

ACE the TEST

7 Proven Ways
to Help Kids Calm Down,
Feel Better and Score Higher On
STANDARDIZED TESTS

*People often say that motivation doesn't last.
Well, neither does bathing - that's why
we recommend it daily.*
- Zig Ziglar

*Riley Roam and
Kenny Mikey*

INTRODUCTION

American students are some of the most tested kids in the world. The results of these tests are taken very seriously by educators, parents, administrators, and the government. They're viewed as a measure of school competence and, in some cases, can affect a child's future school placement, teacher salaries and even housing prices.

NO WONDER KIDS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS ARE SO STRESSED OUT!

That's why we created the This is ONLY a Test! Videos and Live Show Programs. For years, we had been performing our literacy based shows in elementary schools around the country. Everywhere we went, we heard teachers, parents and administrators discussing how stressed out kids were about standardized tests! Over and over we were heard stories about young kids getting migraines, throwing-up and bursting into tears because of test stress.

Yuck! No one wants to feel like that. Not only is it unhealthy, but it has a direct effect on test scores. Children simply cannot do their best when they're freaking out! In fact, many of the stories we heard were about straight A students that knew the information, yet scored poorly because they were derailed by test anxiety.

Whether or not you believe that standardized tests are the best way to assess children is a question for another book. For now, the tests exist and it's important for kids to learn how to DO their best and FEEL their best when they take them. And the truth is there are always going stressful situations in life. Learning the skills necessary to with difficult situations is an important skill that will serve children well beyond the big test.

This report is full of information, tips and tricks we've presented to students in our live shows and video series over the years to help them calm down, relax, and remember...This is ONLY a Test!

In fun,

Riley Roam & Kenny Mikey

P.S. These aren't just for kids. The information in this report can be used by anyone feeling a little extra anxiety!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Riley Roam and Kenny Mikey are the founders of Page Turner Adventures, Inc. and the creators of This is ONLY a Test! Videos and Live Shows. Their goal of Educating and Inspiring Through Humor is apparent in these hilarious videos and dynamic, motivational live shows designed to help ease the stress of standardized testing while reinforcing classroom concepts.

They're both PASSIONATE about helping kids Feel, Do, and Be their Very Best! This book incorporates some of the skills from This is ONLY a Test! along with lots of new information. Please visit Riley and Kenny on the web at www.LessTestStress.com and www.PageTurnerAdventures.com.



MIND SLIME

Research has found a clear connection between student stress and academic success. In the first study of its kind, researchers at the University of Minnesota surveyed 9,931 students and found that more than 30 percent said that stress was hurting their academic performance.

This isn't surprising! In fact, it's chemistry.

When we're stressed our bodies release hormones designed to help with the fight or flight response, including cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones are very helpful if you're, say fighting a bear or running away from a saber tooth tiger. But they're not quite as effective for slightly less life threatening forms of stress like taking a test. In fact, they cause MIND SLIME. Okay, we realize that this isn't exactly a technical term. It's more of a feeling, the frustrating sense that you know the answer, but you just can't seem to access it. You read it, you learned it, you studied it. In fact, you knew it before you walked into the exam...but when you're sitting at a desk, staring at the exam and feeling overwhelming anxiety, the correct answer just seems stuck in...well, Mind Slime!

What's Happening?

When stress increases the brain senses the change with receptors that detect stress-related hormones. These receptors, which are found throughout the brain, are concentrated the highest in the hippocampus, a brain area involved in memory formation and spatial awareness. No wonder we have trouble remembering!

That's why it's so important for kids to learn stress management skills. The researches that studied student stress also discovered that students who said they were able to handle their stress effectively performed much better than those who said they couldn't.

TRY PIE

Want an easy way to cure mind slime? Just TRY PIE! We don't mean a slice of apple pie, although some people might eat when they're stressed. Our TRY PIE is an acronym that we teach kids during our Live Performances. It stands for:

Take a Deep Breath

Relax

Yes! I can do it!

