

◀ CHAPTER ELEVEN ▶



Controlling your feelings

The **Feeling Finder** has helped us to discover that the places we go to or the things we do may sometimes produce strong feelings. For example, you may notice that you:

- ▶ feel **anxious** when you **go out**
- ▶ feel **calm** and safe at **home**
- ▶ feel **worried** when you are **with others**
- ▶ feel **relaxed** and happy **on your own**.



We try to do things or go to places that give us pleasant feelings, and we try to avoid those that make us feel unpleasant.

This seems to make sense. After all, none of us want to feel unpleasant for most of the day.

But sometimes your feelings take over and **stop or limit** what you really want to do.

- ▶ You may **want** to go out, but because you feel so anxious you **feel unable** to go.
- ▶ You may **want** to be with friends, but because you feel so worried you **feel unable** to see them.
- ▶ You may **want** to call up a friend, but because you feel so unhappy you **feel unable** to do this.

At these times, the way you feel is stopping or preventing you from doing those things that you really want to do. Learning how to control your feelings will help to break down these barriers.

The **Feeling Finder** has found that we can learn to control our feelings in different ways.

Learn to relax

There are different ways in which you can learn to relax. Some methods will take you through a series of physical exercises to tense and then relax each of the large muscle groups in your body. Others will teach you to imagine relaxing pictures in your mind, and these calming images will help you to feel more pleasant. It is important to remember the following points.



- ▶ There is no **one way** of relaxing.
- ▶ People find **different methods** useful at different times.
- ▶ It is important to **find what works for you**.

▶ Physical relaxation

This method usually takes about 10 minutes and is very useful if you feel constantly tense or wound up. Using a series of short exercises, all of the major muscle groups in your body are tensed for about 5 seconds and then relaxed.

Concentrate on what the muscles feel like when they are tensed and what they feel like when they are relaxed. You will find that some parts of your body will be more tense than others, so try to find the very tense areas.

By the end of the session you should feel completely relaxed, so enjoy this pleasant feeling. A number of people like to do these exercises before they go to bed. It does not matter if you fall asleep. Like everything else, the more you practise the better and faster you will become at relaxing.

There are various tapes which you can buy that will teach you how to relax. Choose one you like and find restful. If you can't find one, then try the following exercises. Before you start, remember the following points.



- ▶ Choose somewhere warm and quiet.
- ▶ Sit in a comfortable chair or lie on your bed.
- ▶ Choose a time when you will not be interrupted.
- ▶ Tense your muscles just enough to notice what it feels like. Don't overdo it.
- ▶ Tense your muscles for about 3–5 seconds.
- ▶ Tense each muscle group twice.
- ▶ After you have tensed a muscle, try not to move it again.

▶ Quick relaxation exercises

Arms and hands: Clench your fists and push your arms straight out in front of you.

Legs and feet: Push your toes downwards, gently raise your legs, and stretch them out in front of you.

Stomach: Push out your tummy muscles, take a breath and hold it.

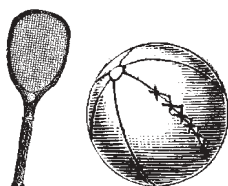
Shoulders: Scrunch up your shoulders.

Neck: Push your head back against the chair or bed.

Face: Screw up your face, squeeze your eyes tight and push your lips together.

Physical exercise

Some people find that **physical exercise** is as effective as systematically tensing and relaxing their muscles. After all, physical exercise does exactly the same thing – it tenses and then relaxes your muscles.



A good run, quick walk or swim can help you to get rid of any angry or anxious feelings.

If physical exercise works for you, then use it. It may be particularly useful to try it at those times when you notice strong unpleasant feelings.

Controlled breathing

There are times when you may suddenly start to become tense or angry, and on these occasions you won't have time to go through the relaxation exercises.

Controlled breathing is a quick method in which you concentrate and gain control of your breathing. You can use this method anywhere, and often people don't even notice what you are doing!



Slowly draw in a deep breath, hold it for 5 seconds and then very slowly let it out. As you breathe, say to yourself 'relax'. Doing this a few times will help you to regain control of your body and help you to feel calmer.

Calming pictures

With this method you make yourself feel more pleasant by thinking about the things that you find pleasant or restful.

Think about your dream place. It could be somewhere you have been or an imaginary place. Imagine a picture of it and make the picture as restful and peaceful as possible. Try to make the picture as real as you can, and think about the following:



- ▶ the noise of the waves crashing on the beach
- ▶ the wind blowing in the trees
- ▶ the smell of the sea or the scent of pine forests
- ▶ the warm sun shining on your face
- ▶ the wind blowing gently in your hair.

