

# Mindfulness Activities

## Mindful Breathing Exercises

### **Belly Breath/ Balloon Breath**

Have child place their hands on their belly and explain to them that their belly is just like a balloon. Breathing in, we allow the stomach to expand out making a balloon, breathing out, the stomach collapses back down.

Explain to the child that when we are worried or upset we forget to fill up the balloon and that results in our body not getting as much oxygen as it needs. When this happens we physically don't feel well and our brain doesn't work as well as it should.

### **Anchor Breath Script**

(Taken from *The Way of Mindful Education* by Daniel Rechtschaffen)

Step 1:

*Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get distracted when you are trying to pay attention to a teacher speaking or to a game you are playing? Your mind may even get distracted as I am talking now. The mind is kind of like a little puppy that keeps chewing up the pillows and making a mess on the floor. The puppy needs some training, just like your mind. Have you ever done something that you knew wasn't a good idea, but you couldn't help yourself? We are going to build your attention muscles with the strong focus that is needed to succeed at sports, playing a musical instrument, or taking a test.*

*Luckily there is a science to the mind. The more we relax and focus on what is happening right now, in the present moment, the more our minds naturally settle down. When we relax, we feel happier and we are better at doing everything we want to do. When we are stressed, our minds and bodies don't work as well and we feel crummy inside. The more you focus on your breath the better you will feel.*

Step 2:

*The breath is also an incredibly useful tool in helping us calm the mind in emotionally charged situations and helps us to pause and reflect before reacting. Breathing mindfully can be used at any time and place throughout the day- when we are taking a test, waiting for a friend, or lying in bed at night. We call this breathing exercise the anchor breath because it can be used like an anchor of a ship to keep you grounded. Even if big waves of fear, sadness, or excitement come, you can use your anchor breath to calm your mind and body.*

*Take one hand and put it on your belly. See what you notice in your belly as you sit silently breathing in and out. What did you notice? Now you can let your hand drop, and let's sit for a little longer, simply feeling the breath in our bellies. When you notice that you are thinking, gently bring your mind back to the breath. Whatever arises- thoughts, emotions, sensations- welcome them without judgment and then bring your attention back to the breath. (After about a minute, or longer if it seems like the children can sit comfortably, ask them to open their eyes. Ask them how this felt... how do they think this might be able to help them?)*

## **Counting Breath**

This can be done a couple of ways...

One way is to just have the children close their eyes or softly look down and count their breaths. Every time they inhale, they count. This helps them to focus their minds on their breath. I explain that if their mind starts to wander not to get upset with themselves or judge themselves as “bad” but to simply go back to focusing on the breath. I explain that this is an exercise that helps them train their brain to focus on what they want it to focus on.

The other way is to use counting to slower and deepen each breath. I explain that they are going to practice taking longer inhales and exhales which will help their bodies to calm down quicker. At first I start with “3”... They are to continue to inhale until I get to the count of 3... Then, instead of letting it all out at once, I tell them they are going to do the same thing when they exhale, exhaling slowly until I get to the count of 3. As they get better at this breath control, I “challenge” them and we bump it up to 5, and so on. I also will insert a “hold” in between the inhale and exhale.

## **Lion’s Breath**

1. Explain: “We are going to do a breath called the Lion’s Breath in order to let go of feelings or thoughts that we no longer want. This breath is a very powerful way to get those thoughts and feelings out from inside of us and to push them far away.”
2. Suggest: “Imagine that you are a mighty lion. You have a giant roar. Sit cross-legged and sit up tall like a proud lion. And get ready to let your roar go.”
3. Model: “I’m going to think of a feeling that I would like to let go, or a thought that I want to release. Now I squeeze my hands in fists, holding tight that feeling or thought and scrunch up my face getting ready to roar. I take a deep breath in and let my roar out, sticking my tongue out at the same time and stretching my arms out wide in front of me, opening my hands wide.”
4. Guide: “Now it is your turn. Sit up tall. Think of the feeling or thought that you would like to roar out. Scrunch that feeling or thought into your hands and pull them up tight in front of you. Now scrunch up your face tight. Take a deep breath in. And. . . ROAR!!!! it out, sticking your tongue out and letting your arms and hand stretch out wide in front of you.”

