

EXERCISES FOR EMOTION REGULATION

Working with Breath

Learning to monitor and work at regulating breathing can greatly support settling and rejuvenation. It is often easier to first learn and practice these exercises with a support person.

General steps for teaching the use of breath for regulation:

1. Practice noticing and describing breathing rhythms.

Pause and notice:

- Where can I notice my breathing? In nostrils or mouth, feeling chest rise and fall?
- What is the pace of my breath like? Shallow, jagged, gulping, even, smooth, deep, stop and start...?

2. Practice shifting the rhythm of breath

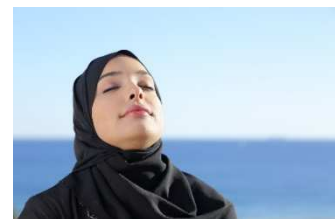
- Place one hand on chest and other hand on abdomen. Practice breathing into each hand in order to feel the difference between chest and belly breathing.
- Use an image to help focus on taking a slow, full breath to completely expand lungs, and then to exhale fully, emptying the lungs.
 - *Imagine blowing up a balloon and then watching it deflate.*
 - *Inhale at a pace to comfortably suck through a straw and exhale at a pace to blow off the petals of a flower one by one.*
 - *Use counting at a regular pace to keep inhale and exhale long and even.*

Tip: learn to *expand* the belly when inhaling and allow it to naturally be soft and empty when exhaling.

3. Continue to practice these techniques at a consistent time in the day (e.g.: upon waking, before eating, while riding the bus, when settling into bed, etc.).

Tips:

- Sometimes it helps to breathe through the nostrils instead of the mouth
- Regulated breathing moves more into the belly rather than high in the chest. However it is important not to *push* too hard to change one's breathing. Start with just one or two longer deeper breaths then allow breathing to go back to natural rhythm. With gentle practice we can expand our ability to slow and regulate the breath.



Guided Observing Breath Exercise

This exercise is best done if guided by a support person. Alternatively a recording can be made to continue to follow the guidelines. Once it is familiar a person can guide themselves through a familiar process.

Guiding instructions:

Get as comfortable as you can in your chair or lying down. Look gently around the room and bring your awareness to the ceiling for a moment, then to a wall or point far away from you. Next bring your awareness to the space just in front of you, about two feet in front of you. Notice how you can move your awareness around to different spots.

Now let your attention go inward – feel free to close your eyes if that’s comfortable. We’re going to explore your inner mind and take a look around – as if we were floating comfortably on a calm lake (or sitting in a pleasant meadow, etc.)

Allow your awareness to find your breath wherever you can feel it easily – your nostrils, chest, belly, lungs... And just follow the wave of your breath... in and out. [pause]



Recognize your breath as the “anchor” for a buoy in the centre of your lake (or a central spot in your meadow – like holding on to the string of a kite). Your breath can be the anchor for the rest of the activity in your mind, such as your thoughts, any images, etc. So when you notice your thoughts floating away somewhere else – allow your anchor (or kite string) to catch and gently pull your awareness back to your breath.

Continue to follow the waves of your breath for a few minutes. Practise this every day.

Cycle Breathing Exercise

- First take a few breaths to settle your attention on your breath – wherever you can best notice it – your nostrils, belly or chest.
- Begin to gently structure your breathing: as you inhale count slowly to 4 matching your full inhale with the count 1-2-3-4.
- Pause and hold your breath for a count of 2.
- As you exhale slowly and until your lungs are completely empty, count so that you are matching your full exhale with the count 1-2-3-4.
- Repeat several times gradually lengthening your count.

Exercises using Movement and Attention to the Body

Strategy: Stretching exercises

Moving and stretching muscles and ligaments allow the release and flow of built-up stress hormones and chemicals in the body and brain from anxiety.

- Intentionally yawn and stretch the jaw and face muscles. This pairs well with remembering to do some regulating breath exercises.
- Sit or stand with spine upright, stretching shoulders back, opening up chest.
- Dynamic stretching (exploring full range of motion)

Shoulder and arm circles, going from small to big and exploring directions.

