

Breathing Techniques to Relax Your Child

by Patti Teel

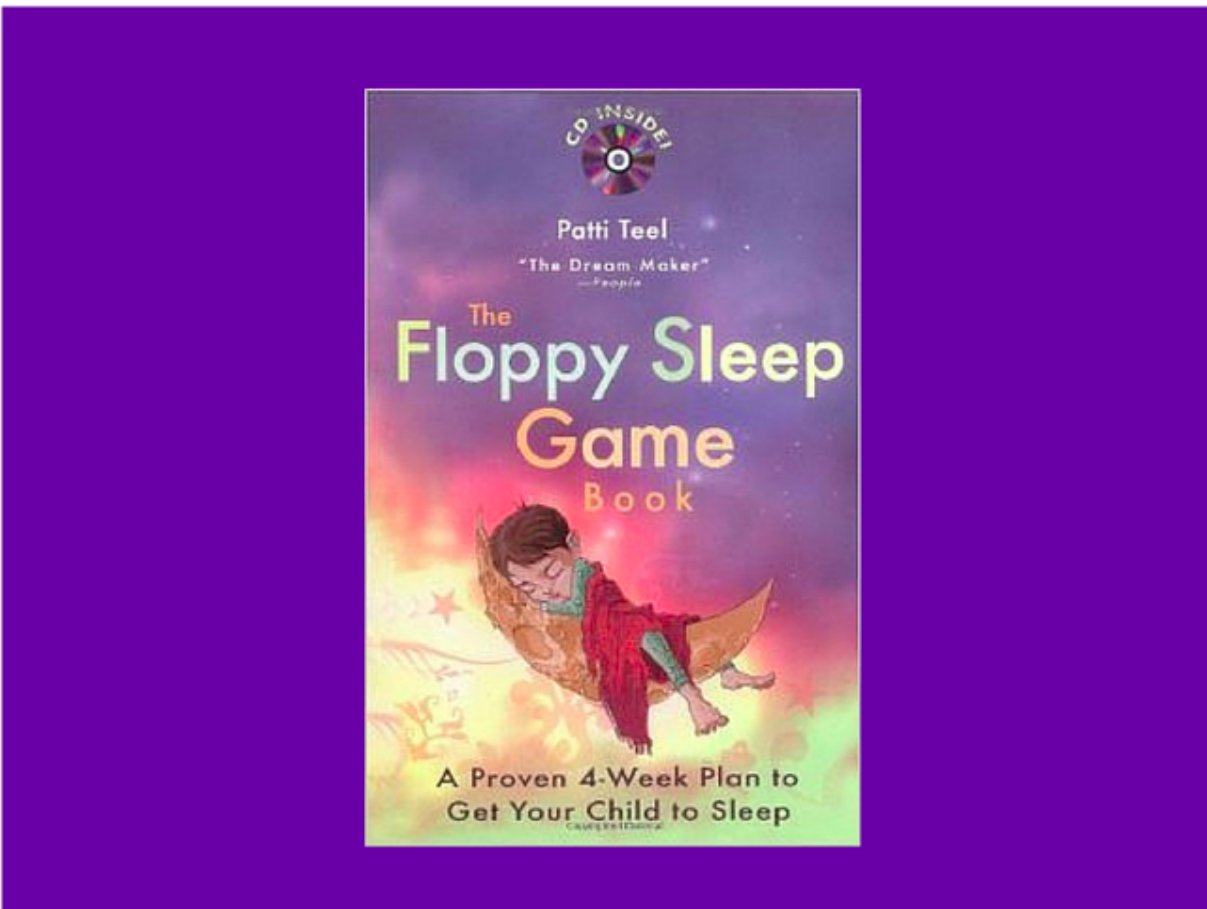
By [Terri Mauro](#)

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[The following is adapted by Patti Teel from her book [The Floppy Sleep Game Book: A Proven 4-Week Plan to Get Your Child to Sleep](#) (copyright © 2005 by Patti Teel; 0-399-53200-5).]

