

HANDOUT 5-C

A TRIO OF TECHNIQUES TO CALM THE BODY

Deep Abdominal Breathing:

Deep abdominal breathing has long been known as an effective tool to reduce the physiological sensations of anxiety. That is why it is used in pain clinics, childbirth classes, yoga, and many meditative practices. The key is to learn how to breathe deeply from the abdomen. Once you have mastered the technique, you need to practice it for up to ten times a day. But you should practice when you are feeling OK. So, if you're waiting for the traffic light to change or your computer to boot up, take 30 seconds to take some deep breaths. If you do this, the technique will be more useful to you if you are confronted with an anxiety-provoking situation. Two simple breathing techniques are listed below. Once you have used these techniques to master the mechanics of deep breathing, you can practice breathing while standing, sitting or laying down.

Technique #1:

Stand up. Place both hands on lower stomach. As you inhale, imagine that your stomach is being blown up like a balloon. This allows the diaphragm to drop and enables air to flow all the way to the bottom of the lungs. As you inhale, your hands should move outward. Breathe in slowly to a count of four. Then, as you exhale, you draw your stomach in and your hands should move inward. Exhale slowly to a count of 4–6.

Technique #2:

Lie on your back on a flat surface. Place your right hand on your stomach and your left hand on your chest. As you inhale, your right hand should rise while your left hand remains relatively motionless. As you exhale, your right hand should fall. Breathe in slowly to a count of 4 and exhale to a count of 4–6.

Relaxation:

Following is a brief relaxation script. You are encouraged to record it (either in your own voice or using the voice of someone with whom you feel comfortable). You can listen to this recording as often as you like. Some people like to start their day with progressive relaxation; others like to practice it in the evening before they go to sleep. Try to disregard judgmental or negative thoughts such as "This isn't working," "I'm not getting relaxed enough," or "I'm not doing this right." Relaxation is a skill that you will develop gradually the more you practice it. In the meantime, be patient with yourself.

"Make sure you are wearing loose comfortable clothing. Find a comfortable position. You can do this exercise either sitting up or stretched out on your back—whichever is more comfortable. In order to eliminate visual distractions, close your eyes. Take a few deep abdominal breaths." (Pause a few seconds.)

"During this exercise, try not to judge or evaluate your experience. Don't trouble yourself with thoughts such as 'I wonder if I'm doing this right,' or 'I'm not getting relaxed enough.' Relaxation is a skill, and the more you practice, the better you will become."

"With your right hand, make a fist and flex your bicep muscle. Hold that tension. (Wait about 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Let your hand and arm return to a comfortable position. Notice the

contrast between the tension and the relaxation. Be aware of something very important. You created the tension, and you created the relaxation. Continue to take deep abdominal breaths, and let yourself relax." (Wait about 15 seconds.)

"Now do the same thing with your left hand and arm. Make a fist and flex your bicep muscle. Hold that tension. (Wait about 8–10 seconds.) When the muscle is ready to relax, let it relax. Let your hand and arm return to a comfortable position. Again, notice the contrast between the tension and the relaxation. Continue to take deep, slow abdominal breaths, and just let yourself relax." (Wait about 15 seconds.)

"Now tighten up all the muscles of your face. Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Again, notice the contrast between the tension and the relaxation. Continue to take deep, slow abdominal breaths and just relax." (Wait about 15 seconds.)

"Now work on the tension in your neck, chest, and upper back by shrugging your shoulders up. Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Again, notice the contrast between the tension and the relaxation." (Wait 15 seconds.)

"Now work on relaxing your back and stomach by arching your back up off of the bed (chair, floor, etc.). Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax and let your back return to a comfortable position." (Wait 15 seconds.)

"Now let's relax your right leg by stretching it out and pointing your toes away from your head. Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Now stretch your right leg out again, but this time turn your toes back toward your head and press your heel away from the head. This will gently stretch the hamstring muscle. (Wait 10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax." (Wait 15 seconds.)

"Now let's repeat this same procedure with the left leg. Stretch it out and point your toes away from your head. Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Now, stretch your left leg out but this time stretch out your heel so your toes point back toward your head. Hold that tension. (Wait 8–10 seconds.) When those muscles are ready to relax, let them relax. Again, notice the contrast between the tension and the relaxation. Continue to take deep, slow breaths. If you notice any tension in your body, just take note of it and let it melt away."

Visualization:

The human mind has a remarkable ability to see in pictures. The amazing thing is that when we have a picture in our mind, our bodies often respond as if the thing we are visualizing is actually happening. If you picture a time from your past that triggered strong emotions, you will likely re-experience the emotions as if the event was happening in the moment. This is why scary movies frighten us. This is why hearing a song that was popular when you were young will no doubt trigger memories and feelings from that time in your life. Take a moment now and try imagining sucking a lemon. You might even notice that your lips are puckered up as if you actually tasted the sour juice.

You are encouraged to record the following visualization exercise and incorporate it with the relaxation exercise previously recorded. If you combine all three tools for relaxation—breathing, relaxation, and visualization—you will find that they work very well together.

"Now that your body is relaxed, we are going to calm the mind. I invite you to go on an imaginary trip. I invite you to go someplace where you always feel relaxed and peaceful. This can be anyplace you choose. It can be someplace

that you have actually visited. Or, it can be a place that you create in your mind. It can be a combination of places. It is completely your choice.” (Pause a few seconds.)

“Go to that special place and enjoy it as thoroughly as you can. What do you see there? Are you there by yourself, or are there people you care about nearby? Perhaps they are people that you dearly love or revere. Either way is OK. What colors do you see? What objects do you see? Everything you see and everything you experience will simply serve to help you become more and more relaxed.” (Pause a few seconds.)

“Make use of all of your senses. Are there any sounds in this place? Do you have any tactile sensations? Are there even any pleasant aromas associated with this place?” (Pause about 30 seconds.)

“Once you have thoroughly explored this special, relaxing place, you can prepare yourself to leave it to return to this time and place. You won’t be too reluctant to leave it because you know that this wonderful, relaxing place is inside you and you can return to it anytime you want. Every time you return to this place, you will become even more relaxed, calm, and peaceful.”