

There are many excellent books that will teach you how to relax. The one I like best is Wayne Dwyer's *Relaxation Response*. He outlines techniques that are fairly advanced; however, you only need to develop enough proficiency to survive the initial feelings associated with stressful situations.

Begin by associating muscle relaxation with a count. I use a silent count from five down to zero.

- On the count of five, I tense all the muscles in my head, neck, jaw, scalp, and the tiny muscles around my eyes. Then I let go, really relax the tension.
- On the count of four, I repeat the procedure for all the muscles in my upper torso. The muscles around my chest, my shoulders, and my back are contracted, held, and then relaxed.
- The count of three is linked to my arms: the upper arm, the forearm, and the hand. Tense up all the way down to the fingers. Then let go and let your arms hang loose and limp beside your body, your fingers like loose elastic bands.
- On the count of two, it's time to address the muscles in your lower torso. Release the tension in the muscles in your lower back, your stomach, and your buttocks. Squeeze them as tight as possible and repeat the procedure of relaxation.
- Finally, focus on your legs. The count is one, and you tighten all the muscles as hard as you can and then let go. Include the large muscles like the hamstrings and calf muscles as well as the little muscles in your feet, down to your toes. Again, let go.
- Now use the count of zero to concentrate on relaxing your whole body. Feel the release of tension.

If you have no experience in relaxation, you need to practise this initial learning phase until you are comfortable and the procedure starts to become automatic. Don't just do it for one day and think you have it; practise this for at least a couple of weeks. Remember, it has taken you years to get to where you are. You won't change overnight.

When you have become comfortable with the muscle technique, the response can be invoked by just counting from five to zero. You can become calm and at peace. There are many tapes you can buy, and do so if you enjoy the sense of calm you experience. Go to meditation classes. This technique is only to develop an ability to quickly relax.

So now, just count from five to zero in a deliberate manner and associate the area you relax with the muscles you have started to train. So, when you say five focus relaxation on the head; four, the upper torso; down to one, your legs; and zero, your whole body. When you feel stress coming on, you are now in the position to handle it, to stay in control, and to learn.

The next phase is to learn to anchor the developing relaxation response. There has been a lot of work done in the field of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). This is a technique where you develop an association of one set of feelings with another action. This is best illustrated with one of the most famous psychological experiments ever carried out. The

Russian psychologist Pavlov took the natural response of a dog and then taught the dog to express this response to an unrelated stimulus. When the dog had food placed in front of it, naturally its mouth salivated. Every time he did this, Pavlov also rang a bell. Eventually, the dog was conditioned to salivate just at the sound of a bell. The dog was conditioned.

Neuro-linguistic programming is a similar attempt to condition a response within you. For me, I have developed an anchor, an associated action that will allow me to relax in stressful situations. I associated the feeling I experienced at the end of my quick five to zero count with another action. Perhaps a classic anchor is to squeeze your thumb and forefinger together on the count of zero. Eventually, when you squeeze your fingers together, your body will assume the relaxed position you have conditioned it to. In my case, I used a concentration on the little muscles around my eye. This is perhaps a clumsy anchor, and if I was redoing this practise, I would choose another. However, it works for me.

You need to condition this association between your chosen anchor and your relaxation response over a period of weeks so that the association becomes powerful enough to be effective when required. When you feel your sense of self being threatened, use your anchor to initiate your relaxation response. This will give you time to put your boundaries in place. You will be able to use the techniques you have learned to deal with the potential threat of further abuse.