SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

"Relax Kids is one of the few resources that I use both at home with my children and at work with young people suffering from chronic physical health problems and pain. The multi-sensory visualisations give children and young people their own 'tool box' of relaxation skills to help them negotiate what is becoming an ever uncertain world. Relax Kids books are invaluable at helping to build our children's resilience." *Dr Fin Williams - Paediatric Clinical Psychologist*

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INTRODUCTION

Relax Kids is an award-winning* mental health initiative that supports children's emotional and mental wellbeing through simple relaxation techniques that soothe and calm the nervous system.

Our pioneering programme is the first of its kind in the UK (founded 2000).

Relax Kids uses research-based mindful and relaxation techniques alongside values and positive psychology (positivity, strength-building, gratitude, resilience and compassion) to help support children's emotional health and wellbeing.

- Relax Kids supports the Department of Health National guidance for mental health in schools document (June 2014)
- 1 in 10 children and young people aged 5 to 16 have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder and around 1 in 7 has less severe problems.[1]
- 50% of lifetime mental illnesses (except dementia) begin by the age of 14.[2]
- Young people experiencing anxiety in childhood are 3.5 times more likely than others to suffer depression or anxiety disorders in adulthood.[3]
- 1-10 children have mental health issues [4]

"Relax Kids is an easy route to helping children relax and feel calm. I recommend Relax Kids meditations to families across the globe."

Dr Julia Ronder Consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist

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MISSION STATEMENT

Relax Kids aims to give children access to a variety of simple, yet effective techniques for relaxation, mindfulness and stress management that are developed and delivered in a fun and creative way.

We believe that relaxation, mindfulness and a positive outlook are the keys to good mental health, self esteem and emotional resilience.

Our mission is to give children and young people the tools they need to help them manage stress and anxiety and to be more resourceful when facing the challenges of daily life. We support parents, teachers and those working with children and young people through our quality resources and training.

We want children and young people to feel happier, more positive and empowered with skills for life!

Marneta Viegas Founder
June 2014

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RELAX KIDS LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Increase concentration, focus and attention
- Help pupils identify and manage emotions
- Improve learning and school performance
- Build sustainable strategies to manage stress and anxiety
- Reduce negative thinking and behaviour
- Aid self-control, emotions and conflict resolution
- Equip pupils with simple behaviour management strategies
- Improve listening skills, social and communication skills
- Reduce anxiety, bullying and peer pressure
- Improve positive thinking, confidence and self-esteem

'The uniqueness of the Relax Kids program not only rests on its developmental appropriateness for children, but also on its ability to integrate information processing in the young brain. According to Dr. Daniel Siegel, acclaimed neuropsychiatrist and the author of The Whole Brain Child, an integrated brain helps children to enhance their decision making, improve emotional and body control, and fosters development of meaningful relationships as well as impacts success in school and life.

In my experience, the Relax Kids programme is a perfect blend of exercises that focus on body & sensory awareness along with emotional and social awareness. By combining imagination and logic, emotional attunement and linear order, Relax Kids sessions give children repeated experiences that have potential to literally change the physical structure of their brain and build generations of children that can blossom physically, emotionally and socially.'
– ***Jelena Popovic***, *school psychologist and mindfulness educator USA*

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RELAX KIDS INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

- Relax Kids provides children and young people with practical mindfulness tools and inner resources that they can draw on during stressful times.
- Relax Kids helps promote resilience so improving mental health. Improved mental health in turn supports education attainment.
- Relax Kids helps young people to thrive even in the face of significant challenges, giving them tools to cope with life's challenges.
- Relax Kids give children a sense of connectedness, which is key to good mental health.
- Relax Kids offers emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, resilience, character building life skills anti-bullying and coping skills.

