Progressive Muscle Relaxation

How do feelings impact on our body?
When adults and children experience fears, worries or stress the body tends to respond by sending blood to the muscles in our limbs and other parts of the body, the effect of which is a general ‘tensing up’ of the body. At times this response can be very helpful, particularly if we have to prepare for danger and need to take some kind of action to deal with an event happening to us such as the ‘flight (escape) or fight’ response. However, if the body turns on this response and muscles are tensed for long periods of time - this experience can result in feeling tense or can lead to headaches, and aches and pains in other parts of the body. Another effect of tensing the body up is that over long periods it can lead to feelings of tiredness and irritability.

Sometimes we don’t even know how our muscles become tense, but perhaps we clench our teeth slightly so our jaw feels tight or maybe hold our postural muscles in a certain way so our shoulders, neck and back become stiff. In fact, muscle tension is often associated with backaches and tension headaches.

How can we turn off the ‘tension’ switch?
We can help our children to manage stressful experiences and challenging emotions such as worry, anger and sadness by helping children to practice muscle relaxation. Activities such as 'The Ragdoll' and 'Pesky Fly' and 'Cool Kids Song' all involve teaching children fun ways they can tense and relax muscle groups. Such activities 'switch off' muscle tension.

Once you find calming/relaxing that your child responds to, it is important to remember to try and practise these activities every day. The benefits of regular relaxation for children and adults, in terms of being able to manage challenging emotions and stressful events more calmly can only be seen if relaxation activities are performed every day.

Reference: