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Edition 4

High-Tech
Textbooks

Page 2

News Map:
Wonders
of Nature

Page 6

Smooth Start

Kids learn stress-busting
tips to have a successful—
and fun—school year!

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cover story

Keeping Your COOL

As a new school year begins, *Scholastic News* looks at how kids can stay relaxed while tackling tests, homework, and tough subjects

Close your eyes for 30 seconds to one minute and imagine a relaxing place.



Miranda MacGillivray, 9, sometimes feels stressed at school. She really likes some subjects, but one is far from her favorite—math.

"It gives me sort of a hard time," Miranda told *Scholastic News*. But last year, she learned ways to **conquer** her fears about her toughest subject. She participated in an after-school program at John W. Kimball Learning Center in Brooklyn, New York. The program, known as SMART-4-Kidz, teaches elementary school students how they can manage stress. Kids in the program learn ways to relax when faced with tough schoolwork. Miranda said she now has the tools to tackle her stress about math.

Though school offers exciting new things to learn and fun times with friends, getting stressed out over tough subjects, homework, and tests is common. But with a few tips, as Miranda knows, kids can learn how to handle those feelings and have a successful—and fun—school year.

Taking deep, slow breaths can help you relax.

Time Management

If homework has ever made you feel stressed, you're not alone. Dr. Mary Alvord, a child and family **psychologist** in

Words to Know

conquer: (kon-kur) *verb*. To defeat and take control of.

psychologist: (syk-kol-uh-jist) *noun*. Someone who studies people's minds, emotions, and behaviors.



Regular physical activity helps keep the mind and body healthy.



Thinking positive thoughts before and during a test can boost your confidence—and your scores!

Maryland, says it's common for kids to feel weighed down by their assignments. That's why she says it's important to get organized.

"One thing I recommend is breaking the task down into smaller parts," says Dr. Alvord. Think about the assignments you need to finish today and those that are due later in the week. Then, spread out the workload into short, manageable sections. Most important, remember to take breaks.

"Don't try to do work for hours at a time," says Dr. Alvord. "Study hard or do your homework hard for about a half hour. Then, reward yourself [by getting] up for 10 minutes."

Time to Relax

Taking a moment to yourself is a good way to handle stress anytime you're feeling overwhelmed, Dr. Alvord says. It can be especially helpful during tests. She suggests closing your eyes for 30 seconds to one minute



and imagining a relaxing place. Then, return to the task at hand.

Taking time to unwind is also important in managing stress. In SMART classes, students use storytelling to take their minds off the day.

"At the end of every class, usually the teacher would tell us a story," explains Miranda. "We got to lie down and use our own imaginations to add to the story." Students were instructed to close their eyes and focus on their slow breathing. Then, they were asked to picture the colors and other details of the imagined place.

Doing something active is another good way to help yourself relax. In Miranda's SMART

program, the students played a version of freeze tag at the end of the day. In the game, players dance to music. When someone stops the music, players freeze. Anyone still dancing is out.

Stay Positive

Dr. Alvord says to never underestimate the power of positive thinking when it comes to stress. When it's time to take a test, for example, remember that the stressful feelings won't last forever and tell yourself you can do well.

"You can write down on the paper that this test is going to be easy," adds Miranda. "It will give you confidence."

This advice worked for her. Math may still be challenging at times, but now she doesn't sweat it.

—Natalie Smith

BACK TO YOU

• **How do you keep your cool during stressful times?** What activities can you think of that help you relax?