throughout your body.

“Now relax still further. You’ll be surprised at how relaxed you can become.”

(Stay aware of the progress of the group, so that you will know when to make suggestions such as these. Also, see the section near the end of this manual concerning, “Directiveness versus Permissiveness,” under Further Considerations.)

“All right, let’s work on the muscles in the face and head. By now you should have a good idea of how much tension you must introduce into your system in order for you to experience relaxation. Be careful not to use too much tension in the muscle groups in the face and head.

“Let’s start with the forehead. Wrinkle your brow and knit your eyebrows, so that you can feel tension in your forehead. Put your awareness into your forehead; really get an idea of what the feeling of tension is all about...hold it...and relax. Notice the difference between the feelings of tension and relaxation. Again, knit your eyebrows and wrinkle your brow, putting tension into your forehead...hold it...and relax. The breathing is important.
“Now let’s do the eyes. Close your eyes, then very slowly and very gently close them just a little bit tighter, until you can feel some tension...hold it...and relax. Again, close your eyes and notice some tension...hold it...and relax. Just allow your eyelids to open or to remain closed, however they feel the most comfortable. If your eyelids feel heavy, just allow that feeling of heaviness to deepen your sense of relaxation.

“Let’s do the muscles in the cheeks. Put your face into a wide grin, until you can feel tension in your cheeks...hold it...and relax. Notice the feeling of comfort as the feeling of relaxation takes over from the feeling of tension. Again, put on a wide grin, introducing some tension into the cheeks...hold it...and relax. The breathing is important.”

“Let’s try the tongue. Press your tongue against the roof of your mouth until you can feel some tension...hold it...and relax. Again, press your tongue against the roof of your mouth... hold it...and relax. As you inhale, think calm, as you exhale, think serene.

“Now let’s do the jaw. This is an important area, since many of us tend to store a lot of tension here. Put your teeth together into a good, firm bite. Then, very gradually bite down harder, and harder, until you can feel some tension...hold it... and slowly relax. Pay attention to the change as the relaxation takes over from the tension. Again, put your teeth into a firm bite, and gradually bite down harder. Now bite down just a little bit harder...hold it...and slowly relax. The breathing is important.

“Let’s relax the muscles in the neck. Very slowly and gently roll your head around in a circle, just using the weight of your head to slowly and gently loosen and relax the muscles in your neck. Now, bring your head forward, and, very gently press your head forward until you feel some tension...hold it...and relax.

“Now bring your head very slowly and gently back until it presses against the pillow, or the back of the chair, and then gently and gradually press back until you feel some tension...and relax. Again, roll your head slowly and gently around in circles, and now...allow your head to come to rest in a comfortable position.

“Let’s relax the stomach muscles. Tighten your stomach...hold it...and relax. Notice what your stomach feels like as it rises and falls with each
breath. Again, tighten your stomach until you can feel some tension...hold it...and relax. Picture your stomach as if it were a bellows, gradually pumping the tension out of your body with each breath.

“Now the buttocks. Tighten your buttocks until you can feel tension...hold...and relax. Again, tighten your buttocks...hold...and relax.

“Now the legs. Let's start with the right leg. Straighten out your leg. Pull the toes back toward your head, putting tension into your calf. Now straighten the leg, and put tension right up to your thigh...hold...and relax. Picture the tension draining down your leg...through the knee, calf, and ankle, and out through the bottom of your foot. Again, pull the toes back toward your head, putting tension into the calf, and straighten the leg, and put the tension right up to your thigh...hold...and relax. (Use the same procedure for the left leg that you use for the right.)

“If there is any particular part of your body where there is still some tension, concentrate on that part. Now add a little bit more tension...hold it, and relax. Feel what your stomach feels like as it gently rises and falls with each breath. Picture your stomach as if it were a bellows, gently pumping any residual tension out of your system.”

