

# **From Theory to Practice: Rehearsal Strategies for Anxious Students**

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# Thank you

to those who shared examples or input for the  
presentation!

Raeanne Adams, Catherine Breault, Joe Burgess,  
Isabelle Cowan, Sheri Gallant, Dave Maloney,  
Jessie Park, Dr. June Groden



# Rehearsal Strategies

## Part I:

*Social Narratives: Variations on a Theme*

## Part II:

*Just Relax! Why Telling Doesn't Work*



# Rehearsal Strategies

**Rationale:** Why these topics?

Are you using social narratives and/or relaxation strategies?

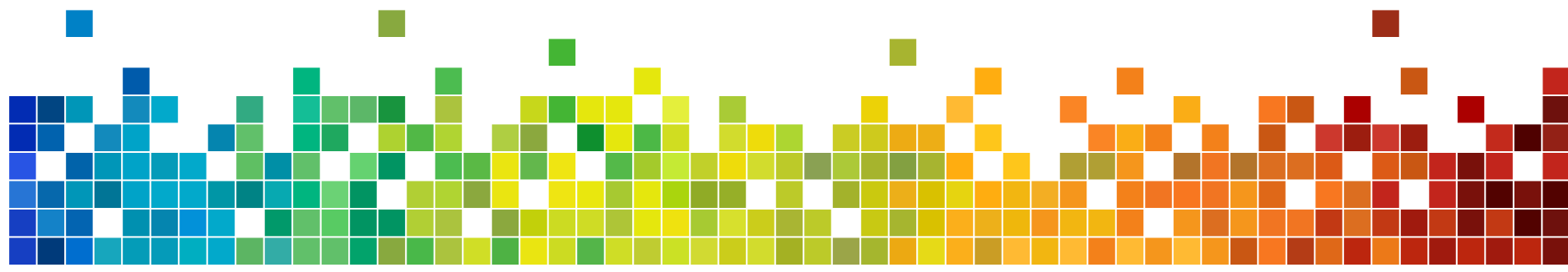
Do you have evidence that they are effective for your students?



# Rehearsal Strategies

## **Goal: Deepen our knowledge**

- Understand the behavioural principles involved
- Better identify which strategies are likely to be effective
- Match strategy to student skills
- More clearly differentiate and encourage correct implementation



# Rehearsal Strategies

## Guiding Principles

**Rule-governed Behavior:** A *rule* is a verbal statement that implies that performing the behaviour as specified will lead to *reinforcement*.

A new skill or behavior may be acquired using a *description* of the contingencies without the person actually contacting them (in that moment).

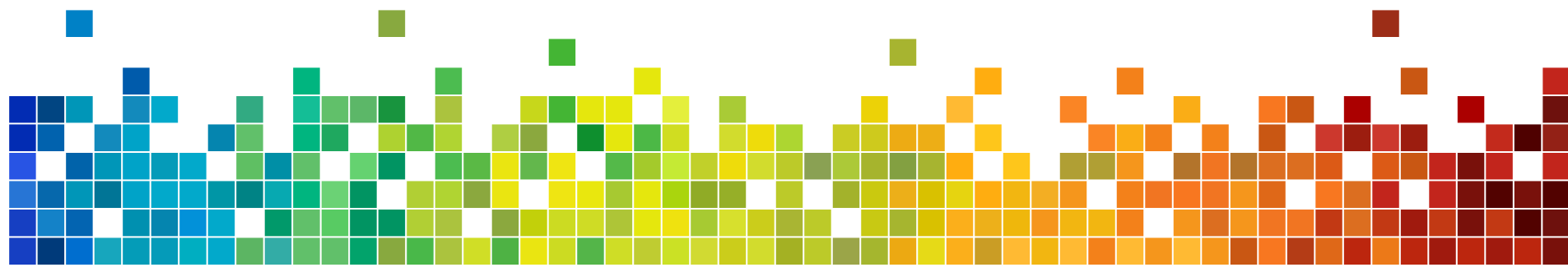


# Rehearsal Strategies

## Guiding Principles

***Rule-governed Behavior:*** The contingency may be implied and does not have to have been experienced previously (i.e., Don't walk on thin ice!)

*(N.B. Just being able to state the rule does not mean it will be followed)*



# Rehearsal Strategies

## Guiding Principles

***Behaviour Rehearsal*** involves practicing appropriate responses, first under simulated conditions

- may include individuals imagining or thinking about themselves performing and responding appropriately to others.





# Rehearsal Strategies

## Guiding Principles

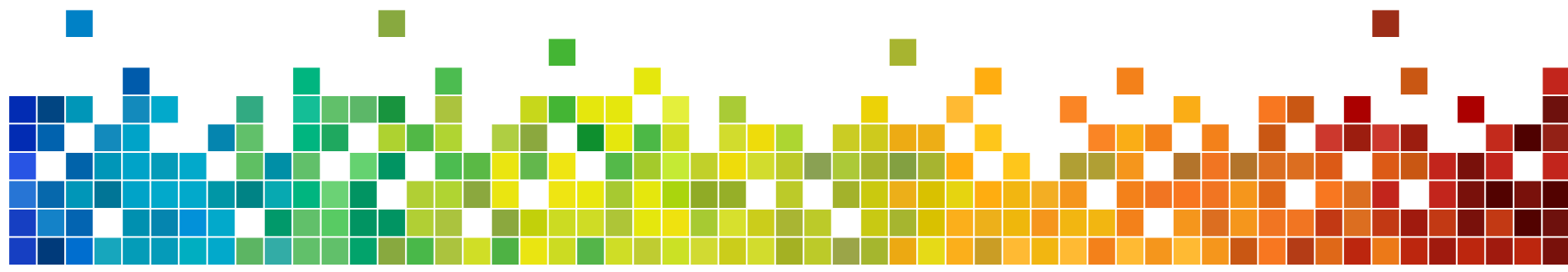
***Behaviour Skills Training*** uses instruction, modelling, rehearsal and feedback to teach a new skill in a simulated context, then in the natural environment.



# Narratives

## Focus Points

- What are social narratives?
- How do the variations compare to each other?
- How do we use and monitor these effectively?



# Narratives



**Scripts**



***Social Stories™***



**Cognitive Picture Rehearsal**

What  
defines a  
Social  
Story?

Is a script  
the same  
thing?

Where does  
cognitive  
picture  
rehearsal fit  
in here?

What's the  
difference?



# Narratives

## Key Features

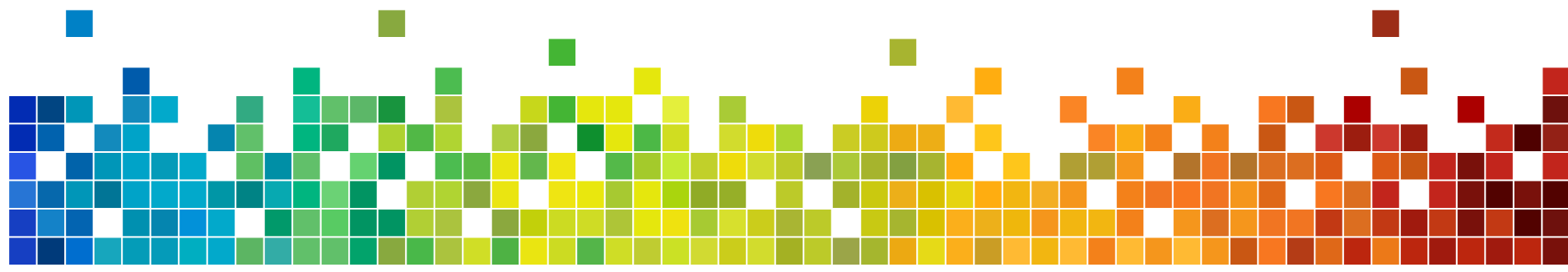
- **Brief** information presented in picture or text format that is descriptive of a situation or outlines steps in a sequence
- **Individualized**, written from the perspective of the learner
- Introduced and modelled through **repeated practice** until ready to be used in real-life situations



# Narratives

## Key Features

- **Topic varies** widely across learning domains
- May provide a **description** of appropriate behavioral expectations and/or an **explanation** of the perspective of others
- **Goal** – teach new skill; change maladaptive behaviour



