



Natalie's Quick Tips: helping kids to calm down, focus attention or relax

When a child is upset, unfocused or finding it difficult to 'come down' from high energy activities or experiences, one of the best ways to help is to draw their attention to their breath and their body. These are very concrete things to focus on and they are always with us – by getting out of our heads and into the physical sensations of our bodies, we can help to diffuse strong emotions and intense physical reactions.

Sometimes focusing on the breath is difficult for children (for example, if they are panicking, or particularly vulnerable). You probably know in yourself that when you feel anxious, uptight or upset, the last thing that helps is someone telling you to calm down! In this case, a good place to start is with something I call 'The Noticing Game' - outlined below. You can use this game as a 'warm up' to a guided relaxation.

Teachers, parents and carers can use the notes below to read aloud to children, or simply play the audio files that accompany the guide. Always try the technique yourself before you teach a child how to do it. And remember that what works for some may not work for others – how we relax and what feels comfortable is very individual.

I recommend using the techniques as either a start to the day, a useful 'emergency' tool if things go awry during the day, or as a nice close. The body scan is particularly useful at bedtime.





The Noticing Game:

To help calm your body and mind you can use your senses. You just need to pay attention to sound, sight and touch to try it out. All you need to do is listen to the instructions and then use your senses to find the answers. Try to be silent, just find the answers for yourself and then at the end, you can talk about what you noticed.

- Notice three different things you can hear (pause for 30-60 seconds)
- Notice three different things you can see (pause for 30-60 seconds)
- Notice three different things you can feel (pause for 30-60 seconds)

Guidance notes: sometimes it can help to describe what you can hear / see/ feel as examples (birdsong, voices, traffic, red sheets, grey carpet, book, cold feet, soft pyjamas, shoes on my feet). If a child is particularly distraught, you can begin the game simply by leading them into their senses. For example, "I know you're upset. I think I can help. I can hear the traffic, can you? can hear the boiler humming, can you? I can see 3 blue things in this room, can you? I can feel my toes in my shoes, can you?" etc

Breathing techniques to help calm or focus attention:

The Star Breath

- Fan your hand out like a star
- Begin to trace the outside of your thumb as you breathe in through your nose
- Trace the inside of your thumb as you breathe out through your mouth
- Continue with your index finger, tracing the outside as you breathe in and the inside as you breathe out
- Carry on with your third, fourth and pinky fingers
- Always breathe IN as you trace up and OUT as you trace down
- Notice how your skin feels. What do the small and slow movements feel like? Warm? Tickly? Soft?
- Continue slowly breathing in and out as you trace your fingers, until you feel like stopping





The Flower Breath

- Look at one of your hands
- Imagine that each finger is a flower – you’re going to smell each one very soon
- Let’s begin with your thumb
- Smell the flower by bringing the top of your thumb to your nose
- Can you feel your thumb touch your nose?
- Can you feel the air coming into your nose as you breathe in? How does it feel?
- Now imagine your flower has turned into a puffball, like a dandelion
- Blow gently on the top of your thumb to disperse the puffball
- Do you feel the breath on your thumb as you breathe out? How does it feel?
- Now smell your next flower – touch your index finger to your nose – and then gently blow the puffball away again
- Continue with each finger, touching each flower to your nose as you breathe in and blowing each puffball away as you breathe out
- Finish whenever you would like to

Take Five Breath / Petal Breath

- Make a fist
- Breathe in
- Breathe out and extend your thumb
- Breathe in
- Breathe out and extend your index finger
- Breathe in
- Breathe out and extend your third finger
- Breathe in
- Breathe out and extend your fourth finger
- Breathe in
- Breathe out and extend your pinky finger
- Now breathe in and close all your fingers, making a soft fist
- Now breathe out slowly, opening all your fingers like the petals of a flower
- Continue breathing in, closing your fist, and breathing out opening your fingers
- Finish whenever you feel like it





Relaxation techniques to calm the body & mind:

Colour Bubble

- Close your eyes gently – imagine you are sitting in a big bubble
- This bubble is your bubble
- No one can enter it unless you say so (pause)
- Imagine a colour – see what colour pops into your head – or what colour you feel (pause)
- Imagine the air in your bubble starts to change to that colour – it's a lovely colour, it makes you feel safe and happy (pause)
- Imagine the air in front of you turns into that colour
- Imagine the air at your sides turns into that colour
- Imagine the air behind you turns into that colour
- Imagine the air above you turns into that colour
- Imagine the air beneath you turns into that colour
- The colour feels safe, happy and warm
- Now your bubble is filled with this colour
- When you breathe in, imagine you breathe in the colour. Imagine you are made of glass and you can breathe the colour into your body, your bones, your muscles and organs
- Imagine it flowing inside you
- Each time you breathe in that colour you feel safer, lighter and happier
- Imagine you are like a balloon, filling with your beautiful colour
- Now the colour is all around you and inside you – and you feel safe, lighter, happier
- Notice how you feel
- When you breathe out, gently open your eyes – notice how you feel





Body Scan

- Start to notice your breath. How are you breathing in....and out?
- Close your eyes if you want to
- You might notice the air going in and out by the tip of your nose. How does it feel? Maybe cool as it comes in, maybe warm as it goes out
- You might notice the breath in your chest too. Perhaps it rises and falls
- You may feel your breath in your tummy, too. You could put your hands there. Can you feel your tummy move as you breathe? Up....and down....up....and down....
- Whatever you feel and notice is ok
- We're going to bring your attention up through the body, starting at your feet and going all the way to your head
- Pay attention to your feet now. Wiggle your toes. How do your feet feel right now?
- Now notice your legs. Squish the muscles in your legs as hard as you can.....and now let go
- Notice the front of your legs, from the ankle, to the knee.....right up to the top
- Notice the back of your legs, from the ankle, to the knee.....right up to the top
- How do your legs feel right now? What sensations can you feel? Cold? Warmth? Tingling? Nothing?
- Whatever you feel and notice is ok
- Now pay attention to your back. Notice how it feels on your bed or the floor. Does it move as you breathe?
- And your belly – how does it feel?
- And your chest – can you sense or feel your heart beating in your chest?
- Notice your shoulders. Are they soft? Squished? Hard? Tired? Notice how they flow into your arms, from the very top, down past the elbow and wrists, all the way to your fingers
- How do your fingers feel? What do you notice?
- Whatever you feel and notice is ok
- And now pay attention to your neck and head. Feel the back of your head on the floor or your pillow.....feel your hair....
- Notice your face – your eyelids, your eyes, your cheeks, your jaw, your tongue, your lips. Imagine you are smiling at someone you love. Notice how that feels.
- Pay attention to your breath again. Notice it coming in. Notice it going out. Take a deep breath in and a long breath out.
- When you're ready, gently open your eyes.





Resources:

Some of the resources used in this guide have been taken from the fabulous book: “Ultimate Mindful Activity Book” by Christian Bergstrom

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