



It Starts With A Breath...
a book about mindful breathing
FOURTH EDITION

Companion Guide

27 Lessons on Mindful Breathing
for Kindergarten – Grade 3

By Karla Dueck Thiessen

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Preface



This companion guide was written to accompany the fourth edition of *It Starts With A Breath...a book about mindful breathing*. The book started as a class project in the Nursery/Kindergarten classroom at Brock Corydon School in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was first published as a celebration of their year together as a class and their message of mindfulness has traveled all around the world. Ms. Karla and her students practice mindfulness strategies daily and it influences every part of their learning. Ms. Karla and her students want to share the empowering message of mindful breathing with more children and their families.



About The Author

Karla Dueck Thiessen teaches Nursery/ Kindergarten in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. She has over twenty-five years' of experience in early years education and is also a Reiki Master.



Letter To Educators

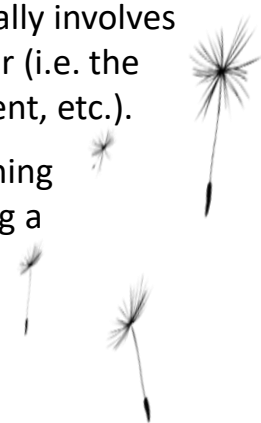
Dear Educators,

This guide provides an overview of the theories behind the mindful breath practices depicted in *It Starts With A Breath...a book about mindful breathing*. Mindfulness is the innate capacity you have to be aware, to bring your full awareness to the present moment while calmly identifying and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and sensations. It is the quality of presence you bring to everything you do. Mindfulness is about observing the mind (not clearing the mind). Breath is a powerful tool to connect the mind, body and spirit.

It is important to help students identify and process the broad spectrum of their emotions without judgment. Emotions are neither good or bad, positive or negative. Many students have difficulty regulating their behaviour because their emotions overwhelm them, which hinders their learning. Behaviour challenges are often a result of an unmet need or lack of skill. Mastery of mindfulness skills leads to self-regulation and being able to self-regulate is a necessary skill in managing the ups and downs of life. Even the youngest students can learn to be mindful with practice (and a few cues). Mindfulness helps children make sense of their feelings and emotions, reducing their risk of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. It is an essential part of health and wellbeing!

Mindfulness is more readily available when practiced daily. Repetition is key in establishing new habits! It can be cultivated and strengthened over time through various formal and informal exercises. It typically involves directing attention to a specific focus, often called an anchor (i.e. the breath, bodily sensations, thoughts, surrounding environment, etc.).

I have been incorporating mindfulness practices in my teaching for over a decade. It has transformed my classroom, creating a space for cultivating love, compassion, empathy, kindness, generosity, and connection. It is my hope that the mindful breathing exercises in this guide will support you and your student's journey towards living mindfully.



Lesson 1 – It Starts With A Breath



“Breath is the bridge
which connects life
to consciousness,
which unites your body
to your thoughts.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

Overview

You breathe about 23,000 times a day without even having to think about it. Learning to be mindful about your breathing creates space to reflect on your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Tuning in to your breath helps you become self-aware of your environment and your needs.

Mindful breathing relaxes the mind and body so that stressful experiences can be calmly observed, reflected upon and responded to intentionally. Practicing mindful breathing is a simple, practical, important life skill that calms the nervous system and helps you develop self-regulation, focused attention, and positive well-being.

Explore and Practice – Belly Buddy Breathing Exercise

Teaching students to be mindful through simple breathing exercises is the beginning of the shift needed to bridge disconnection and division. They will be empowered to accept their current thoughts and feelings and to form healthy habits for coping with their big emotions. Mindful, conscious children can embody the change we need in the world!

Instruct your students to choose a stuffed animal.

- #1. Lie down and put a stuffed animal on your belly.
- #2. Breathe in and watch it rise; hold and count to three; breathe out and watch it fall. Repeat.
- #3. Invite the students to share about what they noticed.



Lesson 2 – Respiratory System



“Breathing in,
I say hello to my breath.
Breathing out,
I say thank you to my lungs.”
Karla Dueck Thiessen

Overview

Breathing keeps you alive and nourishes millions of cells in your body. The act of breathing in and breathing out is called respiration. Your body needs oxygen for all the cells in your body to work. The system that brings oxygen into your body is called your respiratory system. Your respiratory system brings fresh air filled with oxygen through your nose and mouth, down your windpipe, and into your lungs as they expand with air. The oxygen-rich air travels through the bronchioles and reaches the balloon-like air sacs at the end of the airways called alveoli. Your blood then carries the oxygen to all parts of the body. As the body uses oxygen, it makes a waste gas (carbon dioxide). The blood carries that back to the lungs. When you breathe out, carbon dioxide leaves the body through the airways. Your lungs are amazing and help you to breathe, talk, sing, cry and laugh!

Explore and Practice – Paper Bag Lungs Craft

Supplies:

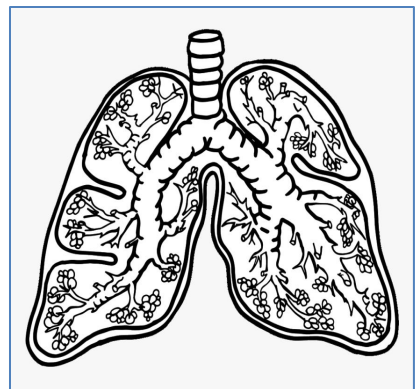
Print out one picture of a lung (**Appendix I**)

Markers

2 paper bags per student

2 paper straws per student

duct or packing tape



Lesson 2 – Respiratory System Cont'

Explore and Practice – Paper Bag Lungs Craft

You cannot see your lungs, but it is easy to feel them in action. Put your hands on your chest and breathe in very deeply. You will feel your chest getting slightly bigger as it rises. Now breathe out the air, and feel your chest flatten as it falls. You have just felt the power of your lungs!

Show the picture of the lungs (**Appendix I**) and highlight the bronchioles and alveoli.

#1. Hand out two paper bags to each student and ask them to draw the bronchioles and alveoli on the side of the paper bag without the flap. Older students can label the bronchioles and alveoli.

#2. Open the bags fully, slip the straw in the bag 2-3" in and gather the top of the bag around the straw.

#3. Tape the tops of the bags to each straw, ensuring a tight seal.

#4. Ask the students to slowly breathe in and out through the straws to see how their lungs work.



Lesson 3 – Exercise



“Your mind, emotions and body are instruments and the way you align and tune them determines how well you play life.”

Harbhajan Singh Yogi

Overview

Breathing gives you energy to move and exercise. You exercise all the time without even thinking about it. Running, jumping, dancing, are all forms of exercise. Your body needs a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise per day. Exercise helps you maintain a healthy weight and lowers the risk of many disease, and keeps you fit and energized. Breathing in a slow and steady manner during exercise helps reduce the risk of muscle fatigue and injury, and improves your core strength. When you are active, you sweat more which helps your body detoxify and keep itself “clean.”

Exercise is a wonderful way to explore the movements of your body. Movement activities help build muscle memory and strengthen the body/mind connection. Exercise helps keep your muscles strong and makes your heart beat harder. Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood to other parts of your body. Blood provides your body with the oxygen and nutrients it needs. Exercising helps release pent-up energy and can put you in a calmer mood. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals that make you feel happier.

Explore and Practice – Animal Prancing

Instruct students to move like animals...run like a cheetah, waddle like a penguin, flap like an eagle, etc. Invite the students to notice how their bodies feel and how the muscles move differently with each animal. Have the class notice how their heart beats faster during exercise.

Lesson 4 – Wellness



“Wellness within is mindfulness and acceptance of what you are, what you feel inside and how it’s always changing. That process is helped by being attentive to the breath as it moves through the body.”