Positive Attitude

Is

Everything

At the end of the show a teacher gets to TRY PIE - Literally! It's the old pie in the face gag (don't worry, we tell them it's happening first and dress them in protective gear!) We're not suggesting that before every test teachers should throw pies at each other (that's completely up to you!) But there's actually a very specific reason we do this...which we'll get to at the end of this report. For now, let's talk about the elements of T.R.Y. P.I.E.! After that, we'll talk about a bunch of other anxiety relieving tips and techniques along with a test-day stress strategy.

Stress Relief Tip No. 7

Take a Deep BREATH

The "T" in TRY PIE stands for TAKE A DEEP BREATH. Seems simple as...well...breathing, right? But when we feel extreme anxiety often the first thing that happens is an increase in our heart rate increases and a tendency to take short quick breaths. It's part of the fight or flight response which again might be helpful if you need to face down a mastodon, but tends to get in the way when you have to sit at a desk and focus.

A few deep cleansing breaths can help reduce stress, focus the mind, put things in perspective and help clear out the mind slime.

Try this simple technique

- Sit in a relaxed position.
- Slowly inhale through your nose, counting to five in your head.
- Let the air out from your mouth, counting to eight in your head as it leaves your lungs. Repeat several times.

Variation #1 (for Advanced breathers)

As you breathe, let your abdomen expand outward, rather than raising your shoulders. This is a more relaxed and natural way to breathe, and helps your lungs fill themselves more fully with fresh air, releasing more "old" air.

Variation #2 (Super Advanced Breathers)

Make your throat a little tighter as you exhale so the air comes out like a whisper. This type of breathing is used in some forms of yoga and can add additional tension relief.

*Practice these breathing techniques with kids in the months leading up to the test.

Stress Relief Tip No. 6

RELAX

The "R" in TRY PIE stands for RELAX and great way to relax is to tense up your entire body! Huh?

It's true...By tensing (then relaxing) all the muscle groups in your body, you can actually relieve tension and feel more relaxed in minutes! This is called the Progressive Relaxation Technique. It can be done lying down, sitting down or even standing up.

- Take a deep breath in and tense the muscles in your feet
Hold for a few seconds then let out your breath and release the muscles.

Tip: Try to isolate only the muscles you're tensing leaving the rest of the body loose

- Take a deep breath in and tense the muscles in your calves.
Hold for a few seconds then let out your breath and release the muscles.
- Do this same technique with knees, thighs, butt, stomach, shoulders, arms, hands, neck and head and face.
- After going through all the individual body parts, take a deep breath and tense EVERYTHING, hold for five or six seconds then relax EVERYTHING.

This exercise not only reduces tension also helps kids become aware of where they hold stress, so when they're taking the test and realize that their shoulders are creeping up around their ears or their forehead is all scrunched up, they can quickly tighten then relax those muscles along with some deep breathing and move on with the test!

Butterflies vs. Velociraptors

Sometimes we can get stressed out about...STRESS. You know the feeling, you say to yourself, "I'm feeling nervous, but I know that I don't do as well when I'm nervous. I better stop feeling nervous, but I can't. Uh, oh. Now I'm really nervous!...and so on and so on!

Kids are no different! They might worry that they're feeling stressed the morning of the test. Remind them that this is NORMAL! In fact, a few butterflies help keep them sharp and alert. It's when butterflies morph into Velociraptors that it becomes a problem. But if they're still worried...about...you know, worry. Use the tear off sheet at the back of this book and go through a few "morning of" stress relieving exercises.

Stress Relief Tip No. 5

YES! I CAN DO IT

Sometimes simply saying YES I CAN! is a great way to feel better about...well, anything, especially tests. But just saying it isn't enough. Kids need to BELIEVE they can do it. Visualization can be a powerful tool to help kids FEEL successful.

VISUALIZATION EXERCISE

Have the children get into a comfortable position. This can be either sitting or lying down (if done in a classroom, they'll probably be sitting in chairs, which is fine). Tell them to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then either use the script below or come up with your own language.