Practise imagining your relaxing place, and if you start to feel unpleasant, then try turning the picture on. Really concentrate hard on your restful scene and see if it helps you to relax.

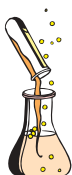
Relaxing activities

There will probably be some things that you enjoy doing and which make you feel good. Examples of these might include:

- ▶ reading a book
- ▶ watching TV
- ▶ listening to music
- ▶ taking the dog for a walk.

If a particular activity makes you feel good, then try doing it when you notice unpleasant feelings. You may only be able to do this at certain times, but if you are:

- ▶ sitting around on your own worrying about tomorrow, try reading a book
- ▶ sitting in your bedroom feeling unhappy, try watching TV
- ▶ lying in bed feeling uptight because you can't sleep, try listening to some music
- ▶ feeling uptight, then take the dog for a walk.



Experiment and see if you can stop your unpleasant feelings.

Prevention

Sometimes we are aware of our feelings, but often we leave it too late to do something about them. At these times our feelings become too strong and no matter what we do we just can't seem to regain control. We need to learn to identify these times so that we can try to control our feelings **BEFORE** they get too strong.

▶ Jimmy's temper

Jimmy often felt very angry and became very wound up. This seemed to happen very quickly, and when he lost his temper it took him a long time to calm down afterwards.



He travelled up the anger escalator very quickly, and before he could stop, Jimmy had exploded. The **Feeling Finder** tried to help Jimmy to gain more control over his angry feelings. The **Feeling Finder** suggested that they should draw an anger volcano to help Jimmy to discover what happens as he becomes angry.



Once Jimmy became aware of his anger build-up, the next stage was to learn how **to bail out** at an early stage and prevent himself from exploding.

Jimmy was able to do this by imagining the last time he lost his temper. He imagined the picture as clearly as he could, but this time he changed the ending.

- ▶ Jimmy imagined himself **bailing out** before he lost his temper.
- ▶ He imagined himself walking away.
- ▶ He imagined the look of disappointment on the faces of the others who were teasing him.
- ▶ He imagined how pleased with himself he felt.
- ▶ He practised listening to the taunts of the other children and staying calm.

Jimmy practised every day. He was practising a different ending, so he was better prepared and this helped him to cope with the teasing the next time it happened.



There are many different things you can do to help you to feel better.

- ▶ Choose those methods that feel right for you.
- ▶ Remember that they won't always work, but do stick with them.
- ▶ The more you practise the more likely it is that these methods will help.



The 'feeling strong room'



We all have unpleasant feelings, but sometimes these feelings become very strong and are difficult to get rid of. They could make you feel:

- ▶ very angry
- ▶ very sad
- ▶ very frightened.

When you feel very unpleasant you may want to try locking these feelings away somewhere safe so that they do not bother you so much.

- ▶ Find a box, make it into your '**strong room**' and decorate it as you wish.
- ▶ When you feel very unpleasant, get some paper and write or draw your feelings.
- ▶ Think about what is making you feel like this and write about or draw a picture of this, too.
- ▶ Once you have finished, put these feelings away in the 'strong room'.
- ▶ At the end of the week, open your box and talk about your feelings with Mum, Dad or someone you trust.

