Seven Day Test Anxiety Desensitization Program

This desensitization program is designed to help you control test anxiety. **This program will help you begin to substitute relaxation responses for the anxiety responses you now feel when studying for and taking tests** for the week prior to the exam as you attempt to master your anxiety.

The procedure involved in this test anxiety desensitization program involves establishing a series of test-preparation and test-taking scenes, visualizing the scenes individually in your mind's eye, and then doing relaxation immediately after each scene has been visualized.

The program involves seven steps, one for each day of the week prior to your exam. Each time you perform a step:

- Find a quiet place where you will be alone and not interrupted by visitors or phone calls.
- Do not have the radio or TV on.
- Lie on your back on your bed or in a reclining chair, and get as comfortable as you can.

The method for establishing the imagery for each of the seven days in the program is the same throughout the procedure. With your eyes closed, you create mental images of four scenes in sequence. You first imagine what the setting you are in would look like if you were looking straight ahead of you. Next, you picture what you would see if you looked to your right, and then behind you, and finally to your left. In other words, you visualize four different scenes to completely picture in your mind's eye the physical environment in which the scenes take place. For ease of visualization you may wish to first imagine an empty gray screen, and then develop your image on that screen. After viewing the image for a particular scene, you erase it by imagining again the empty gray screen. You hold each of the four scenes in your mind's eye for about 10 seconds before erasing it.

After visualizing each scene, you are to do relaxation for about 10 seconds. Keeping your mental screen blank, you repeat one or two of the relaxation listed on page 4. You may also take two or three deep breaths, slowly exhaling to feel the relaxation, or say "Calm" or "Relax" to yourself. It would probably help you to do some relaxation before you start visualizing the scenes. If you find it difficult to relax well, you could record some of the relaxation phrases on page 4 and listen to them before starting the scenes.

When finished with the desensitization scenes and relaxation for that day, gradually and easily become active again by: Taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling; moving your hands and feet, arms and legs, slowly at first and then somewhat more vigorously; opening your eyes; and stretching your body before sitting or standing.

To summarize, each day of the program you will:

1. Find a quiet place where you can be left alone and become very calm and relaxed.
2. Imagine the first of the four scenes for that day, holding the mental image in your mind's eye for about 10 seconds.
3. Erase the mental image of the first scene and do relaxation for about 10 seconds.
4. One at a time, imagine the three remaining scenes, and do relaxation after each one.
5. End the session by breathing deeply and exhaling slowly; gently and then more vigorously moving your hands and feet; opening your eyes; and stretching before arising.
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Now, starting with the first session, which is seven days before your exam, do one complete session each day. If you have more than a week to prepare for your exam, repeat the scenes causing you the most anxiety or simply start the entire program over again.

Seven Days Before Your Exam
Imagine yourself in the setting where you usually study. You're looking at your course outline, class notes, and textbook. The outline tells you the next test is one week away, and what will be covered on the test.

Now, one at a time, imagine four scenes: what you see in your study setting as you look straight ahead of you; what you see as you look to your right; what you see as you look behind you; and finally what you see as you look to your left.

Be specific as you visualize each scene. Imagine the details of your environment. Be aware of your room and its furnishings, the material on your desk, the words and diagrams on the pages of your books and note- books. The more closely you recreate in your mind's eye the actual setting and its physical details, the better the desensitization benefits will transfer to the real environment later on.

After each scene has been pictured in your mind's eye, pause and do relaxation for about 10 seconds. To help you feel relaxed and calm, you may use one or two of the relaxation phrases numbered 9 through 16 on page 4, or take some deep breaths, or say "Calm" or "Relax" to yourself. Once you feel relaxed, move on to the next scene. If you wish, you may repeat scenes causing you the most anxiety.

Six Days Before Your Exam
Again, picture yourself in your normal study setting. Imagine that you are preparing for the exam, now only four days away, and reviewing the material to be covered. Picture in your mind's eye the specific material you're reviewing, and what you see as you look straight ahead, to your right, rear, and left.

Remember to relax for 10 seconds between each new image.

Five Days Before Your Exam
Once more imagine yourself studying for the exam, now only two days away. If you sometimes study in more than one place, imagine that today you are in a setting different from the one before. You are reviewing material you know will be covered on the exam. Imagine how the study material and setting look in front of you, to your right side, left side, and behind you. Picture yourself studying with concentration and efficiency, but also being relaxed and comfortable. Relax 10 seconds between each new image.

Four Days Before Your Exam
Picture in your mind's eye the setting and events of the evening before the exam. You have finished studying for the exam and feel confident you have covered the material and are well-prepared. Imagine yourself as you prepare for and get into bed. You feel drowsy and relaxed, and sleep comes easily. You have a normal night's sleep. Picture yourself in that setting, and what it looks like in front of you, to your right, behind you, and to your left. Relax 10 seconds between each change of image.
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Three Days Before Your Exam
Imagine it is the morning of the exam. You wake up, get out of bed, and get ready to go to school. You are aware that this is the day of the exam. Because you have studied well, you know the material to be covered on the test. You feel prepared, confident, and relaxed. Imagine what it looks like ahead of you, to your right, behind you, and to your left. Relax 10 seconds after each scene you imagine.

Two Days Before Your Exam
Picture yourself on the way to your exam. You go to school, enter the building, walk down the hall, and enter the classroom. You know you have prepared well, and still feel confident and calm. You believe the exam will be a challenge but will not provide you with anxiety which would hurt your performance. Imagine what you see in front of you, on your right side, behind you, and to your left. Relax 10 seconds between scenes.

One Day Before Your Exam
In your mind's eye, you see yourself sitting in your seat in the classroom just before the exam is about to start. The instructor passes out the test. You receive your copy, look at the exam, decide which question to answer first, and begin. Imagine these events and what the room will look like in front of you, on both sides, and behind. Visualize yourself taking the exam feeling thoroughly prepared and alert, but very calm and relaxed. Allow 10 seconds of relaxation between each scene.

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Relaxation Phrases

1. I feel quiet and calm.
2. I am beginning to feel more and more relaxed.
3. My feet feel heavy and warm.
4. My ankles, knees, and hips feel warm and relaxed.
5. My stomach, chest, and back feel heavy and relaxed.
6. My shoulders, arms, and hands feel warm and relaxed.
7. I can feel warmth flowing down my arms into my hands.
8. My neck, jaws, face, and forehead feel smooth and relaxed.
9. My whole body feels heavy and warm, and very relaxed.
10. I feel very quiet and calm.
11. I feel very relaxed. My whole body feels warm and relaxed.
12. My whole body feels comfortable, calm, and relaxed.
13. My mind is quiet and calm.
14. My thoughts are turned inward, and I am at ease.
15. I can visualize myself as still and relaxed.
16. I am alert, but in a very calm, quiet way.

To increase relaxation as you use the above phrases, concentrate on your breathing. Feel each breath as it flows into your nose, lungs, and diaphragm. Be aware of how you feel increased relaxation as you exhale. You may also want to say "Calm" or "Relax" to yourself as you exhale.

If you use this sheet to practice relaxation, be sure to end the session by following the instructions for becoming alert and active given at the bottom of page 1.

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