# Narratives

Power  
Cards

Comic  
Strip  
Conver-  
sations

*Social  
Story™*

Script

Cognitive  
Rehearsal



**Social Stories??**

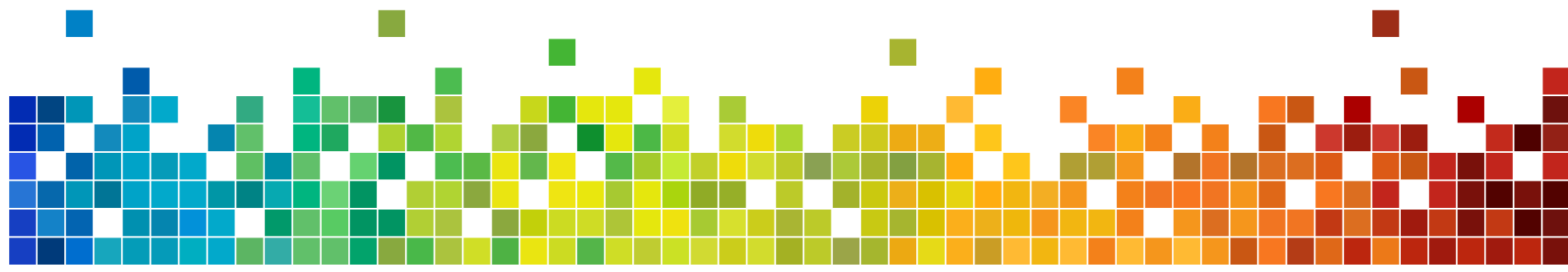
# Script

- Approach that predates Social Stories
- Written and/or picture description of a specific skill or steps in a sequence
- Often used to teach a routine or familiar activity
- May be in outline or list format
- *Purpose: provide cues for the learner to help organize and follow a process*



# Script

- Task analysis helpful as a starting point
- Topics can vary widely (e.g., cooking project; steps to go to a movie; how to tie a shoe, etc.)
- Usually practiced and/or modelled repeatedly prior to use in actual situation
- May or may not include social interaction or maladaptive behaviour





# Script

1. Peel banana



2. Cut banana.



3. Scoop ice cream



4. Pick toppings.



5. Eat and enjoy!

# Script

Carve a pumpkin



Get Pumpkin



Carve pumpkin top



Scoop out inside



Draw face



Carve pumpkin



Put in candle



Put on pumpkin lid



Finished



**PictureSET**

[https://www.setbc.org/  
pictureset](https://www.setbc.org/pictureset)

# Script

## Time Out Steps

- ☐ Loud yelling, pushing materials...
- ☐ Teacher says, "Go to time out".
- ☐ Walk to Quiet Room and sit on the mat. Door is open.
- ☐ Timer set for 3 minutes.



- ☐ Three minutes done!
- ☐ Stand up and return to lesson.
- ☐ Calm and back to work!

(McLean, et al. 2014/2016)

# Script

My Quiet Area



When I yell, throw my toys,  
hit people, or bump my  
head...



...an adult says, "Go to the  
Quiet Area."



I walk to Quiet Area...

# Script



...and sit on the floor.



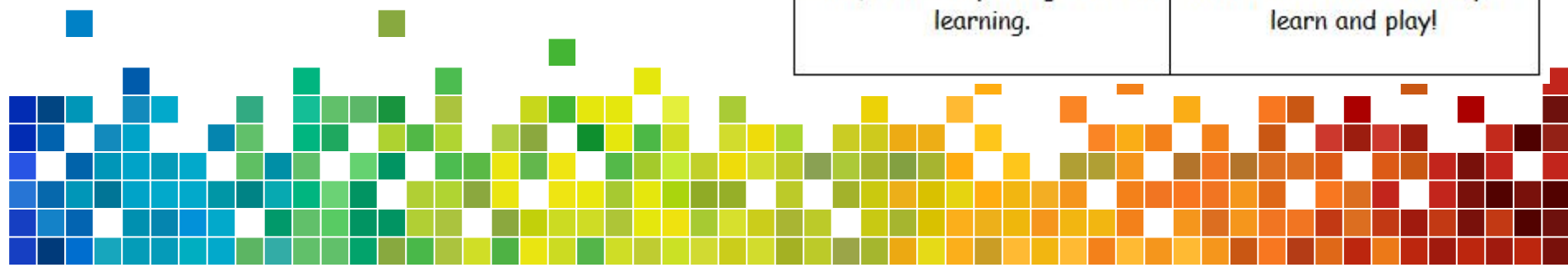
I will stay in the Quiet Area  
for 3 minutes.



Then, I stand up and go back to  
learning.



Now I am calm and ready to  
learn and play!



# Script

Let's tell.....a joke

Ben

Buddy

Knock Knock



Who's there?



Boo



Boo who?



Don't cry...  
It will be okay.

Ha Ha  
Ha !  
Good one!



Can you tell me one?

Sure. \_\_\_\_\_

# Comparing Strategies



**Scripts**



***Social Stories™***

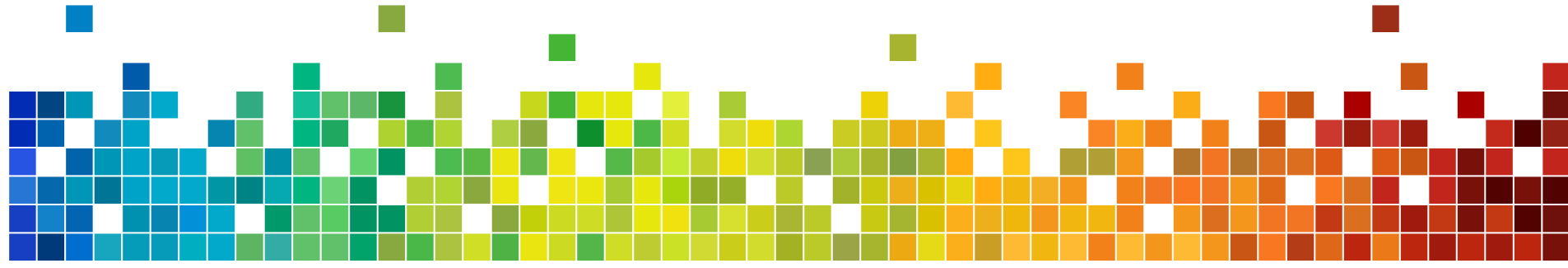


**Cognitive Picture Rehearsal**

**Uses task analysis**

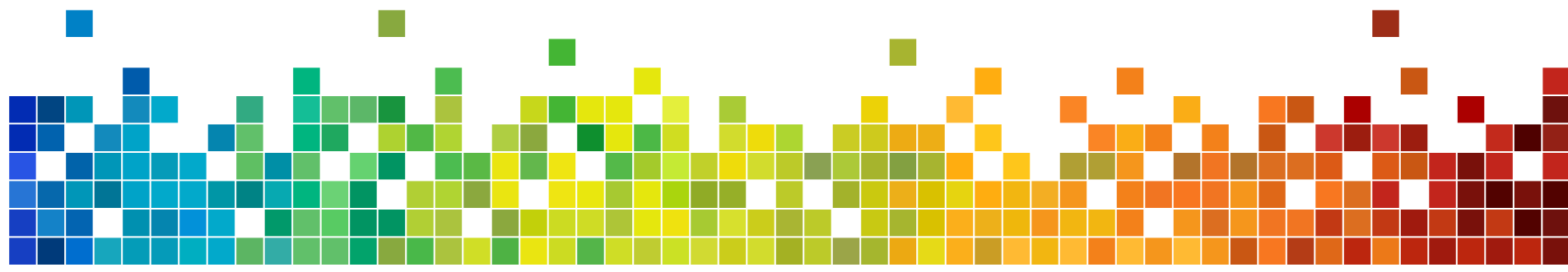
**Teaches sequence  
of new skill or  
routine**

**Pictures and text  
serve as cue for  
each step**



# Social Story™

- Based on work of Carol Grey
- Main purpose is to ***describe, explain and suggest rather than direct*** specific behavior
- Addresses 'theory of mind' problems
- Describes social situations, highlighting relevant cues
- *Social Story™* follows specific formula of types of sentences





