



Mindfulness Practice: Belly Breathing Exercises



Create a Safe Place

While Mindfulness practice has been recognized as beneficial to academic as well as social emotional well-being, not all students are able to tolerate sitting still and quietly. Due to past trauma exposure and other challenges, many of our students may appear defiant or behave in a silly and disruptive way when invited to participate. They may even appear more agitated during and after practice. Even being asked to close their eyes can elicit an unwelcome response within the student.

When beginning Mindfulness practice, you can give options such as suggesting they close their eyes, half-close them, look down, or look straight ahead. Remind them to sit straight up, both feet on the floor, with their hands in their lap, and palms up.

Learning to “Belly Breathe”

Learning to breathe through the belly will elicit a calming reaction. Breathing and holding breath in the lungs can elicit an anxious response or even hyperventilation. We will stay with three repetitions until they are able to master belly breathing. Do not expect them to learn this skill immediately.

Explaining belly breathing can be challenging for children as well as adults. Depending on grade level, the teacher may want to use metaphors for belly breathing. Some suggestions are:

Example 1

1. Place your hands on your belly.
2. See if you can slowly make your belly grow full of air, without filling your lungs in your chest or making your shoulders go up.
3. Hold for three seconds, I will count 1-2-3.
4. Now slowly let the air out, 1-2-3. Good.
5. Let's do that two more times.

Example 2

1. Imagine you are about to eat some delicious hot soup. It might be some homemade chicken 'caldo' your grandmother just served you or your favorite flavor of noodles in a cup. You breathe in the delicious aroma of your soup.
2. Let's all imagine that soup now, breathe in slowly through your nose.
3. You want to eat the soup, but can see it's really hot, so you breathe slowly and softly on it, very carefully so none of the hot soup splashes out or on you.
4. Oh, it is still hot, so you do it again, breathing in the delicious steam and blowing on it very slowly. Good.
5. Let's do that one more time.

Example 3

1. Let's pretend our stomachs are balloons, and we are getting them ready for a birthday party.
2. We are going to breathe air in through our noses to fill our bellies up with air very slowly, slowly now so we don't pop our balloon bellies.
3. We hold the air in just our bellies, while I count 1-2-3
4. And now we are going to slowly let the air out by breathing the air out of our mouths, as our stomachs go back to how they were.
5. Let's do that again two more times.