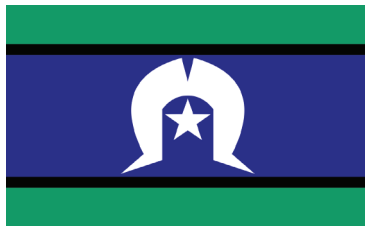


# RESOURCE BOOKLETS for Kinship Carers

## Relaxation techniques for carers

Carer Kafe'





GPV/KCV acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners of our great land and offers respect to Elders, past and present.

GPV/KCV acknowledges that the Aboriginal culture existed in Australia before European settlement and consisted of many community groups. Further, we acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of this land as the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

GPV/KCV acknowledges that laws and policies of the past have inflicted grief and suffering on our fellow Australians and regrets the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

GPV/KCV believes that a society that is inclusive of all is crucial to individual and community wellbeing and will behave with respect towards all irrespective of their race, religion, sexuality, gender or socio-economic background.

GPV/KCV acknowledges 13th of February as National Apology Day, the anniversary of then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, delivering the National Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples in 2008. GPV/KCV will take steps that promote a happier and healthier future for Indigenous Australians, particularly the children and young people.

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Key words which influence GPV/KCV approaches are: Truthfulness, Confidentiality, Inclusiveness, Integrity, Constancy, Gratitude, Commitment, Compassion

Kinship Carers Victoria  
acknowledges the support of the  
Victorian Government.





# ADAPTATION of a PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

## Relaxation techniques for carers – from a podcast addressed to kinship carers

This podcast was recorded and produced on Djaara Country, the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, and we extend our ongoing respect to all Kulin Nation peoples, the traditional custodians of these lands and pay respect to the elders both past and present and to the deep knowledge of the land that is embedded within the indigenous communities.

*CARER X – I care for three other people, so my mind gets overshadowed with doctors, specialists.*

*CARER Y – Or if your children are sick or your children have mental health issues or whatnot, it's just constant, so it's hard to go, "Oh geez, I'm going to take a breather amongst all this."*

Psychological stress has a devastating effect on health. Research shows that people with heart disease do worse over time if they don't control their stress levels and this is also associated with a higher risk of cancer. Stress is also linked with poorer memory and more aches and pains.

Deep breathing and meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that can benefit your emotional wellbeing and overall health by reducing stress. One of the easiest ways to start is to simply focus your attention on your breath. It's a form of entry-level meditation that anyone can do. When you breathe deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down, which will then slow your heart rate and decrease your blood pressure.

**We spoke with two Victorian carers – their names are not published for privacy reasons – who shared details of their own experiences with trying relaxation techniques.**

**Our first kinship carer has been looking after her granddaughter for 13 years, and our second contributor has two grandkids and two of her own older children in her care.**

*CARER X – My main one I was taught is just taking deep breaths, sliding your hands along your legs, making sure you're sitting up straight – and just breathing in and out for two or three minutes.*

*I researched on the Internet to help me find the mindfulness and meditation that I could use in my own time – it doesn't even have to be at home. If I'm sitting in the car waiting for my granddaughter for 10 minutes, I pull it out. It's called **Mindfit Mindfulness**. And you can just do 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation on YouTube.*

*It was hard at first to train your mind to just block out everything, but once I kept practising, I got it. It just made me feel a lot more relaxed and a lot more aware of my surroundings. After I finish, I just feel on top of the world for the rest of the day.*



## Relaxation techniques for carers

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CARER Y – I've tried breathing exercises and meditation to relieve stress and anxiety, but I'm not consistent with it and it doesn't go much past that point of just trying a couple of times. I prefer to walk; I like to exercise. I suppose to do other forms of relaxation or meditation or whatnot you've really got to slow yourself down to do that, and sometimes I just have too much on my plate, so I don't find that easy to navigate.

We are joined today by Eliza Terry from Yoga Living. Eliza has been teaching Iyengar yoga since 1998 and has a diploma of Classical Yoga. She also teaches mindfulness meditation with a strong focus on breath work.