## **Mindful Awareness Exercises**

### **Sit and Listen (MindUp’s “Core Practice”)**

Children begin by sitting tall on the floor or in their chairs. Explain that they are going to train their brain to focus today. Tell them that you are going to make a sound with a chime (or bell) and they are to listen to the sound until it fades out and they can’t hear it any more, raising their hand when they can no longer hear it. Demonstrate and then they practice. Then take it to the next step and explain that they are going to do the same thing except this time but they will start with their eyes closed. When they can no longer hear the sound they are to open their eyes. Again, demonstrate and have them practice.

Next, explain that they are going to combine focusing on belly breath with focusing on the sound of the chime. Tell them they will start with listening to the sound of the chime and then when they can no longer hear the chime, they should switch their focus to their belly breath. Explain that if their mind is having trouble staying focused on their breath they can count their breaths. After taking 3-5 breaths (You can increase this number as their ability to focus increases.) sound the chime again. Tell the children that when they can no longer hear the chime, they should slowly open their eyes.

## **Mindful Relaxing**

Explain that they are going to see what happens when their bodies go from a relaxed state with a calm heart to an excited state with a rapid heart rate. First explain how we can find our heart rate by finding our pulse. Demonstrate how to find your heart rate and have them practice finding it. Explain that they are now in a relaxed state and we are going to figure out what are heart rate is when we are in a relaxed state. Time them for 15 seconds and have them share their number of beats... Take notice that everyone's heart rate can be a little different.

Next explain that when we get stressed or nervous our body has a physical reaction and part of that reaction is an increased heart rate. The good thing is that we can slow down our heartbeat which will help our brain to think more clearly. We can do this by mindfully relaxing. To demonstrate this we are first going to raise our heart rate through exercise. Brainstorm some exercises that they can do within the space that they have. Tell them to pick the exercise that they would like to do and when they hear "Move!" they are to start doing the exercise until they hear the word "Stop!". Try to let them go for 1 minute. After they stop have them quickly find their pulse and again time them for 15 seconds while they count their heart beats.

Next have them sit down, close their eyes and bring all their attention to their breathing. Have them take several deep, slow breaths. Tell them to focus on how relaxed their arms are... their neck... their back and their legs... feeling their shoulders relax... Have them take their pulse again... giving them 15 seconds to count.

Discuss what happened and how this strategy of Mindful Relaxing can help them when they start to get stressed about other things.

## **Slow Motion**

Becoming aware of our movements helps us with coordination, knowing our personal boundaries and again requires us to focus our attention. Explaining this to the students and telling them that you are going to help them train their brain to become better at physical activities as well as improve their ability to focus. Point out that this is what professional athletes and dancers have to do. They have to be able to focus on each and every muscle that is being used and how to get them to work together.

Start with a simple activity such as writing their name. Explain that while they are writing their name in slow motion, see if they can actually feel the muscles in their fingers, hands and maybe even up into their wrists. Discuss how it felt... discuss what the result was in regards to their handwriting... was it better than it usually is?

You can repeat this with a large motor skill such as walking or tossing a ball back and forth with a partner... feeling each muscle, watching each movement... are their movements more accurate? What does it feel like? Remind them that this is being mindful... bringing awareness to what they are doing.

## **Balancing Exercises**

Another way of helping to train our brain is to practice having our body and brain work together to balance. Explain to the students that they are going to work on improving their balance. Discuss what it means to be balanced and do they remember a time when they had to work really hard to stay balanced.

Have them begin by planting their feet into the ground taking slow deep breaths and relaxing. Next have them find a focal point... something that doesn't move that they can stare at while they are trying to balance. Have them start by putting all their weight into one foot and lifting their heel off the ground. Tell them when they are ready they can slowly lift their foot off the ground as they continue to stare at their focal point. Tell them if they lose their balance that's okay, bring your foot down and when you feel balanced, try again. After practicing on one side, have them try the other side.

Discuss how they felt... Was one side easier than the other?... Did they get better each time? Why do they think that is?... Did the focal point make a difference? Emphasize that when our bodies and brains work together, we can focus and think more clearly.

