

Zoe Sameth, Training and Consulting



(415) 279-9573; email: zoe@sameth.com
www.zoesameth.com

Breathe Easy: Reduce Stress, Raise Relaxation and Enjoy Work/Life More!

Breathing Exercises

(Handouts with additional exercises/activities will be available at training)

Paying attention to our breath and being sure to get sufficient oxygen helps us to be more balanced, relaxed and centered. It helps our bodies and brains function better. It helps us calm down and focus. All of this helps us to be healthier as an individual, and to create stronger and healthier learners and learning environments. It is true for all ages, children through adults.

With each exercise — for the adults, as well as for the children who can understand —ask the participants to notice how they feel. You can ask them both before and after. You can ask them to answer with words, and/or by showing you a “thumbs up” if they feel better in any way (more calm, relaxed, energized, focused, etc), “thumbs down” if they feel worse, and thumbs in the middle if they feel the same as before they did the breathing. It is important not to judge anyone’s response. In fact, this is an opportunity to point out that different ways of breathing work at different times for different people. And it helps the individuals, children and adults identify for themselves how paying attention to their breath affects them.

~Breathing Exercise #1, Floating Arms

With your feet on the ground, either standing or sitting, raise your arms and hands up into the air (imagine them floating up to the sky) while taking a deep breath in, and on the exhalation allow your arms to drop down, and feel free to let out a sound or a sigh. Repeat as many times as desired.

This is a good exercise to do as a group or with individuals when starting an activity, during transition times (such as indoors/outdoors, naptime, etc), or any time you feel you need it.

~Breathing Exercise #2, Breathing In, Breathing Out

Put your hand on your belly. Notice your breath moving your hands and your stomach up and down. (If teaching this to a group, you can ask the participants what they notice).

If teaching this to a child, or a group, have the participants pay attention to your breath as you breath in and out, and say the words “breathing in, breathing out” as you breath in and out. Then, have the participants pay attention to their own breath as you say the words “breathing in, breathing out.” Next, have the participants say the words “breathing in, breathing out” silently to themselves. If practicing by yourself, just say the words silently to yourself.

This activity can be done sitting, lying down, or standing, and along with helping individuals and groups become more relaxed, calm and balanced, it also has helped many children and adults with insomnia.

~Breathing Exercise #3, Animal Breathing

This is another great exercise to get children breathing, which will help everyone, including the children, be part of a more balanced and centered (and therefore strong) learning, home, and program environment. It is called animal breathing.

Ask the children to breathe like an animal with you (for example, a crocodile) and demonstrate breathing in and out, using your hands and your body to show which animal. Ask them for suggestions of other animals. This gets them breathing deeply without even having to think about it. Be aware that doing this using animals such as lions and tigers will raise their energy (which you may want to do sometimes) and a butterfly, bird, or even rainbow (though not an animal) can help calm their energy, for when you want that (such as naptime).

~Breathing Exercise #4, Stuffed Animal Breathing

Try putting a stuffed animal, bean bag, etc, on the chest or belly of the child(ren). Have them observe what happens (tummy or chest and animal/bean bag going up and down). This can put them in touch with their breathing at a very simple level and can be incredibly calming. You can try this with pre-verbal children and infants as well, who will naturally pay attention to their breath and experience the calming effects, just by watching the animal/bean bag going up and down.

HAVE FUN!!!

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For more activities and games, and further instruction and training on mindfulness, relaxation, self-care and stress reduction or teambuilding/communication techniques, or to order Deep Relaxation CDs for individual and group practice sessions in English and/or Spanish, please contact Zoe Sameth at 415-279-9573 or zoe@sameth.com.