Rodney Yee

Overview

Your body has three brains. Neuroscience has shown that aside from your head brain (cephalic brain), you also have a heart brain (cardiac brain) and a gut brain (enteric brain). Each of these brains has nerve cells that are able to receive, process, store and access information. Sometimes your head, heart, and gut brain do not communicate well with each other when you are feeling overwhelmed or unwell. Once you become aware of how you are feeling, you can activate and balance your head, heart and gut brains to improve mental and physical wellness.

Explore and Practice – Tapping (adapted BodyTalk cortices technique)

Tapping (similar to acupressure) is used by therapists, psychologists, teachers and millions worldwide to ease emotional distress and clear negative emotions, helping the head, heart and gut brain communicate.

#1. Settle into a comfortable position and breathe in and out through your nose as you turn your attention to your body.

Keep your breathing deep and relaxed throughout the exercise.

#2. Bring your hands to the sides of your head and gently squeeze, like you are giving your brain a hug. Take one hand away and lightly tap the top of your head five times, your heart five times and finally your gut five times.

#3. Move your hand from the side of your head to the top of your head.

With the other hand, lightly tap your head, heart and gut, each five times.

#4. Move your hand from the top of your head to your forehead. With the other hand, lightly tap your head, heart and gut, each five times.

Lesson 5 – Central Nervous System



“Mindfulness is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience.”

Joh Kabat-Zinn

Overview

Your brain is amazing! It helps you think, learn, create, and feel emotions. It controls every heartbeat, breath, blink and keeps working 24 hours a day. There is ongoing communication between the body and brain through the central nervous system. The nervous system is the highway along which your brain sends and receives information about what is happening in the body and the environment around it. The body and brain continuously influence each others’ functions. Research shows that brain regions linked to emotion, attention, and body awareness are activated when we pay attention to our breath. Inhaling and exhaling through the nose is ideal for optimal health. Mindful breathing helps connect the mind and body.

Explore and Practice – Pace Breathing

When you are upset, your breath becomes shallow and your brain does not get enough oxygen to work well. You can learn to listen to your body and notice when your breath changes and then respond. Breathing deeply, slowly, and steadily signals your nervous system to calm your body down and helps your brain problem-solve. Pace breathing has been shown to focus attention and regulate the nervous system because you breathe about half as many times per minute as you normally would.

#1. Hold out your hand with your palm face down. As you breathe in through your nose slowly and steadily, pull your hand towards your shoulder. As you breathe out through your nose slowly and steadily, lower your hand. Repeat for 1 minute. (Teachers can use this as a non-verbal cue)

Lesson 6 – Mindfulness



“Every one of us already has the seed of mindfulness. The practice is to cultivate it.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

Overview

Mindfulness means paying attention and noticing the present moment. As you learn to bring your attention back to being mindful, the grey matter in your brain increases and your learning and memory improves. Meditation is a tool you can use to practice mindful living. To meditate means to reflect or contemplate. Anchors such as a sound, sensation, mantra (repeated word/phrase), or breath can help focus your attention. When meditating on the breath, focus your attention on the natural rhythm and flow of your breathing, and the way it feels as you inhale and exhale. As you mindfully meditate on your breath, you become more self-aware and emotionally calm. Focusing your full attention on your breath quiets the mind. Daily mindful meditation helps your body and mind be well.

Explore and Practice – Breathe and Be (You will need a bell or chime)

The challenge of this game is to be quiet and still. Keep time with a sand timer or stopwatch. Start with one minute and gradually increase the minutes to build mindfulness stamina over time.

- #1. In a soft voice, instruct the students to sit with their eyes closed and focus on their calm breathing to help them be quiet and still.
- #2. Tell your students that you will make the sound, and they should focus on their breath and listen carefully until they can no longer hear the sound.
- #3. Ring a bell or singing bowl to start the activity and start the timer.
- #4. When the timer runs out ring the chime again and invite the students to open their eyes when they are ready. Invite students to share.

Lesson 7 – Healthy Mindset



“The body heals with play,
the mind heals with laughter
and the spirit heals with joy.”

Proverb

Overview

How you think and feel affects your emotional, mental and physical health. Your breathing is influenced by your thoughts and body chemistry, and your thoughts and body chemistry are influenced by your breath. Learning to breathe mindfully helps you manage your emotions and impulses, be a flexible thinker, and control your behaviour. This healthy mindset focuses on growth and healing. Learning breathing techniques can ease anxiety, depression and stress. Breath is the foundation of good mental health.

Breathing deeply lowers stress in your body. It increases oxygen in your bloodstream, decreases your blood pressure, reduces tension, and even helps to reduce pain. Breathing mindfully sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax when you are in distress. Deep breathing helps you create a peaceful space and improve your health.

Explore and Practice – Peace Breathing

Set an intention to connect the mind, body, and heart through the breath.

#1. Sit comfortably and rub your hands together. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your heart.

#2. Begin by completely exhaling and push out as much air as you can, pulling the belly in towards the spine.

#3. Next, inhale through the nose and down to the belly for four counts, noticing your belly expanding and feeling the energy of love in your heart. Breathe out through your nose. Repeat steps 2 and 3.

Lesson 8 – Breathing Out



“By changing the pattern of breathing we can change our emotional states, how we think, and how we interact with the world.”

Dr. Patricia Gerbarg

Overview

You have an information highway called the vagus nerve that connects your brain with organs throughout the body. When you are under pressure or thinking stressful thoughts, you inhale longer than you exhale. This increases your heart rate and your body becomes tense. When you exhale, the vagus nerve sends a signal to the heart, telling it to slow down. Increasing your out breath helps you calm down. Pattern breathing can reduce stress levels, improve overall health, and help you sleep better.

Explore and Practice – Pattern Breathing 2,1,4,1 (2-to-1 breathing)

As you exhale, your heart rate slows. Repeated deep breathing brings your heart rate more in sync with your breath and your brain releases endorphins, which are chemicals that have a natural calming effect.

#1. Breathe out before you start a new cycle of breath.

#2. Close your mouth. Breathe in through your nose as you count to two and notice the air filling up your belly.

#3. Pause. Hold your breath for a count of one.

#4. Blow the breath out through your mouth as you count to four.

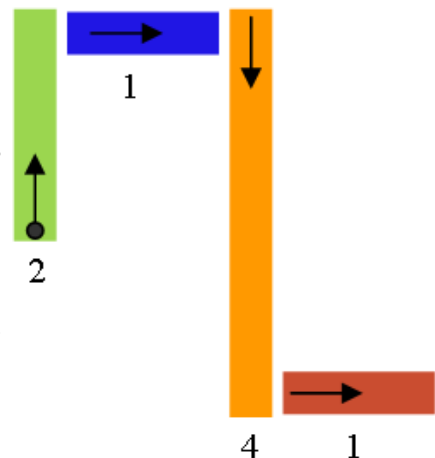
Notice the air leaving your belly.

#5. Pause. Hold your breath for a count of one.

Repeat pattern.

***See Appendix II for printable tracing pattern**

Craft Idea – Paper Pinwheel



Lesson 9 – Emotions



“Emotions play out in
the theater of the body.
Feelings play out in the
theater of the mind.”

Dr. Sarah McKay

Overview

Emotions are your body’s physical response to an experience. Feelings are your awareness of those emotions. For many people, there is a disconnect between emotion and feeling; their behaviour may express the emotion but they are not aware of it. Mindful breathing can help bring awareness to emotions. When emotions are very intense, mindful breathing can be the pause you need between *having* your emotion, *feeling* the emotion, and *expressing* the emotion.

Learning to identify, label and express your emotions helps you be more emotionally intelligent and helps manage mental health challenges. Building these skills enables you to understand, respond to, and manage your own feelings, interpret others’ emotions, and respond to others in more appropriate ways.

There are three main ways you can learn about your emotions and feelings.