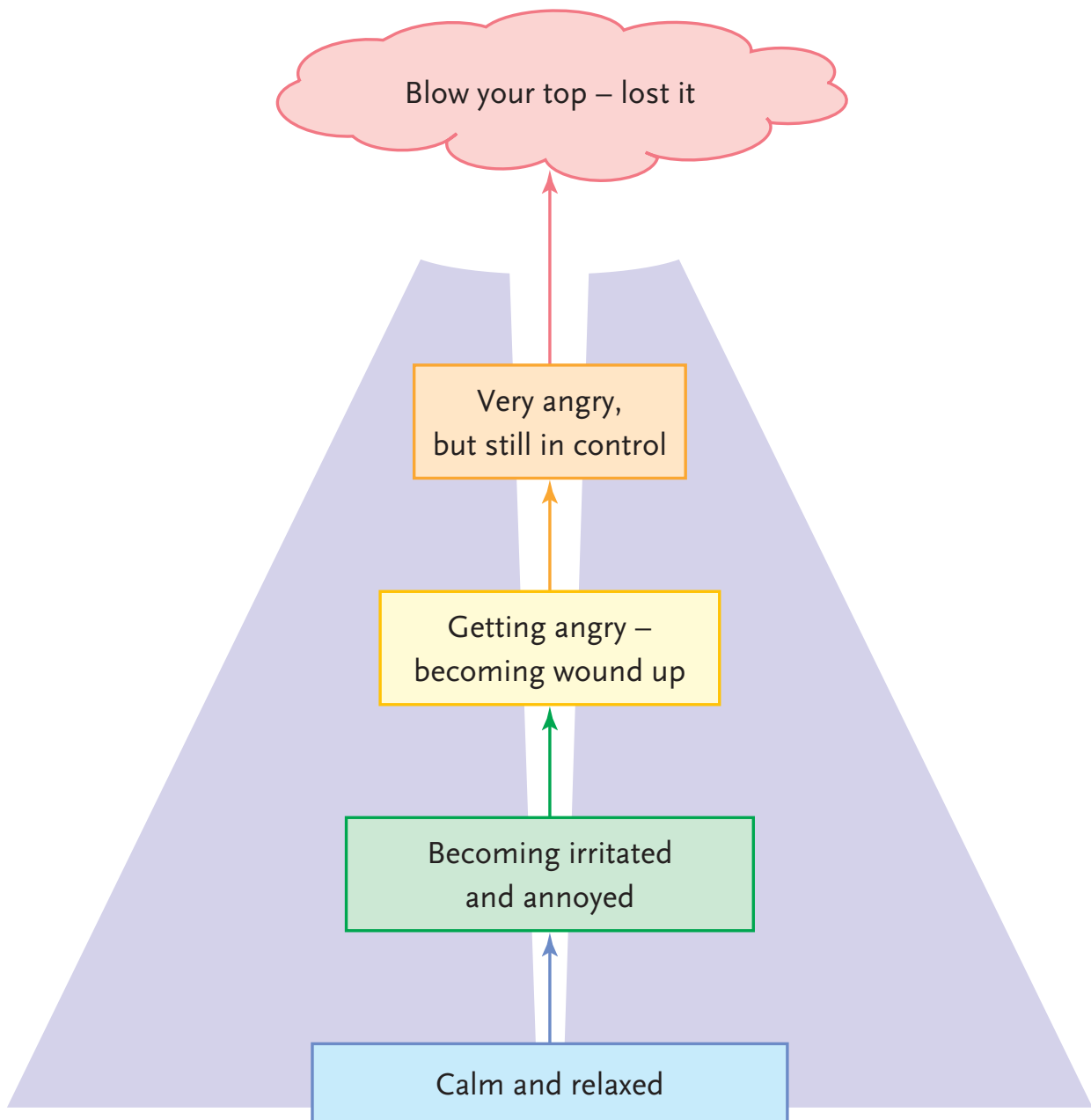


- ▶ Putting your unpleasant feelings away in a strong room may help you to feel better.



Anger volcano

Think about how your body feels when you are calm and how it feels when you are angry. Plot the changes you notice as you become angrier on to your Anger Volcano.





Learning to relax



For younger children, learning to relax can be made fun.

Muscles can be stretched and tensed by playing a game such as 'Simon Says', in which the child is asked to do the following.

- 1 March straight and upright around the room.
- 2 Run on the spot.
- 3 Pretend that their arms are branches of a tree by waving them above their head.
- 4 Screw up their face to look like a scary monster.
- 5 Stretch up to the sky and be as tall as possible.
- 6 Roll up tightly to become as small as possible.

After the child has stretched their muscles, the final stage is to tell them to calm down and relax. Ask them to pretend to be a big heavy animal and to move around the room very slowly. Move as quietly and as slowly as possible. Finally, ask them to be 'sleeping lions' and to lie on the floor as still and quiet as possible for a couple of minutes.

THINK GOOD – FEEL GOOD



My relaxing place

A useful way of relaxing is to try to imagine a calming picture.

This could be a real place you have been to or a picture you may have created in your dreams.



- ▶ Choose a quiet time when you will not be disturbed.
- ▶ Shut your eyes and imagine your picture.
- ▶ Really concentrate on your calming scene and imagine it in lots of detail.
- ▶ Think about the colours and shapes of things.
- ▶ Imagine the sounds – seagulls calling, leaves rustling, waves crashing on the sand.
- ▶ Think about the smell – the smell of pine from the trees, the smell of the sea.
- ▶ Imagine the sun warming your back or the moonlight shining through the trees.
- ▶ As you think of your picture, notice how calm and relaxed you have become.
- ▶ This is your special calming place.



You will need to try to practise this. The more you practise the easier you will find it to imagine your picture and the quicker you will become calm.

Whenever you feel yourself becoming stressed, think of your calming picture.

My relaxing activities



Fill in the thought bubbles by writing or drawing the things that help you to relax and feel calm.