Hip circles – place your hands on your hips and swing the hips forward, then circling them around – go in both directions.

Knee circles – place your hands on your knees as you bend them slightly, slowly circle the knees together – go in both directions.

Ankle circles – one ankle at a time either with your toe on the ground or holding foot in the air – circle the ankle around – go in both directions.

Strategy: Neck rolls

Stand or sit with your spine upright and so you are well supported. Gently release your head so that it tips forward – only as far as is comfortable. Explore small, gentle neck rolls from side to side (caution going back) and stretching. Find what is comfortable right now. Clicks and cracks in the neck muscles are normal as they release and let go. Do not push or strain this movement—listen to the limit of your body.

Tip: Any physical activity that involves and allows full range of motion of different muscle groups can greatly aid emotion regulation if it is approached with an attitude of leisure, relaxation and pleasure. Example: basketball, soccer, running, walking, hiking, biking, tai chi, yoga, dance, skating, etc.

Strategy: Muscle Tension & Release

Inhale and tense each muscle group (hard but not to the point of cramping) for four to ten seconds, then exhale and then completely relax the muscle group (do not relax it gradually). Give yourself 10 to 20 seconds to relax.

Slowly move through each muscle group one at a time. Following is a suggested guide for moving through different muscle areas and how to tense them:

- **Hands:** Clench and release them both together.
- **Wrists and forearms:** Extend fingers and bend your hands back at the wrist.
- **Biceps and upper arms:** Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the elbows, and flex your biceps.
- **Shoulders:** Shrug them up to your ears.
- **Forehead:** Wrinkle it into a deep frown.
- **Around the eyes and bridge of the nose:** Close your eyes as tightly as possible. (Remove contact lenses before beginning the exercise.)
- **Cheeks and jaws:** Smile as widely as you can, and open the mouth as wide open as you can.
- **Around the mouth:** Press your lips together tightly.
- **Chest:** Take a deep breath and hold it, then exhale.
- **Back:** Arch your back backwards. Then relax. Circle your back forward so you are folding in toward your chest. Then relax.
- **Stomach:** Suck it into a tight knot.
- **Hips and buttocks:** Press the buttocks together tightly.
- **Thighs & hamstrings:** Clench the big muscles in your upper legs hard. This can also be done one leg at a time.
- **Lower legs:** Tense the lower legs and feet. This can be done one leg at a time. Lift each foot up at the ankle to tense the front of the leg.
- **Feet:** Curl toes down as far as you can. This can also be done one foot a time.

Take a few minutes at the end to breathe through your whole body inviting all muscle groups to relax as fully as possible.

Rhythmic Movement

Activities with consistent physical rhythms help with physical and emotional regulation.

- Walking is a natural rhythmic movement – matching the breath to the pace of walking supports the body and mind working together to settle. A
 1. As you step, inhale and say to yourself “breathing in”.
 2. As you step, exhale and say to yourself “breathing out”.
 3. Continue – you can also replace these with other phrases.
- Dancing, swinging, jump rope, swaying and stretching can all be intentional rhythmic movements used to support regulation.
- Play simple rhythms while listening to music using a drum, the floor and your feet, your hands and clapping or other percussive instruments.
- Collaborative games involving music, drum-beat, clapping rhythms.
- Humming or singing while doing simple movements.

Being Still or Quieting: Practicing Resting

Create a tranquil space by limiting stimulation (light, sound, interruption, etc.) and practicing stilling the body and the mind. Choosing a simple stimulation to focus the mind can help, such as a mantra, music without lyrics, soothing visual to look at.



It can be particularly useful to practice this after spending some time doing more active movement. This supports the body to release stress and chemicals and then deepen the state of regulation. Note that this doesn't have to be completely still. Some people regulate better with some stimulation (walking slowly, swimming, gentle movements).