1. Identify – Learning to feel and identify your emotions will help you settle and focus yourself when you are upset.

2. Label – Learning when, why, and how your emotions arise will help you become more emotionally aware.

3. Express – Developing verbal skills to express your emotions will help release the emotional energy and give others cues as to how they can support you.

Lesson 9 – Emotions Cont'

Your emotions give you information about every aspect of your world. You cannot think, reason, learn, decide, or interact without them. Regular mindful breath work is the foundation of regulating emotions. There are seven emotions that have universal facial expressions: happy, sad, fear, disgust, anger, contempt, and surprise.

Explore and Practice –

1. How Does Your Face Look?

Teaching children to identify their emotions helps them recognize emotional cues. Emotions on the inside show on the outside.

Activity – Ask students to share about the physical sensations they have when they have strong emotions (i.e. Happy=Smiling face, Sad=Tears, Fear=Wide Eyes, Disgust=Wrinkled Nose, Angry=Furrowed Eyebrows, Surprise=Raised Eyebrows).

2. Emotional Role Play

Building an emotional vocabulary helps children express themselves.

Activity – Act out the 7 emotions and ask the students to guess what you are feeling.

3. Create Your Face

Learning to recognize emotions that occur in different situations helps children identify what they and others are feeling and why.

Activity – Ask the students to think about the strongest emotion they felt that day and draw how their face looked when they felt that emotion. Invite students to show their drawing and share why they felt that way.

Alternate Option – Show emotion photo cards and discuss.

Lesson 10 – Creating Space



“Sometimes the most important thing in the whole day is the rest we take between two breaths.”

Etty Hillesum

Overview

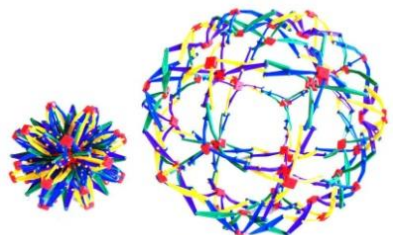
The energy you bring into a space sets the tone for interactions and affects the people around you. Your mood creates the climate and contributes to the weather in your learning environment. The stress and busyness of life can take a toll on your body. Your posture contracts, as if the muscles themselves have less space available than before. When you are in distress, your breathing can be fast and shallow, so there is less space available in your lungs to be filled with oxygen. Breathing deeply can remind your muscles to stretch and lengthen. It helps you stay calm and collected.

Stress can also cloud your mental space. One of the best way to quiet your busy mind and create calm mental space is to make time to be still. Setting aside just 10 minutes each day for mindful practices increase your capacity for awareness, compassion, wisdom.

Explore and Practice – Belly Breathing

Start with practicing for just a minute or two and gradually increase to build stamina over time. (A Hoberman Sphere is a useful visualization tool for demonstrating this exercise)

- #1. Inhale slowly through your nose, pretending that you are blowing up a balloon in your belly until it grows big and tight. Hold and count to two.
- #2. Slowly exhale through the nose until your belly is soft. Hold and count to two. Repeat.



Lesson 11 – Diaphragmatic Breathing



“Dance with the waves,
move with the sea. Let the
rhythm of the water set
your soul free.”

Christy Ann Martine

Overview - There are four types of breathing.

Resting Breath (Eupnea) is normal, unlabored, quiet breathing.

Active Breath (Hyperpnea) is deeper and faster breathing (during exercise or exertion).

Shallow Breath (Costal) is shallow breathing from your chest.

Belly Breath (Diaphragmatic) is deep breathing from your diaphragm.

Breathing deeply from your belly helps your body relax and feel calm. Diaphragmatic breathing involves fully engaging the stomach, abdominal muscles, and diaphragm when breathing. It strengthens your diaphragm and helps fill your lungs more efficiently. The diaphragm is a dome-shaped muscle that sits beneath your lungs and it contracts and flattens as you breathe in and breathe out air. Diaphragmatic breathing influences the heart and mind by helping lower your heart rate and blood pressure, lowering the harmful effects of the stress hormone Cortisol.

Explore and Practice – Diaphragmatic breathing

#1. Sit in a comfortable position or lie flat on the floor or other flat, comfortable surface and relax your shoulders.

#2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your heart.

#3. Breathe in through your nose for about two seconds. Feel the air moving through your nostrils into your expanding abdomen.

#4. Purse your lips (as if you're blowing bubbles through a straw), press gently on your stomach, and exhale slowly out your mouth for about two seconds, pulling your belly button towards the ground. Repeat step 3 & 4.

Lesson 12 – Rhythm



“Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.”

Thomas Merton

Overview

How you breathe can make a difference in how you feel. You may notice that your breathing gets fast when you are stressed, nervous, frightened, worried, or angry. Your breath will be shallow and come from higher up in your chest when you are upset. Noticing where your breath is coming from can help you realize when you feel stressed. You can slow down your breathing, making each breath longer and deeper when you are stressed.

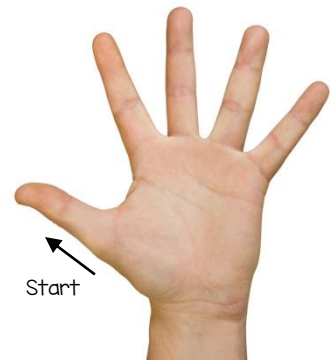
When you are feeling calm, your breathing will be slower and deeper and come from your belly. Steady rhythmic breathing relaxes your body and mind. The more you practice mindful breathing, the better you become at staying calm, even in very stressful situations.

Explore and Practice – Starfish Breathing (Also called 5 Finger Breathing)

Starfish breathing uses both tactile and visual feedback, which can help students grasp the concept more quickly. Students can continue with the breathing exercise until they feel calm and relaxed.

#1. Spread your fingers wide, so your hand looks like a starfish.

#2. Use the pointer finger of your other hand to slowly trace the outline of your thumb, starting at your wrist. Breathe in as you move your finger up the side of your thumb, and breathe out as you move it down the other side. Repeat for each finger.



Lesson 13 – Affirmations



“If you want to conquer
the anxiety of life,
live in the moment,
live in the breath.”

Amit Ray

Overview

It is normal to feel worried, frustrated or stressed at times. Sometimes this causes you to feel bad and you may think or say mean things about yourself. This is called negative self-talk. Negative self-talk limits your ability to believe in yourself and reach your potential. Sometimes the words we hear from our family and friends, role models, television, etc. can be hurtful and make us feel like we are not good enough. Negative thoughts and beliefs can impact your life and be hard to change as you grow up.

Positive affirmations are a form of positive self-talk which give us courage to keep trying new things and never give up. Positive thoughts and words contribute to building growth mindset, self-esteem, and overall positive well-being. When we become aware of our negative thoughts and patterns we have the power to change them. The more you practice affirmations, the more you will feel positive about yourself. Affirmations are a powerful way to encourage, love and accept yourself.

Explore and Practice – Affirmation Rap

Leader calls out the phrase and students repeat.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| #1. I can breathe and problem solve | #6. I am kind and helpful too |
| #2. I can learn from my mistakes | #7. I am smart and I am strong |
| #3. I can think and speak my mind | #8. I am brave and I am unique |
| #4. I can learn and grow each day | #9. I am worthy of respect |
| #5. I have purpose in the world | #10. I am enough and I am loved |

Lesson 14 – Instinct



“You cannot control the results, only your actions.”

Allan Lokos

Overview

The amygdala is one of the smallest parts of your brain. It processes emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety. When you are in distress, your emotional brain takes over and sets off an alarm that you are in danger. This triggers your amygdala to release a stress hormone called Cortisol in your brain. Cortisol is best known for producing the instinctual fight-flight-freeze response. This is what may cause you to overreact, lose control, and act on impulse, even though you are in danger. The good news is you can train your thinking brain to calm your emotional brain with your breath and be thoughtful about your choices instead of reacting instinctually.

