Helping Children Notice and Release Tension

A practical companion to the activity sheet **Tight and Loose: A Squeeze-and-Release Adventure**, for parents, caregivers, educators, and clinicians.



Understanding the concept

Progressive muscle relaxation is an established relaxation technique. In its full form, a person works through the body one muscle group at a time, briefly tensing each and then releasing it, while paying attention to how the two feel different. Noticing that contrast between tension and relaxation is the heart of it.

Tight and Loose borrows only that central idea. It uses one or two small, playful squeezes instead of a guided sequence through the whole body. It is a way for a child to learn what loose feels like, not a complete therapeutic protocol.

How to introduce it

A little silliness helps. Show it first, and make joining in optional:

> "Want to try something a bit silly? Let's pretend we're holding two tiny lemons. We'll squeeze them gently, then let go and see how our hands feel."

Practicing together

1. Sit comfortably, side by side or facing each other.
2. Hold out your hands with an imaginary tiny lemon in each.
3. Squeeze for two or three slow counts: a small squeeze, never a hard one.
4. Let go. Open the hands and let the fingers rest.
5. Pause, and ask: "What feels different now?" Any answer, including "nothing," is fine.
6. Repeat once if the child wants to, or finish there. One to three minutes is plenty.

Making practice playful

- Lemons squeezed for a little juice, then dropped in a bowl.
- A stiff piece of uncooked spaghetti, then a floppy cooked noodle.
- A gentle fist, then a hand resting open like a starfish.
- Toes scrunching into warm sand, then spreading out.
- A child's own idea: what else starts stiff and ends floppy?

Adaptations

- **Sit down for it.** Every version works seated, at a table or on the floor.
- **Skip any muscle group** that is sore, injured, or uncomfortable. The hands alone are enough.
- **Watching counts.** A child can observe you do it and join in later, or not at all.
- **Shorten it.** One squeeze and one release is a complete practice.
- **Swap the squeeze for noticing.** Without tensing anything, ask: "Do your shoulders feel tight or loose right now?"

When not to push

Stop or change the activity if it causes pain, cramping, discomfort, or distress. Never ask for a hard or forceful squeeze, or hold one for long. If a child becomes upset, comfort comes first; the activity can wait. For a child with a medical condition that affects the muscles or joints, follow the advice of their clinician.

In everyday life

AT HOME

Try it at a quiet moment, such as before sleep or after a busy day, and keep it light. A shared, silly version is easier to come back to.

IN A CLASSROOM OR GROUP

Lead a short, seated version as an optional transition. Children follow at their own pace, and watching is welcome.

IN A CLINICAL SETTING

It can be demonstrated as a brief, supportive teaching tool. Adapt or leave out movements for pain, injury, or conditions affecting muscle tone. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment.

Evidence and limitations

Progressive muscle relaxation is a long-established technique, practiced in full as a structured sequence through the body. Tight and Loose is a brief educational exercise built on its central idea, the contrast between tension and release.

The exercise itself has not been tested in research. It is not a substitute for a complete therapeutic protocol, or for individualized medical, developmental, mental health, or educational care. How Building Blocks Books moves from an established technique to a story is described on the Evidence page of our website, under From evidence to book.