



Breathing Techniques for Children

As adults, we perhaps have an appreciation that when we inhale a big, slow breath, followed by a long out breath, that we actually feel calmer, more relaxed, and less anxious. Whilst we may forget to practice this in times of anxiety or stress, we do know it helps. So if your child feels worried, stressed, anxious, angry, hyper, over-stimulated, or busy, then breathing techniques will help them too.

Sounds simple, however it can actually take some time to teach children breathing techniques, to find one they like. and more importantly to practice them, so that they become second nature. As with any form of learning the key is to make it fun!

What Happens To Our Breathing When We Are Anxious

Here's little reminder:

- When we are anxious, emotional, angry or worried our bodies go into survival mode - fight, flight or freeze mode
- We may not know what is causing the threat, more often than not it's something stored deep within us that we aren't consciously aware of, that gets triggered
- All of our energy (carried by oxygen) goes to our muscles to support that mode
- Our brain then lacks energy, meaning we can't think straight, so we may flip our lid
- When all of this happens our breathing changes, it goes short and shallow, by the way this is how panic attacks start
- Our body continues to send more oxygen (carrying energy) out to our muscles to prepare us to survive perceived threats
- And before we know it we are in that loop
- So we need to get energy back to our brain so that we can think rationally
- We need to calm our nervous system to reassure it that we are ok
- We need to relax our muscles so that they aren't on edge, ready for action
- And how do we do this? That's right, by breathing deeply!
- Deep breathes to our lower tummy send a signal to the fight/flight/freeze location that we are OK
- When this happens our muscles relax, energy goes to our brain, and we start to feel calmer

Benefits of Deep Breathing

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Promotes happiness
- Ignites peace and calmness
- Lowers blood pressure and heart rate
- Reduces tension
- Improves focus and concentration

Top Breathing Techniques for Children

Remember:

1. That children won't know the difference between deep and shallow breathing so you will need to explain it, simple terms only!
2. That kids will need a demo from you first
3. Children have smaller lungs and take less time to complete a full breath cycle so if you are doing these exercises with them be sure to match a suitable breathing pace
4. You can do this in small groups
5. Let them lead with their favourite approach

Balloon Breathing

Great for all ages, especially kids who are visual, no tool required, just imagination, can do this anywhere!

- You can sit or stand up
- Place both hands on your tummy if this feels comfortable
- Begin to breathe in deeply and imagine you are blowing up your tummy which is a balloon, visual kids may see a balloon in their minds eye, encourage them to make it their favourite colour
- As you exhale slowly, imagine (see or feel depending on your strongest sense) that you are deflating the balloon
- With each in breath get the balloon bigger
- With each out breathe see how lowly and calmly you can deflate the balloon
- Do a cycle of 5 balloons and see how you feel



Teddy Bear Breathing

Great for really little ones and for kinaesthetic kids (feeler's), you need a soft toy:

- Ask your child to lie down and put their favourite teddy on their tummy
- Ask them to inhale deeply for a count of 5, watch Teddy move up
- Then, ask them to exhale for a count of 7, watch Teddy move down
- Prompt them to watch the teddy rise and fall as they breathe in and out
- Do 5 to 10 rounds



Magic Hand / Five Finger Breathing

Great for all ages, no tool required, just imagination, can do this anywhere

- Sit or stand comfortably with your back straight
- Open the palm of one hand wide
- Now with the pointer finger of the opposite hand, slowly trace your fingers while breathing.
- Breathe in whilst sliding up one side of a finger & breathe out whilst sliding down the other side.
- Trace up one side of your thumb, 1, 2, 3, trace down the other side of your thumb, 1, 2, 3.
- Repeat for all five fingers.



One Nostril Breathing

Better for older kids, no tool required

- Have your child place their finger over one nostril, then breathe in deeply
- Next, switch your finger to the other nostril as you breathe out
- Once you have exhaled slowly, switch nostrils and repeat
- Practice this exercise for a few minutes



Ball / Sphere Breathing

Great for kinaesthetic kids (feeler's), you need a Hoberman sphere (cira £5 amazon)

- Breathe in deeply and expand the ball.
- Pause for a short moment with your lungs full.
- Breathe out and let the ball contract.
- Repeat a few times.