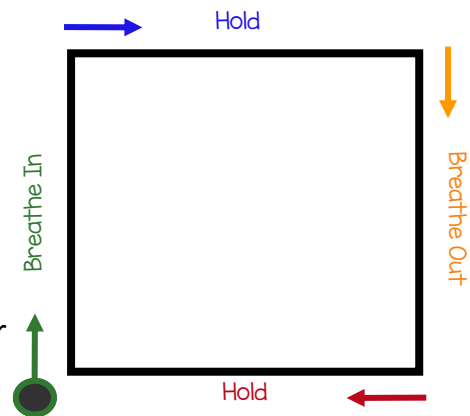
Explore and Practice – Square Breathing (also known as Box Breathing)

Square breathing is a type of paced breathing that follows a rhythm.

#1. Visualize or touch a square shape. Start at the bottom left side of the square.

#2. Breathe in and count to four as you trace the first side of the square. Hold your breath and count to four as you trace the top of the square.

#3. Breathe out and count to four as you trace the right side of the square. Hold your breath and count to four as you trace the bottom of the square. Repeat.



***See Appendix III for Square Breathing tracing pattern.**

Lesson 15 – Autonomic Nervous System



“Breath is like
a hug from
the inside out.”

Karla Dueck Thiessen

Overview

Your autonomic nervous system controls the function of your glands and organs (i.e. blood vessels, stomach, intestine, liver, kidneys, bladder, lungs, pupils, heart, and sweat, salivary, and digestive glands). If you breathe too rapidly or deeply when you are upset, you may begin to hyperventilate. This decreases the amount of gas in your blood (carbon dioxide or CO₂) and over-stimulates your nervous system. This can cause you to have a rapid heartbeat, feel short of breath, and feel lightheaded. When you are distressed, rapid breathing also triggers your amygdala into a fight-flight-freeze response. This may make you feel anxious, angry, fearful, or like you want to run away. Breathing in and out gently through your nose can help settle your nervous system, lower the production of stress hormones (Cortisol), and calm your fight-flight-freeze response.

Explore and Practice – Buteyko Breathing (adapted)

Buteyko Breathing is a technique that focuses on nasal breathing, breath-holding and breathing less deeply and rapidly. Buteyko Breathing helps normalize the CO₂ in your lungs.

- #1. Close your mouth and take a normal breath in and out through your nose.
- #2. Once your lungs are empty, pinch your nose closed and hold your breath while you count backwards from 5,4,3,2,1.
- #3. Let go, but keep your mouth closed and breathe in and out through your nose normally for 10 seconds. Repeat.

Lesson 16 – Stress



”The quality of our
breath expresses
our inner feelings.”

TKV Desikachar

Overview

Stress is your body’s physical, mental, or emotional response to feeling overwhelmed. When you feel stressed you may feel emotional, eat more or less, have nightmares, feel less secure, or have difficulty learning. Stress causes chemical changes in your body that can raise blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar levels. Controlled yoga breathing (Pranayama) can help you manage your stress. Pranayama is an important part of yoga, an exercise for physical and mental wellness. For centuries yoga practices have been used to improve focus, sleep, memory, self-esteem, learning, mindfulness, and reduce anxiety.

Explore and Practice – Bumblebee Breathing (adapted)

Bumblebee Breathing (also known as Bhramari Pranayama, Hum Breathing or Sound Breath) involves an extended exhale which is especially effective at calming the parasympathetic nervous system (also called the rest and digest system). This is achieved by producing a sound while closing the eyes. Plugging their ears makes it easier for young children to bring their focus inward.

- #1. Sit with your legs crossed and eyes closed.
- #2. Gently press the tips of your thumbs into your ears and cover your eyes with your fingers.
- #3. Breathe in through your nose, then hum the letter M as you breathe out through your nose. Repeat.



Lesson 17 – Problem Solving



“When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know; but when you listen, you may learn something new.”

Dalai Lama

Overview

Mindful problem solving can be defined as paying attention with openness, kindness, and curiosity. When you learn good problem-solving skills you become more confident, independent, and successful. “Stop”, “Breathe” and “Listen” is a phrase to help you learn the steps of good problem-solving.

Stop – Problems can grow quickly and you may say hurtful things when you speak before you think. You can react from a place of impulse, rather than intention which can cause hurt feelings. Stopping before you speak will give you time to regain focus and time to think about the most helpful way to communicate your feelings, emotions, and ideas.

Breathe – Breathing releases tension in your body and changes the energy in the room. Being calm creates space to be a creative problem-solver.

Listen – Listening gives the other person time to finish talking and makes room for problem-solving. Making an effort to see things from their point of view demonstrates that you value what they have to say.

Explore and Practice – Buddy Mirror This game fosters cooperation.

Developing an awareness of another person’s body language and facial expressions is helpful in problem-solving.

#1. Face a partner and decide who will be the leader first.

#2. Slowly start to match breaths, in and out, until you are in sync.

#3. The leader makes simple body or facial movements while their partner imitates the leader, like a mirror reflection. Switch leaders.

Lesson 18 – Listening To Your Body



“No one can listen to your body for you. To grow and heal, you have to take responsibility for listening to it yourself.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Overview

You can learn to listen to your body! Interoception is the sense that sends information to your brain. There are receptors inside your organs, including your skin. These receptors send signals to your brain and a physical sensation is felt on the inside or outside of your body. This helps regulate your vital functions like body temperature, hunger, thirst, digestion and heart rate.

The interoceptive system also helps you feel your emotions and be able to identify what your body is feeling (your face gets hot when you are angry, your eyes tear up when you are sad). When your interoception system is working well, you can sense what your body needs and take action to meet that need. Students with sensory processing issues may crave interoceptive input, or they may find it irritating. Sometimes you do not notice the sensations in your body. Breathing mindfully will help you listen to these sensations so you can understand and manage your emotions.

Explore and Practice – Sensation Exploration

Supplies: One feather and one ice cube for each student.

- #1. Rub your palms together for 20 seconds and notice the sensations in your hands.
- #2. Hold an ice cube and describe the feeling in your hand.
- #3. Tickle your nose with a feather. Notice and describe the sensation.
- #4. Dance to a song. Notice the sensation of your breath and heart rate.

Lesson 19 – Body Sensing



“Feelings come and go like clouds on a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

Overview

Body Sensing means listening to your body through mindfulness and movement. Body Sensing can help you learn how to cope with the stress in your everyday life. It involves tuning in to your senses to feel calm, grounded, and healthy. By calmly observing, reflecting upon and accepting the uncomfortable sensations in your body, you connect your body and mind. Body Sensing can help you learn where you store tension in your body and help you learn to mindfully release it. Practicing listening to your body can help you understand your patterns of behavior, such as over-reacting or shutting down. When you notice how your moods and emotions change your body, that awareness can shift the energy and help you relax and feel better.

Explore and Practice – Body Sensing Meditation

#1. Lie down on your back. Settle yourself in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose... 1,2,3. Breathe out through your nose...1,2,3. Feel your body sink into the surface under you.

#2. Wiggle your toes and notice if they feel cool or warm, restless or relaxed. Flex your ankles and let your feet relax. Feel your heels making a connection with the ground.

#3. Let yourself be still. There is nothing to do. When your mind gets busy or your body feels fidgety, gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Lesson 19 – Body Sensing Cont'

#4. Now move your attention to your legs. Do they feel heavy, light, warm, cold, or something else? Feel the backs of your legs resting on the floor.

#5. Next, move your attention around to your back. How does it feel against the bed or the floor? Notice how it rocks with each breath. Stretch your body and feel your spine lengthen and release.

#6. Place one hand on your belly. Pay attention to how your belly rises and falls like waves on the sea. You might feel something on the inside, maybe full or hungry. You might even feel emotions in your belly.

