



BELLY BREATHING

CASEL Competency

Self-Management

SEL*f Component

Breath Awareness

Purpose

Focuses the mind, regulates the body, builds inner strength.

Materials

None

DESCRIPTION

- Find a comfortable seated position. Lengthen your spine, open your heart, and rest your shoulders down your back.
- Take a breath in and a breath out. Notice the quality of your breath (e.g., temperature, rhythm, length, etc.). Pay attention to where your breath is moving throughout your body.

We are going to experiment breathing into two different places: our chest and our belly.

1. First, place both hands on your upper chest. Open your mouth and breathe in, noticing your chest puff up and fill with air. Now, breathe out, letting the air go.
2. Next, place both hands on your belly. Slowly breathe in through your nose, and fill your belly up with air. Notice your belly puffing out. Now, breathe out, noticing your belly coming back in toward your body.

3. What differences do you notice between the chest breathing and belly breathing? (Chest breathing can feel constricted or stressed, while belly breathing feels calming). Let's try chest breathing and then belly breathing one more time each.
4. As you belly breathe, feel your stomach move out and in. Feel free to close your eyes if it feels safe. Take a moment to notice any subtle changes happening in your mind and body.
5. When you breathe deeply like this, your diaphragm is sending calming signals to your brain through the vagus nerve, which reduces stress. Deep breathing also slows the heart rate and calms nerves.

Know that you can always return to this type of breathing whenever you need to recenter or calm yourself, or when you want to feel more at peace.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How did you feel at the beginning of the breathing exercise?

How did you feel at the end?

Did you notice any changes in your mind and/or body?

When can you use belly breathing to help you?

SENTENCE FRAMES

I felt _____ at the beginning of the breathing exercise.

I felt _____ after Belly Breathing.

I noticed _____ changes in my mind/body.

I can use belly breathing _____ to help me.

PEDAGOGICAL POINTERS

VARIATIONS

Students can belly breathe while comfortably sitting on the floor or in a chair, standing up, or laying on their backs. You can also invite students to sit back-to-back and practice belly breathing together; this can increase their breath awareness, and simultaneously build connections between students.

PRIMARY DIFFERENTIATION

Model what belly breathing looks like as well as what it doesn't look like (e.g., holding the breath at the top of the inhale) to ensure young children know how to breathe healthily. Young students love to use their imagination and creativity with breathwork; you can integrate culturally relevant themes into the belly breathing to increase engagement (e.g., Jedi Breathing, Bear Belly Breathing, etc.)

SECONDARY DIFFERENTIATION

Explain the neuroscience to increase engagement and participation! Students love learning how belly breathing impacts their minds and bodies. After

modeling and practicing multiple times, you can invite students to facilitate belly breathing for the class.

TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE

Students who have experienced, or are currently experiencing extreme stress in their lives tend to have shortened breath. Be mindful of where students hold tension in their bodies; it may not feel natural for some students to breathe all the way up into their chest or down into their bellies yet. Use invitational language to ensure this practice meets students where they are.

CONSISTENT PRACTICE

Time students to motivate them to sustain and grow their practice overtime. Continue cueing to build stamina throughout the exercise. If students get distracted, gently remind them to return their attention to the breath.



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