

## YUCK RELEASE STRATEGIES



**Yuck Release Strategies**  
**help children and adults**  
**reduce (or eliminate) Yuck in a healthy way...**  
**so they don't take it out on others or themselves.**

Note: Yuck Release Strategies are only a portion of an emotional regulation plan. If you need help teaching your child emotional regulation skills more generally, please contact me at [Rachel@Rachel-Bailey.com](mailto:Rachel@Rachel-Bailey.com).

# What Are Yuck Release Strategies?

## (And Why Do We Need Them?)

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To understand Yuck Release Strategies, we need to start with a review of "The Yuck Factor."

"The Yuck Factor" is a simple principle:

**When humans feel good, we act positively.**



When we have gotten enough sleep, when we are not hungry... when we've had a generally good day... we can be respectful and thoughtful of others. We behave in a way that is consistent with our morals and values.

**When humans are in Yuck, we act negatively.**

On the other hand, when we are in any sort of Yuck...when we feel anything negative, such as feeling tired, hungry, overwhelmed, stressed, frustrated, angry, hurt, etc...we often act in a way that we later regret.

**Think about it...**

Imagine your child doing something that frustrates you. Perhaps they're whining, or perhaps they've forgotten to bring their notebook home from school AGAIN.

When you've had a good day (maybe you've gotten a lot of sleep, you've had a good conversation with a friend or spouse, you've had some time to yourself), how do you respond to your child's frustrating behavior?



When you've had a bad day (maybe you're tired, you've existed on sugar and coffee all day, you've gotten into an argument with someone), how do you respond to your child's frustrating behavior?

You probably respond to your child differently in those two situations. But notice *that it's not your child's behavior that determined your reaction*. (Their behavior was the same in each scenario.) It is how you were feeling that determined your reaction. For so many of us, Yuck drives our behavior.



# The Problem With NOT Releasing Yuck

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So now you know that Yuck affects behavior. But exactly HOW does it affect behavior?

Most people do one of 3 things when they're in Yuck:



## 1.) Turn it out

As adults, we turn Yuck out when we have a bad day and then take it out on our kids, or our spouse, or a friend. When kids turn Yuck out, they typically become disrespectful, or aggressive, or defiant. They may also refuse to take responsibility for their behavior and blame others.

## 2.) Turn it in

As adults, we might make a mistake and you say, "Ugh, I'm an awful parent. Why do I keep making the same mistakes over and over?" That's Yuck turned in.

When kids turn Yuck in, they think that everything bad that happens is their fault. They say, "I can't do anything right." or "I'm stupid," or "No one likes me." This may eventually turn into low self-esteem or anxiety (or other issues).

## 3.) Numb it

As adults, when we've had a really long day we "numb" with a glass of wine, or chocolate or other "comfort" food... or we tune out on social media or Netflix.

When kids numb Yuck, they start to want to only be on their electronics, playing a certain video game or watching TV shows. They don't want to do anything else. As they get older, they turn to drugs, or alcohol, or sex, or other compulsive behaviors to reduce their feelings of Yuck.

So...

**Yuck release strategies are meant to offer an alternative to turning Yuck out, turning it in, or numbing it. They are meant *to replace the behaviors that we inevitably regret.* Ideally, they help us release (or at least tolerate) the discomfort that Yuck causes so we don't turn it out, turn it in, or numb it.**



# A Warning About Yuck Release Strategies

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## WARNING!

**It is NOT a good idea to suggest that a child try a Yuck Release Strategy when they are IN Yuck.**

You may have tried this before and recognized that it doesn't work very well...

But even if you haven't tried it, imagine it now: Your child is very angry or upset and you say, "Why don't you try to do some deep breathing?!"

How would they react?!



The key to helping your child use Yuck Release strategies is to

**PRACTICE THESE YUCK RELEASE STRATEGIES WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT IN YUCK.**

That's because when we are in Yuck, all humans default to behavior that is comfortable and familiar – behavior that we have "practiced" many times before.

So if children don't practice these new strategies frequently and regularly when they're not emotionally flooded, then during times of Yuck they will naturally revert to the old negative behavior that they have used so many times before.

