

All S.O.F.T.

Laura Brooke: I'm Laura Brooke with the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, and today I'm going to share a strategy with you called SOFT.

This is a strategy that you can use when you're tense, when you're feeling overwhelmed, when you just need to take a time out. It only takes two minutes — maybe less — and it really makes a difference in terms of calming effect, calming the nervous system, slowing down the breath.

So we're going to begin by just talking about how we're sitting because this is something we do want to address. It's very important to the breath to have your spine back against your chair, and your feet flat on the floor. Hands can just be gently laying on the thighs, palms facing upwards, relaxed.

So, I'm going to begin with the S in SOFT, and we'll work through the rest of the acronym.

The S in SOFT stands for soften your face.

So, beginning at your hairline, I want you to actually imagine — picture — your little hair follicles just beginning to soften. Your forehead softening, melting that furrow around your brow. Softening, melting, coming around the area around the eye, the bony area under the eye.

Melting, softening, releasing. Cheeks softening. Coming down to your jaw. Release that jaw. Just let it drop. No clenching. We tend to clench our teeth when we're stressed. We're going to just let that go. Let our jaw hang.

We're going to bring our tongue down from the roof of our mouth to the bottom of our mouth. This is a calming strategy. Soften the face.

Let's go to the O in SOFT. Open the heart. Open the chest.

So, sensing your shoulders, moving back toward the chair — they may not touch it. That's OK. Just sensing that direction. As your — as your shoulders move back. Your heart and your chest begin to lift slightly. Imagine them lifting, opening toward the sky.

Come back up. Check your face. Soft, melting, jaw released. Open heart, open chest.

Floating down the shoulders is the F in SOFT. Float down the shoulders. I like to sometimes imagine I have gentle hands saying, "Laura, remember to float down on your shoulders." Or you can actually physically gently put your hands on your shoulders.

We know that as we get stressed, as we're tense, shoulders rise. Shoulders rise. Headaches appear. Neck aches appear. Back aches appear. Floating the shoulders down makes all the difference.

Review. Soft face. Open heart, open chest. Shoulders floated down.

The T in SOFT, take a deep breath. Hand on the belly.

As you inhale, you're blowing up a balloon. Feel that rise. As you exhale, balloon deflates. Inhale, rise. Exhale, deflate. The reason you put your hand on your belly is because the breath needs to come from the belly to be calming. Way down there, not up here.

Soften the face. Open the heart and chest. Float down the shoulders. Take a deep breath.

SOFT.

This is a strategy called put it in a bubble.

So what we're going to do is bring in our imagination and think about something that is stressing you out right now, worrying you, concerning you, something that you really don't have control over perhaps.

And what you're going to do is begin by just imagining a big iridescent bubble in your hand. You've got to be gentle.

You're holding it, a big iridescent bubble, very gently, softly. And you're going to put one of your worries, one of your stressors, in that bubble, just for now. You're going to just put it in there.

Let it sit there.

Let it be there. It's still there.

You can see it, but now it's encased in a bubble. It's not encased in you right now. It's in the bubble.

And now, you're going to imagine that that bubble is beginning to move outward toward the tip of your finger. And now, it's just sitting on the tip of your finger.

We're going to put our hand on our belly. And we're going to take a deep breath, feeling that balloon rise.

And as you exhale, you're going to blow that bubble away, letting your stressor go, picturing that bubble floating away.

Putting it in a bubble.