"Relax Kids is a wonderful resource that will have a positive effect on children and families using these meditations. Often children with anxieties feel stuck or unable to find a pathway out of the challenging situation that they are facing. Like a good map to navigate stress and anxiety, Relax Kids resources can help young people problem-solve their way out of life's challenges."
- Kevin Baskerville - Leicestershire Autism Outreach Service (IS) Manager

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7 STAGES OF RELAX KIDS

All of the stages have used research-based techniques. Using them in the Relax Kids order works with children's natural energy and so encourages a deep sense of calm and relaxation by the end of the programme. Exercises can also be used separately as a toolkit when needed.

MOVE
PLAY
STRETCH
FEEL
BREATHE
BELIEVE
RELAX

MOVE

Movement - incorporates dance and movement. It helps develop physical skills, improves coordination, boosts energy, circulation and immune system and helps release endorphins.
Games and Play - includes a range of energetic, fun, as well as relaxing games.
Drama-based, thinking and social games are also included. These help build children's confidence, social and communication skills.

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PLAY

Games also help develop their focus and concentration. Children develop their confidence taking turns to lead group games, or working in pairs.
- Children learn when to talk and when to listen to each other
- Improvisation games help children learn how to respond creatively to new situations
- Children develop creative ways of expressing themselves, using mime, facial expression, movement and sound. Play is very important for long-term emotional health. Play has a natural anti-stress effect and releases opioids that promote positive powerful emotional states. Interactive play can enhance the regulation of emotions in the frontal lobe that can help children manage their feelings better.

The first two stages harness kids natural energy. Exercise and physical activity cause the hypothalamus to release endorphins, which are our bodies form of natural pain relief and pleasure chemicals. Exercise is often used as a treatment for depression and anxiety. Exercise has also been proven to have a positive effect on the concentration levels of children with ADHD and other attention span disorders, and promotes generally better concentration levels throughout the rest of the Relax Kids session.

STRETCH

Stretching and Balance - includes a set of stretches that help lengthen and stretch bodies so improving postural awareness. Simple exercises help children to identify and deal with their emotions constructively, while respecting other people's feelings and emotions at the same time. These exercises help release physical tension; develop motor skills, body awareness, balance and flexibility.

Muscle stretches have many of the same positive effects as higher intensity exercise. Relax Kids stretches are adapted to be effective and non-strenuous for children. Recent trials have found that yoga stretches have a generally positive effect on treating depressive disorders, and can also be used effectively to target symptoms of PTSD. It is also a calming warm-down activity that transitions into the following stage.

FEEL

Massage - includes self and/or peer massage (clothed massage with parental consent). These calming exercises promote positive touch and encourage respect, communication and empathy amongst peers. Children become aware of their bodies and learn to respect others. Positive touch boosts the immune system, calms the nervous system, helps the production of Oxytocin and Endorphins and lowers stress levels in children.

The feel stage of the Relax Kids process involves consensual and clothed self or peer massage. This is an entirely optional stage that can be omitted for children with sensory issues. Massage and positive touch stimulates the long Vagus nerve. This nerve is

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responsible for the lowering of the heart rate and blood pressure and the production of Oxytocin, a chemical produced during positive social experiences, which includes positive touch. Studies have shown people artificially dosed with oxytocin had lower stress levels and higher pleasure chemical levels. Oxytocin also promotes peer bonding, which is important for creating a safe social space within Relax Kids classes.

BREATHE

Breathing - includes a range of child friendly exercises that encourage deep breathing. These exercises help calm the nervous system and have an almost instant calming effect on children. Breathing exercises also improve concentration and focus. Deep breathing is essential in managing our automatic responses and allows us to access the thinking part of our brain. This is such an important skill that needs to be practiced on a daily basis and can have dramatic effects on our emotional state as it helps develop a more reflective attitude to our behaviour. Breathing helps tame the amygdala, which is the primitive part of the brain.

Deep and controlled breathing promotes full oxygen exchange, which slows the heart rate and decreases blood pressure. Both of these act as a sedative for the body and mind. Deep and slow breathing can be used as an effective way to manage anxiety disorders[6].

