

MIDDLE SCHOOL

RELAXATION SKILLS

Skill Sheet for Educators

Middle school can be a stressful time for adolescents. While managing more challenging workload demands, they also grapple with anxiety brought on by larger issues like forming their identity and gaining independence. These emotions can be difficult to experience but are easier with relaxation skills.

As highlighted in the video, stress and anxiety often produce physical sensations due to our fight, flight, or freeze response. Effective relaxation skills like paced belly breathing help to calm the body and turn down the intensity of that emotion.

Summary of the **KEY SKILLS** from the video.

- Paced belly breathing is breathing slowly and deeply at a steady pace. By slowing their inhales and extending their exhales, your students can use their breath to harness control of their emotions.
- Paced belly breathing balances out the carbon dioxide and oxygen in students' bodies, cutting off their fight, flight, or freeze response. It returns their mind and body to a calmer state.

Practice skills

- When you notice that a student is feeling anxious, frustrated, or worried, encourage them to stop what they are doing and take a few minutes to practice taking paced belly breaths.
- Encourage your students to practice belly breathing when they are calm. They will be more prepared to use the skill in the moment they need it if they have practiced it beforehand.
- Paced belly breathing for relaxation is different than the breathing teens do without thinking about it. If your students say, "I've tried that," encourage them to give it another try. Providing some information about why belly breathing helps may increase their willingness to try.

Start with this →

- Take some class time each day, even just a few minutes, to give students the opportunity to practice paced belly breathing. Using a few minutes of class time for your students to relax their bodies and calm their minds may ultimately save you time. Students will be better prepared for learning when they are relaxed and centered.
- Encourage students to note how they feel before and after paced belly breathing.

On the next page there is an activity that you can share with your students or post in your classroom to reinforce and practice paced belly breathing.

Activity

Practicing these skills helps you to increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to improve your mental health and wellness.

Paced Belly Breathing

Breathing deeply into your belly helps to tell your body that you are safe and calm. Follow the instructions below and practice paced belly breathing when you are feeling calm and when you are feeling stressed or anxious.



- 1 Sit comfortably in your chair or on the floor either cross-legged or on your shins.



- 2 Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.



- 3 Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds and feel your belly expand.



- 4 Slowly breathe out for 5 seconds through your mouth, letting the air gently leave your body.



- 5 Repeat 3-5 times, or for as long as you want.

Use the space below to think about times to practice paced belly breathing:

Before going to bed

Before taking a big test

Before sports practice

In the morning at school

After getting into an argument with a friend

Outside, sitting down, and enjoying nature