Ultimately, with time and patience – and when they realize that these strategies are actually comforting – children eventually CHOOSE to use these strategies themselves. And then you don't even have to suggest it to them when they're upset.

See the appendix for suggestions for how to practice these strategies with kids.



# Let's Get Started!

## Directions:

On the following pages, look at the names and descriptions of the Yuck Release Strategies and choose one (or two at most) that seems like it would be a good fit for your child. Whenever possible, ask your child for their input about the strategy they'd like to try.

Notice that the strategies are broken down by general "type" of release. For example, for physical kids, movement may be a more effective Yuck Release Strategy tool than the more "cognitive" (and not-so-active) tools like thinking of something calm in their heads.

Then choose one (or two at most) to practice **IN BETWEEN TIMES OF YUCK.**



# Yuck Release Strategies for Kids

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## BREATHING STRATEGIES

**Use a pinwheel:** Take a deep breath in for a count of 4. Then exhale and blow on the pinwheel to make it move. Repeat.

**Snake exhale:** Take a deep breath in for a count of 4. Then exhale using a “hissing” sound that a snake would make. Repeat.

**Balloon breathe:** Pretend your belly has a balloon in it. Take a deep breath in for a count of 4 to inflate the balloon (belly should rise). Then exhale to deflate the balloon (belly should flatten).

## COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

**Visualize something that calms you:** Imagine something that makes you feel safe and loved – a hug from a parent, curling up in a sleeping bag, etc.

**Sing a relaxing song in your head:** Think of a song that makes you feel safe and loved – something a parent sings to you at night, etc.

**Repeat a phrase:** Say a simple, comforting phrase over and over – “I’m safe. I’m safe. I’m safe.”

## PHYSICAL STRATEGIES

**Cross your arms behind your back:** Take your right arm and put it behind you, reaching to the left side of your body. Take your left arm and put it behind you, reaching the right side of your body.

**Stomp your feet:** Stomp down hard, as if you’re squashing all the bad things on the floor.

**Rip paper:** Put together 2 or 3 sheets of paper and rip it. Get more paper if necessary.

**Scream into a pillow:** Get something big and soft to scream into.

## SENSORY STRATEGIES

**Use a sensory jar:** Sensory jars are mostly liquid, but there are solid objects that will float through the liquid as you turn it upside down. [It is easy to make one on your own.](#) (Click on link for ideas.)

**Pet an animal:** Repetitively pet a soft animal (if this can be done without hurting the animal)

**Squeeze a pillow or big stuffed animal:** Use a large stuffed animal or pillow and squeeze as hard as you can.

**Wrap yourself in a blanket:** Use a soft blanket and wrap yourself tightly in it, as if it is a cocoon.

**Push your palms against something hard:** Use a surface (desk, table) or even a wall and push as hard as you can.



# Yuck Release Strategies for Adolescents and Adults

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## PHYSIOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

**Square breathing:** Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts. Repeat.

**Breath counting:** Count 1 as you exhale; inhale; count 2 as you exhale; inhale. Continue until a count of 5. Start over with 1.

**Progressive relaxation:** Focus on tightening and relaxing each part of your body. Start with your toes and progressively make your way up to the top of your head.

## COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

**Visualize Something that calms you:** Imagine something that makes you feel safe and loved – a hug from a child, the face of someone you love, etc.

**Sing a relaxing song in your head:** Think of a song that reminds you of a calm time – something you sing to your children, something that was sung to you as a child, etc.

**Repeat a mantra:** Repeat a comforting phrase over and over – “this too shall pass,” “your emotions don’t control my emotions,” etc.

**Do something that requires concentration (math problem, etc.):** Think of something that is not too difficult but that does require you to concentrate a bit –  $24+17$  or naming three foods that begin with “c.”

**Do the opposite of what you want to do:** If you want to yell, whisper. If you want to say something mean to your child, say something loving instead. If you want to scream, laugh instead.

## PHYSICAL STRATEGIES

**Move your body (especially crossing the midline of your body):** Give yourself a hug, cross your arms in front of your body and then behind your body, etc.