BELIEVE

Affirmations/Positive self-talk - incorporates a range of games and circle time activities that help children to enjoy using positive affirmations and self-praise. These enjoyable exercises include the use of affirmation cards and help improve children's emotional health and literacy. Affirmations help children identify their strengths and help them set themselves achievable goals to improve their weaknesses. Affirmation exercises help boost children's self-esteem and identify personal qualities and achievements. Positive self-talk also re-programmes the brain and promotes positive thinking and develops self-confidence and self-esteem. They also encourage the release of Endorphins as children think and speak positively. Every thought creates a neural path-way, the more that pathway is used the more automatic that pattern becomes. Positive self-talk helps retrain the brain and develop new neural pathways and encourage positive thinking. Gratitude, kindness and self-love and appreciation are all explored in this section.

The believe section of a Relax Kids class focuses on simple self-affirmations such as 'I am special' or 'I am a calm' These positive statements affirm perceived good personal qualities, improving self-esteem. Studies have demonstrated that positive affirmations can have a dramatic effect on achievement. A group of stressed pupils performed badly in a problem-solving exercise. However, after doing the same activity following a brief self-affirmation exercise, the participants performed at normal levels.

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RELAX

Visualisation/Mindfulness - incorporates deep body relaxations, mindfulness exercises, guided imagery and visualisations. These lying down exercises help release physical and mental tension, lower blood pressure, increase body awareness and give children tools to cope with stress. When done regularly, these exercises can help relieve fatigue and promote deeper sleep while improving child anxiety. Exercises also improve concentration, listening skills, memory retention as well as develop imagination and creativity. Learning these skills has a direct impact to pupils inner alarm system giving them the ability to respond to stressful situations. When the inner alarm system is calm, children can easily access the executive brain (thinking part) and so can respond rather than react to life events. Body awareness and mindful listening are explored in this section.

The relax stage consists of being led through a guided meditation either by one of our Coaches or by pre-recorded CD/MP3 tracks provided by Relax Kids. These tracks use a combination of mindfulness exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation to mentally and physically relax participants.

Studies have shown that mindfulness can be effective in combating anxiety disorders in both adults[8] and children[9], alleviating symptoms of depression[10], and reducing stress[11]. A 2015 review of mindfulness research suggests that it has a generally positive effect on a wide variety of disorders[12].

'Relax Kids enhances young people's capacity to be successful. A lot of the features from the Relax Kids programme really help young people to ground themselves learn how to deal with adversity and they will be more resilient and able to survive with these techniques. There will always be times where it is tough and they will be more resilient and resourceful if they have these techniques.'

Dr Catherine Tobias
Clinical Director Durham and Darlington CAMHS

'Over the last 4 years we have invested significantly in rolling out Relax Kids in our area. Relax Kids gives young people and families skills to build up their resilience and start to prevent mental health issues and identify mental health issues before there is a problem.'

Catherine Richardson
Public Health lead Durham County Council

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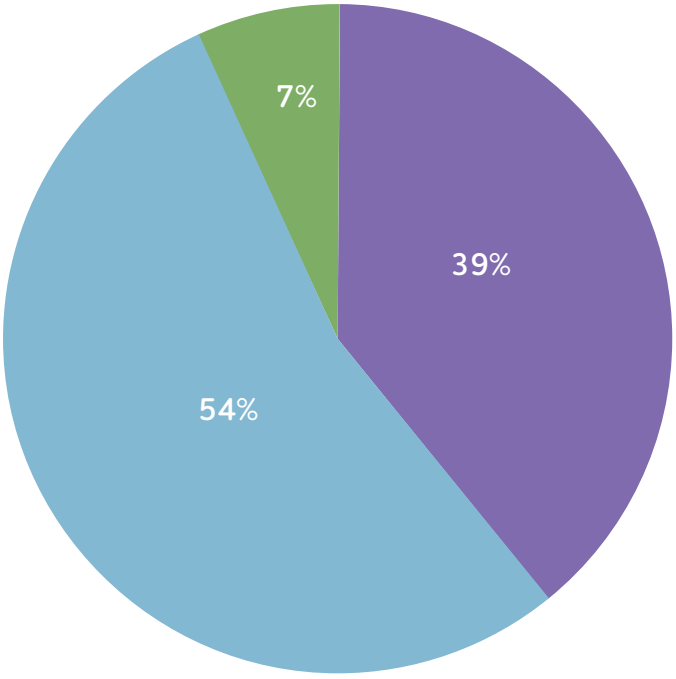
EVIDENCE