**At this point in the initial session, a few hypnotic suggestions may be employed to ensure that all participants experience a deep sense of relaxation.**

“Picture yourself at the top of a great flight of stairs. The stairs are filled with crushed foam rubber and goose down. They are soft. Now picture yourself descending the stairs; and with each step your sense of relaxation deepens. (Pause) I'm going to count down from 5, and as I do, you will relax even more...more than before...you will give yourself permission to relax...fully...and...deeply. Five...four...relaxing more and more...three...two...deeper and deeper...one...and...relax.”

Gently bring the group back to a “normal” state. This can be done by simply asking that the clients stretch their muscles a bit, and begin to open their eyes and become fully aware of their surroundings.

As you count back up to 5, ask for feedback from each group member. Clients who normally have great difficulty relaxing will typically express an
exhilaration at having been able to totally relax. The success of a client in utilizing Anxiety Management techniques is contingent upon first teaching his or her body the sense of deep muscle relaxation.

C. Discuss Practice Work (15 minutes)

A review sheet is handed out at this stage of each session of the workshop (see Appendix A), plus a Recording sheet (Appendix E).

1. Ask the clients to practice the deep muscle relaxation exercises a minimum of once a day for 15 minutes each time.

2. Ask the clients to keep a list of what makes them anxious during the next week. Provide them with a recording sheet (see Appendix E) to ensure that this is done. Ask them to discriminate where in their body the anxiety (tension) is felt, and the relative strength of the feeling.

3. Ask them to check with their buddies at least once during the week to monitor progress and provide encouragement.

D. Leader Self-Evaluation

The major criterion by which to evaluate yourself in the first session is whether or not the participants reported that they were able to relax more fully than is normal for them. Given a quiet, undisturbed setting and a series of well-delivered exercises, participants will typically report very enthusiastically that they achieved a sense of relaxation deeper than any in their recent memory.

Feedback from the participants will usually inform you as to the strengths and weaknesses of your presentation. Attend to feedback relating to the following variables:

(1) VOICE. Your voice is very important, but you DO NOT NEED a deep resonant voice. If you are relaxed yourself, you should be able to communicate a relaxed feeling through your voice.

(2) VOCAL TONE AND INFLECTION. Relaxation is a pleasurable experience. If you enjoy and believe in the experience yourself, you should be able to express this in a manner that will be helpful to your clients. Let your own pleasure in the experience come through GENUINELY in your vocal tone and inflection.
(3) SPEED. Try to determine if your speed was adequate. Too slow a speed can be boring; too fast can fail to be relaxing.

(4) AWARENESS OF AND ADJUSTMENT TO NEEDS OF GROUP. You may adjust your presentation to meet the needs of your group. Such factors as specific muscle groups used, number of repetitions of each muscle group, and direct suggestions to relax must be adjusted to meet the group’s needs. This ability must be acquired with practice and experience.
Session II

A. Purposes

The Purposes of Session 2 are:

1. To check the progress each participant is making toward being able to self-induce relaxation using the exercises
2. To reinforce success
3. To “troubleshoot” problems and give specific strategies to those students who are experiencing difficulty in relaxing by themselves.
4. To teach each group member how to construct a relaxation scene
5. To set into motion the important process of coupling the use of imagery with the exercises, so that imagery can ultimately be used by itself to induce relaxation and counteract tension.

B. Procedure

1. Check on Practice Work (10-15 minutes).
   
   It is important to be sure that the buddy system is positively reinforcing, and that each person is ready to make maximum use of relaxation exercises this session.

2. Use of Imagery and the Development of Scenes (30 minutes).

   Since anxiety is an internally-cured response, it can be controlled by the use of imagery. This premise may be challenged, so be prepared to use a Gestalt fantasy experience to demonstrate that anxiety is, indeed, often caused by internal cues--often by our internal interpretation of an external event. Make the distinction between anxiety and fear. Fear is a reaction to a known threat; anxiety is usually an uneasiness about a situation in which there is no clear threat.

   Help each client to create a personal relaxation scene. It is important to make use of all of the senses: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic. Try to get an idea of which sensory modality the client is best able
to imagine, and make maximum use of this sense in helping the client to construct his or her scene.

