**Relaxation Training**

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

First, explain to children the rationale for relaxation training

"Sometimes we all feel a little on edge, or nervous. When we have those feelings, our bodies can sometimes get tense or tight. This is an uncomfortable feeling - sometimes it even hurts to be tense. To help get rid of those tense feelings, we're going to figure out a way to help you learn to relax your body. This will help you feel looser and calmer."

*Younger Children*

"Have you ever seen spaghetti noodles before they are cooked? What do they look like? Right, they are very stiff and not relaxed at all. How about spaghetti after it's cooked, what is that like? Right, bendy and twisty. Well, that's what I'd like us to do. First, we'll pretend to be uncooked spaghetti and be very tense and standing up very straight. And then we'll be cooked, loose and relaxed spaghetti. Good! OK now...Let's see you do it. Uncooked spaghetti (pause a few seconds)... Cooked spaghetti."

*Older Children*

"OK now that you are comfortable, I'd like you to listen carefully. I am going to be making you aware of certain feelings of tension in your body and then showing you how to reduce those tensions. Watch the movements I make and then make them yourself. First, point your toes back up toward your head. Feel the tension that occurs in your feet, ankles, and lower legs. Pay close attention to the feelings of tightness and tension. And now relax your feet, let them return to their normal position. Feel the difference in your feet, ankles, and lower legs; where it was tense just a moment ago, there is now a feeling of relaxation. Now straighten your right leg and lift it off the chair. Feel the tension on the top of your leg and also in your stomach. Pay attention to that feeling of tension. And now let go, let your leg relax and return to the chair, and note the difference between the relaxations you now feel and the tension that was there before."

This same basic instruction is then given for each major muscle group moving up the body, such as arms/biceps, stomach, shoulders, neck, face, and eyes/forehead.

**Belly Breathing**

Step 1: Explain to children the rationale for belly breathing

"Today we're going to be learning a way to help ourselves calm down and control our nervous and upset feelings. I'm going to show you a special way of controlling the way you breathe that can really help you calm down and feel better. When you learn to control your breathing, you'll find that it's much easier to control your emotions and calm down. It's also something you can do anytime and anywhere. When you get good at it, we'll have you show your parent how to do it, too."

Step 2: Demonstrate proper body positioning

"OK, let's get in a comfortable position. Can you sit like I am? Now, put one of your hands here, right above your belly button, and the other up here on your chest."

Step 3: Demonstrate proper breathing technique

"Now, let's concentrate on our breathing. When we breathe in, the hand on our tummy should move up, and when we breathe out it should move down. The hand on our chest should stay still and not move the whole time. This means we are breathing correctly... Okay, now that you're getting the hang of it, let's try to breathe more slowly when we breathe out than when we breathe in. I'll count while we practice, and let's see if I can count higher when we're breathing out than when we're breathing in."

Step 4: Introduce relaxing word

"Now that we've learned the helpful, calming way to breathe, let's try to add a way to keep our thoughts and minds calm as we're breathing. You keep breathing like you are, but each time you breathe out, I want you to say the word 'Calm' to yourself. I want you to try to concentrate on the word calm. If you have other thoughts pop into your head besides 'calm,' try to picture them floating away with your breath as you exhale."