#7. Take three slow, gentle, large breaths. Place your other hand on your chest. Notice how your chest rises and falls with each breath. Notice if your chest feels heavy or light. Feel your chest open and relax with each breath. Feel the pause at the end of each breath.

#8. Turn your attention to your arms and hands. Feel the energy flowing through your hands.

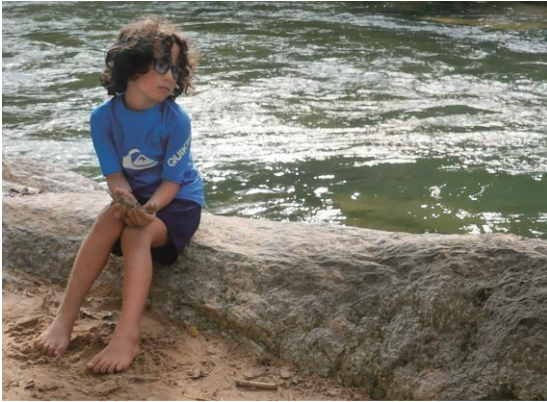
#9. Now move your attention to your neck and shoulders. Do they feel tense or tight? Shrug your shoulders up to your ears and let go. As your shoulders sink into the floor, feel your chest widen and your breath become easy.

#10. Bring your attention to your face and head. What expression do you have on your face right now? What else do you notice in your face, and in your mind? If you feel like it, yawn and feel everything stretch and soften. Smile gently.

#11. Finally, spend a few moments paying attention to the stillness in your body. Thank your mind and body for the way they work together as a whole.

#12. Take a breath and bring your attention back to the room. When you are ready you can open your eyes.

Lesson 20 – Grounding



“To ground is to pour your energies back into the earth and feel the warm calm of nature entering your body in exchange.”

Unknown

Overview

Many people struggle with anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear. Worry can also make you feel nervous, irritable or angry. When you feel anxious, you may think worried thoughts. Anxiety symptoms can also include trouble sleeping, tiredness, headaches, or stomachaches. Sometimes anxiety can grow into a panic attack and cause you to feel overwhelmed. During a panic attack, the body's fight-flight-freeze response takes over. While anxiety can build gradually, panic attacks usually come on suddenly.

Practicing grounding techniques is a good way to gain the skills you may need when anxiety or panic attacks surface. Practice grounding yourself when you are calm and practice it often. That way, it will be second nature when you find yourself needing to use it. Grounding is a powerful way to interrupt anxious thoughts in the moment! There are lots of different grounding exercises and you can learn which one works best for you to help you stay calm and grounded.

Explore and Practice – Senses Count Down (have a little snack ready)

- #1. Find 5 THINGS that you can SEE with your eyes.
- #2. Find 4 THINGS that you can TOUCH with your hands or feet.
- #3. Find 3 THINGS that you can HEAR with your ears.
- #4. Find 2 THINGS that you can SMELL with your nose.
- #5. Find 1 THING that you can TASTE with your tongue.

Lesson 21 – Present Moment



“Yesterday is history.
Tomorrow is a mystery.
Today is a gift.
That is why it is called
the present.”

Alice Morse Earle

Overview

Your mind is constantly busy, rarely allowing you to rest in the present moment. Every breath you take brings an opportunity to pause and observe yourself in the very present moment you are experiencing. When you focus on the present moment you are not distracted by the past or worries about the future. Staying in the present helps you live life more fully. Research shows that people who live in the now are happier, more optimistic, and more content.

Explore and Practice – Guided Breath Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes or lower your gaze.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose.

Focus on the rise and fall of your breath. On the sensation of your lungs filling, and feel the breath leave your body.

Your mind will wander; you will find yourself thinking about recess, or what you would like for a snack. That is ok.

Some call this wandering the Monkey in the mind.

Whenever you spot a Mind Monkey gently bring your attention back to your breath. Be present in this moment.

Turn your senses inwards. Let your day pass you by.

Lesson 21 – Present Moment Cont'd

Guided Breath Meditation Script Continued...

Watch your thoughts as they drift by...like a leaf in a stream.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Feel the muscles in your face relax.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Feel your head balancing level on your spine.

Feel your neck muscles loosen.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Let your shoulders sink down and back while keeping your spine straight.

Release all the tensions of the day.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Imagine your lungs filling with cool air.

Feel the openness of your chest.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Breathe easy, feel the rhythm of your breath.

Feel the muscles in your abdomen release.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Feel the emotions in your heart.

Are they pleasant or unpleasant?

What you are feeling is OK. Feelings come and go.

Watch your emotions as they float by...like a leaf in a gentle breeze.

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

Gradually let your eyes open and bring your attention back to the room.

How do you feel?

Does anyone want to share their experience?

Lesson 22 – Self-Care



“An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly.”

Unknown

Overview – Part One

Blowing bubbles is a soothing, mindful activity. It is hard to worry about the past or future when you are blowing bubbles. You can imagine those bubbles as your overwhelming or stressful thoughts and blow them away. You can use your imagination to care for your mind and body.

Your body is made up of matter and energy. The heart, brain, and muscles all function because of an electrical field of energy. Your body is like a sponge that releases and absorbs energy from your surroundings through electrical impulses, signals, and chemical reactions. If you pay attention, you can feel the energy of a room change when there is tension or excitement or when someone has positive or negative energy. You can learn to use your imagination to take care of yourself and protect yourself from overwhelming energy.

Explore and Practice – Bubble Superpower

Some students are sensitive to the energy around them and seem to be tuned in to the pulse of the classroom. Students can be taught to ground themselves through visualization techniques.

- #1. Take a deep breath in through your nose and pretend to blow a big bubble around your body, like a protective superhero shield.
- #2. Breathe out through your mouth and pretend the energy of your breath is making your bubble stronger. You feel calm and safe inside your bubble.
- #3. As you mindfully breathe in and out, you feel relaxed and comfortable.

Lesson 23 – SOS Release



“Breath grounds us
when the winds of emotion
tug and pull”

Karla Dueck Thiessen

Overview

When people experience events that emotionally overwhelm them, they sometimes hide their feelings instead of expressing them in a healthy way. You feel inner pain when you can't process experiences or accept your emotions, and express them through your body and mind. The unresolved emotions get trapped in your body and the unpleasant emotional energy can settle into your body like scar tissue. It is important to talk about your emotions and the feelings they create, to release painful emotional energy. When you are upset, it is important to mindfully breathe so that you can calm down, identify and talk about the problem you are having and look for a solution to the problem. Just being listened to can help you feel supported and less alone.

SOS has been a symbol of distress since 1905. It is a Morse code sequence and it looks like this: “. . . – – – . . .”. Many have used the code as a quick way to signal when help was needed. Because it is a universally recognized symbol, it lends itself to be used as a helpful acronym to use when you are in distress.

Explore and Practice – SOS Release (Adapted from Thomas Keeting's Welcoming Practice)

S – Settle your body and mind and take some deep cleansing breaths in and out through your nose. Notice the sensations in your body.

Lesson 23 SOS Release Con't

O – Observe and name the sensations you feel. Tune into whatever you are feeling. Sit with that feeling. Do not run away from it or fight it. Just feel what it is like to be experiencing it. The word “feel” can mean either to feel it in your body or feel it in your mind. Connect those two. Feel the emotion physically. Notice the sensations in your body. Are you tense or anxious or hot or fidgety or sleepy. Just observe the feeling, do not try to change it.

S – Say “hello” to the sensation (not necessarily the situation). Name and welcome the feeling. “Hello fear”, “hello pain”, “hello anger”. Your natural response is to resist uncomfortable feelings. However, anything you push away gets energized. By acknowledging your uncomfortable feelings, you take away their power over you. Accept what you feel.

Release – Let go of the feeling for this moment. This changes the flow of energy through your body... “I let go of the need to change this feeling” or “I let go of my anger” or “I let go of my fear”. Imagine the feeling floating away like a balloon soaring into the sky.