Encourage the clients to see themselves directly IN their scenes. Stress feelings of comfort, lack of obligations, and a feeling of endlessness in the scenes. (Once again, the specific techniques for helping clients to construct powerful scenes may best be learned from an experienced trainer.)

Relaxation scenes may be active or passive. An active scene may come under the category of a competency (or mastery) scene. Most clients seem to be more successful with relaxation scenes. However, the concept of competency scenes should be made available to the group.

Relaxation and/or competency scenes may be real experiences or they may be imaginary. The test of a scene is that it should be able to draw upon the sense of relaxation achieved through the exercises in the next part of the session.

3. Relaxation Exercises (30 minutes).

Lead the group through the deep muscle relaxation exercises, as in the first session. But use fewer repetitions or fewer muscle groups, or fewer of both. Then ask the clients to deepen their sense of relaxation by putting themselves into their relaxation scenes. The relaxation scene will then take the place of the “staircase scene,” which you provided in Session I.

Gently bring the group back to a normal state, and ask about each client’s experience. It is important that the clients were able to increase, or deepen, their sense of relaxation by using the scenes. Discuss ways of making the imagery experiences more real and vivid, by eliminating anxiety-provoking elements and by expanding the detail of the relaxing aspects of the scenes.

C. Discuss Practice Work (15-20 minutes).

1. Practice relaxation for the same time periods, but begin to fade out the use of tensing muscle groups. Emphasize that each client must work out his own strategy and time framework for eliminating the physical tensing.

2. While relaxed, use the relaxation and/or competency scenes to enhance the comfort.
3. Begin thinking of two anxiety-provoking scenes. Each scene should be such that it provokes anxiety that the client can feel, but that is not out of control. Draw the analogy between the build-up of anxiety and the build-up of a snowball rolling down a hill. It picks up momentum as it continues and becomes increasingly more difficult to stop. The anxiety-provoking scenes should cause the clients to feel the physical effects of anxiety, but should not produce panic. As an example, a person who fears airplanes should not imagine being in the airplane during an electrical storm and seeing the wing shorn off by a lightning bolt. It would be more appropriate for that person to picture having packed his or her bags and having the taxicab outside waiting for the trip to the airport.

4. Encourage the clients to meet with their buddies at least once to reinforce practice and monitor progress.

D. Review Sheet (Appendix B). A review sheet is handed out at this stage of each session of the workshop.

E. Leader Self-Evaluation.

The two major areas in which you may want to evaluate your own performance are (1) helping to develop specific strategies for those participants who are having difficulty relaxing outside of the group and (2) helping each individual to develop a satisfactory relaxation scene.

Relative to specific strategies, it may be necessary to see a few students after the group session. The key factors in developing specific individual strategies are that the strategies must be (a) “do-able,” achievable tasks; and (b) they must be amenable to a gradual fading-out process. As you look back and evaluate the specific strategies that you may have recommended, their face validity may be as important a criterion of their value as their actual success in practice. This is because there are some students who are not ready to give up their anxieties and tensions—for any of a number of reasons. You may best be able to help them by pointing out this process to them (but not as early as Session II).

Relative to helping each individual to develop a usable relaxation scene, consider your own performance in terms of how well it suited the needs of the individual, and how comfortable the individual seems to feel with you. You may actively help some students to strengthen their scores; however, other students may wish
to remain somewhat more independent and would regard too much help or support by you as an intrusion.
Session III

A. Purposes

1. To help the students to be more aware of the process of ebb and flow of feelings of tension and relaxation in their bodies

2. To help the students to gain a sense of control over their experiencing of tension

3. To begin to teach the students to condition themselves to automatically introduce relaxation as a way of combating nonproductive anxiety.

B. Procedure

1. Discuss-Homework and Practice on Relaxation and Imagery (10–15 minutes)

Be sure that the group feels comfortable and skilled in these areas since they are basic to the Anxiety Management model. Reinforce participants for learning the skill of relaxation.