## **Guided Imagery**

### **Imagination Vacation**

There are many resources for sample scripts of guided meditations. The following is an example of one.

"Let's learn how to relax our bodies and minds. Are you comfortable? OK, now let's start with something called a Balloon Breath. Let's breath in very deeply and fill up our tummy like we're filling up a big balloon. Doesn't that fill good? Give your balloon a color. What color is your balloon? Make it really big and beautiful, as you fill it up completely. Breathing in from your nose, fill up your balloon completely and when it's full, exhale the air out and watch your balloon completely deflate! Isn't that amazing? Again a very deep breath, and now, exhale... very good.

Now imagine that you are floating on a huge, white cloud. Feel how this fluffy light cloud totally supports your body and makes you feel so peaceful and light. The cloud seems to wrap itself around you so comfortably so you feel safe and warm. You have a feeling of being loved and cared for. It feels so great. Feel yourself floating on this soft wispy cloud, enjoying the gentle motion of this loving cloud as it glides and softly sways. There is a feeling of total peace and easiness... it feels so wonderful to just relax here.

Now in just a moment, there is a large balloon that is going to float up near your cloud. This balloon is your blow away worry balloon. It's going to take away any worry you have, far far away. See that balloon coming up, floating close to your cloud. Picture the balloon any color you want.

Now, put any worry or fear you have up into the balloon..... just watch that worry go into the balloon and see how tightly and nicely the big balloon holds onto that worry for you. Whatever it is that you are worried about, just see that going into the big balloon. Feel it lifting up out of your body and going straight into that balloon. The balloon is helping you and loves to take away that worry for you. Now, the balloon is quickly floating far far away. In the distance now, you see that balloon just pops a HUGE pop! And your worry is completely gone! How wonderful that feels! Now you see another balloon floating up to you on your nice fluffy cloud. This balloon is a different color. What color is this balloon? Now this is another blow away worry balloon and it's here to help! So put another worry into this balloon and watch it do the same as the first did.... it quickly floats

far far away and then POPS! Wow... this is really amazing!

(Continue with new balloons coming until you ask...) Do you need anymore balloons or are all your worries gone? (Proceed according to your child's answer, if there are more worries, use more balloons, if not continue with script). If you look below you now, you will see that in fact there is someone down there sending up these beautiful helpful big balloons to you. It's someone you love very much and who loves you very much! How wonderful it is to know you are so loved and cared for! Wave to that person and send love back as a Thank You! Just by imagining you are sending love to that person, you are. So send love now.

Now that all your worries are gone, you start to feel the sun shining it's beautiful warm rays done on you. You start to feel a very warm, loving feeling in your heart. You feel so wonderful and so loved! You are such a wonderful and special child! You are unique and amazing. Always remember that and keep that special feeling in your heart all the time. There is no one else like you. You are very important and no one can do exactly what you do in the way you do it.

Now when you are ready, you can float back down on your soft cloud and back to this room. It was a wonderful journey!"

Script: Mellisa Dormoy, copyright ShambalaKids 2013. [www.ShambalaKids.com](http://www.ShambalaKids.com)

## **Pebble Meditation**

Pebble meditation is a way of giving the child something concrete to hold onto that symbolizes what they want to focus on. It can be one pebble or a collection of pebbles that symbolize what they are thinking about. There could be a mother pebble and father pebble and when they are missing them or needing to feel safe, they can hold their pebble and focus on the feeling they have when they are together and they do feel safe. The book "A Handful of Quiet... Happiness in Four Pebbles" by Thich Nhat Hanh, has the pebbles stand for Flower, Mountain, Water and Space... Choosing the "Flower Pebble" when they need to be reminded how amazing and beautiful they are and how to look at things from a fresh point of view... Choosing the "Mountain Pebble" when they need to feel solid and safe... Choosing the "Water Pebble" when they are needing a sense of calm and a focus, reflection, on what is actually in the present moment... And choosing the "Space Pebble" when they are needing space and a sense of freedom to be themselves.

