

Skills Sheet for Caregivers: Middle School

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 flight, fight, or freeze response. Effective relaxation skills like paced belly breathing help to calm the body and turn down the intensity of that emotion.

Below is a summary of **PACED BELLY BREATHING**, one of the key relaxation skills in the video.

- Belly breathing is breathing slowly and deeply at a steady pace. By slowing their inhaleds and extending their exhaleds, your child can use their breath to harness control of their emotions.
- Belly breathing balances out the carbon dioxide and oxygen in kids' 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 your middle schooler 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.
- Paced belly breathing for relaxation is different than breathing we do without thinking about it. If your middle schooler says, "I've tried that," encourage them to give it another try. Providing some information about why paced belly breathing helps may increase their willingness to try.
- Encourage your middle schooler to practice paced 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.
- If you notice your middle schooler using paced belly breathing strategies make sure to provide positive feedback for their efforts.

Start with this →

- Breathe together! Take five minutes right after dinner or before bed to take some relaxing breaths together.
- Once you've practiced a few times together, bring in other family members. Ask your middle schooler to instruct siblings, grandparents or friends in paced belly breathing.
- You can also suggest your middle schooler utilize apps like Calm, Headspace, or Shine that help guide paced belly breathing.

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



RELAXATION SKILLS

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