



RESILIENT LIFE SKILL 1: MINDFULNESS & DEEP BREATHING

WHY TEACH THIS LIFE SKILL?

A crucial life skill you can instill within your child(ren) as they develop is the ability to be fully present with oneself. This skill allows one to reflect on and connect with one's own emotions and needs, as well as to employ strategies for coping with big feelings and difficult experiences.

Mindfulness and deep breathing are exercises that can assist with establishing this important life skill. These exercises are great companions as they raise self-awareness while calming oneself during moments of stress or overwhelming feelings. Because of this, researchers point to mindfulness as a foundation for those who are best able to demonstrate resilience through adverse situations.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS AND DEEP BREATHING?

Mindfulness is practiced around the world as a scientifically proven means to benefit physical and mental health, relationships, school and workplace performance, behavior, and overall wellbeing. Mindfulness is the psychological act of turning attention inward to focus on the present moment and the accompanying thoughts, emotions, breath, and body.

Deep breathing (also called diaphragmatic, abdominal, or belly breathing) is the physical act of taking in air fully through the nose, which expands the lungs to the point where the lower belly rises. Deep breathing is one of the body's greatest self-healing mechanisms.

With the right guidance and practice, you can help your child(ren) develop a mindfulness and deep breathing routine that can become second-nature.

WHEN SHOULD I TEACH THIS?

The best way to teach your child(ren) these core life skills is organically. Pick a time that is calm and quiet in your house, perhaps as part of a bedtime routine.

The first time you introduce this concept should not be in the middle of an emotional breakdown, as it may not be well received or understood. Initiate the idea when you have free time and you know you will have undivided attention.

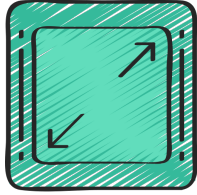


Consider making a plan before you begin. Have any needed supplies ready. Print out the sheets below, and introduce each. Children love choices, so trying out different options and letting them pick their favorite is a great way to empower them in the process.

GENERAL STEPS FOR INTRODUCING DEEP BREATHING

- Talk to your child(ren) about the many emotions people feel.
- Ask if they can name some of those emotions.
- Explain that when we feel big emotions, like the ones that they shared, it can be hard to calm ourselves down.
- Ask if they can remember a time when they had a hard time calming down.
- Explain that deep breathing is a really great way to help ourselves calm down whenever and wherever we need it. If they ever feel overwhelmed at home, school, or at a friend's house, they can use deep breathing and it will help them to feel better.
- Share that learning to breathe deeply and calm ourselves down is a skill, just like learning math, science, a musical instrument, sports, or any other skill.
- Explain that you want to share a few deep breathing activities together so they can start to practice them regularly, and once you have tried them all, they can pick the one they want to keep doing every day.
- Share your idea for when you can do this together (over breakfast, on the way to school, at dinner time, right before bed, etc.).
- Ask if they have any questions, and then go ahead and introduce an activity!





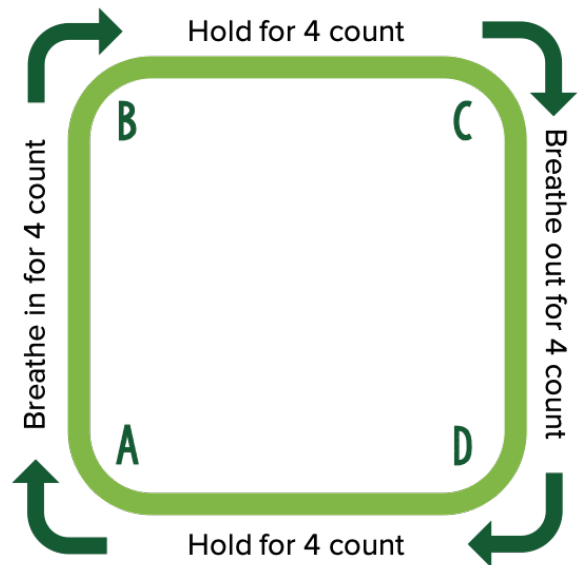
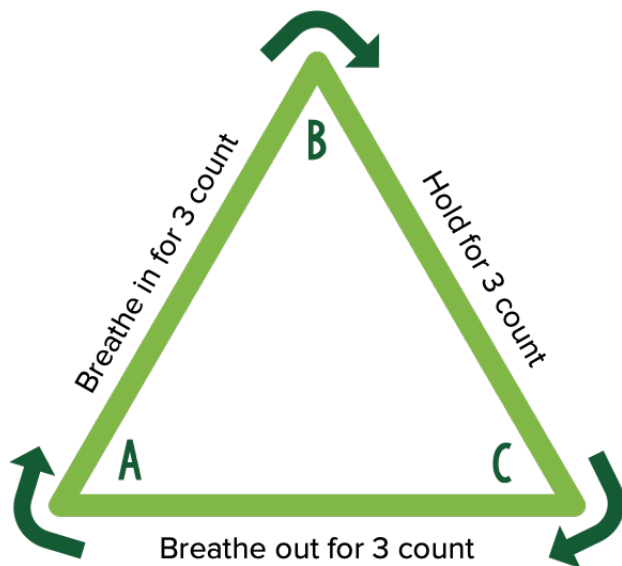
ACTIVITY, GRADES K-5: BREATHING WITH SHAPES

PREP FOR ACTIVITY

Print out the shapes below, or draw your own shapes on a piece of paper at home.

STEPS FOR BREATHING WITH SHAPES

1. Place a finger on a shape below and follow the pattern of the triangle or square to guide breathing.
2. The triangle is the best for beginners, and then as you get more comfortable with the practice move on to the square.
3. Be sure to breathe “around” the shape at least 3-5 times to feel the intended effects.
4. At most, breathe with the shape for 30-60 seconds to avoid getting light-headed.





