



BREATH-COUNTING MINDFULNESS PRACTICE FOR TWEENS AND TEENS

"The future depends on what we do in the present."

—Mahatma Gandhi

OVERVIEW

Students learn to focus on their breathing patterns by counting each breath.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily
- At the start of a school day, to close a class, during a classroom meeting, or a student's one-on-one meeting with a school mental health professional
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- <10 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice focusing and redirecting their attention to their breath by counting in breaths and out breaths

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Try this [Mindful Breathing practice](#) before leading students in the practice below. Check in with yourself before doing the practice and again afterwards. Do you notice a change in how you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- You can begin this activity by inviting students to lie down. However, if they prefer to remain sitting upright in a chair (or on the floor) that is fine, too.
- Click [here](#) for the audio recording of this practice featured in Mindful magazine, or use the script below to lead your students through this practice

THE PRACTICE

- **Lie down [or sit down] and let your body rest.** Notice whatever you're thinking right now, however you feel right now.
- **When you're ready, take three deep breaths** while paying attention to the rising and falling of your belly. We're not trying to do anything special except just notice the sensation—what it feels like.
- **Place your hand on your belly.** As best as you're able, pay attention to the rocking of your hand with each breath.
- **Recognize that your mind will go off somewhere else, over and over again, or you might feel restless—all of that's normal, all of that's totally fine.** Each time you notice your attention has gone somewhere else, come back again to your hand rising and falling on your belly.
- **If you'd like, count your breaths, sticking to small groups.** Perhaps you could count up to five and then start again at one.
- **Each time you lose track, simply start over.** Note any tendency to get frustrated—there's no need to, the distractions will happen. Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, continuing at your own pace... and coming back again to breathing in and breathing out.

- **Wherever your mind’s gone, allow those thoughts to be for just now.** Allow them to show up and then continue on. Thoughts are normal. Everyone has thoughts continually throughout the day, throughout this type of practice.
- **Come back gently, and over and over again to the feeling of breathing, right now.** Allow thoughts and feelings to show up because they will and then each time come back again.
- **Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, and then again coming back to the next breath—not trying to fix anything or change anything at that moment, or at this next moment.**
- **At some other time during the day, there might be something to act on, but right now, simply lie here, guiding your attention to the rocking of your hand, to the sensation of breathing.**
- **And when you’re ready, if you’d like, opening your eyes, or continuing to lie still.**

CLOSURE

- Invite students to describe their experiences.
- Ask them what they noticed about their ability to count their breath.
- Assure them that the mind is easily distracted—a key to mindfulness is to continue redirecting your attention to an “anchor” (e.g., the breath) as your mind wanders.
- Ask students when and where they might want to try this activity again in the future.

EXTENSIONS

- Consider using this practice in conjunction with other mindfulness activities, like a body scan practice or a loving-kindness practice.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Were they calmer and more focused?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Mindful breathing is a core mindfulness practice, and [research](#) with adults suggests that breath-counting, specifically, can improve mood and reduce mind wandering. Further, a [review](#) of 24 mindfulness studies with K-12 students indicates that mindfulness can increase students’ ability to focus and bolster their resilience to stress.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“Mindful breathing” is a simple process—one that involves observing the breath and redirecting attention to the breath when the mind wanders--and is a tool that students can easily use when faced with a stressful situation.

This particular activity gives students an anchor for their attention—their breath—a place to focus when they might feel carried away by emotions. However, students also receive additional supports with mindful breathing as they practice: 1) breath counting and 2) following the rising-and-falling movement of their bellies under their

hands. These components come together to help students focus their attention while potentially easing their stress and/or anxiety.

SOURCE

Mark Bertin, MD, adapted from [Mindful Parenting for ADHD](#) and "[A Mindful Breath-Counting Practice for Teens and Tweens](#)" and originally featured on www.mindful.org