

BREATHING PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION: The respiratory system has a regulating effect on all our body systems (heart, nerves, muscles, digestion). We can learn to relax and control our whole body by practicing these breathing exercises.

1. BALLOON BREATHING

Sit up straight, place one hand over your stomach and concentrate on your breathing. Feel how your stomach fills up as you breathe in and goes down as you breathe out. Imagine a balloon inside your stomach that fills itself with air as you inhale and empties itself of air as you exhale. Try to feel the balloon with your hand. Notice your whole body relaxing as your breathing becomes deep and full. Practice this exercise for about one minute and use this technique whenever you feel anxious.

Alternate instructions for young children: “Lie on your back and place a teddy bear or other stuffed animal on your stomach. Watch the animal as you breathe and try to make it move up and down as you breathe in and out.”

2. BREATHING WITH SOUNDS

This exercise can be done with children in a group or individually. Inhale deeply and make a soft sound, such as AH, HA, O, OO or MMM, as you exhale. You can also use animal noises. In a group, select a leader to choose the sound and have the others copy the sound. A variation of this exercise is to make the sound last as long as possible, followed by a deep, full inhalation.

3. BREATHING BY NUMBERS

A. Calming Breath: For this breathing practice, try to make your in-breath and out-breath equal in time. Do this by counting slowly (one second for each count) as you breathe in and then counting for the same amount of time as you breathe out. Practice this breathing exercise for about two minutes once or twice each day, and use it whenever you feel tense or anxious.

B. Counting Breath: This exercise can be introduced as a method of relaxation involving counting, where each count represents one second. Each in-breath is the same for the count of 2, and each out-breath increases by 2, as follows:

In 2—Out 2

In 2—Out 4

In 2—Out 6

In 2—Out 8

In 2—Out 10