

Relaxation using controlled breathing

Strategy: Bubble Blowing for Breathing

Using the bubbles blowing technique as an instrument to help children to practice slow, deep breathing and as an aid to relaxation or as a means to help them recover from anger or frustration

Breathing deeply is a simple, effective addition to a healthy lifestyle. Stress from anger, academic pressures or social pressures, anxieties or frustration all leads to quick, shallow breathing which then becomes a habit. Bringing conscious attention to our breath, lengthening and deepening the drawing in of oxygen, nourishes every cell of our body and promotes relaxation.

If students are unable to engage in slow deliberate breathing on their own, get them to try bubble blowing. This activity encourages deep breathing, allowing their body to relax. Explain to them that when they blow bubbles, their mouth, lips and respiratory muscles engage in a style of breathing called “pursed-lip” breathing (model this to them). Tell them that pursed-lip breathing increases pressure on their airways, which in turn helps keep them open. Prolonged exhalation through pursed-lips helps get rid of stale air and toxins in their lungs, leaving more room for fresh inhaled air. This results in better circulation in their respiratory system. When they blow bubbles, this respiratory action occurs naturally.

They could turn the bubble blowing into a game to see how big a bubble they can blow. By blowing bubbles **slowly** (get them to point towards this) will help maximize their control over their breath. To help stimulate their breathing, encourage them to focus exclusively on blowing the bubble itself.

I usually tell them that many people already benefit from doing deep breathing. When you are stressed, you breath in short, shallow bursts, so to aid relaxation, you do the opposite - breathing deeply and slowly. So, if they find just simply focusing on their breathing to be boring, they could try this bubble blowing technique to help them. I also explain to them that **quick breathing does not result in the big bubbles that slow, deep breaths provide.**

Here’s how to do it

Tell them that this exercise will help them to blow out their worry bubbles so they can begin to feel more relaxed. Using a bottle of bubbles, ask them to think about something, which causes them some upset in their life (though nothing too traumatic). Have them imagine blowing their anxiety or anger into the bubble, as they blow into the bubble wand. Tell them to picture the event in the bubble as it floats/drifts away into the air. When it pops, explain to them that their worry has popped outside of them and can't trouble them anymore. Have them continue blowing bubbles until they are relaxed and calm. I encouraged students to **take a nice deep breath in first** before blowing into the bubble wand and remind them “**to blow bubbles slowly.**”

Here is an alternative way of promoting deep breathing they could also try:

Strategy: Candle and Flower

This exercise encourages deep breathing also. It allows children to relax through deep breaths as they use their imagination.

What to do

Get them to make a fist with their left hand, imagining that they are holding a flower. Now ask them to form a fist with their right hand as well, pretending they are holding a candle. Encourage them to inhale deeply as they sniff the flower and to then blow out the candle, **slowly**. Ask them to really inhale the scent of the flower and to make sure the candle is completely blown out.

.....and here's another way in which you can practice slow, deep breathing:

Imagine that there is a candle in front of you. You can even hold up one finger in front of your mouth and pretend it is a candle, if you like. As you breathe out, blow the air out through your mouth very slowly. Feel the air on your finger. Imagine that you are blowing enough air to make the flame of the candle flicker, but not enough to blow it out. You will need to blow very softly.

When you breathe in, imagine that the flame of the candle flickers and leans toward you. As you breathe out, the flame flickers and leans away.

Imagine the flame of the candle moving in and out with each breath you take.

.....and another variation:

Strategy: Balloon Breath. The Balloon Breath is really a basic yoga breath taught to children in a way that makes it simple and easy to understand. Ask them to relax their body.

Script

“Take in a slow, deep breath, filling up your tummy as if it were a big balloon. Keep your chest still, as you allow the air to go right down to your stomach and fill up your big balloon. Give your balloon a colour, feel and watch as your stomach gets really big! Blow it up big and slowly... filling it all up. And now, exhale slowly and calmly. Feel your entire body relax as you exhale.....”

“This is the basic balloon breath. Breathe in to a count of 4 or 5 to begin with. Work up so your big balloon breaths become larger and larger. This will develop and train your body for correct breathing. Newborn babies breathe like this. If you watch them while they sleep, you will see that it is their bellies that go up and down, not their chests. They are breathing correctly and this is very calming and natural to the body. It decreases stress in the body and helps release endorphins so you feel good! Try this several times a day.”

Encourage them to get into the habit of using it when they feel themselves getting anxious. It's fun to do and very relaxing for everyone.

Then ask him/her to see them-self quietly relaxing by a lake. Imagine a beautiful lake and describe it to your child in full detail, use all the senses you can think of! Then ask him to take out a magic bubble blower and blow away any stress or worries... and see them float off into the distance and then POP! Allow him to do this as long as needed. Practice with him and you'll find it's helpful to you as well. When he has finished tell him that he can use the magic bubble blower at any time during the day or night he needs it, ask him to put it away in his invisible pocket. Voila! A fantastic tool for you to help your child deal with stress or worry!

.....and another different way to encourage slow, deep breathing:

Strategy: Snow Globe

This is a very simple exercise that helps children (particularly the younger ones) to practice slow, deep breathing whilst focussing on watching the snow settle inside the globe. It's a good distraction technique particularly for the younger children who are extremely distressed and out of control. All you do is simply shake the snow globe (preferably one where the snow/glitter takes a long time to settle as with some snow globes, the snow settles quite quickly and therefore, does not give the child enough time to practice their breathing). When it has been shook, ask them to watch the snow as it settles and to focus on **slow, deep breathing**, so getting them to take a nice deep breathe in, then to exhale very slowly.

If the child is not too upset, I usually get the child to place their hand on their tummy first asking them to notice what happens when they breathe in and out. Hopefully, they will see that their tummy rises as they breathe in and falls when they breathe out. You may need to model this. They can then keep their hand on their tummy as they practice deep breathing as an added focal point.

If the child is in a very distressing state, I do not usually bother with getting them to exhale using 'pursed-lips.' If when the snow has settled, the child is still distraught, shake the globe again and do this until they have recovered.

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