Breathing techniques are very important for inducing relaxation. They are effective for all children but can be particularly beneficial for those with special needs because it can help to avoid panic, aggression, meltdowns, or tantrums.

The ultimate goal is for children to be able to relax quickly when faced with stressful situations. However, in order to do so, it's important for children to practice breathing techniques on a daily basis so that they become second nature.

Children are naturally fascinated by their own breathing, just getting quiet and paying attention to it is extremely soothing. Rather than thinking about the events and worries of their day, as children focus on their own breath, their minds will become quiet. Their breathing will also automatically slow down and deepen, bringing more oxygen into their bodies and helping them to relax. In the Floppy Sleep Game program, kids will practice being very quiet as they simply watch their breath. They don't need to try to change their breath in any way. In fact, they don't have to do anything. They will just be watching the breath as it breathes itself. It will be a time of undoing, allowing, and letting go -- a time to gather the senses that are usually focused on the outside world and turning them inward.

After a few days of this simple yet valuable activity, I suggest you introduce children to belly breathing (that is diaphragmatic breathing.)

Diaphragmatic breathing, or "belly breathing," is a wonderful way to release mental and physical stress and tension. It calms the mind and induces a state of relaxation in children's bodies.

The directions are simple: have your child lay on his back and, putting a hand on his belly, take slow, deep breaths, feeling his belly rise and fall.

Because it's so much more fun for children to learn when imagination and fantasy are involved, visualization can be interwoven into the breathing techniques. For instance, when practicing belly breathing, have your child imagine that there is a colorful balloon in his or her belly.

Elevator breathing also incorporates visualization and it can be introduced after your child is comfortable with belly breathing. Children will be learning to isolate three areas: the head, the chest, and the abdomen. This *pranayama* (yoga breathing technique) focuses the attention on the present moment, while calming and grounding the mind. It is often done while seated in a comfortable, cross-legged position, but it is also nice to do while lying on the back. When your children are lying down, they can really feel the breath moving through their bodies as it makes contact with the floor.

without changing anything, then proceed with the directions.

Directions:

Your breath is an elevator taking a ride through your body.

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Breathe in through your nose and start the elevator ride.

Breathe out and feel your breath go all the way to the basement, down to your toes.

Breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your belly.

Hold it. Now, breathe out all your air. (Pause)

This time, breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your chest.

Hold it. Now breathe out all your air. (Pause)

Now breathe in and take your elevator breath up to the top floor, up through your throat and into your face and forehead.

Feel your head fill with breath. Hold it.

Now breathe out and feel your elevator breath take all your troubles and worries down through your chest, your belly, your legs, and out through the elevator doors in your feet.

(Repeat)

ey can imitate and denate the air of their imaginary
e same way.

*Maker” by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former
[Sleep Game Book](#), which gives parents techniques to
ss, or fall asleep. She holds Dream Academy workshops
s the country where parents and children learn the
book and widely acclaimed children’s audio
workshops practice the three R’s by resting their*

*bodies, relaxing their minds, and refreshing their spirits. Visit her online at
www.pattiteel.com.]*

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN > MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Guided Relaxation for Children with Special Needs

The Author of "The Floppy Sleep Game" on Special Needs and Bedtime

By [Terri Mauro](#)

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Patti Teel is a sleep guru who's been helping kids (and parents) get some rest for over a decade. Dubbed "The Sleep Lady" by the Wall Street Journal, Teel has risen to fame thanks her system which teaches kids to relax themselves to sleep through exercises based in [yoga](#), visualizations, music and storytelling. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, also addresses bedtime struggles with [special needs children](#).

Excerpt from *The Floppy Sleep Game*

can dramatically improve the life of special needs children, helping them to calm and relax themselves.