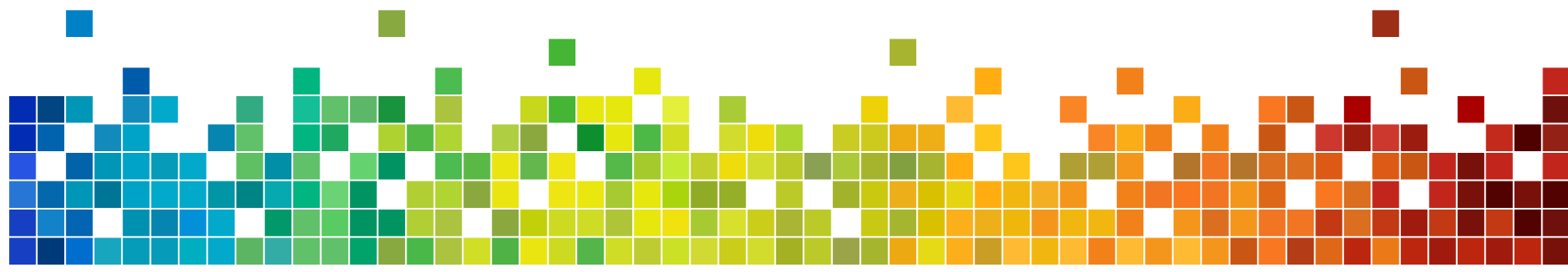
# Social Story™

- Narrative based on teacher/parent observation and interpretation of what the social misunderstanding is
- Learner encouraged to read the story often and memorize the text
- May be more effective with children with language and self-awareness
- Definition affects research outcomes regarding effectiveness



# Social Story Components

- ***Descriptive*** – objectively define where, who, what and why
- ***Perspective*** – describe reactions and feelings of others in the situation
- ***Directive*** – positive statements of desired responses
- ***Control*** (optional) – written by the student identifying strategies for recalling info



## ***Picking Up My Towel***

**When I take a shower, I use a towel.**

**Towels help me dry off my body. Towels keep water off the floor.**

**After I use my towel, it is wet. If I leave it on the floor, then it gets the floor wet. It may begin to smell.**



# Social Story™

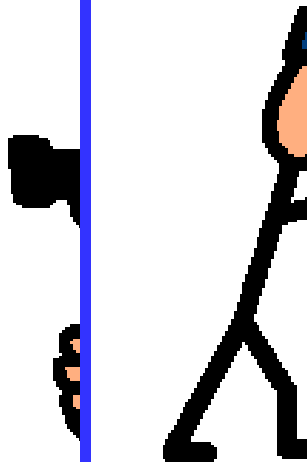
**It will make Monica happy if I pick up my towel and put it in the hamper.**

**I will try to pick up my towel after my shower.**

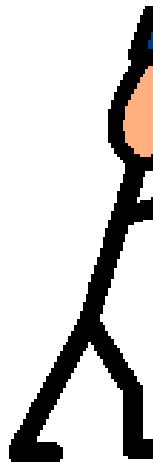


# Social Story

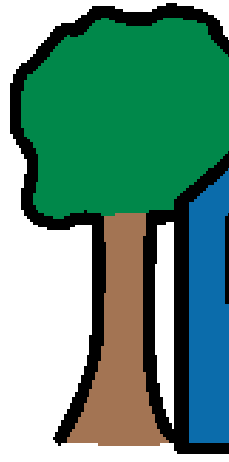
My Daddy  
carpenter



He likes to



Sometimes  
he works near

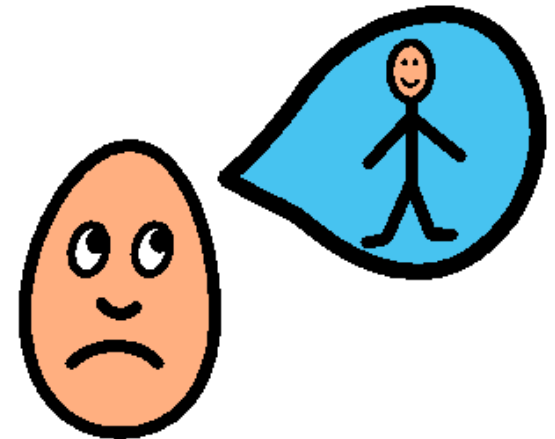


Sometimes  
he works



Then I miss  
Daddy.

I miss Daddy.



# Social Story

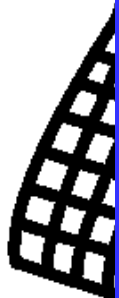
When I am thinking  
I can...  
for a h



or say  
Daddy  
phone



or look  
calenda  
when d  
coming



Daddy is  
home o



I will be happy  
to see Daddy...



and he will be  
happy to see me.



# Social Story

## The Mommy Story

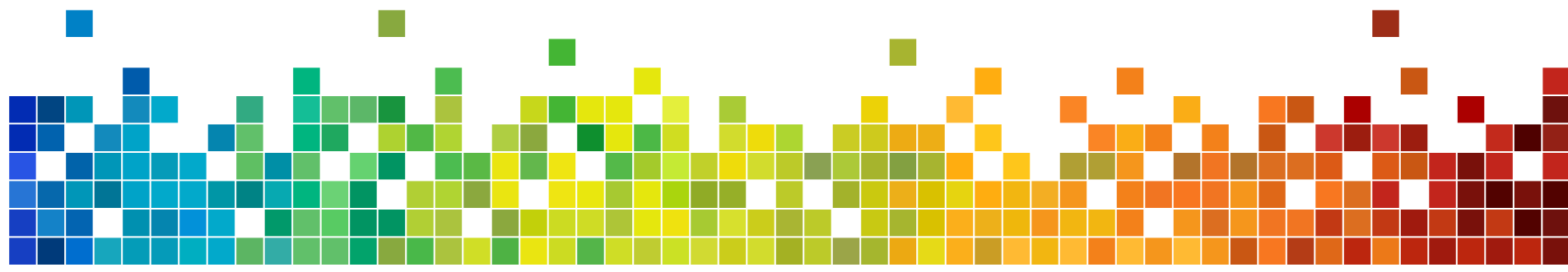
My name is Joey. My family is Mommy, Daddy and my brother, Peter. We have lots of fun together. We like going camping and to the pool.

One day, Mommy's heart stopped working. This is called dying. That means Mommy is not coming home. Mommy went to heaven to be with Grandma.



# Social Story

**This makes me sad. Daddy and Peter are  
sad too. Sometimes we cry if we are sad.  
When I am sad, I can ask for extra hugs.  
I can jump on my trampoline.  
I can look at pictures of Mommy.  
I can remember she loves me.  
Remembering will help me feel better.**





# Social Story

Daddy and my family will take good care of  
me now. Friends will still come on Friday.  
We will give each other extra hugs.  
After a while we will feel better.  
Mommy will watch us from heaven and  
send us her love.



# Comparing Strategies



**Scripts**

Uses task analysis  
Teaches sequence  
of new skill or  
routine  
Pictures and text  
serve as cue for  
each step



***Social Stories™***

Uses specific  
formula  
Describes social  
situation  
Includes social  
perspectives  
Non-directive

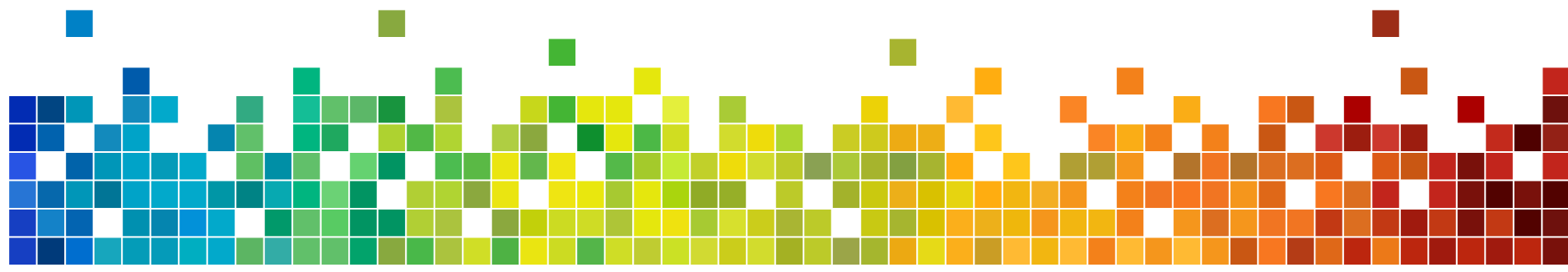


**Cognitive Picture Rehearsal**



# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

- Instructional strategy closely aligned with the use of relaxation and visual imagery
- Based on covert conditioning research of Dr. Joseph Cautela, Dr. June Groden, and others
- Used with people with significant developmental disabilities as a means of **replacing maladaptive behaviours**