"I wholeheartedly support the work of Relax Kids in helping children think more positively. In many ways the techniques are like adult mindfulness, yet simplified for children. There is much evidence to show how using a relaxed state to focus on positive thought is hugely beneficial."
Dr Andrew Mayers, Psychologist and children's sleep expert

5 Week Relax Kids Study in a Primary School in Scotland 2018*

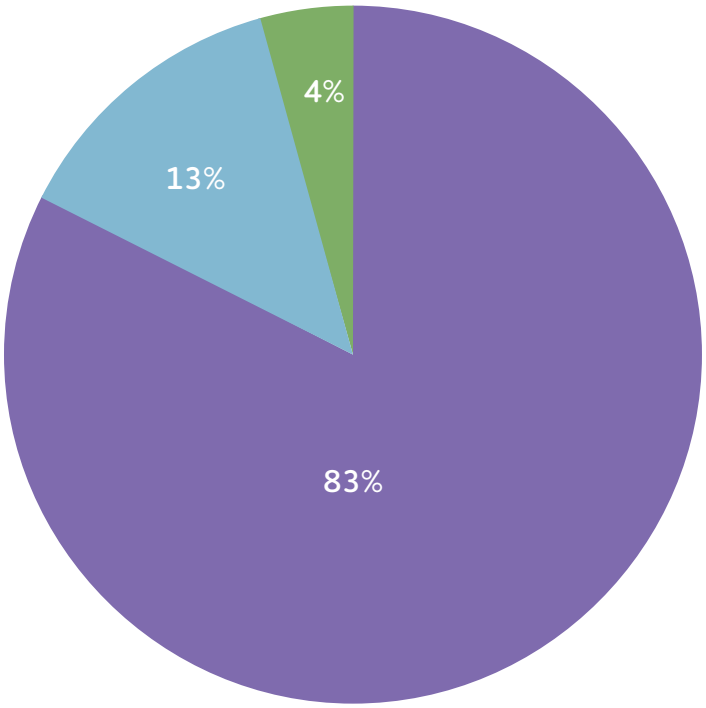
BEFORE RELAX KIDS



KEY

- *NOT RELAXED*
- *UNSURE*
- *RELAXED*

AFTER RELAX KIDS



* results are based on a classroom study.

