

Breathing Techniques for Children

Building self-regulation, self-awareness and selfconfidence

Becoming aware of your breath and learning to control it is a useful self-regulation tool that allows children to gain composure, develop good posture, relax, de-stress and better understand themselves and others.

In our daily lives, our breathing frequently reflects our state of mind. Each thought and feeling expresses itself in the form of relaxation or tension, peace or worry, receptiveness or fear, and triggers a biochemical reaction in the body. In normal speech too, there are many expressions that relate to the relationship between the body, mind and breathing: you catch your breath, something takes your breath away, you wait with bated breath, you take a breather, you come up for air, etc. If you are relaxed, your breathing is regular, deep and calm. However, if you are experiencing turmoil, your breathing becomes shallow, rapid and irregular. We can use breathing techniques to bring about a calm mind.

Children can use breathing techniques to deal with anxiety, anger and tension. They can be taught how to apply an awareness of breath to stressful situations such as dealing with exams and tests, conflicts or being bullied, as well as before performing or presenting to their peers and parents. Breathing techniques can also help children to create a space into which they can come to understand their own emotions such as anxiety, anger or worry, and the physiological responses that these emotions manifest in their bodies such as tummy aches, headaches and fatigue.

Children should be encouraged to develop a toolkit of breathing strategies that they can tap into at any time, or anywhere. Remember, your breath goes everywhere with you! These strategies will help them to relax and find a sense of calm and peace when faced with overwhelming emotions or challenging situations.

The following breathing activities can be used by children of all ages, and adults too. Children should be encouraged to build up their breathing practice slowly, starting with three breaths and building up to as many as they need in a given situation. Once children have developed a breathing practice as a self-regulation skill, they might even like to create their own new breathing techniques based on animals or nature.