Using the 5 Senses to Connect to the Present

The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise

This is best learned with a support person guiding first. Then a person can easily remember and guide themselves silently in their own mind.

Guiding Instructions:

- *What are 5 things you hear (pause and list); 5 things you see (pause and list), and 5 things you feel (touch) (pause and list).*

Continue in same way:

- *What are 4 things you hear, see, and feel (touch)*
- *What are 3 things you hear, see, and feel (touch)*
- *What are 2 things you hear, see, and feel (touch)*
- *What is 1 thing you hear, see, and feel (touch)*

This exercise can be repeated. It is most beneficial if done slowly and really noticing each item as it is named.

Self-Soothing Using the 5 Senses

With Vision:

Buy one beautiful flower; make one space in a room pretty; light a candle and watch the flame. Set a nice place at the table for a meal using your best things. Go to a museum with beautiful art. Go sit in the lobby of a striking old hotel. Look at nature around you. Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars. Walk in a nice part of town. Fix your nails so they look pretty. Look at beautiful pictures in a book. Go to a ballet or other dance performance.

With Hearing:

Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to invigorating and exciting music. Pay attention to sound of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling). Sing to your favourite songs. Hum a soothing tune. Learn to play an instrument. Be mindful of any sounds that come your way.



With Smell:

Use your favourite perfume or lotions, or try them on in a store; spray fragrance in the air; light a scented candle. Put lemon oil on your furniture. Put potpourri in a bowl in your room. Boil cinnamon, bake cookies, cake or bread. Smell the roses. Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.

With Taste:

Have a good meal; have a favourite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate; treat yourself to a dessert. Put whipped cream on your coffee. Sample flavours in an ice cream store. Suck on a piece of peppermint candy. Chew your favourite gum. Get a little bit of a special food you don't usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice. Really taste the food you eat, eat one thing mindfully.



With Touch:

Take a bubble bath; put clean sheets on the bed. Pet your dog or cat. Have a massage; soak your feet. Put creamy lotion on your whole body. Put a cold compress on your forehead. Sink into a really comfortable chair in your home or find one in a luxurious hotel lobby. Put on a silky blouse, dress or scarf. Try on fur-lined gloves or fur coats in a department store. Brush your hair for a long time. Hug someone. Experience whatever you are touching; notice touch that is soothing.

Visualization Exercise

Imagine a caterpillar. You can watch it crawling about on the tree where it lives. Attaching itself to a branch of the tree, the caterpillar starts to form its cocoon. Gradually it surrounds itself with golden, silken threads until it is totally hidden. Observe the cocoon for a few moments.

Now be inside the cocoon...Surrounded by the softness of silk...you rest in the warmth of the golden darkness... You are only dimly aware, so you do not know exactly what is happening to you, but you sense that in this apparent stillness a hidden, transforming intelligence is at work...

At last the cocoon breaks open, and a ray of light penetrates through a chink... As the light touches you, you feel a sudden surge of vitality and realize that you can shed the cocoon.

As you feel the cocoon falling away, you discover that with it you have shed the defences and supports of your safety and your past... You are now freer than you ever dreamed you could be; you are a beautiful, multicoloured butterfly... You soon realize that your boundaries have extended infinitely... you can fly... You find yourself dwelling in a totally new realm of colors, of sounds, of open space... You experience yourself flying...being supported by the air, being gently borne up by the breeze, gliding down, flying up again...



Below, you see an immense meadow full of flowers of every kind and color...You settle on one...then on another...then on another still, so gently that the petals are not even disturbed. You experience each flower as a different being with its own color and perfume...its own particular life and quality. Take your time in experiencing the many aspects of your expansion, your freedom and your lightness.

Your own Visualization

Write your own visualization. Think of a place that brings you comfort. What would you see? What would you hear? What might you smell? What would you feel? What would you be thinking about?

or...

Draw a picture of place that would give you a sense of peace and comfort. What would be in this place? Who would be there? What might they say to you?