Lesson 24 – Nature’s Classroom



“You’ll find my heart in the deepest ocean, the highest mountains, the tallest trees. I’m in love with the sun, each star in the sky, this beautiful world and the journey of life.”

Christy Ann Martine

Overview

Nature is a wonderful classroom and a delight to your senses! Playing and learning outside help you become more self-aware and improves your health and wellbeing. Your body creates Vitamin D from direct sunlight, the fresh air cleans the lungs, and there are so many opportunities for physical activity and fun outside. Kids who get outside more are less likely to develop high cholesterol, heart disease, high blood pressure, and Type 2 Diabetes as adults. Playing outside in the fresh air also helps your lungs be stronger and your heart healthy.

As you explore and observe nature, you become more aware of and sensitive to the interdependence of people, plants, animals and the land. This larger awareness shifts focus from an “I” mentality to a broader understanding of “we”, as you become more aware of your relationship with other living things as part of a community of ecosystems.

Explore and Practice – Fresh Air Buddy Breathing (outside activity)

- #1. Find a partner and sit back to back. (Option – Try linking arms too)
- #2. As you inhale the fresh air in through your nose and exhale the fresh air out through your nose, notice each others’ breathing.
- #3. Slowly start to match breaths, in and out until you are in sync.
- #4. Carefully try to stand up while still pressing your backs together.

Lesson 25 – Musical Mindfulness



“The rhythm of the body,
the melody of the mind
and the harmony of the soul
create the symphony of life.”

B.K.S. Iyengar

Overview

Singing is a wonderful way to feel your breath. You can feel the vibrations in your chest, and it is a pleasant feeling. Singing stimulates what is called the nucleus accumbens, the pleasure center of the brain. Singing exercises your lungs, relaxes muscles, lowers stress, boosts immunity and lung function, enhances memory, and improves mental and emotional health.

Explore and Practice – Mindfulness Song Tune: The Wheels on the Bus (Slow)

Be present and calm, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

Be present and calm, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

When you are upset, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

When you are upset, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

Accept what you feel, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

Accept what you feel, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

Be kind to yourself, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

Be kind to yourself, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

Keep learning each day, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

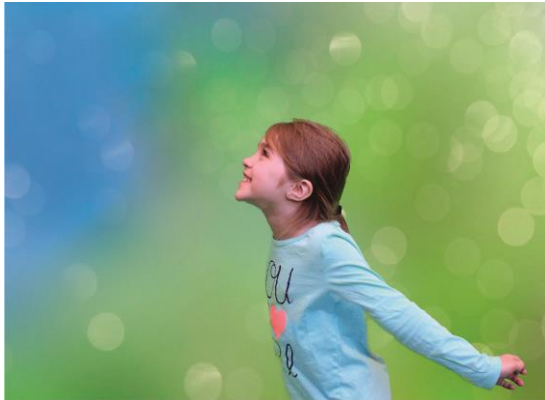
Keep learning each day, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

When you're feeling glad, breathe in and out, in and out, in and out.

When you're feeling glad, breathe in and out, be mindful today.

Actions: Student can use the Pace Breathing action (lesson #5).

Lesson 26 – The Gift of Breath



“When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.”

Marcus Aurelius

Overview

Your life is a gift. Every breath you take is an opportunity to pause and notice the things and people in your life you can be thankful for. Being thankful means you appreciate and show gratitude for the gifts in your life. Life has many ups and downs. During difficult times, finding things to be thankful for is even more important. Gratitude can help you cope with stressful events, regulate your negative emotions, and improve your well-being. With every breath, give thanks for what today brings.

Explore and Practice – Thankful Heart Meditation

- #1. Place your hand on your chest and focus your attention on your heart.
- #2. Take in a deep breath in through your nose for a count of four and feel your chest expand as it takes in oxygen.
- #4. As you breathe out slowly through your nose, thank your breath for keeping you alive and well.
- #5. Take a deep breath in through your nose for a count of four and think of someone or something you are grateful for.
- #6. As you breathe out slowly through your nose, thank that person or thing in your mind. “I am thankful for _____.” Imagine the gratitude flowing out from your heart, through your whole body, and out into the world.
- #7. Repeat this as many times as you like.

Thankful Jar Activity - (Print a copy of Appendix IV for each student)

Draw a picture in the jar of something you are thankful for.

Lesson 27 – Acceptance



“You are the sky.
Everything else
is just the weather.”

Pema Chödrön

Overview

It is normal to become overwhelmed by your big emotions. It is important to remember that emotions come and go like clouds in the sky. Breathing mindfully can help you feel calm and clear, no matter what life brings your way.

Explore and Practice – Changing Faces

If possible, begin the lesson by taking the students outside on a breezy partly sunny, partly cloudy day. Have the students lie in the grass as they look up at the sky and watch the clouds pass by. (Option - look out the window or watch a cloud video online.)

Next, gather the students in a circle and use a Buddha Board to draw a face. Elicit ideas from the students about the feelings that someone might have with that face. Watch as the face disappears...just like the clouds in the sky, emotions do not last either - they come and go.

Cloud Meditation *Invite the students to lie down again with their eyes closed as you read this mindful meditation.*

Notice the sensation of lying in the soft grass.

Feel the warmth of the earth below your body.

Breathe in and feel the cool air entering your nostrils.

Breathe out and feel the warm air leaving your nostrils.

Focus on your breathing. Notice your body relaxing and softening.

Lesson 27 – Acceptance Cont'

In your mind, picture a sky filled with clouds.

Some are white and fluffy. Some are dark and gloomy.

The clouds are drifting by, just like the feelings you have.

Sometimes you feel happy, sometimes you feel sad. We have lots of feelings: happy, excited, sad, angry, nervous, annoyed, depressed, scared.

These feelings come and go, just like the clouds in the sky.

Your feelings are like clouds.

As the clouds come closer, they may cast shadows across the landscape of your mind. Just watch them as they drift by.

More clouds pass by and then float away.

Breathe in and imagine that your feelings are nothing but clouds in the sky.

Breathe out, and imagine the wind blowing the clouds away.

As you focus on your breathing, all the clouds disappear one by one, and your mind becomes clear.

As the clouds move away beyond the horizon of your mind, you become aware of the quiet spaces. Your mind is like a wide-open blue sky.

Your breathing is slow, and your body is relaxed.