ET – For my personal practice, it's a combination of yoga and meditation. The yoga is a moving meditation, so it's mindfulness based. And the still, seated meditation is also mindfulness based. And I've continued in training in those areas, branching out into Yin yoga meditation with imagery and self compassion, as well as yoga that's a bit more trauma informed, in that it's very hands off and very open for people who experience anxiety or depression – and they can come along to class as well.

So gradually over 25 years I've expanded the practice from being just about the physical practice to being a more healing process for people to work through. And that's what I do: I heal myself through yoga and meditation.

I personally love the principle or the acronym of RAIN. RAIN stands for to **Recognise** or to notice how you're feeling; to then **Allow** that feeling, so actually give it permission to be here with you. To **Investigate** it – that might be where it is in your body or how the feeling feels: Is it strong or weak? Is it hot or cold? Does it feel contracted or spacious? And then to **Nurture** that, so you can do that through relaxation, through soothing breathing practices, through gentle movement, through going for a walk, through talking to someone about it. That's the sort of process I use.

Generally with breathing techniques, you're slowing down your breathing. So the type of thing you might do is breathe in for four, pause for four, breathe out for four, pause for four. And in that process this sends a message to your brain to quieten your nervous system. That's how your vagus nerve works. It sends that message back up to your brain to slow down a little. Your heart rate slows a little.

And that's how most breathing practices work. You're generally extending the length of your breath, maybe extending the pauses – not to the point of strain, but extending them a little – so that quietens your nervous system and also has the opportunity to give you some space. Within those pauses, there's an internal silence and stillness that you can really tune into with a little bit more attention, because you've extended the space and made it a little bigger.

It's always important not to overdo the strain with breathing. You don't want to be at a point where there's any straining or pushing or a tightly held grip in your belly. The change is always fairly soft. The extension is only a little bigger than the breath you're already taking normally.

And your breath is always with you, so you don't have to look for it or add something. You don't need an app; you don't need equipment. You don't need anything: it's always with you, so you can just choose to tune in to it.





## Relaxation techniques for carers

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**Meditation is a practice in which an individual uses a technique such as mindfulness or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought or activity to train attention and awareness and achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.**

**Meditation may significantly reduce stress, anxiety, depression and pain, and it may enhance peace, perception and wellbeing. Eliza explains.**

*ET – Meditation is turning your attention from looking and doing outward, connecting, transacting, speaking, moving, planning, organising – anything that you do in that thinking realm. Meditation is turning that attention back onto yourself: how you're feeling, the movement of your breath, what you're noticing in the present moment, you're breathing. It's impossible, of course, to breathe in the past or the future. So it keeps you present.*

*And continuing that process of turning the other way – from outward thinking to just being. Not doing anything but just being and noticing that. It can give you some clarity because you're pausing and you're taking time out in a busy day. Sometimes what you'll find is when you go back into the day, you've got a bit of clarity about what's important and what you can let go of.*

*Meditation also helps to regulate your brain. We have a reptilian brain, of course, that is, our fight and flight that's often switched on. Meditation helps to dampen that constant heightened sympathetic drive by stimulating your parasympathetic nervous system. It quietens that down a little, gives you the opportunity to reflect and to respond rather than to feel reactive all the time. And although it takes time to step away from that habit of being in reaction mode all the time, once you do and you realise that actually you don't need to be there all the time, it is quite freeing. It's quite liberating knowing that from the feeling of always being switched on and in hyper overdrive, or vigilant all the time, you can sometimes let that go.*

*There are different types of meditation. I've mentioned mindfulness based, which is often very breath based or very sensation based. It focuses on what you're feeling in your body. I think it's really useful for relaxation for beginners. You can do it for a minute or for an hour – it doesn't matter how much time you've got.*

*You can add something like a mantra or an intention that you say to yourself while you're doing it. One of the ones I like is just to breathe in the word '**be**' and breathe out the word '**here**'. So you're adding something for your mind to do. You can also add sounds. You might listen to something that feels soothing to you – which again is very personal – but there's lots of meditation-style music around. You can also meditate outside, with nature, maybe with your eyes open. And rather than doing anything, looking or planning, you let the trees look at you. That's another style of meditation. And there are many, many more.*



## Relaxation techniques for carers

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Some people may not have ever tried meditation before. Others find it difficult to make time and space for it. Eliza acknowledges reasons people might be reluctant or too busy, but reinforces the simplicity and ease with which relaxation techniques can be built in.

