

Try 'Fred' to relieve stress

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Stress-relieving methods number many. They run the gamut from such old standbys as nail biting, Scotch drinking and punching a life-size inflatable Mr. T doll to more New Age-y techniques like lighting aromatherapy candles and listening to whale-mating calls on CD.

But saying "Fred"?

Author David L. Mocknick says the name Fred — derived from Frederick, a German moniker that means "peace ruler" — has curative powers. And he's developed a whole system to prove it that he explains in his recent book, "Who's Fred, Ha!: Silly, but Fun Stress Relief" (Clear Brook).

Fredding (which can be done in solitaire but works best in a group setting) begins when someone "baits" another person by getting him or her to say a word that rhymes with Fred. When the target — a waitress in a diner who suggests bread when asked for an alternative to rolls, for example — falls into the trap, the Fredder calls out, "Bread! Fred! Who's Fred, ha!"

It's not science, admits Mocknick. "I'm no psychologist and I don't have a medical background," says the 47-year-old Philadelphia-based literary agent. "But I've seen it work firsthand."

Going overboard is not difficult with the Fred variations Mocknick details

in his book and its accompanying CD. These include double Freds (when someone says two words that rhyme with Fred), musical/cinematic Freds (Fredding in Britney Spears' or Humphrey Bogart's voice, for example) and Fred clues ("What's thermometer liquid called?" "Mercury." "Freddie Mercury! Who's Fred, ha!").

The last example refers, of course, to the late lead singer of Queen.

It's no secret that Fredding is weird — Mocknick even advises against doing it on a first date. But he says the technique's bizarreness is an asset. But beware: Fredding comes with side effects. Fredders are subject to strange looks, allegations of insanity, and even, as Mocknick knows firsthand, restaurant eviction. "One time the owner of a diner threw me out," he says. "But I was stress-free when he did it."

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