Visualization Script

Let's imagine that today is the big test. *(You'll probably hear groans. Remind kids that this is just imaginary and they can choose how they want to feel about the day and the test. Since it's not real, they can choose to feel positive and calm and relaxed).*

You feel good as you walk in and sit down at your desk. You know all the information. You're prepared, calm and ready. What does that feel like in your body? *(Some children might actually answer this question. Remind them that they should only do this in their mind).*

Now you're beginning the test. You look at the first question and smile. You know the answer. You fill it in then move onto the next question. You read the question and all the choices. Yes, you know this one too! You move through the test, easily answering all the questions. You feel great. You know all of this stuff!

Then you get to a question that you aren't sure about. Maybe you start to feel a little anxiety, maybe your breathing starts to get a little shallow. But you're okay, because you know what to do when you get to a difficult question. You take a deep breath and say, I can do it. Then you read the question and choices very carefully. Ahh! There it is. You know the answer. You finish the test with plenty of time.

Now close the test booklet and...I know this isn't the way it happens, but just imagine that you see your name on the front of the booklet. Imagine the grade or score you want to get. Picture it. See it. How does it feel? Does it feel great? Really imagine yourself feeling good and proud and happy. Now open your eyes and give yourself a round of applause. You did a great job on the test!

Stress Relief Tip No. 5 (cont.) **YES! I CAN DO IT**

More Visualization Techniques

Some people find it difficult to visualize with the technique above. That's okay. There are plenty of other ways to visualize success!

Vision Books/Boards

Vision books and boards are an amazing tool and they're fun to make! A vision board is simply a big piece of poster board with pictures, images and words of what you want in your life. Vision books do the same thing, but you can have different pages focusing on different aspects of your life. To create a vision board or book you'll need, old magazines, paper, inspirational quotes, words and phrases, markers, glue, paste, or tape.

Have the kids cut out images that inspire them and help them visualize the outcome they want to achieve. They can also draw images and words or print them out on the computer. Give them time to cut, write, draw and arrange their images on the board, paper or pages of a blank book. Then it's time to glue, paste and tape!

Encourage kids to keep their vision board or vision book in a place where they can see it every day.

Added bonus: The simple act of cutting, drawing and pasting can itself be a great stress reliever.

Scripting

Scripting is a great tool for kids that like to write. They're simply going to write about the outcome as if it already happened. They can do this in the journal or on a blank piece of paper. Sometimes it helps to write it in letter form, addressing it to a friend or family member. The trick is to write about an event as if it already happened and everything went perfectly! Encourage kids to put as much feeling into it as possible and really let their imaginations go.

Here's an example....

Dear Sue,

I just had to write and tell you about what happened when I took the big test! I was feeling nervous at first, but I did some exercises before I went in and I felt great!!! It was amazing. I knew all the answers. They were all right there in my brain. When I got to an answer I wasn't sure about, I just took a deep breath and read the question really carefully and it made sense!!! I answered everything and even had plenty of time to go back and check over my test.

We just got our grades back and I got an A (or a 5 or whatever the high score is for your test). I'm so proud of myself.

**Your friend,
Brooke**

Stress Relief Tip No. 4 (cont.)

POSITIVE ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

This is a biggie! In fact, it's the longest chapter in this book because having a positive attitude is so darn important. Seriously, more than any other skill, having a positive attitude will help kids feel better about school, the test, and themselves!

Some people are just naturally positive and optimistic. They see the good in life and EXPECT positive outcomes. These people usually experience much less stress than their pessimistic friends, and while research on optimism suggests that it's at least partly genetic, experts also say that we can learn to be more positive, no matter how we're wired. This is especially important for kids to LEARN NOW. It's a skill that will serve them through their entire life.

Positive thinking is a key part of effective stress management. Being positive doesn't mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's less pleasant situations. It just means that you approach the unpleasantness in a more positive, productive and optimistic way.

Optimism is the skill of focusing on the positive - without denying the negative - and channeling one's energy toward what is controllable.