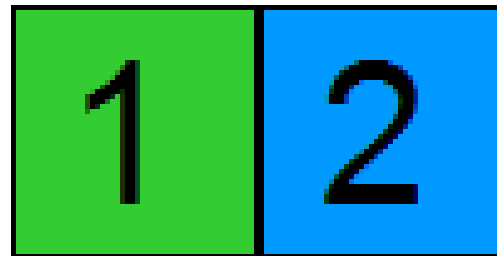
# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

- Text (rehearsal script or scene) is written and illustrated following functional assessment of the problem behavior
- Pictures or line drawings illustrate the antecedent, the target behaviour and the consequences (reinforcement).
- Relaxation and/or visual imagery is often incorporated into the script.
- Relaxation steps are taught first as a separate skill



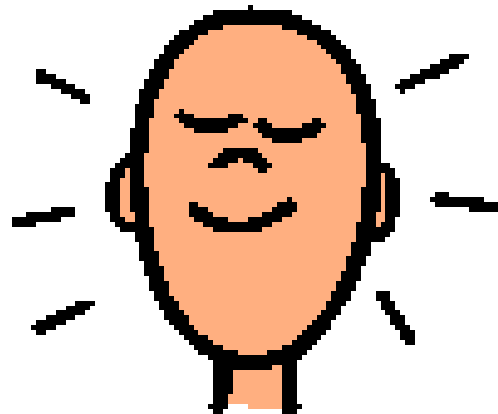
# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

When I am calm, I come back to  
work. My voice is quiet again.  
Time for a HIGH FIVE!!



# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

**I feel proud when I stay safe.**



# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

## ***The Wrong Mailbox***

I work in the college mailroom. I match all the names and the addresses. I like to put all the letters and packages in *just the right slot.*

Sometimes someone puts a package in the **WRONG SPOT!!!** I start to feel **REALLY ANGRY!**

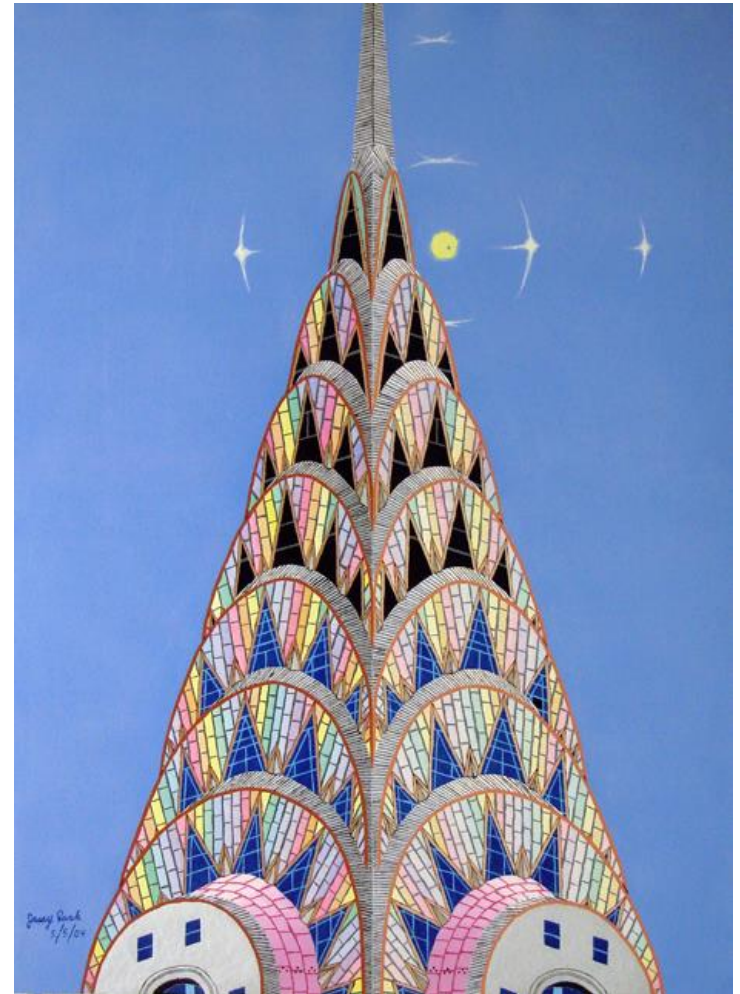


# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

**I stop what I am doing  
and sit down.**

**I close my eyes and  
breathe long and slow.**

**I think about how I feel  
when I am painting a  
picture of the sky.**





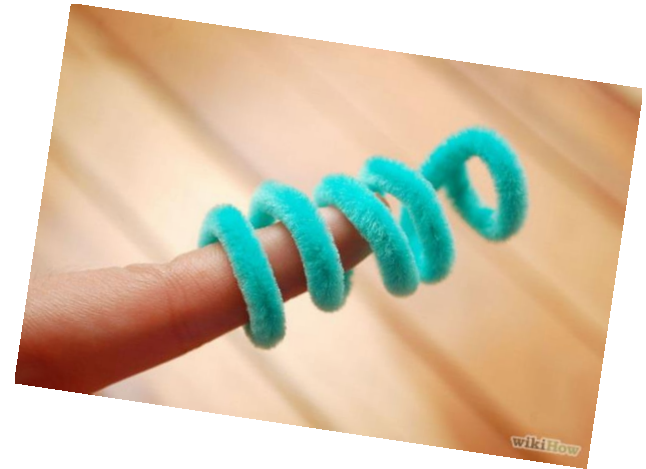
# Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

I say to myself, “*It’s NO BIG DEAL!*”.

Time to get back to work (and put the package in the right spot).



# Pairing Concrete Cues



# Comparing Strategies



## Scripts

Uses task analysis  
Teaches sequence  
of new skill or  
routine  
Pictures and text  
serve as cue for  
each step



## *Social Stories™*

Uses specific  
formula  
Describes social  
situation  
Includes social  
perspectives  
Non-directive



## Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

Requires FBA  
Describes  
contingency  
Includes replacement  
behaviour and  
reinforcement  
May include  
relaxation/imagery



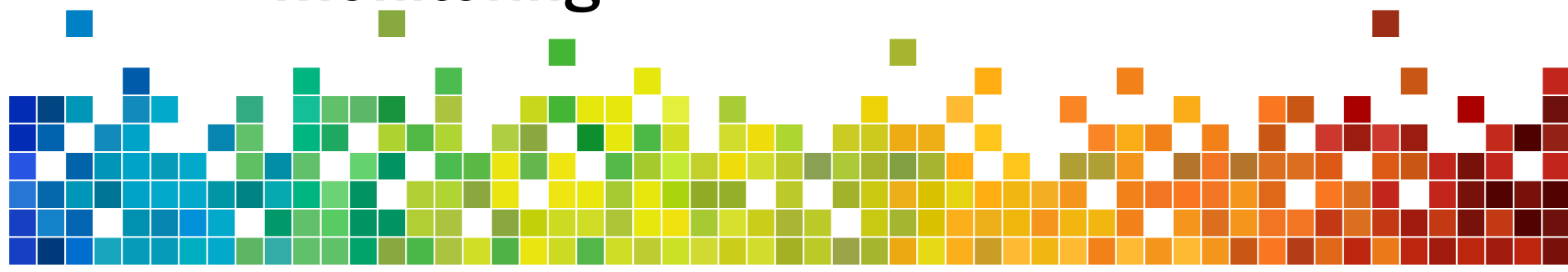
# Narratives

## Similarities

- Use pictures and text
- Individualized
- Teaching procedure
- Need for monitoring

## Differences

- Purpose
- Preparation needed
- Prerequisite skills
- Content



# Considerations

- Understand the behaviour first!
- Select the type of narrative to use based on the purpose and name it accurately
- Match the number and level of statements and illustrations to the learner
- Don't assume understanding of emotions in the text
- Provide adequate daily practice



# Cautions

- Avoid introducing several strategies at the same time as it will make effectiveness unclear.
- Use of narratives brings increased attention to specific situations and behaviours. Sometimes ignoring is better.
- Choose wisely. Social narratives are not effective for everyone and may be inadequate when used as the sole intervention.