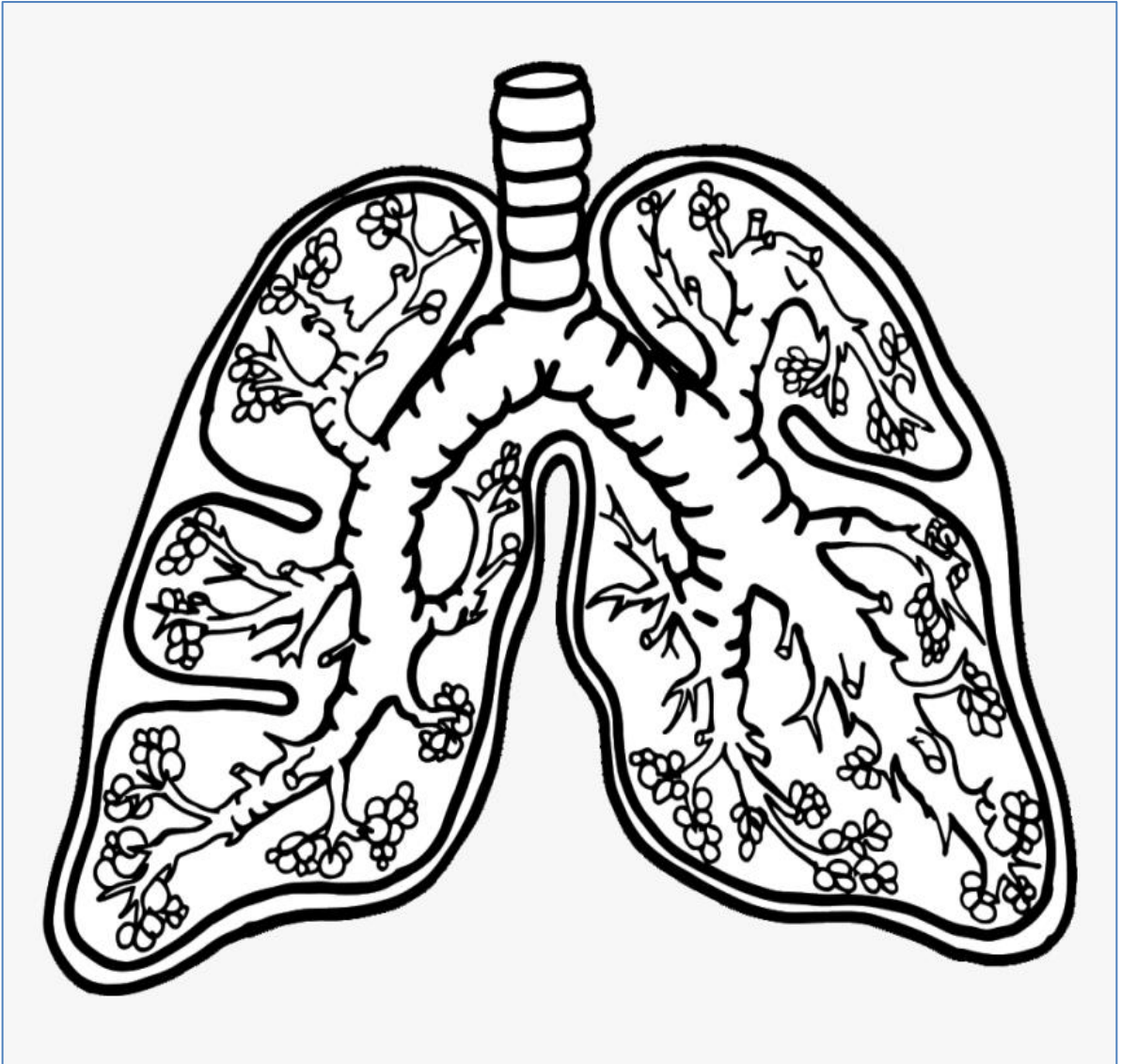
You feel calm and peaceful.

You feel the warm rays of the sun shining down on you. All is well.

Breathe in and relax as the warmth spreads through your whole body.

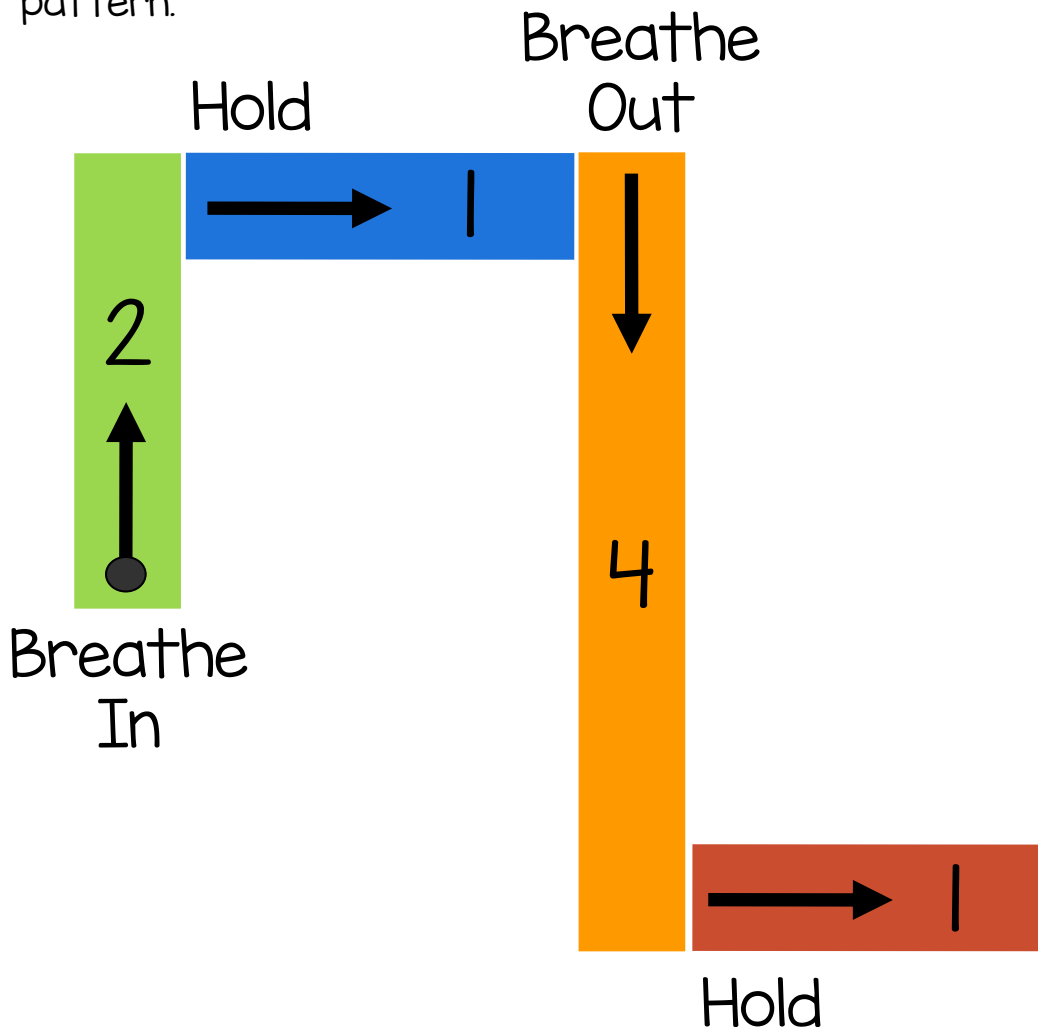
When you are ready, bring your attention to the present and slowly open your eyes.

Lungs



Pattern Breathing Template

- #1. Breathe out before you start a new cycle of breath.
- #2. Close your mouth. Breathe in through your nose as you count to two and notice the air filling up your belly.
- #3. Pause. Hold your breath for a count of one.
- #4. Blow the breath out through your mouth as you count to four. Notice the air leaving your belly.
- #5. Pause. Hold your breath for a count of one. Repeat pattern.