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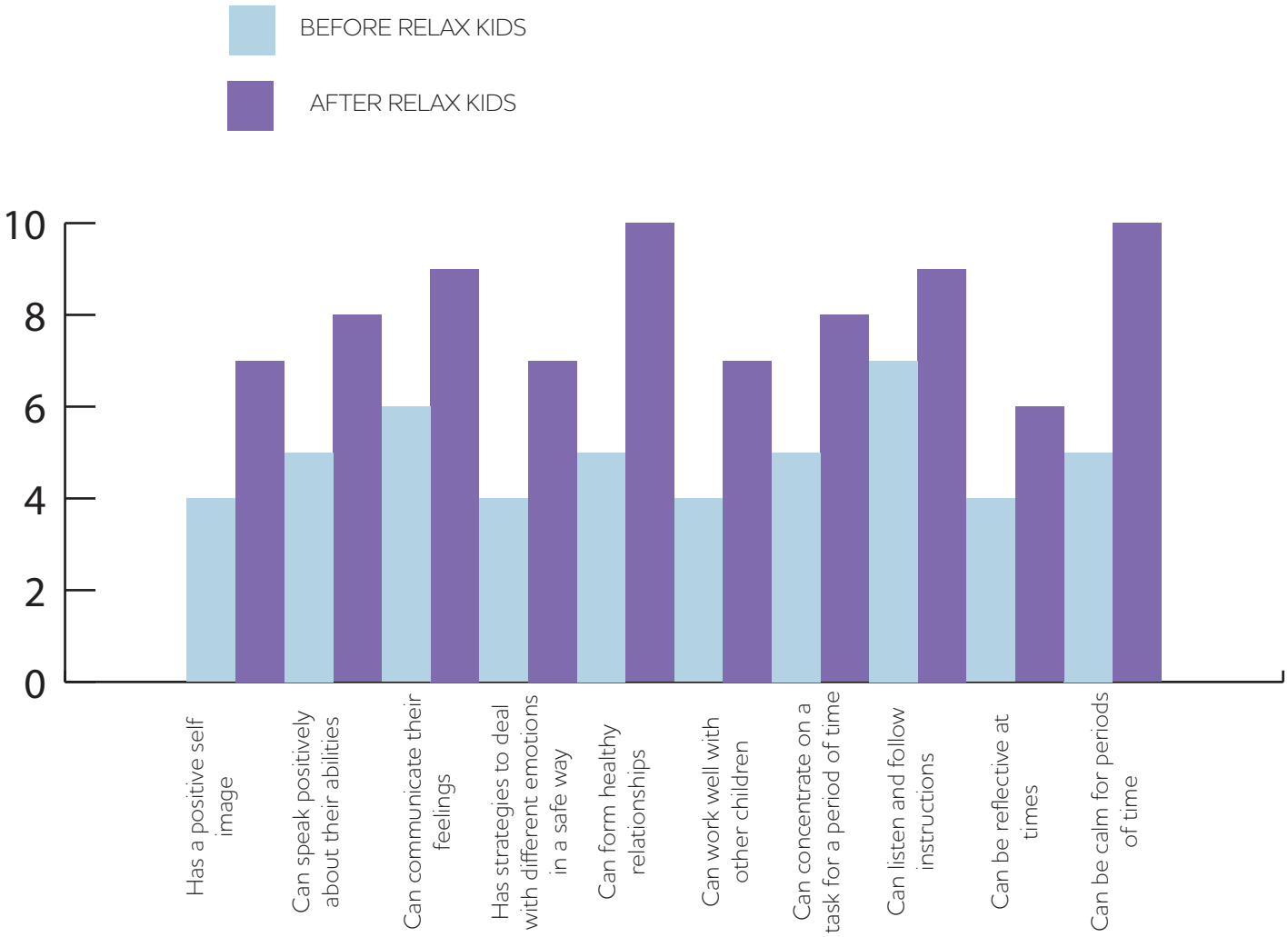
6 Week Relax Kids Course
Marlow C of E Primary School Evaluation 2017*



* results are based on a classroom study.

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PILOT

Western Health and Social Care Pilot
- Northern Ireland

A Relax Kids project funded by the Public Agency Mental Health and Suicide Prevention was run in ten schools across the Western Trust area of Northern Ireland. 265 children participated including 3 special schools totalling 33 pupils with special needs. The schools were a mix of urban and rural. Weekly sessions were run over 6 weeks. Parents reported their child's self-esteem, self- confidence and mood were raised after using Relax Kids. They also noted a difference in behaviour, sleeping habits and attention span at the weekends. Teachers recognised the importance of "quiet time" and were able to incorporate this into their classroom which helped them feel less stressed. Special needs students showed most outstanding results. Teachers noted that concentration levels improved.

The Relax Kids facilitators also noticed the pupils weekly improvement in how the children participated in each session. Some children who weren't able to participate at the start due to either confidence issues or special needs, by end were able to fully participate. As the programme developed the children's concentration and listening skills vastly improved as did their ability to become calm and peaceful at the end, in fact the amount of time they were able to relax was doubled by the end from one song to two.