# Summary

- Rehearsal of useful and functional skills with the aid of social narratives can be effective strategies, especially for learners who benefit from visual supports
- As with any evidence-based practice, careful planning, individualization and monitoring is needed







# References

Baker, J. (2007). Social skills training for students with ASD and their peers. *The Best of The OARacle: A Compilation of Articles from 2002-2007*, 18.

Gray, C. (1993). Social stories: Improving responses of students with autism with accurate social information. *Focus on Autistic Behavior*, 8, 1-10.

Groden, J., & LeVasseur, P. (1995). Cognitive picture rehearsal: A system to teach self-control. In K. A. Quill (Ed.), *Teaching children with autism: Strategies to enhance communication and socialization*. (pp. 287-306) New York: Delmar.



# References

National Professional Development Center for ASD Information and free tutorials on evidence based practices

<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices>

Quill, K. A. (1995). Visually cued instruction for children with autism and pervasive developmental disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 10(3), 10-20.

Vicker, Beverly. *Behavioral Issues and the Use of Social Stories*.

Retrieved from <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/Behavioral-Issues-and-the-Use-of-Social-Stories>





***Just Relax!***

**Why Telling Doesn't Work**



**Anxiety** develops out of worry and becomes a problem *when people change their behaviour to avoid a feared person, place or event.*



**Stress** is the body's reaction to a *perceived, anticipated or imagined danger or threatening situation*. The stressful situation can be happy or unhappy.



# How do we cope?

***Buffers*** - adaptive responses to stress

- Talking with friends
- Participating in sports, hobbies
- Exercise
- Restful, calming activities
- Sleep
- Medical intervention



# Challenges

- **Communication skills may be compromised**
- **Difficulty understanding and expressing emotions**
- **Limited number of friends or support system**
- **Lack of self awareness**
- **Group sports often difficult**



# Challenges

***“I taught my student to use the relaxation steps, but he doesn’t use it when he needs it”***

***“One on one? How do I build in time for this? Who should teach this? ”***

***“My student thinks the breathing is silly and won’t use it.”***





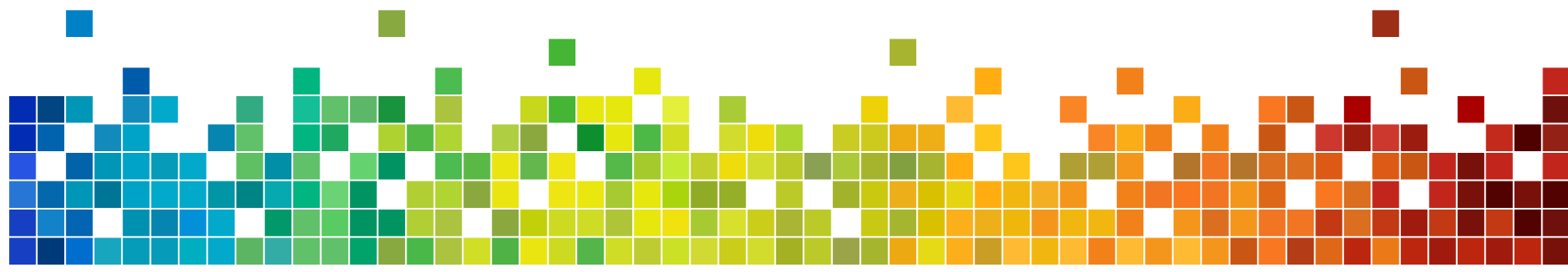
# Relaxation

- Why teach relaxation?
- Which strategy do we use?
- How do we teach effectively?
- How do we target generalization?



# Why teach relaxation?

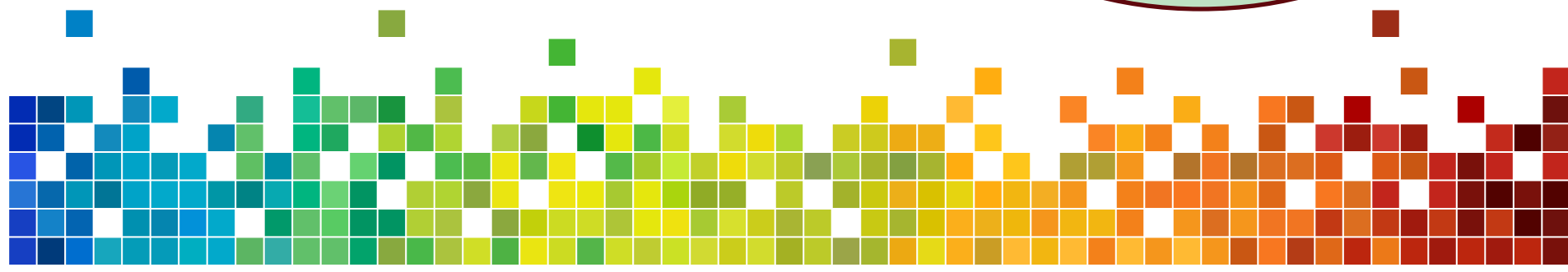
- **Functional skill with lifelong impact**
- **Can be used across environments**
- **Non-stigmatizing**
- **Perceived as neutral or pleasant in general**
- **Can be guided by parents or teachers**
- **Demonstrated effectiveness**



# Which strategy do we use?

- Progressive Relaxation (PR)
- Behavioral Relaxation Training (BRT)
- Controlled Breathing
- Guided Imagery

Goal:  
The *Relaxation*  
*Response*  
(physically calm  
and mentally  
alert)



# Progressive Relaxation (PR)

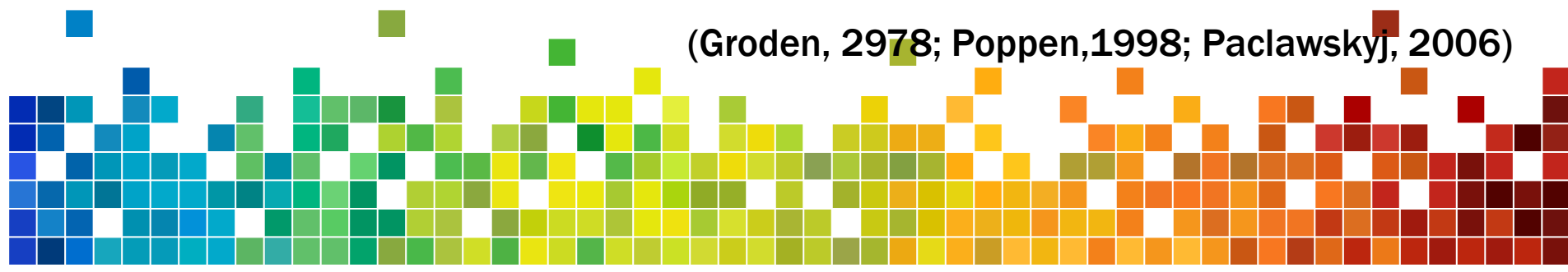
- Focuses on teaching to *recognize and label the difference between muscle tension and muscle relaxation*
- Apply tension to each body part in top-down or bottom-up sequence, release and pay attention to the feeling
- Longer exercise, more conspicuous
- Flexible (use with as many or few body parts as appropriate)



# Behavioral Relaxation Training

- PR techniques modified for developmentally disabled learners with limited verbal skills
- Observable responses defined and measureable; shortened sessions
- Rationale: engaging in the motor responses alone produces the relaxation response; no verbal reporting from the learner needed

(Grodén, 1978; Poppen, 1998; Paclawskyj, 2006)



# Behavioral Relaxation Training

- Modelled/trained ten behaviours in specific order from large to small muscle groups (body, head, shoulders, feet, hands, throat, mouth, eyes, breathing, quiet)
- Able to acquire relaxation response more rapidly than other forms of relaxation training
- Average session, 7 minutes; average mastery, two hours

(Poppen, 1998; Paclawskyj, 2006)



## RELAXATION ROUTINE

1. SIT  
ON A CHAIR...

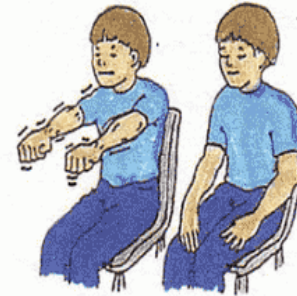


2. "SCRUNCH"  
UP YOUR  
FACE...



