## **Breathing exercises: why they’re good for children, teenagers and parents**

**Source:** www.raisingchildren.net.au

Breathing exercises help you and your child learn to breathe deeply. When you breathe deeply, you feel calmer and more relaxed.

When you’re calm and relaxed, it’s **good for your overall wellbeing**. Feeling calm also helps you use good judgment and make better decisions, especially in stressful situations.

Breathing exercises work best if you practice them regularly. This means that breathing deeply will come naturally when you need it. You’ll be able to use this breathing technique to calm yourself in stressful situations or when you’re under pressure.

## What you need for this breathing exercise

To do this breathing exercise, you need just **one minute and a quiet, calm space** where you won’t be interrupted. You can do the exercise outside if you can find a quiet space.

It’s also good to give yourself time and space to do this exercise regularly. When you practise this technique, it’ll work much better for you in stressful situations. That’s because your mind and body have had the chance to experience relaxation and benefit from learning how to calm down.

You and your child can do a breathing exercise by yourselves, or you can take the time to relax together.

## **How to breathe for relaxation: basic exercise**

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Slowly breathe in through your nose. As you breathe in, notice your chest filling up with air. Notice your tummy rising.
4. When you feel that your lungs are full, hold the breath. Focus on the feeling of fullness in your chest and tummy.
5. Now slowly breathe out through your mouth. As you breathe out, notice your chest emptying. Notice your tummy relaxing.
6. Repeat this exercise another 2 times (3 times in total).
7. Return to your normal breathing pattern.

If you still feel tense or anxious, do the exercise again.

## Options for breathing exercises

These two options for breathing exercises need just 1-2 minutes, plus a calm, quiet space.

**Breathing and stretching exercise**

1. Stand up straight. As you breathe in through your nose, raise your arms up over your head and touch your palms together.
2. As you breathe out through your mouth, turn the palms of your hands outwards.
3. Slowly bring your arms down to your sides while stretching out your hands and fingers.
4. Repeat the exercise until your breathing slows and you feel calmer.

**Breathing and body scanning exercise**

1. Close your eyes.
2. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply. While you breathe, scan your body from top to bottom. Check for any tension or discomfort. You’ll probably notice that you’re feeling tension somewhere – perhaps in your neck, chest, legs or shoulders.
3. Visualise breathing slowly into the areas of your body where you’ve noticed tension or discomfort. Think of it as a warm, healing breath.

## Adapting breathing exercises for children at different stages

You might need to guide **younger children or children with disability or autism** through this activity or do it with them, using the steps above as a script.

Here’s how you could guide your child through the activity. Remember to speak softly and slowly, and pause after you say each step:

1. ‘Let’s sit down so we’re comfortable.’
2. ‘Close your eyes.’
3. ‘Now breathe in very slowly through your nose. Feel your chest filling up. Feel your tummy rising.’
4. ‘Now hold your breath. Feel how full your chest and tummy are.’
5. ‘Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. Feel your chest emptying out. Feel your tummy relaxing.’
6. ‘Would you like to do that again?’
7. Depending on your child’s concentration levels and interest, you could just do one round of breathing at a time to start with, and build up to 2-3 repetitions.
8. **As your child gets a little older**, you might like to do breathing exercises together. You could record yourself saying the steps above, and then use the recording as a guide for yourself and your child. Or you might be able to find a relaxation app with breathing exercises that suit both you and your child.
9. **Older children and teenagers** might like to do breathing exercises independently. Your child could use your recording when they’re feeling stressed or want some help to relax. Or your child might like to make their own recording or download a relaxation app with exercises that work for them.