2. Construct Two Anxiety-Provoking Scenes (20–30 minutes)

Anxiety-provoking scenes are constructed in the same way that relaxation and competency scenes are constructed. Be sure to use all the senses and to concentrate on the use of that sense most easily and vividly imagined by each individual client. It is necessary that these scenes be vivid enough to be the type of anxiety cue that has the potential to “snowball.”

When the students have indicated that they can, indeed, produce within themselves the physical manifestations of tension and anxiety, emphasize with them a key concept: that tension and anxiety are not solely caused by external events; instead, they are caused by our interpretation of external events; they therefore have certain internal cues, which vary from person to person.
3. Discuss Anxiety Management Training Procedure (10–15 minutes).
   a. Re-emphasize that the goal is to learn to monitor and control anxiety.
   b. Let the clients know that they can use anxiety itself as a cue to introduce relaxation.
   c. The leader will ask the clients to signal by raising one finger when they actually feel anxiety and to keep the finger raised only as long as anxiety is felt. The leader will then alternately ask the clients to project themselves into their anxiety-provoking and relaxation scenes. The anxiety-provoking scenes will be presented for 20 seconds, followed by 45-60 seconds of relaxation. During the first 3 presentations, instruct the clients to let themselves feel the anxiety—to become aware of the physical and psychological manifestations of anxiety.
   For the rest of the presentations, instruct the clients to “hope to remain relaxed while being “in” the anxiety-provoking scene. Gradually increase the length of the presentations of the anxiety-provoking scenes with the goal of having the clients imagine their anxiety-provoking scenes for 45 seconds with no one signaling anxiety. This is equivalent to systematically desensitizing the clients to the particular anxiety-provoking scene that they are using.
   Point out to the clients that their success in this exercise provides them with a new tool—that they will now be able to use this method to desensitize themselves to an expected situation by creating an anxiety-provoking scene of that situation and using the Anxiety Management Training model.

4. Anxiety Management Training (30-45 minutes).

   Carry out the procedure described above, reinforcing the clients for learning to monitor and control anxiety.

C. Hand out Appendix C, review of concepts.
D. Discuss Procedure and Practice Work (10–20 minutes)

A basic premise is that the more a client understands and accepts the procedure, the more likely he will be to successfully utilize it.

The practice work for the next week is aimed at generalizing the relaxation response to real-life situations:

1. Ask the clients to practice RELAXING first with eyes open while reclining, and then in a normal, non-reclining position. The eventual goal is to be able to relax in a real-life situation.

2. Ask the clients to practice eliminating anxiety first by using the SCENES at home in a comfortable position, then by using the scenes to combat anxiety in a real-life situation.

3. Stress the need to be aware of any new anxiety-provoking situations where Anxiety management can be used.

4. Ask clients to check with their buddies at least once during the week.

Some of the clients will typically drop out between the 3rd and 4th sessions, because they will have largely acquired the skills by the end of the 3rd session. For those who attend the 4th session, the procedures will be much the same as they were in the 3rd session.

E. Leader Self-evaluation

There will typically be some variability in the participants’ abilities to use imagery to create physical manifestations of anxiety. Therefore, you will have to conduct the training exercise in such a way as to meet the needs of the majority of participants. You may also have to offer suggestions as to how to enhance the effectiveness of some anxiety-provoking scenes as well as of some relaxation scenes.

Pay attention to the extent to which you altered the workshop routine to work with one or a few individuals. It should be particularly gratifying if you were able to allow some of the participants to help others by use of their own experience with the training model.

Also, try to assess whether you may have “wasted time” by working with individuals who are resistant to the idea of giving up their tension and anxiety. Or, if you pointed out this type of process to a resistant individual, try to assess
whether you gave feedback in a manner in which the individual could really bear it without becoming defensive.
Session IV

A. Purposes

1. To “troubleshoot” areas in which some students may be experiencing particular difficulties.
2. To reinforce success and set the expectation for future practice of skills.
3. To provide another practice session of the training model.
4. To introduce and discuss the concepts of rational emotive therapy as a way of exerting a rational control of anxiety.