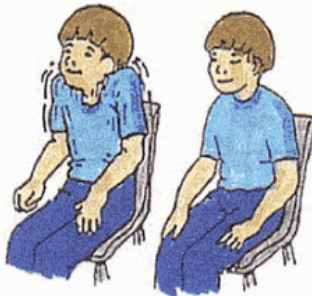
THEN...  
RELAX  
IT...

3. TENSE  
YOUR  
ARMS...



THEN...  
RELAX  
THEM

4. TENSE UP YOUR  
SHOULDERS  
AND CHEST...



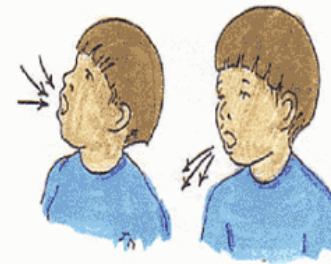
THEN...  
RELAX  
THEM

5. TENSE UP  
YOUR LEGS...



...THEN RELAX!

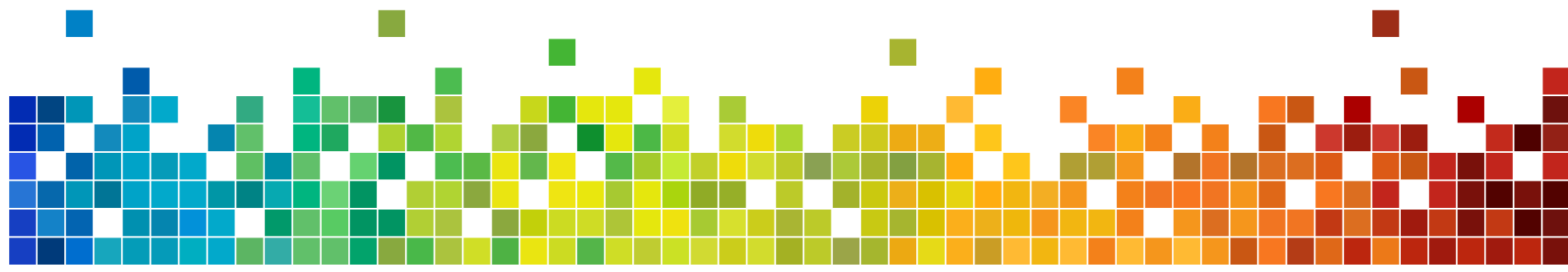
6. BREATHE  
IN  
RELAXATION...



...BREATHE OUT  
TENSION

# Controlled Breathing

- Commonly taught in school settings
- Easy; focuses on breathing alone without any other activity
- Can be done unobtrusively, anytime, anywhere
- Slow, calm, “secret” breathing
- Practices are brief but frequent



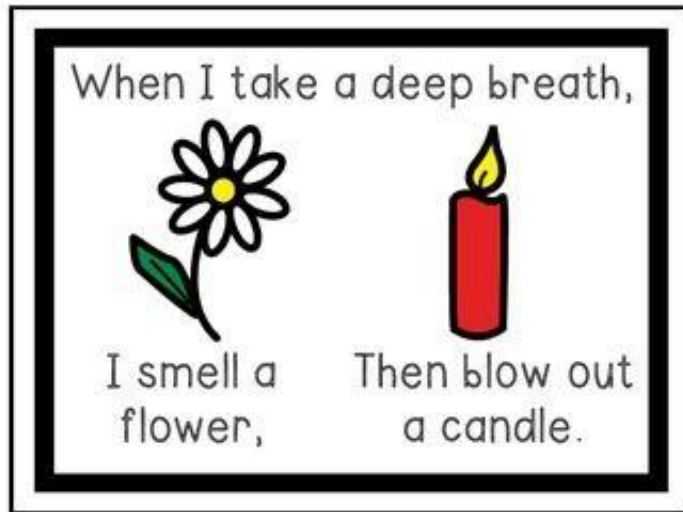


# Controlled Breathing

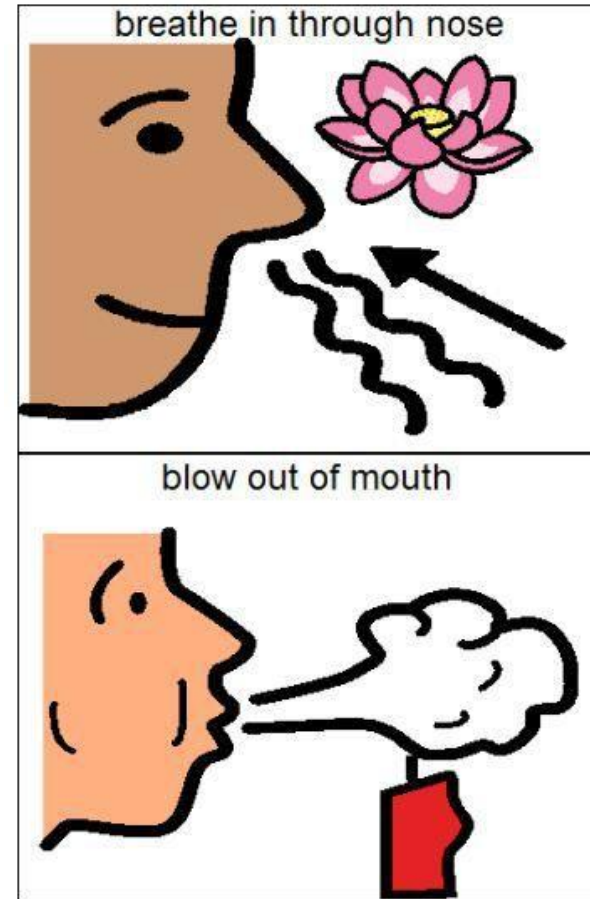
1. Sit comfortably
2. Breathe slowly and evenly
3. Breathe in through the nose,(slow count three)
4. Breathe out through the mouth,(slow count three)
5. Continue until calm