"Relax kids has enabled the children to develop their positive thinking and given them the tools to manage their feelings and behaviour. The children have developed their life skills in a fun way and the positive contribution it has made to their overall emotional intelligence and wellbeing is evident." *- Principal, Omagh County PS*

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PILOT

Sylvester Primary School
- Knowsley

Sylvester Primary School in Knowsley reduced their fixed term exclusions from 19 to zero in 3 years after using the Relax Kids programme.

Relax Kids was used in the following ways:
- **Short daily relaxation sessions throughout the day**
- **Weekly Relax Kids classes and lunchtime classes were introduced**
- **Relaxation was used during assembly**
- **Two relaxation rooms were set up**
- **Relax Kids After School Clubs**
- **Daily Positive Affirmation**
- **Special Relax Kids day events for Health Week and Friendship Week**

Pupils' overall level of emotional literacy rose and the number of incidents has fallen, and parents and teachers have reported healthier and happier children.
Using the NFER Emotional Literacy Assessment and Intervention tool, Sylvester Primary School was able to directly measure the impact of their approach to the social and emotional aspects of learning since introducing Relax Kids.

After Relax Kids 3 year pilot, 91% of pupils in the school scored average, above average or well above average on their overall level of emotional literacy on the NFER scale.
The school also measured a dramatic improvement in pupil behaviour. The number of serious behaviour incidents, including aggressive or violent behaviour, or serious disrespect halved in the first year, halved again the following year and continued to fall in the final year of the pilot. Incidents of repetitive low-level disruptive behaviour also fell by 20%.

Ofsted gave the school an 'Outstanding' for emotional well-being, personal development and pastoral care.

The Knowsley Education Authority were so impressed with the results, the Relax Kids Program has been introduced to all fifty seven schools in the Borough!

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PILOT

Northampton

Over 250 teachers in Northamptonshire use Relax Kids in the classroom.
Teachers have noticed a big difference in the ability of their pupils to focus on their work and the children are much calmer after listening to a CD or doing other relaxation exercises. In one Year 3 class the teacher was surprised at the speed at which the programme started to impact on class morale.

The local Educational Psychologist noticed a difference in the class after 6 weeks of using Relax Kids, especially for one child with possible mental health and social problems.

"As a Local Authority teacher for mental health I wholeheartedly recommend Relax Kids to all schools I work with. Individual children and whole classes love to use the exercises and resources, which provide them with a great sense of emotional wellbeing. Relax Kids is wonderful for teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors, especially used alongside SEAL materials, and also for some of the more troubled youngsters."
- John Fardon - Mental Health Teacher

Durham

In a project in Durham 163 pupils aged 3-15 years have taken part in Relax Kids, in 15 schools. At the start of the projects, 96% of participants scored low on their relaxation levels or high on hyperactivity. Approximately 85% of participants reported they felt more calm and relaxed. 98% of participants requested more sessions. School staff reported positive changes, such as, children increased confidence in quieter children.

"There was a lovely atmosphere in the room, it felt calm and safe. One of the pupils is very lively, talkative and fidgety; he was engaged and relaxed throughout. I will definitely use the programme again as I was very impressed with the results." - Teacher

Over 300 teachers in Durham have been trained to use Relax Kids techniques in their school.

"Overall the Relax Kids project has been a great success with 98% of participants requesting more sessions. This is just the beginning!" - Wendy Minhinnett

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AWARD WINNING*

The Relax Kids system was used in a project run by CAMHS. It was awarded the 2011 Nursing Standards Mental Health Award. The project has been run in schools in North Herts.

"As a mental health professional I know the difference a relaxed mind can make towards improved concentration and behaviour."

- Deborah Bone Emotional and Mental Health Advisor CAMHS

A team from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) have been running a successful therapeutic programme using the Relax Kids 7 step system in Hertfordshire schools since 2007. Evaluations have shown that the programme has lessened the stigma attached to mental health services for young people and that they continue to use the practical techniques taught. The programme won the 2011 Nursing Standards Award in their Mental Health section.

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