## **Body Scan**

Again, there are many scripts you can find for this or you can create your own. I am copying one that I have used.

### **Children's Body Scan Meditation**

*by CHERYL on NOVEMBER 8, 2012*

in [GUIDED MEDITATION](#)

Let's begin by lying down in a comfortable position on the floor, with your arms resting gently on the ground, and your eyes closed. Feel the weight of your body as it rests on the earth. Feel the earth supporting you. Feel your feet resting firmly on the ground. Pretend that you are an ice cream cone

on a hot summer day and simply melt into the ground. Rest your attention only on the sound of my voice. Let all of the other sounds in the room fade away.

I am going to lead you on a scan of your body as a way of getting centered and relaxed – a reminder that you can be at home and at peace in your own body.

Start by settling your attention on your feet. Feel the weight of your feet as they rest on the earth. Notice the position of your feet, the sensations inside the feet, travel along the bottom and tops of your feet to your toes. Just notice what you feel there. . . . Notice each toe and move your attention from toe to toe noticing how they feel. Notice the space between the toes.

Now bring your attention to the tops of your feet and then to your ankles. Bring your attention up your shins and around to your calves. Notice how the backs of your legs feel. Now, bring your attention to your knees, the front of your knees and the back of your knees. Notice how they feel.

Bring your attention to your thighs, the front of your thighs and the back of your thighs. Now move your attention up to your hips and see what sensations you feel there. Notice how your lower back is resting on the earth.

Move your attention to the back body, to the lower back, to the mid back, to your shoulder blades. You may feel stiffness or tension, whatever you encounter, simply notice it.

Keep moving your attention around to the front of your body, to your abdomen and rib cage. Notice how that feels as you inhale and exhale. Slowly move your awareness to your chest, noticing any sensations you find there. Notice the lungs themselves, as you breathe . . . Does the breath reach into all areas of the lungs? Notice the heart itself, and the sensations and movements within the heart. Notice how it feels. . .

Move your attention back to the tops of your shoulders. Slowly move your awareness down the upper arms, feeling your elbows, your forearms. Let your attention rest for a moment on your hands – the palms of your hands . . . the backs of your hands. See if you can feel each separate finger, each fingertip. . . .

Slowly move your attention back up to the top of the hands, back up the arms to your shoulders and neck. Notice your neck and your throat. Notice any tension or tightness . . . notice the feeling of breath as it passes in and out with ease.

Bring your awareness slowly up to the front of your face. Be aware of what you encounter. Tightness, relaxation, pressure. Turn your attention to your eyes as they gaze inward, and feel the weight of your eyelids as they rest over your eyes . . . Move your attention to your nose. Notice the feeling of air as it passes through your nostrils. Is it warm or cool? Feel your cheeks and your jaw. Is your jaw clenched or loose? Just notice what you are feeling and continue to breathe through these sensations. . . . Feel your mouth, your teeth, your lips, the light pressure of skin on skin, softness, coolness.

Bring your attention to the back of the head, over the curve of your skull, notice your ears as they buffer the sounds of the room. Now, bring your attention to the top of your head and simply feel whatever sensations are there—tingling, pulsing or the absence of sensation.

Now bring your body as a whole into your awareness, and take a moment to scan through your entire body. Allow your breath to become more full, taking a few deep breaths. . .

Gently and gradually regain awareness of your surroundings. When you feel ready, open your eyes.

## **Mindful Attitude**

### **PT's**

Positive Thoughts... Affirmations... This can be done numerous ways. I give my students a little card each day with a "PT" on it. This could also be written on the board and the students could write it in their journal or assignment book each morning. I use this message as my teachable moment during our Morning Meeting. Many times I'm just "planting seeds" that won't bloom for a while... but they are planted and if they are written down somewhere they can be revisited.

### **Mindful vs. Not Mindful**

This is just that constant teachable moment... deciding if our actions are mindful or not mindful.

### **Gratitude Jar**

Mindful practice for what we have and what is real and present. I just took a large pretzel container and had them put a "gratitude slip" into the jar once a week and on Fridays we would pull some out during our class meeting to share. The students could choose whether or not they wanted to write their names on them.