It's very important to practice relaxation in a fun, imaginative way. The last thing you want your child to think is that relaxation is "just one more thing to do." After all, relaxation is not so much doing as it is an *undoing*, or a letting go. If you imagine that you are relaxed, your tension is likely to abate and your muscles will relax. In contrast, if you try to *will* yourself to become relaxed, you are likely to become tense. Still, the ability to let go and relax will improve with practice. A daily routine of self-calming exercises is important in order that children learn to relax and quiet themselves whenever they have a need to do so.

At first, have children practice relaxation exercises when they are not upset or overly anxious. It's best to practice them at least once and preferably twice a day. In order for children to relax when they encounter [stressful situations](#), the relaxation response needs to become second nature.

Children are wonderfully receptive to guided relaxation.

It often helps if children are first taught to tense and then relax each of the muscle groups, a technique known as progressive relaxation. By first tensing their muscles, children are able to feel and understand the contrasting feeling of [relaxation](#). Practice in a number of fun ways: tensing and relaxing muscles by making fists, holding the eyebrows up before relaxing them, or curling up in a ball before releasing and relaxing the entire body. Once your child is able to relax without first tensing the muscle groups, you may wish to try the following guided relaxation routine, "Heavy and Relaxed." Remember, children like repetition and it will help them to become more comfortable and secure with the movements if you repeat a routine that is effective and that they find enjoyable.

child is directed to relax is a great way for your child to learn the names for all the various body parts.)

More from The Floppy Sleep Game: Instructions for "Heavy and Relaxed"

Heavy and Relaxed

Excerpt from The Floppy Sleep Game Book

Directions:

Lie down on your back. Wiggle or move your body to make it comfortable. Now be still and close your eyes. Allow your feet to fall slightly apart and turn your palms upward.

Feel your right hand. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, the palm and the back of your hand. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole right hand.

(With younger children add, Good-night hand.)

Feel your right arm. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm and shoulder. Take a deep breath in and as your breathe out, relax your whole right arm.

(With younger children add, Good-night arm.)

Feel your left hand. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, the palm and the back of your hand. Take a deep breath in and as your breathe out, relax your whole left hand.

(With younger children add, Good-night hand.)

(With younger children add, Good-night arm.)

Feel your right foot. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, bottom of your foot, top of the foot and heel. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole right foot.

(With younger children add, Good-night foot.)

Feel your right leg. It is heavy and relaxed.

(With younger children add, Good-night leg.)

Feel your left foot. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, bottom of your foot, top of the foot and heel. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole left foot.

(With younger children add, Good-night foot.)

Feel your left leg. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax your ankle, calf, shin, knee, thigh, and hip. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole left leg.

(With younger children add, Good-night leg.)

Take another breath in and as you breathe out, relax your right buttock and your left buttock. Feel your lower back. It is heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole lower back.

(With younger children add, Good-night back.)

Feel your shoulders. They are heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your shoulders.

(With younger children add, Good-night shoulders.)

Feel your neck. It is heavy and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your neck.

(With younger children add, Good-night neck.)

Feel your head. It is heavy and relaxed. Relax the back of your head, the top of your head, your forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right cheek, left cheek, right nostril, left nostril, upper lip, lower lip, and chin. Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, relax your whole head.

(With younger children add, Good-night head.)

in and as you breathe out, relax the front of your whole body.

(With younger children add, Good-night body.)

Feel your arms and legs. I feel my arms and legs and they are heavy and relaxed. Relax your whole right leg, your whole left leg, your whole right arm, your whole left arm. Breathe in and as you breathe out, relax your arms and legs completely.

(With younger children add, Good-night arms and leg.)

Read more: [Breathing Techniques](#)

[About the author: Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the author of The Floppy Sleep Game Book, which gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress, or fall asleep. She holds Dream Academy workshops at schools, hospitals and libraries across the country where parents and children learn the playful relaxation techniques from her book and widely acclaimed children's audio series. Children at the Dream Academy workshops practice the three R's by resting their bodies, relaxing their minds, and refreshing their spirits. Visit her online at www.pattiteel.com.]

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