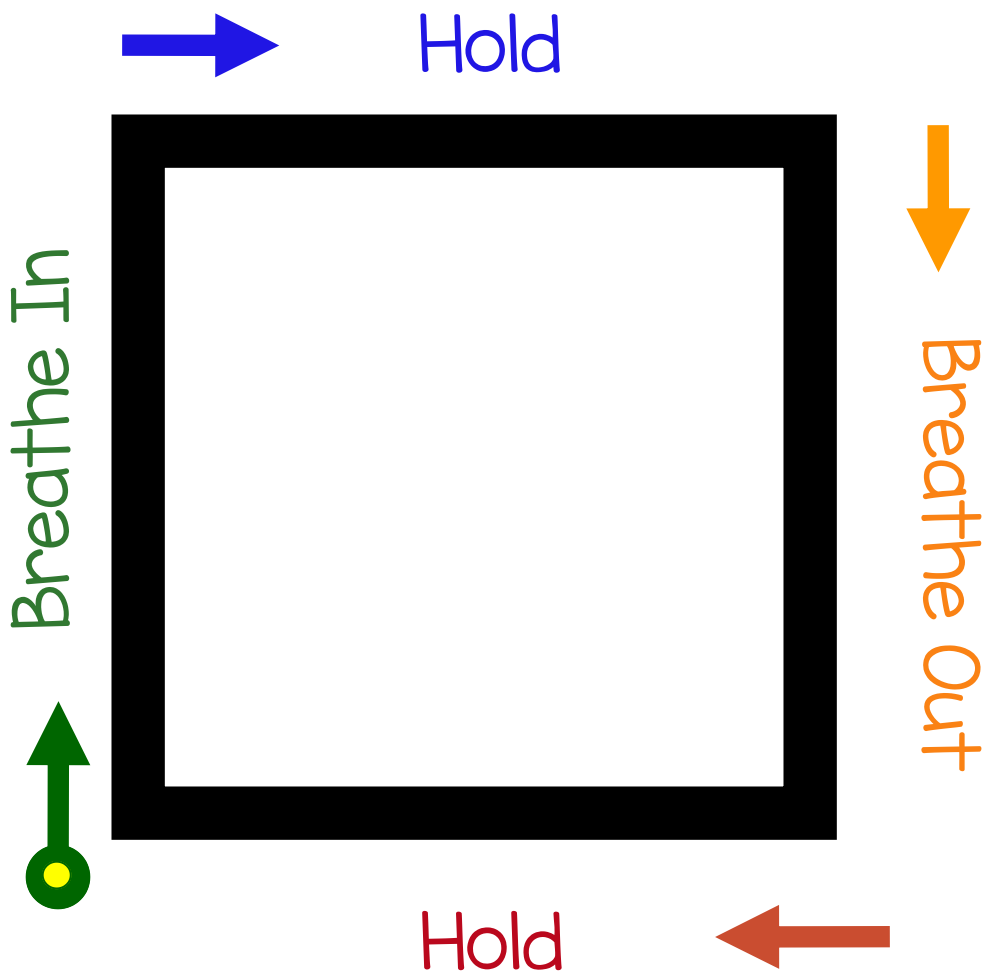


Square Breathing Template

#1. Visualize or touch a square shape. Start at the bottom left side of the square.

#2. Breathe in and count to four as you trace the first side of the square. Hold your breath and count to four as you trace the top of the square.

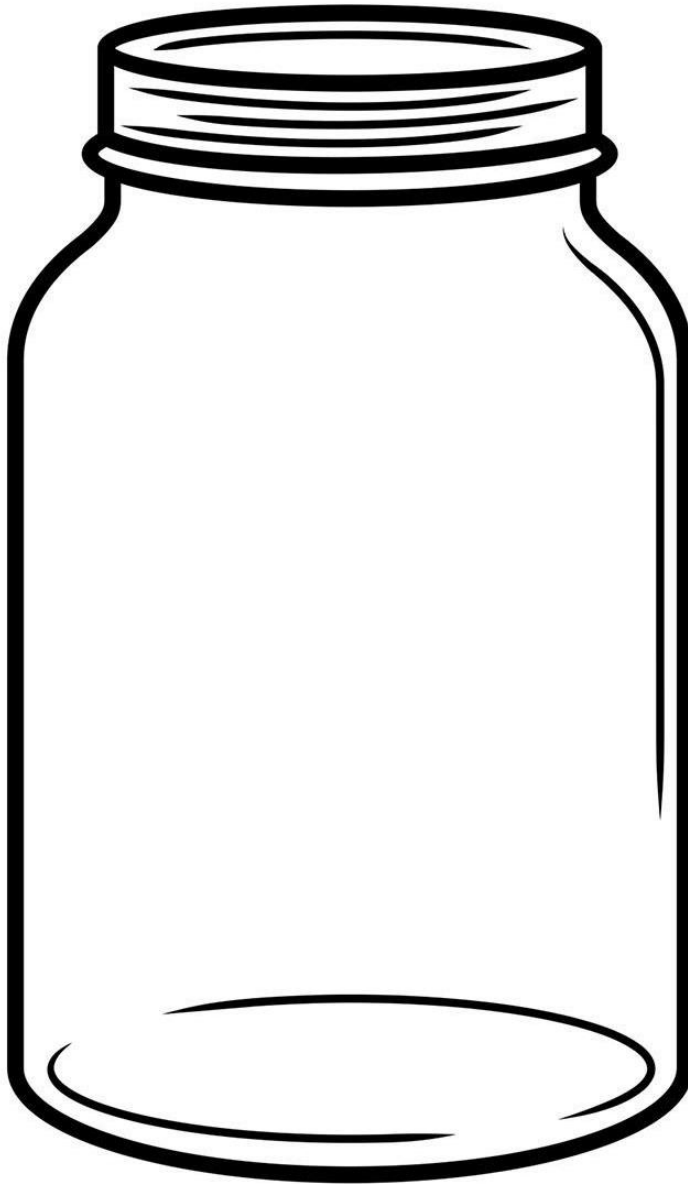
#3. Breathe out and count to four as you trace the right side of the square. Hold your breath and count to four as you trace the bottom of the square. Repeat.



My Thankful Jar

Name: _____

Date: _____



I am thankful for _____

This collection of mindful breathing lessons has evolved from 25+ years of learning and teaching. I am grateful to the many authors, educators, students, and experiences that have influenced me over the course of my career. Thank you to Revanna Powell and Kim Werestiuk for sharing their knowledge, and to Melissa Chandler Wiens, Heidi Defehr, and Jubilee Dueck Thiessen for their editorial guidance. Heartfelt gratitude to my family for their love and support.

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All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewers, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Summary: Through simple rhythmic poetry and relatable pictures, the author and her Nursery/Kindergarten students demonstrate the benefits and ease of mindful breathing.

Subjects: breath, breath exercises, mindfulness, mindful breathing, feelings, emotions, senses, self-regulation, self-awareness, focused attention, positive well-being, stress/anxiety reduction, relaxation, mental/physical health, problem solving skills, children, nursery/kindergarten students.

The events portrayed in the book by the students are fictitious. Photographs of Brock Corydon School students taken by Karla and Jubilee Dueck Thiessen with parents' permission. Swing photo and backgrounds for chroma key photos: public domain; newborn: iStock.com/Sean O'Riordan; chalkboard: www.freepik.com; earth: Arek Socha; river: Erika Black; siblings: Donna Riediger; dandelion clock: Michael Schwarzenberger.

Children are masters of living in the present moment and they naturally embrace the concept of mindfulness. Teaching children to be aware of their breath helps them to mindfully connect with their body, mind and spirit. Breath is a tool we carry with us wherever we go and mindful breathing is a simple and effective way of helping shift our thoughts and emotions. Research shows that stress and anxiety are toxic to our bodies. Mindful breathing helps children and adults process stress and anxiety in healthier ways and helps them cope with big emotions. Mindful breath practices should be the foundation of all learning because mindful, conscious children can embody the change we need in the world!

This companion guide is designed to be used alongside *It Starts With A Breath... a book about mindful breathing*. Each practical lesson includes an overview for parents and educators about the foundations of breath practices as well as quick and easy breathing exercises to do with children.



Reviews of *It Starts With A Breath...a book about mindful breathing*

"Mindfulness seems to be one of the most immediately impactful concepts. I love how Karla boils one thousand pages of Jon Kabat-Zinn into a children's book." **Kevin Kohut, parent**

"Karla's book is a sweet introduction to breathing mindfully. With rising levels of anxiety and stress at all age levels, it is increasingly apparent that we need to intervene early and teach our children how to calm themselves. Through simple poetry and photos, Karla teaches young children to pay attention to their breath when they feel upset as a means of returning to a state of peace and calm." **Dr. Michèle Keijzer, Counsellor**

"This book is a timely reminder for adults and a great lesson for kids to slow down and breathe. It puts into words what is happening to your body during emotional times. By providing some simple exercises, it gives kids permission to own their feelings and gives them skills to reduce stress and anxiety."

Natalie Sundmark, parent

