Guidelines for Using Nature Breathing Exercises

Developed for use outdoors in nature, these eight breathing exercise cards use simple, nature-inspired prompts to introduce children to breathing as an emotional regulation tool. Regular practice of breathing exercises can also help to support students' self-awareness, focus and readiness to learn.

The purpose of a breathing exercise is not to make children perfectly calm, silent or still, instead, they can help students learn to:

- notice what is happening in their bodies
- develop awareness of their own emotions
- pause before reacting to big emotions
- return to a state that supports learning and positive interactions.

How to use nature breathing exercises

1. Make self-regulation routine

Embedding breathing exercises into everyday classroom routines helps to normalise their use and increase the likelihood that students will draw on them independently when needed for self-regulation. A breathing exercise can make a positive addition to:

- morning meetings
- transition times
- after recess or lunch
- before beginning a challenging task
- as part of an end-of-day reflection.

Practising breathing exercises regularly during calm periods helps children to build familiarity and confidence with breathing as a calming technique.

2. Take students outdoors

Practising breathing exercises outdoors offers students a change of environment, with fresh air, natural sights and sounds to support relaxation and help them focus on their breathing.

You don't need a dedicated nature space to practise breathing outdoors. A garden, playground or oval edge, courtyard or space under a shady tree will work.

3. Keep breathing exercise sessions short

Choose just one breathing exercise to focus on for each practice session and provide students with opportunities to master that exercise before introducing a new one.

For school-age children, breathing activities are most effective when the practice session lasts between one and five minutes. You will see the cards include the following recommendation for repeating an individual breathing exercise:

Pre-primary to Year 3: 3-5 breaths
Year 4 and up: Up to 10 breaths

5. Model participation

Teacher modelling plays an important role in helping children engage with breathing exercises. The instructions included on each breathing exercise card act as a script for you to use to guide students through the exercise.

6. Take a moment for reflection

Breathing practices are even more effective as an emotional regulation tool when paired with opportunity for reflection. Following an exercise with a simple, reflective question encourages students to build self-awareness and emotional vocabulary. You might try one of the following questions for reflection:

- What do you notice in your body now?
- How has your breathing changed?
- When might be a helpful time for you to use this breathing exercise?

Adapting to meet diverse needs

Each child responds differently to breathing and mindfulness activities. Some students regulate best through movement rather than stillness, whilst others benefit from visual supports, physical props or shorter activities.

To help support student autonomy with nature breathing exercises, we suggest:

- making participation invitational
- offering students choices, such as keeping their eyes open, moving into to a more comfortable position (e.g. sitting, standing, lying), or simply observing quietly.

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RAINBOW BREATHING

GENTLE MOVEMENT

GET READY

Head outside. Stand comfortably with your hands by your sides and your palms facing the front. Close your eyes.

BREATHE

As you take a gentle breath in through your nose, raise your arms out to the sides to meet above your head, imagining your hands are painting a brightly coloured rainbow across the sky... 1... 2... 3... 4

Hold for a moment...

Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you lower your arms... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels. When you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.

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5 SENSES BREATHING

SENSORY CHECK IN

GET READY

Sit comfortably outside with your eyes closed.

BREATHE

As you breathe in slowly through your nose, listen carefully to the **sounds** around you... 1... 2... 3... 4

Then breathe out slowly through your mouth... 1... 2... 3... 4

Take another slow breath, this time noticing any **smells** around you.

Take another slow breath, noticing if you can **taste** anything in your mouth.

Take another slow breath, noticing what you can **feel** on your skin.

With your final breath, open your eyes, noticing what you **see** in front of you.

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels.

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BEE BREATHING

SENSORY CHECK IN

GET READY

Sit comfortably outside. Gently place the tips of your pointer fingers into your ears and close your eyes.

BREATHE

Keeping your hands in place, breathe in slowly through your nose... 1... 2... 3... 4

Hold for a moment...

Hum quietly as you slowly breathe out... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

VARIATIONS

Experiment with making higher or lower pitched humming sounds.

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels. When you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.

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SUNSHINE BREATHING

GENTLE MOVEMENT

GET READY

Stand comfortably with your hands by your sides.

BREATHE

Stand up tall and stretch your arms up high as you reach for the sun.

Gather the sunshine into your body by folding your arms in, hands to heart. Breathe in slowly through your nose... 1... 2... 3... 4 as the sunshine fills your body.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you open your arms wide, sharing your sunshine with the world... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels. When you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.

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OCEAN BREATHING

USING MY IMAGINATION

GET READY

Sit comfortably on the ground and gently cover your ears with the palms of your hands. Close your eyes.

IMAGINE

Imagine you are at the beach, looking out at the ocean. The waves gently swoosh on the sand. You feel the warmth of the sun or a cool breeze on your skin.

BREATHE

Keeping your hands in place, breathe in slowly through your nose... 1... 2... 3... 4

Breathe out slowly through your mouth... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Relax your hands and return to breathing normally. Slowly open your eyes.

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FLOWER BREATHING

USING MY IMAGINATION

GET READY

Sit comfortably outside with your eyes closed.

IMAGINE

Imagine you are holding a flower in front of you. Notice its shape and colour.

BREATHE

Pretend to smell the flower as you breathe in slowly through your nose... 1... 2... 3... 4

As you breathe out slowly through your mouth imagine you are gently blowing on the flower to make the petals dance... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

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TREE POSE BREATHING

GENTLE MOVEMENT

GET READY

Stand with feet together. Bend one knee slightly, resting your toes on the floor and your heel on the other ankle.

IMAGINE

Stretch your arms up like the branches of a tree standing tall in the nature around you.

BREATHE

Breathe in slowly through your nose... 1... 2... 3... 4

Breathe out slowly, imagining kindness flowing from your heart, along your arms and out into the world... 1... 2... 3... 4

Lower your arms and your foot.

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels.

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BUTTERFLY BREATHING

USING MY IMAGINATION

GET READY

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Rest your fingertips on your shoulders.

IMAGINE

Imagine you are a butterfly resting in the nature around you. Your arms are your delicate wings.

BREATHE

Breathe in slowly through your nose, raising your elbow as you breathe in... 1... 2... 3... 4.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth, lowering your elbows as you breathe... 1... 2... 3... 4

REPEAT

PRE-PRIMARY - YEAR 3: 3-5 BREATHS
YEAR 4 AND UP: UP TO 10 BREATHS

FINISH

Return to breathing normally and notice how your body feels. When you are ready, lower your hands and open your eyes.

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