Progressive muscle relaxation is a relaxation technique that can be used to calm the body and mind. It is a direct way to help address the symptoms associated with the fight, flight, or freeze response caused by stress. It can help those who struggle with falling asleep and may reduce some symptoms of chronic pain. With practice, progressive muscle relaxation can help to promote awareness of tension and the development of skills necessary to relax.

- 1. **Position yourself.** Find a comfortable position for this exercise. Laying down flat on your back or sitting in such a way that your body can relax are both good options. If possible, consider dimming the lights and removing distracting objects or sounds. Closing your eyes, if comfortable, may help to promote deeper relaxation.
- 2. Contract muscle groups. While inhaling, contract one group of muscles for 5-10 seconds. Hold the tension tightly in this area. Then, exhale and release the tension. Focus on how the change from tension to relaxation feels. Consider using imagery to heighten the experience, such as imagining the release of tension being the release of stress leaving your body.
- Relax for a moment. After releasing the tension, relax for a moment to experience the change in how the muscle group feels before moving on to the next muscle group.
- 4. **Repeat.** Repeat steps two and three as you work your way through all muscle groups in your body. If time allows, follow the recommended sequence below that starts at the feet and works up to the head. If time is limited, abbreviate the sequence and focus on larger sections of the body (such as left leg

Feet (curl toes and arch feet)

Calves

Upper thighs

**Buttocks** 

Abs and lower back (engage abs and tilt hips)

Chest and upper back (round shoulders and tense chest)

Shoulders (lifting shoulders to your ears)

Neck (roll neck back)

Hands

Arms

Jaw

Face (squint eyes tightly, grimace)

5. **Return and Relax.** Return to any muscle groups

where tension still remains. After completing the sequence, take time to breathe deeply and notice the