- Optimism helps children solve problems, set goals, build confidence and find ways around obstacles.
- The more Optimism is practiced the easier it becomes.
- Optimism leads to greater happiness and well-being.
- Optimistic children:
 - Have greater motivation, greater resilience, more positive moods, higher achievement and a greater sense of control
 - Perform better in school
 - Have better relationships
 - Have better overall physical health
 - Have better coping skills during times of stress

Optimistic children even experience greater resistance to the common cold!

While we can probably all agree that a positive attitude is better than a negative one, the question is HOW DO WE TEACH CHILDREN TO BE POSITIVE?

Stress Relief Tip No. 4 (cont.)

POSITIVE ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

CREATE A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Many ADULTS even find themselves getting intensely stressed about these tests because they want the kids to do well and be successful. Unfortunately, children pick up on this anxiety. Creating a positive space at home and at school will help everyone keep the test in perspective. Posters with uplifting quotes and sayings are constant subtle reminders that will help everyone keep things in perspective.

Kids can create their own Positive Posters. This is a fun activity that allows children to choose sayings and quotes that resonate with them. Plus, the simple act of coloring, painting, cutting and pasting can be a great stress reliever. Provide children with a list of positive quotes or allow them to create their own inspirational messages. Post these in a place where they can be seen every day.

Sprinkle some of the other stress-relieving activities mentioned in this book throughout the day; schedule a quick exercise break, watch positive videos and try some of the techniques listed below.

Positive Thinking Techniques:

Mind Control

Sounds a little creepy doesn't it? But we're not talking about a *robot overlord kind of mind control*, because someone else isn't controlling our minds, **WE ARE CONTROLLING OUR OWN MINDS!**

It's true. It might feel like there aren't many things we can control in life, but the truth is **WE CAN CONTROL OUR OWN THOUGHTS.** At any moment in time and in any situation **WE CAN CHOOSE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS.**

Stress Relief Tip No. 4 (cont.)

POSITIVE ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

There is actual scientific evidence to prove that our thoughts form neural pathways in our brain. These become well worn paths that we take automatically. If we continually think negative thoughts, we'll continue along the same path until it becomes a habit. But NEW neural pathways can be created when new habits of thought are formed. Thinking positively on a consistent basis creates new neural pathways. The old pathways-carved from the negative patterns-will eventually disappear from lack of use. That's why it's so important for kids to learn this. If they develop these pathways now, they'll create a positive habit for life! Being positive will be their default mode!

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

But the question again is...how do we create new positive pathways? Well, one of the best ways to control how we think is to control how we speak to ourselves. If we keep up a constant stream of negative self-talk, it's almost impossible to see anything in a positive light. Patterns of negative or positive self-talk often start in childhood, which is why it's so important to nip them in the bud!

BECOME AWARE

Help kids become aware of the negative statements in their heads. Ask them to write down a list of their negative thoughts. Now have them flip these around and turn them into positive statements. I can't do it becomes "Yes, I can do it!" I'm so stupid becomes "I'm very smart." I have no idea what I'm doing becomes "I know all the information I need is somewhere in my brain!" I'm going to fail becomes "I'm going to rock this test." When they catch themselves thinking negatively, replace that thought. Explain that this might be difficult and even seem silly at first, but it WILL help.

AFFIRMATIONS:

Remember Stuart Smalley - the funny self-help guru from Saturday Night Live? (He was played by now Senator Al Franken by the way). He used to look in the mirror and repeat affirmations to himself: "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough and gosh darn it, people like me!" It was a very funny bit, but it kind of made the idea of affirmations look a little cheesy. But affirmations work! Part of the positive self-talk exercise above was about affirmations. We all have a constant stream of self talk flooding our minds every day. We might as well make that talk positive, loving and supportive! Affirmations are a great way to do this.

Have kids create their own affirmations. This can be a list they put inside their notebook, or a stack of index cards with one affirmation per card. Encourage them to read these daily. Keep them in the present tense, so instead of... "I'm going to be smart," write "I AM SMART!"

Stress Relief Tip No. 4 (cont.)

POSITIVE ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

Here's a list to get the juices flowing:

I am smart!
I feel calm and relaxed about the (fill in the name of your state's test).
Everything I need to know is already in my brain.
I did an amazing job on the test.
I feel great!
I'm an awesome student.
I love being able to show everything I know on this test.
I feel great about myself!
You get the idea!

LITTLE MONSTERS IN OUR HEADS!

People have different names for the negative voices in their head...inner critic, inner mean girl... Fred! By naming the voice, you're actually making it easier to recognize and deal with them. You can take this a step further and give that inner voice a complete personality and persona. What does it look like? Is it a snake that whispers mean, slither-thoughts in your mind? Or a nasty old lady, who whacks your fingers with a ruler and tells you that you aren't good enough? Maybe it's a monster or an ugly bug.

Have kids draw a picture of their inner critic. Give it a name and personality. What does it sound like? How does it talk?

Encourage them to talk to this inner creep and tell him that you don't believe the mean things he's whispering. Giving personality to these inner meanies helps make us more aware of them, decreases their power and helps us deal with them.

Authors have been doing this forever. They turn their inner demons into characters. J.K. Rowling said on an interview with Oprah that the Dementors are a manifestation of the depression that she experienced when she was younger.

You can also give a personality to the smart, wise, confident you! What does this character look like? Is it a superhero? A wizard? Just a really confident version of yourself? Draw this character and the next time the critic starts to say something negative...SuperYou can come to the rescue!

"As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives."

– Henry David Thoreau

Stress Relief Tip No. 2

Let's Get Physical!

EXERCISE AND STRESS

Earlier, we talked about the fight or flight response caused by excessive stress. Hormones surge through the body giving the energy to either fight or run really far, really fast. That's why exercise is a great way to relieve stress. When we exercise, we metabolize the excessive stress hormones coursing through our systems—restoring the body and mind to a calmer, more relaxed state. This doesn't need to be a 40 minute workout to be effective. Any form of activity where we "work up a sweat" for five minutes will effectively metabolize—and prevent the excessive buildup of—stress hormones. Do pushups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, jump rope, run in place, run up and down the stairs - whatever (not all at once!). By exercising to the point of sweating, we effectively counteract the ill effects of the fight or flight response.

Not only does exercise DECREASE stress hormones, it INCREASES endorphins, the body's 'feel-good' chemicals, giving your mood a natural boost. So if you exercise BEFORE getting too stressed, the endorphins flooding your system can stop you from going into flight or flight mode to begin with.

STRETCH

One of the most common physical manifestations of stress is tense, tight muscles. Not only is this uncomfortable and often painful, it's just plain difficult to take a test when your shoulders are bunched up around your ears! A few simple stretches the morning of the test and even some neck and shoulder rolls during the test can alleviate some of this tension.

EXERCISE YOUR MIND

According to one school of thought, crossing the centerline of the body "hooks up" the left brain with the right brain, and helps with cognitive function, memory and concentration. There are a few simple exercises that kids can do right before the test:

- Touching the left knee with the right elbow and the right knee with the left elbow. Repeat several times.
- Draw a large imaginary infinity sign in the air in front of your body. Use your right finger, then left finger. Repeat several times.

Stress Relief Tip No. 1 Laugh!!!

That's right! Laughter, Chuckles, Guffaws...even a nice a big smile will make anyone feel instantly better. Humor has HUGE stress relieving benefits, which is why we infuse humor into EVERYTHING we do! In fact, we call our videos the "Laugh and Learn" series, because kids (and adults for that matter!) just learn better when they're having fun.

Laughter puts life in perspective, helps us cope with difficult situations and even makes us healthier. Most of us realize that we feel better when we laugh, but there's actual science to back it up. Remember those hormones we talked about earlier: cortisol and adrenaline? Well Laughter actually helps reduce the level of stress hormones in the system. It also increases the level of health-enhancing hormones like endorphins, and neurotransmitters. This means fewer physical effects from stress.