**Rip paper:** Put together 2 or 3 sheets of paper and rip it. Get more paper if necessary.

**Do pushups:** Do pushups (or jumping jacks, etc.) until you wear yourself out.

## SENSORY STRATEGIES

**Squeeze your fists:** Make your fists into balls. You may want to dig your nails into your palms.

**Push your palms against something hard:** Use a surface (desk, table) or even a wall and push as hard as you can.

**Snap a rubber band, hold ice:** Do something that will shock one of your senses.



# Yuck Release Strategies for Adolescents and Adults

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## CREATIVE STRATEGIES

**Write/Write in your head :** If you enjoy writing, write about whatever comes into your mind. Write on paper or in your head if you don't have any paper around.

**Paint/ Imagine painting:** If you enjoy painting, think of something you want to paint. Paint on a real canvas or imagine the painting in your head.

**Photography/ Imagine taking pictures:** If you enjoy photography, think of something you want to take a picture of. Take real pictures or just imagine taking them.

**Music/ Compose in your head :** If you writing music, think of something song you'd like to write. Write down the music/lyrics or just compose in your head.

## SPIRITUAL STRATEGIES

**Listen to relaxing music:** Find music that calms you down and listen to it; focus on what you hear as you listen.

**Read motivational quotes:** Find or recall quotes that remind you of your personal values.

**Practice gratitude:** Recall the things in your life you have to be grateful for. (I personally remember that even when my kids are being a pain, they are still healthy and safe.)

**Do something for someone else:** Make a gesture that you know will make someone else feel good.

**Be / Picture yourself in nature:** Go outside, or if not possible, imagine you are outside.





# APPENDIX: HOW to Practice

## Yuck Release Strategies

Now that you understand the importance of practicing Yuck Release Strategies proactively, have your child choose one a strategy that sounds like it might be useful and practice it in the following ways:

### Practicing Yuck Release Strategies With Younger Kids

**Do role plays:** Kids love to play the role of parent, so you could do a role play where they are the parent and you are the child getting upset. You show them (as the child) what it looks like to do their Yuck Release Strategy. Then switch roles.

**Have them teach a doll (or stuffed animal, etc.) the strategy:**

Have them teach the strategy to someone or something else. You can coach them, "Tell your bear what to do when he's really angry..."

**Books, movies and TV shows:** Read them books or watch shows or movies that have a character who gets angry or upset. Discuss how that character handled it. Talk to your child about their OWN Yuck Release Strategy and how it might work for them.

**Practice regularly:** Once or twice during the day, tell your child you're frustrated and ask them to show you how you should handle it.

### Practicing Yuck Release Strategies With Older Kids

**Ask what you could have done differently:** Kids love to correct you or tell you what you've done wrong! The next time you lose your cool with them, ask them how you could have handled your Yuck differently. As they're "teaching" you, they're actually learning how to regulate their own emotions.

**Ask for their advice:** Tell them about a situation you're facing that causes you Yuck. Treat them as if they are the expert, and ask them (with curiosity) how they might handle that situation.

**Books, movies, and TV shows:** Discuss a book, movie, or TV show with them and talk about characters and how they handle their Yuck. Ask them what they would have done the same or differently if they were that character.



# APPENDIX: WHEN to Practice

## Yuck Release Strategies

### When to Practice Yuck Release Strategies

**1. Practice when you're already doing something** that a child has to do anyway – driving home from school, eating dinner, etc.

Most kids won't want to take time away from playing to practice these strategies. In fact, they may start to resent these strategies if they interrupt their fun.

**2. Make your practice routine.** For example, if you're going to practice at dinner time, choose the same days to practice. Having a routine makes it much more likely that you'll do what you say.

**3. Practice when your kids are NOT IN YUCK.** It's a good idea to do some sort of connection with them first – play a silly game with younger kids, ask the kids to help you with something – before jumping into this

Last hint: **Ask your child to hold YOU accountable** for making sure this practice happens. When they feel control/power over a situation, they're much more likely to buy into it.

