

BREATHING EXERCISES

Purpose and Goals: As a foundation for all life, the breath is vital. We can all be more aware of our breath. It is important to become conscious of one's breath, focusing inward, to exercise some degree of control over the breath. This can have the effect of helping us to breathe deeply, to oxygenate our bodies. Furthermore, this can have a calming effect, helping us to focus our attention, "centering" and increasing our self-awareness, while reinforcing mindfulness. It is very common when people are fearful, the breathing become shallow. To reduce fear, taking deep breaths is very helpful.

Vocabulary: Inhale and Exhale; Diaphragm and diaphragmatic breathing; Lungs; Oxygen and Carbon dioxide

Calming Breath: Do at least 3 times. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth (can make a quiet sound). Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Sunrise and Sunset Breath: Stand with arms down by your side. Inhale while sweeping arms out to the side and up on sunrise. Stay there briefly gathering the sun's energy, wiggle fingers. On the sunset exhale, move arms back down.

****Snake Breath:** Sit up tall. Inhale through your nose. Exhale with the sound "ssss" (a hissing sound) for as long as you can. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

****Bumblebee Breath:** (Standing, sitting, walking) Inhale through your nose. Exhale with the sound "zzz" (humming) for as long as you can. Think of what makes you happy. Repeat as much as you like. Feel the vibrations in your throat. Feel the difference when you switch from snake breath to bumblebee breath and back and forth.

****Bunny Breath:** Sit on your shins or heels with a straight back, shoulders wide, and chest lifted with your chin down. Inhale through your nose with 3 short sniffs, one right after the other. Exhale for as long as you can through your nose. Do 5 to 7 times.

****Elephant Breath:** Standing with feet apart, arms in front, hands together. Inhale through your nose while bringing arms overhead and arch backward slightly. Exhale bringing arms down and between legs. Repeat 2 more times (3 altogether). At end, keep hands above your head and "shower" yourself with love, strength, happiness, etc..

****Bear Breath:** Sit tall and close your eyes. Go inside. Inhale through your nose on the count of 5. Hold for 3. Exhale for 5, hold for 3 counts. Repeat 5 to 7 times. This can also be referred to as box breathing, rectangle breathing, or square breathing if all the counts are the same number.

Triangle Breath: This can be visualized as a triangle pointing down. Begin by either drawing it on a piece of paper or a board, or simply trace it in the air (sky writing) when doing the exercise. With a finger or pointer, start at the very bottom corner. Inhale as you slowly trace one side of the triangle going up. Hold the breath while slowly tracing across the top line of the triangle. Exhale while slowly moving downward to the bottom point. Repeat several times.

Peaceful Breath: Inhale through your nose and think positive thoughts, like love, happiness, and peace, etc.. Let these thoughts move through you, feel these good feelings. Exhale through your mouth and let all negative thoughts and feelings leave you. Repeat several times.

Belly Breath (Diaphragm Breathing): Put your flat and open hand on your lower belly, cover your belly button. Inhale and watch your belly move outward, filling with the air like a balloon. Exhale and watch your belly move inward and get flat while letting all the air out of your lungs.

Leaf Breath: Using a visual image of a simple leaf that fills up a sheet of paper, trace with a finger one side of leaf on the inhale and continue tracing the other side of the leaf on the exhale. Repeat several times. The leaf picture works best if it has a small stem on the bottom and a point at the top to clearly show where to begin the inhale and exhale.

Flower Breath: Use a visual image of a simple flower drawn on a piece of paper with a small circle in the center and six to eight large, round petals. On the inhale, slowly trace a single petal outward. Finish tracing the petal inward to the center circle on the exhale. Repeat for all petals.

Five Finger Breathing: Hold up one hand with fingers spread apart. Using the pointer (index) finger on the other hand, beginning either below the thumb or the little finger very slowly go up and down each finger inhaling as you go up and exhaling as you go down.

ACTIVITY: Read the book *Each Breath a Smile*, story by Sister Susan based on the teachings by Thich Nhat Hanh

ACTIVITY: During a transition, when moving from one place to another, children can make a "snake" while walking, and use the Snake Breath repeatedly.

ACTIVITY: Given a certain time period, perhaps hourly, ring a quiet bell or strike a pleasant sounding chime. Children will stop what they are doing and take a few conscious breaths before returning to their activities.

ACTIVITY: Before singing, do some breathing exercises to warm up. Make sure that the children are sitting up tall to make room for their lungs to fill up with a lot of air.

****Taken from the set of cards "Yoga Pretzels" by Tara Guber and Leah Kalish**