Positive Aspects of Laughter

- **Physical Release:** Have you experienced a cleansed feeling after a good laugh? Laughter provides a physical and emotional release.
- **Internal Workout:** A good belly laugh exercises the diaphragm, contracts the abs and even works out the shoulders, leaving muscles more relaxed afterward.
- **Distraction:** Laughter brings the focus away from, stress and negative emotions.
- **Perspective:** Studies show that our response to stressful events can be altered by whether we view something as a 'threat' or a 'challenge'. Humor can give us a more lighthearted perspective and help us view events as 'challenges', thereby making them less threatening and more positive.
- **Self Esteem:** Developing good humor skills during childhood helps build a solid sense of self-esteem.
- **Intellectual Development:** Many child professionals believe that humor is really a form of intellectual play, since language is our main vehicle for thought.
- **Coping Skills:** Numerous research studies document humor's power in helping kids (and adults!) cope with life stress.

"The seeds of what we will do are in all of us, but it always seemed to me that in those who can laugh in life the seeds are covered with better soil and a higher grade of manure."

- Ernest Hemingway

"The most wasted of all days is one without laughter."

- E.E. Cummings

TEST DAY

Many of the stress relieving activities in this book can be done in the days, weeks and months leading up to the big test. They can be used either separately or in conjunction with each other and will definitely help kids feel more confident, positive and focused.

BUT...

What about the actual day of the test? This can be a day of ACCUTE STRESS and many of the methods taught in this book will be quickly forgotten in the face of overwhelming MIND SLIME!

One of the most dire symptoms of MIND SLIME is the dreaded CHRISTMAS TREE EFFECT. You can see this on the answer sheets that are "bubbled-in" in such a way that they resemble Christmas Trees or a cactus or a bunny. This phenomenon is not due to any artistic tendencies on the part of the test designers. Rather, it's caused by kids that have GIVEN UP. Instead of trying and doing their best, some kids just start filling in answers in a random order...or they don't fill any answers, period! This is caused by many factors: extreme overwhelm, exhaustion, anxiety. Basically...

STRESS!

It's important for kids to have tools and strategies at their finger tips if they start to experience these feelings. Going over the techniques listed above so kids are familiar with them is the first step. But it also helps to be reminded of specific strategies the day of the test.

We've created a tear off sheet that you can copy and distribute to students so they can remind themselves of the things they can do during the test! This is something to post on the fridge and have kids look at the morning of the test.

NO STRESS TEST

(CUT OUT THIS PAGE AND GO OVER IT THE DAY BEFORE AND THE DAY OF THE TEST)

If you start to feel nervous, stressed, tired or anxious during the test...remind yourself that YOU KNOW THIS STUFF! That's right! All the answers are in your head. Even if you don't think you remember them, they're in there!

The night before the test

Prepare: Clothing, Pencils, anything else you might need, so you don't feel rushed.

Visualize: Imagine yourself doing well. Really EXPERIENCE how good this feels.

Affirmations: Read Over Your Positive Affirmations

Sleep: Get a good night's sleep!

The morning of the Test

Breakfast: Eat a good nutritious breakfast. Your brain needs energy!

Stretch: Stretch your body, neck and shoulder rolls, so you feel good.

Exercise Your Mind: Do a few exercises to get your mind focused and ready. Draw a figure 8 in the air. Touch each knee with the opposite elbow a few times.

Remember Butterflies are Normal: A few butterflies are normal. Take deep breaths and remind yourself that you are going to do well!

DURING THE TEST

If you get to a question you don't know the answer to. Take a deep breath to clear out some mind slime. Read the question again very carefully and try again. If you still don't know the answer or start to feel stressed try some of these strategies:

- Skip the question and come back to it later.
- Don't let it FREAK YOU Out! Just move on to the next question and keep going.
- Take a deep breath, do a few neck and shoulder rolls.
- Quietly tell yourself I CAN DO IT! Remember, Positive Attitude is Everything!
- Think of a funny joke or situation (but try not to laugh out loud during the test!).
- Even if you feel overwhelmed. Do your best! It might be very tempting to give up. Don't! Remind yourself that all the answers are in your mind and you can do it!

After the Test

- Congratulate yourself!
- Don't WORRY about your score.
- Do something fun. Reward yourself.
- Remember.... **THIS IS ONLY A TEST!**