B. Procedure

It is important to advise the group to take small steps in attempting to generalize Anxiety Management skills to real-life situations. In order for behavioral learning principles to pertain, it is important to BEGIN by discussing SUCCESSFUL experiences, and THEN move to problem situations. Therefore, in discussing the practice work, say “In using the techniques, how many of you used the techniques successfully?” rather than saying, “How did things go during the past week?”

Spend 10-15 minutes developing two new anxiety-provoking scenes. One scene should be a troublesome situation, somewhat higher in anxiety evocation. The second scene should be another problem area where the client would like to feel more relaxed and competent.

Spend 20-30 minutes utilizing the Anxiety management Training procedure as in the 3rd session. Re-emphasize the idea that we can desensitize ourselves to an anticipated anxiety-provoking situation by creating an anxiety scene and using it for practice.

Next, introduce the concepts of rational emotive therapy. Begin by repeating the concept that we are not so much affected by external events as we are by our interpretation of these events. Introduce some of the basic irrational beliefs that we tend to carry around with us, and which determine our interpretation of events in such a way as to cause us to be anxious. The irrational belief that we must be competent in all situations is often a key concept for persons with anxiety-related complaints.
Ask each of the group participants to share a situation in which they unnecessarily cause themselves to be anxious because of their irrational beliefs. You may wish to open this discussion by sharing a situation of your own, in order to “warm things up.”

Choose a particular irrational belief shared by at least a few group members, and elaborate on strategies to dispute the belief rationally. End the discussion by stressing the concept that each individual has the choice to live with anxiety or to deal with it using either rational control or behavioral control, or both. Emphasize the idea that each group participant must now take responsibility for himself/herself without the assistance of the group, and that not using the newly-learned techniques means a choice to live with tension and anxiety.

C. Hand out Appendix D, Review of Concepts & Homework Assignment.

D. Homework Assignment

1. Recommend that the participants practice on a regular basis for two additional weeks and then on a fairly regular schedule or as needed.

2. If possible, schedule a follow-up appointment with each individual in 3-6 weeks. Or, a questionnaire can be mailed to the participants after a prescribed period of time in order to provide reminders and gather data.
Further Considerations

Reading

A few books which may be helpful to students are:


  Note: a new edition has been issued: *Beyond the Relaxation Response: How to Harness the Healing Power of Your Personal Beliefs* by Herbert Benson and William Proctor (Berkley Publishing Group, 1994).


Directiveness versus Permissiveness

Anxiety Management Training is a behavioral approach, based on Classical Conditioning. It is a structured group learning procedure, and as such is somewhat directive. However, with respect to the use of imagery and suggestion, it is a permissive approach.

In the rather lengthy description of procedure for Session I, a few examples are shown of a more directive approach, with the use of suggestion. For instance, there is the “staircase scene” used to deepen the relaxation induced by the progressive relaxation exercises. This is an example of a hypnotic technique, as is the use of counting back from 5 as a means of deepening relaxation. Even in hypnosis, the client is susceptible to suggestion because he or she is in agreement with the suggestion. However, the use of a more directive, hypnotic approach is a more powerful device.

It is recommended that Anxiety Management Training be approached in a permissive style, in general. The use of a few more directive, suggestive devices during the first session is necessary in order to ensure that, if possible, all the group members do experience deep muscle relaxation as a prelude to the remainder of the training. However, if the training is to be a workable tool for the participants after the 4 sessions are finished, it is desirable that the participants be allowed to work out their own strategies without the “aid” of a more directive, hypnotic approach by the trainer.
Appendix A: Session I Handout

Review of General Concepts
(1) The basic premise is that a person cannot be both anxious and relaxed at the same time.
(2) Relaxation is a skill, which can be learned.
(3) We can learn to generalize the skill of relaxation to “real life” situations, using “shaping” and “fading.”
(4) Our goal is to successfully monitor and control anxiety.