ET – *I think the most difficult part of meditation is actually setting aside the time to meditate. It's not difficult to do because all you're doing is noticing what's happening right now, so your mind will be busy, but that's not a problem at all. No thoughts are a problem. We're not trying to stop them or push them away. We're just trying to notice them.*

*The tricky part about it is setting aside the time to do it. That's what everybody finds hardest. And some of the ways you can work around that are to meditate before everyone gets up in the morning, even if it's only for five minutes that you have to yourself. You can also try before you go to sleep, when you're in bed, and again you only need five or 10 minutes. And you can also use a time that you might otherwise be waiting for something. I used to use waiting in the car at the school gates – it's a really useful time. Again, five minutes is enough.*

*And I think for someone who's really busy, there are free apps such as Insight Timer – that's one I really love. You can choose the time that you've got: from as little as five minutes to an hour, and you can also choose the style. It has a lot of sleep meditations on it you can listen to in bed while you're going to sleep. Or if you want to relax and you have 15 minutes during the day, they're really useful. So if you feel like just starting completely from nothing, try something like that and see what happens. As I said, it's impossible to fail. Try one with someone's voice you will probably like.*

### Our carers had some questions for Eliza about breathing techniques and meditation.

CARER X – *I'm 67 now. What techniques would help me to sleep and stay asleep?*

ET – *My favourite one for going to sleep (again, they'll talk you through this on an app if you want to or you can talk yourself through it) is you might begin with extended breathing first. You are slightly extending each breath, but then moving from your feet to your head through progressive relaxation. So this means breathing into your feet for a short time, maybe half a minute, breathing into your lower legs, breathing into your knees, breathing into your hips, breathing into your back, and then your shoulders and down your arms and into the back of your head and through your face. Moving along like that through your body and letting each part relax as you go.*

*And if I wake up in the night, I redo that from the beginning all the way through again. Also, while recognising that although sleeping is ideal, deep rest is almost as effective as sleeping for your body. If you can get into a state of deep rest, it's worth reminding yourself that "although I'd like to be asleep, deep rest is a really wonderful place to be."*



## Relaxation techniques for carers

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CARER Y – *I find it hard to relax and wind down. How do you begin to start to allow and make time to incorporate that in your day so then you can reap the benefits from it?*

ET – *I think approaching it as using very small steps is essential. If you think you're going to have the time, the energy, the headspace to take an hour out of your day, you're probably not. But try to start with a few minutes and see how it feels. The way to assess whether meditation is right for you is to notice how you feel after it, not while you're in the practice. Often while you're in it, your head feels busy. You might feel uncomfortable or restless. You don't want to be still, so it's challenging at times. But how you feel after meditation really gives you a good indication as to whether what you're doing is useful.*

*So I would begin with very small steps and maybe use those little bits of time, probably just before going to bed where you're already tired, and use that tiredness to practise some deep breathing and some relaxation.*

**Kinship carers' roles in families can be stressful, complicated and busy. So while it's not always easy to build in time to learn relaxation techniques or practise them, the benefits are immediate and effective. As Eliza and our carers have pointed out, there are useful phone apps, podcasts, and videos on YouTube that offer inexpensive or free guided meditations and breathing exercises to take you through.**

**Learning to meditate or breathe deeply may be challenging at first, but if practised regularly it can improve not only your stress levels but your health overall.**

**This podcast was made possible by generous support from the Department of Families, Finance and Housing and Carer KaFE.**

**To listen to or download any of KCV's podcast series, click here:**

**<https://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/podcasts-videos/>**





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**Carer Kafe'**