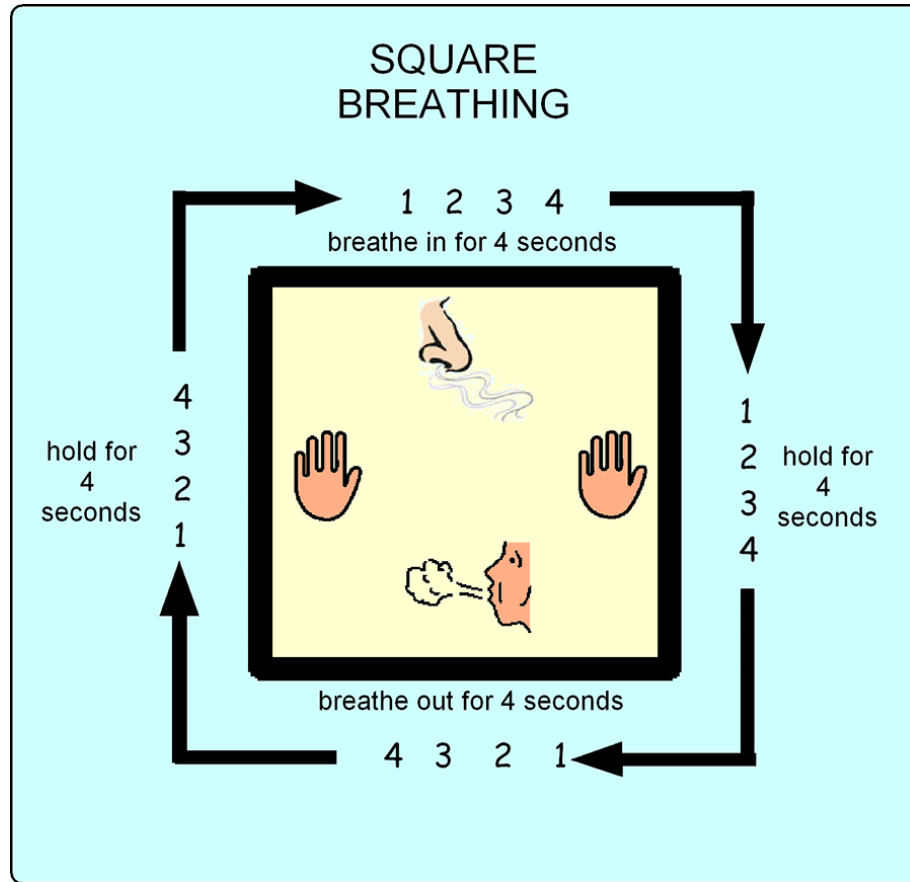
# Controlled Breathing



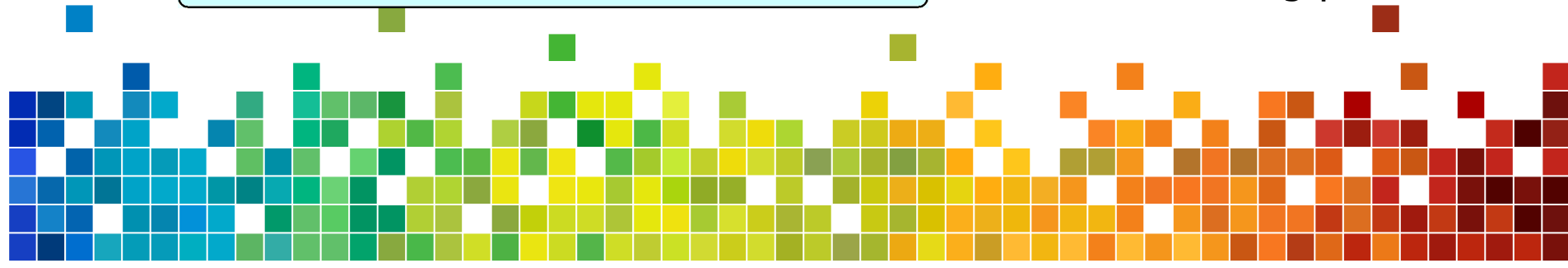
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# Controlled Breathing

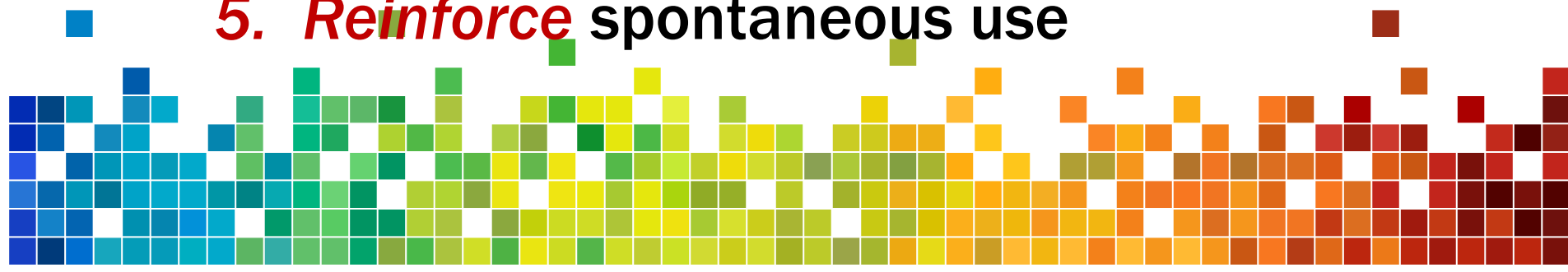


PictureSET  
[www.setbc.org/pictureset/](http://www.setbc.org/pictureset/)



# How to teach relaxation effectively

1. *Identify situations* or events that are associated with the problem behavior
2. *Teach, model and practice* until fluent in calm situations (BST)
3. *Prime and prompt* in identified target situations. Reinforce!
4. *Prime and prompt* in identified target situations across settings. Reinforce!
5. *Reinforce* spontaneous use



# How to teach relaxation effectively

- Use role play and practice together with the learner a minimum of three times a day *when NOT anxious*
- Use visual, text or concrete supports if helpful for understanding
- Provide checklists or reminders to ensure practice occurs
- Involve parents!

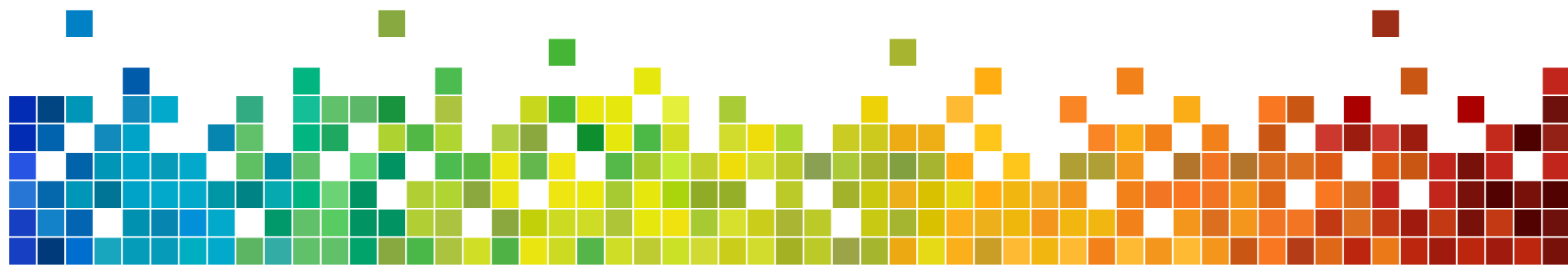
(Chalfant, 2011)



# Tips from the Field

*How can we make relaxation more accessible to learners with language and/or cognitive challenges?*

- Teach fewer or simpler steps by combining them (e.g., hug yourself tight and release; teach only gross muscle groups first)
- Teach through imitation or with physical prompts
- Combine teaching with visual supports or concrete reminders
- Use simple and consistent language when teaching (1-2 words)



# Tips from the Field

*My student has difficulty with the breathing...sounds very loud and inappropriate.*

- Use gestural or number/symbol prompts to help slow and quiet the breathing.
- Use more physical prompts to help the learner identify which body parts are involved.
- Use physical props to illustrate the way the breathing should look/sound (e.g., windmill toys, candle, balloon, fat straw)



# Tips from the Field

*The teacher/parent starts to teach this to the learner but gives up. “It isn’t working”.*

- Has there been adequate and consistent practice (6-8 weeks)?
- Have the steps for effective teaching been followed?
- Do the steps and/or the visual supports need to be changed?





# Tips from the Field

*My student is in high school and thinks this is too babyish.*

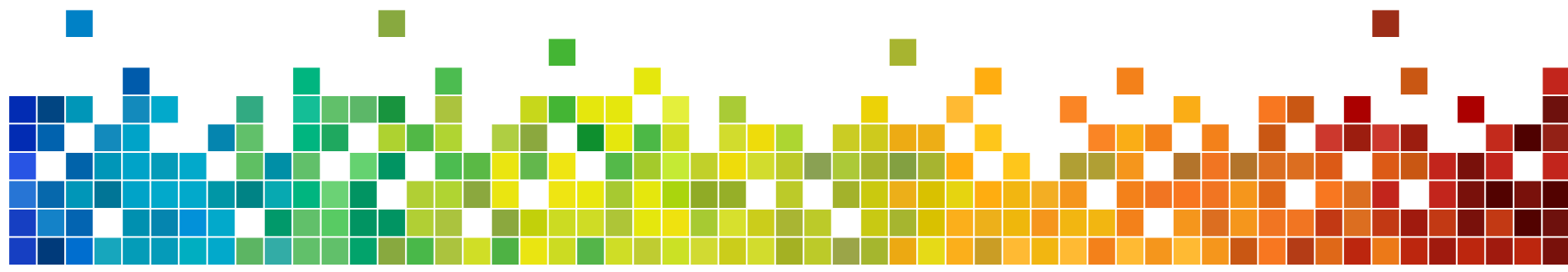
- Pair with a peer model; Use video modelling
- Emphasize as a powerful and private strategy - “top secret breathing”
- Use imagery; build in special interest
- Identify concrete reinforcers or positive outcomes