ACTIVITY, GRADES K-5:

GOODNIGHT CANDLE BREATHS

PREP FOR ACTIVITY

This is a great activity to use with your child(ren) as part of a bedtime routine. Use a real candle (under supervision), [LED candle](#), light switch, or imaginary candle. Be creative with what you have!

STEPS FOR GOODNIGHT CANDLE BREATHS

1. Sit in a comfortable position with the candle, light, or imaginary candle turned on.
2. Begin breathing slowly in through your nose.
3. When you breathe out through your mouth, hold the candle up to your mouth and pretend that you are trying to make the candle 'flicker' without blowing it out.
 - a. Tip: This should encourage very slow breaths out.
4. Repeat for 3-5 breaths, and then share something that you are grateful for today.
 - a. Tip: Participate with your child(ren) and share your own thoughts of gratitude.
5. Finally, invite your child(ren) to say goodnight to important people (mom, dad, siblings, grandparents, friends, etc.), and take one last deep breath in and blow out the candle by turning it 'off' on the exhale.





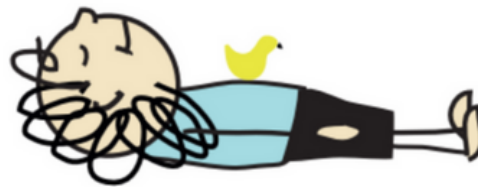
ACTIVITY, GRADES K-5: BELLY BREATHING

PREP FOR ACTIVITY

Make sure you have a stuffed animal or something soft that can be placed on your bellies as you do this activity together.

STEPS FOR BELLY BREATHING

1. Lie down and place a stuffed animal on your belly.
2. Fully relax your whole body, including your belly.
3. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, and watch the stuffed animal rise.
4. Hold for a moment, then exhale slowly through your mouth and watch the stuffed animal lower.
5. Repeat as many times as your child(ren) can stay engaged.
 - a. Tip: With younger children, start with 3-5 simple breaths. Invite them to pretend that they are 'rocking' their stuffed animal to sleep.
 - b. Tip: As your child practices and gets more comfortable, you can extend the time they breathe. There is no need for them to go beyond 30-60 seconds, or they might start to feel a little light-headed



Belly breathing





ACTIVITY, GRADES 6-12:

DEEP BREATHING FOR RELAXATION RESPONSE

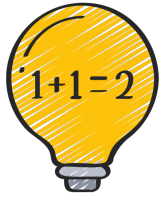
PREP FOR ACTIVITY

You can do this deep breathing exercise lying down, sitting, or even out on a walk! Create space to quiet your mind, turn inward to self-reflect, and focus on breathing. Have a timer handy.

STEPS FOR DEEP BREATHING

1. Set a timer for yourself. Start with 60 seconds, and then build from there to doing this for up to 3-5 minutes.
 - a) Tip: Write down what you are feeling before you start.
2. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
 - a) Relax your stomach muscles too. We are accustomed to keeping it taut, but it is important to learn to relax your stomach when breathing deeply.
4. Start breathing in and out through your nose. Become aware of your breathing.
 - a) As you breathe out, say the word, "one," silently to yourself.
 - b) For example, breathe in...out, "one." Breathe in...out, "one."
 - c) Repeat easily and naturally – this should not feel forced.
5. Do your best to focus solely on your breath and the present moment.
 - a) When you notice thoughts, emotions, or other distractions simply acknowledge them, and then gently set them aside and return to focusing on your breath.
 - b) Maintain a positive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace.
6. When your timer goes off, very gently transition back to opening your eyes and being aware of your surroundings.
 - a) Tip: Write down how you are feeling now that you have concluded the practice. What emotions did you notice come up for you? What (if anything) changed?





ACTIVITY, GRADES 6-12:

MINDFUL BREATH COUNTING

PREP FOR ACTIVITY

The deep breathing activity below is a great one to declutter an anxious mind by focusing on counting while breathing. Follow the directions below and you will feel stress and anxiousness disappear as you count.

STEPS FOR MINDFUL BREATH COUNTING

1. **Lie down and let your body fully rest.**
 - a. Pay attention to the thoughts and emotions that you are experiencing.
2. **When you are ready, fully relax your stomach and take three deep breaths** while paying attention to the rising and falling of your belly.
 - a. Notice the sensation — what it feels like.
 - b. Note: Your belly (and not your chest) should be going in and out while you breathe.
3. **Place your hand on your belly.** As best as you are able, pay attention to the rocking of your hand with each breath.
4. **Recognize that your mind will go off somewhere else**, over and over again, or you might feel restless. This is completely normal.
 - a. Each time you notice your attention is gone somewhere else, come back again to your hand rising and falling on your belly.
5. Begin to count **your breaths, sticking to small groups.**
 - a. Start by counting to five, and then go back to one and repeat.
 - b. Next, count to ten and repeat.
 - c. **Each time you lose track, simply start over.**
 - d. Note any tendency to get frustrated — distractions will happen.
 - e. Continue at your own pace: Breathe in, one, breathe out, one; breathe in, two, breathe out, two...
6. **Any thoughts or emotions that come up are normal. Acknowledge the presence of these distractions, and then return to focusing on your breathing, your hand, or your counting.**
 - a. Remind yourself that all you are here to do is focus on your breathing.
 - b. This is not about being productive or taking action, but only about being fully present in the moment.
7. **When you are ready**, if you would like, open your eyes, or continuing to lie still until you are ready to conclude your practice.
8. **End with gratitude:** Acknowledge one thing you are grateful for in that moment.
 - a. Ideas: Health, friendships, work, school, today, breath, family, etc.