Student Contract for Course
Each student should affirm his or her commitment to attend each session; to be on time for each session; and to do the practice work between sessions.

Practice work
(1) The students will be asked to practice the relaxation exercises a minimum of once a day for 15 minutes, but preferably twice a day.
(2) You will be provided with a recording sheet (Appendix E). Please keep a list of anxiety-provoking situations and their effects on you for the next week.
(3) Each student should select a “buddy” from among the other class members, and should check with the buddy once during the week.
Appendix B: Session II Handout

Review of General Concepts

(1) Anxiety is an internally-cued response, and therefore it can be controlled by the appropriate use of imagery.

(2) Imagery can be used as a more natural method of inducing relaxation and counteracting tension.

(3) Guidelines for constructing imagery scenes for relaxation and competence include seeing yourself in the scene and imagining all of the sensations which you would feel in the scene.

Practice Work

(1) Practice relaxation exercises at least twice a day, but by the end of this week you should fade out tensing before relaxing.

(2) While relaxed, use relaxation scenes to enhance the vividness and comfort of relaxation.

(3) Continue to monitor your anxiety cues and record the experience on the handout sheet. Your goal is to determine the first recognizable clue provided by the body that there is tension in the system.

(4) Create another relaxation scene using the same guidelines used by the instructor in class.

(5) Meet with your “buddy” at least once to reinforce practice and monitor progress.

(6) Create two anxiety-provoking scenes, using the same guidelines that were used to create relaxation scenes.
Appendix C: Session III Handout

Review of General Concepts

(1) Since anxiety is at least partially an internally-cued response, we can learn to be aware of our own internal cues by paying attention to its ebb and flow in our system.

(2) Using imagery, deep breathing, and the sub-vocal repetition of certain words (such as “calm” and “serene”) we can change our internal cues and replace tension with relaxation.

(3) Since tension and anxiety tend to “snowball,” it is important to be aware of our early cues to anxiety, so that we can replace anxiety with relaxation before it builds up.

Practice Work

(1) Begin to fade out the use of some of the helpful “props” for relaxation. Relax using scenes only. Start by practicing in a reclining position, eyes closed, move toward a normal position, eyes open.

(2) Use the scenes at home the way we used them in class. Then try the scenes in some real-life situations.

(3) Be aware of new anxiety-provoking situations where your new skills can be utilized.
Appendix D: Session IV Handout

Review of General Concepts

(1) It is necessary to occasionally monitor the ebb and flow of tension in our system, so that we can be aware of our internal cues and control anxiety before it can “snowball.”

(2) We can use the anxiety management training model to desensitize ourselves to an anticipated anxiety-provoking situations before it occurs.

(3) We tend to hold certain irrational beliefs and to interpret external events according to our irrational beliefs; this therefore causes ourselves anxiety. The concept of rational emotive therapy is that if we can dispute our own irrational beliefs, then we can be freed from our anxiety-provoking interpretations of events.

Practice Work

(1) Practice your newly-acquired anxiety management skills on a regular basis for two more weeks. Then practice on an as-needed basis.

(2) Schedule a follow-up appointment with the trainer for 3-6 weeks from now.
## Appendix E: Recording Cues of Anxiety

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Appendix F: Workshop Evaluation

Name(s) of Leader(s): __________________________________________________________

Date Workshop Began: _________________              Today’s Date: ______________

In order that we might know what has been helpful and useful in this group program, your candid answers to the following items are most valuable and appreciated.

1. How would you rate the overall program in terms of its success in your increasing ability to manage your anxiety?
   _____ very successful
   _____ moderately successful
   _____ of little help
   _____ a waste of time

2. What parts of the program were MOST helpful and why?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. What parts of the program were LEAST helpful and why?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Would you comment briefly on each session and its particular high and/or low points?
   SESSION I:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
SESSION II:

SESSION III:

SESSION IV:

5. What specific changes would you recommend be made in this program? Add any other comments.

________________________________________________________________________

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