# Tips from the Field

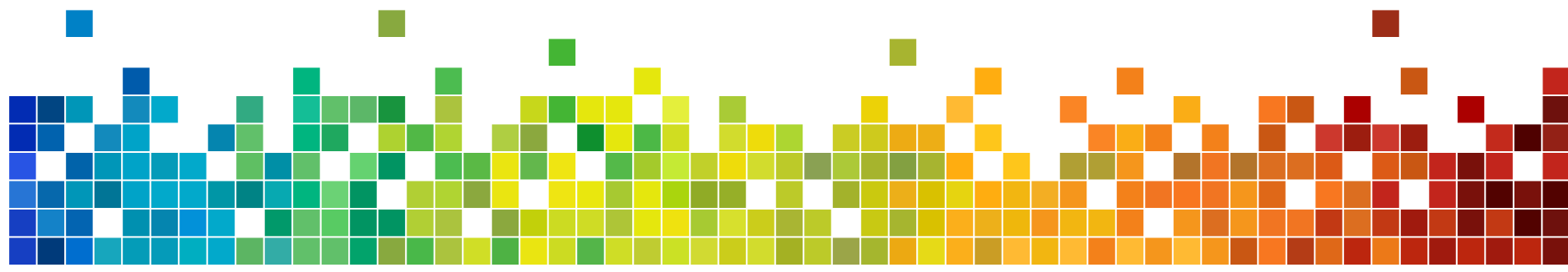
*The teacher doesn't recognize early enough when they should prompt the learner to use the technique.*

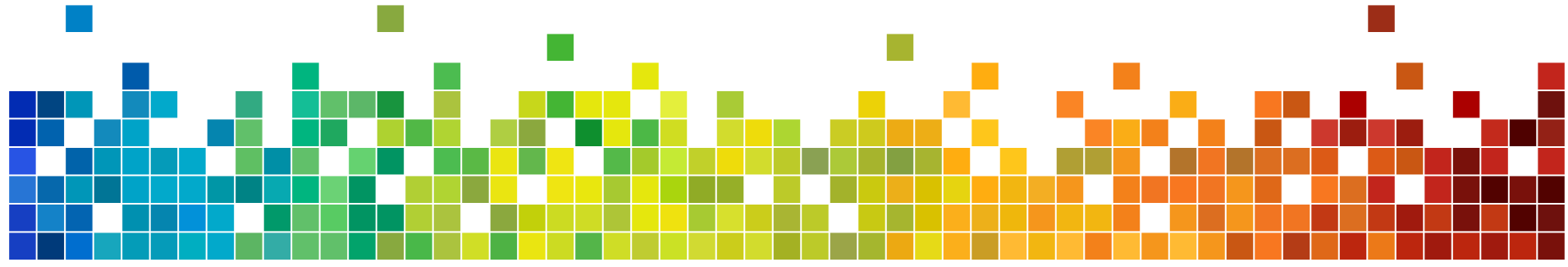
- Directly observe or involve the learner to identify the antecedents and/or precursor behaviours more clearly
- Provide many opportunities to practice evocative situations in a safe environment



# Summary

- *Relaxation skills can be a useful strategy*
- *Can be taught one on one or in a group*
- *Usually used to complement other intervention components*
- *Time involved can lead to significant positive benefits for the learner*





# Final thoughts.....

*Breathe in.  
Breathe out.  
Let it be.*



# Resources

*E-learning, Geneva Centre for Autism*

<http://visuals.autism.net>

Video illustrating steps for relaxation  
and visual supports

*PictureSET*

[www.setbc.org/pictureset](http://www.setbc.org/pictureset)

Relaxation picture sequence in  
French and English



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Cautela, J., & Groden, J. (1978). *Relaxation: A comprehensive manual for adults, children and children with special needs*. Champaign, Ill: Research Press.

Chalfant, A. M. (2011). *Managing anxiety in people with autism: a treatment guide for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals*. Woodbine House

Paclawskyj, T. R., & Yoo, J. H. (2006). Behavioral Relaxation Training (BRT): facilitating acquisition in individuals with developmental disabilities. *NADD Bull.*



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Paclawskyj, T. R. (2002). Behavioral Relaxation Training (BRT) with children with dual diagnoses. *The NADD Bulletin*, 5, 81-82.

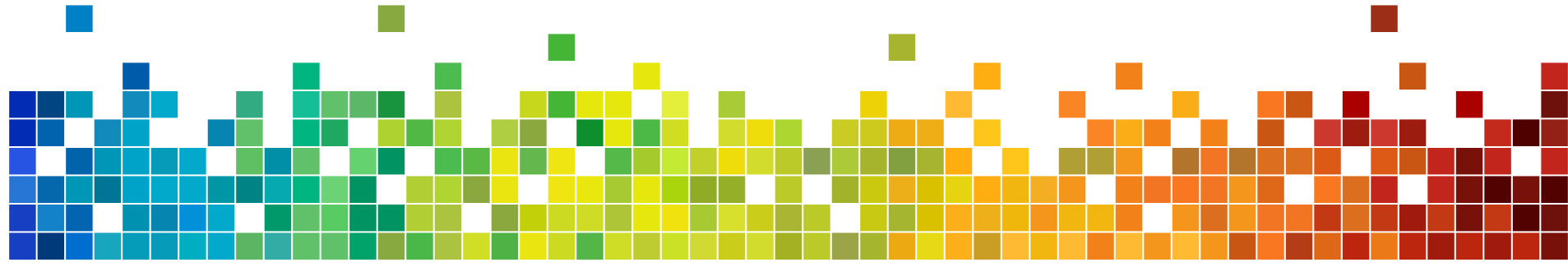
Poppen, Roger (1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). *Behavioral Relaxation Training and Assessment*. Sage Publications





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Williams, D.A. and Carey, M. (2003). *You Really Need to Relax: Effective Methods*. University of Michigan Medical school. Downloaded 4/20/16 from [www.med.umich.edu/painresearch/patients/Relaxation.pdf](http://www.med.umich.edu/painresearch/patients/Relaxation.pdf)



# Children's Books

Buron, K. D. (2003). *When my autism gets too big. A relaxation book for children with autism spectrum disorders. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.*

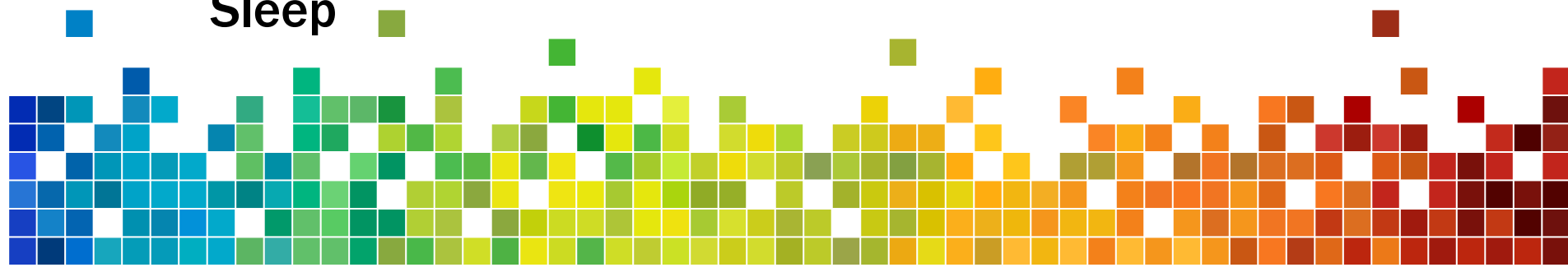
Crist, J. (2004). *What to do when you're scared and worried. A guide for kids. Free Spirit Publishing. Minneapolis, MN*



# Children's Books

**Lori Lite Books**, Stress Free Kids, Publisher

- **Angry Octopus. An Anger Management Story for Children Introducing Active Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Deep Breathing to help Control Anger**
- **The Goodnight Caterpillar: A Children's Relaxation Story to Improve Sleep, Manage Stress, Anxiety, Anger**
- **A Boy and a Bear: The Children's Relaxation Book**
- **Sea Otter Cove: A Stress Management Story for Children Introducing Diaphragmatic Breathing to Reduce Anxiety, Control Anger, and Promote Peaceful Sleep**



**Thank you!**

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