

# Mindfulness Activities to Relieve Anxiety



Put simply, mindfulness is to pay attention, on purpose, to the present. A five or ten-minute daily mindfulness practice can see young people reduce stress and anxiety.

## Breath Awareness Activities

### Mindful Breathing (5 minutes)

Students can stand or sit for this activity.

Ask students to put both hands on their tummy.

Students should close their eyes, or look down to their hands.

Guide students in taking three slow deep breaths in and out to see if they can feel their hands being moved.

You may like to count "1, 2, 3" for each breath in and "1, 2, 3" for each breath out, pausing slightly at the end of each exhale.

Encourage students to think about how the breath feels, answering the following questions silently, in their mind.

- What is moving your hands? Is it the air filling your lungs?
- Can you feel the air moving in through your nose?
- Can you feel it moving out through your nose?
- Does the air feel a little colder on the way in and warmer on the way out?

Can you hear your breath?

- What does it sound like?



## Belly Buddies (10 minutes)

Ask students to use a small stuffed toy, or a small, light-weight object such as small bean bags or wooden blocks.

Students lay on their backs and place the object on top of their belly buttons.

Take students through the guided breathing activity above, asking them to watch the object as it moves up and down with their breath.

## Breathing Colours (5 minutes) use coloured card as starting point if it helps



Ask students to think of a relaxing colour. It can be any colour they like, as long as it is one that makes them think of relaxation.

Ask students to think of a colour that represents stress, sadness, fear or anxiety (whichever is relevant to how they may be feeling).

Students imagine breathing in the relaxing colour and visualise it filling their lungs.

Students then imagine breathing out the stress, sadness or anger colour.

Your spoken instructions may be along these lines:

Imagine you are surrounded by the relaxing colour. No longer is the air clear, it is the relaxing colour.

You can still make out shapes, but your world is now a different colour.

Imagine that as you breathe in, you breathe in this colour too.

See the colour filling up your lungs.

Imagine as you breathe out, that your breath is the colour of stress.

See the stress colour mix into the relaxing colour around you. Watch the stress colour slowly disappear.

Breathe in your relaxing colour.

Breathe out the stress colour,

## Breathing Hands (2 minutes)

Spread one hand out like a star.

Use the index finger on your other hand to trace the outline of your star hand.

Take a deep breath in as you move to the top of your thumb.

Breathe out as you move down between your thumb and first finger.

Take another breath in as you move to the top of your first finger.

Breathe out as you move down between your first and second finger.

Repeat until you have taken five slow, deep breaths.

## Back-to-Back Breathing (10 minutes)

Work in pairs for this partnered breathing activity.

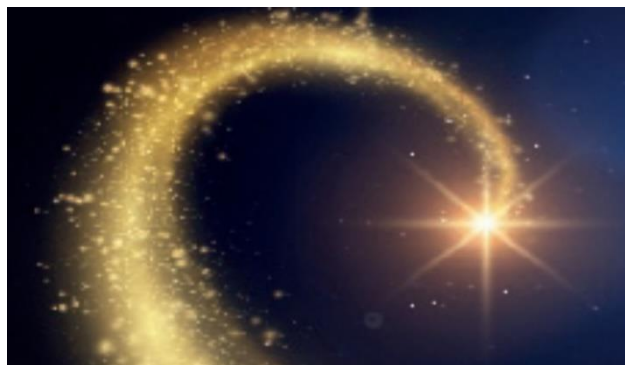
Sitting tall, with their back resting against their partner's back, begin the mindful breathing from activity #1.

Encourage students to notice their partner's breath.

- Is it shallow or deep?
- Fast or slow?
- Can they feel their partner's back moving as they breathe?

After a little while, students may find that their breath falls into sync with their partner.

Or it may not! These are all talking points for bringing awareness to the breath, in the present



## Practising Active Mindfulness

The following 'active' practices help to hone the skill of mindful action. Some students who struggle with the 'still' mindfulness activities may be more likely to feel successful during active practices.

## Gratitude Practice (5-10 minutes)

Students use a notebook or a folder and paper to make a Gratitude Journal.

Practise gratitude journaling at a regular time each day, perhaps first thing in the morning, after lunch or just before the end of the day.

Take five minutes to think of something that you feel grateful for today. Here are some topics or ideas you can use to guide your students:

- Something that someone else did for you that day.
- A person in your life that you appreciate.
- An activity or hobby you are grateful to be able to do.
- A positive quality of someone that can sometimes be hard to get along with.
- A skill or ability you have.
- A part of your body you are grateful for and why.
- An item that you love.
- Something that made you laugh.
- What you have learnt from something that was hard.

Another beautiful idea is for each student to put their day's thanks into their own Gratitude Jar, or to create a Gratitude Tree where each day's thanks is written onto a 'leaf'. This could either be on a notice-board or be hanging on a string from the limb of a real plant or tree branch.



## Glitter Bottle (5 minutes)

Use this familiar sensory bottle concept as a means to explicitly teach how mindfulness can help to calm us when we are feeling stressed, anxious, sad or angry.

Fill a bottle or jar with water, leaving 2-3 cm of space at the top.



Add a generous amount of glitter glue to the bottle (or a combination of PVC glue and regular glitter).

Seal the bottle well!

Shake the bottle well to mix the glitter, water and glue.

Share the following words:

“Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you’re stressed, scared or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That’s why it’s so easy to make wrong decisions when you’re upset – because you’re not thinking clearly. Don’t worry- this is normal and it happens in all of us.

[Now put the jar down in front of them.]

Now watch what happens when you’re still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you’re calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer.”

### Add a Touchy Feely Focus (5 – 10 minutes)

Restless minds are magnetised by the sensation of touch: we can’t think and feel at the same time. The stroking and feeling itself (when using a prop to help a young person focus) becomes the meditation, in place of the breath awareness focus.

Provide students with a prop to hold, touch, balance or focus their eyes on during one of the above activities.

- small soft toys
- small bean bags or beany pillows
- stress balls
- pieces of furry fabric

For more ideas see:

<https://www.teachstarter.com/au/blog/classroom-mindfulness-activities-for-children/>