

Group Application: Deep Breathing

Learning Objectives:

- Practice emotional self-regulation, stress management, and clear thinking
- Participants learn a useful coping mechanism

Materials Needed:

- Timer
- Ability to play music
- Stress balls
- Optional: Ability to play a video with sound

Preparation:

- If you haven't practiced deep breathing, take some time in the days leading up to this group to practice deep breathing for at least 10-15 minutes per session. If possible, practice guiding deep breathing for your family and friends, or in front of the mirror. Notice how the tone of your voice and how quickly you speak affects how participants or you, yourself, feel – do they feel calm and relaxed? Rushed or bored?
- Prepare a true (and appropriate) example to share about when/how deep breathing has been an effective practice in your life (or how it could be effective).
- Choose background music in advance

Part 1: Understanding Mindfulness (5 minutes)

Facilitator Script: "Let's talk about mindfulness. First, I'd like to hear from you - what do you think mindfulness means? What comes to mind when you hear that word?" [Allow 2-3 responses]

"Mindfulness is simply being aware of the present moment - what you're thinking, feeling, and experiencing right now. It's like being the observer of your own experience, without judging it as good or bad. Think of your mind like a busy street. Thoughts and feelings are like cars passing by. Mindfulness is sitting on a bench, watching these cars go by without chasing after them. You notice them, but you don't have to jump into every car that passes.

Discussion Questions:

- When might this be useful in your life?
- When do you find your mind racing with thoughts?" [Allow 2-3 responses]

Part 2: Introducing Deep Breathing (5 minutes)

One way to practice mindfulness is with deep breathing. Ask participants "Has anyone ever felt overwhelmed or stressed out? What does someone usually look like when they're stressed out? (if no answers, volunteer rapid short breaths, sweaty palms, etc). What do you usually say to someone who looks stressed out? Take a deep breath! "One of the best ways to practice mindfulness is through breathing. Our breath is always with us, making it a perfect anchor to the present moment. Breathing deeply, from your belly instead of your chest, is an easy way to calm yourself down if you become overwhelmed or stressed. Deep breathing reduces your heart rate and can relax your muscles."

"Really successful people use mindfulness tools, especially deep breathing." If possible, show LeBron James video about deep breathing (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7rzz9asT7Q>).

Tell participants to place one hand on their stomach and to try and breathe from the spot their hand is touching. Demonstrate this as the participants try it.

“Breathing deeply increases oxygen flow to your blood and brain, and it slows your heart rate. Breathing deeply can alleviate stress in your whole body. Remember, our bodies often know what we’re feeling even before our minds do. Today, we’re going to practice breathing deeply. This isn’t easy, it will be a challenge. Let’s see if we can do it as a group.”

Part 3: Deep Breathing Exercise (20 minutes)

1. Participants should spread out in the room, so they aren’t touching each other, sitting in their chairs.
2. Tell participants that “we, as a group” are going to breathe deeply for two minutes
3. Tell participants to put their feet on the floor and feel the ground under their feet
4. Tell participants to place one hand on their stomach and to breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth. Focus only on each breath coming in and out.
5. Tell participants that they are welcome to close their eyes, and that this may help them relax through the exercise
6. Tell participants that thoughts may enter their minds - acknowledge each thought, let it drift away, and focus attention on their breathing.
7. Instruct the participants to use the Box Breathing technique
 - a. Breathe in through your nose, 1-2-3-4
 - b. Hold the breath in, 1-2-3-4
 - c. Breathe out through your mouth, 1-2-3-4
 - d. Hold the air out, 1-2-3-4
8. Throughout the two minutes, quietly say things like “in through your nose, out through your mouth” or “let your thoughts go, concentrate on your breath” or “breathe in to yes (or thank you)”
9. Count down from 10 as the two minutes ends and welcome the participants back to the room.
10. Invite the participants to check-in about how breathing deeply felt to them. Let the participants stay in their chairs spread out in the room. After a few participants check in, tell them that we’re going to do the process again, for five minutes this time.
11. Repeat step four, for five minutes instead of two.
12. Ask the participants to return to the circle, and prompt the participants with the following questions (take 3-5 responses for each question):
 - a. What did you notice about yourself when you were trying to breathe deeply?
 - b. What do you think about deep breathing?
 - c. When would be a good time to try this outside of group? When you feel out of control? Or unhappy? (share your example of when deep breathing has been an effective tool in your life.
 - i. Write these answers on flip chart paper to be displayed in the room

Closing Exercise (5 minutes) - "Bubble Breath"

Facilitator Script: "For our closing practice, imagine you're blowing bubbles. We'll do this together:

1. Cup your hands in front of your mouth as if holding a bubble wand
2. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose
3. Blow out very slowly through your mouth, as if trying to create the biggest bubble possible
4. Watch your imaginary bubble float away, carrying any stress or tension with it

Let's do this three times together..." [Guide the group through three cycles]

"As we finish, remember that you can use these breathing techniques anytime, anywhere. Whether you're feeling stressed, angry, or just need a moment to reset, your breath is always there as a tool to help you center yourself. Thank you all for participating. Does anyone have any final questions?"

Additional Notes for Facilitator:

- Deep breathing and sitting still/quiet will likely be a new experience for participants and they may display behavior that shows they are uncomfortable with it (laughing, talking, making jokes). If this happens, gently

remind the participants that this activity requires quiet participation, reminding them of the agreed upon rules and values. Allow for additional time for them to settle down and give them a chance to get used to the experience. Deep breathing may also be triggering for some participants, especially those that have experienced significant trauma. If a participant is uncomfortable with this process, an option could be to have them simply place their hand on their stomach throughout the lesson.

- Be mindful of participants who may be uncomfortable closing their eyes. Always offer alternatives like soft focus on a spot on the floor
- Watch for signs of discomfort or anxiety during breathing exercises
- Some participants may feel lightheaded during first attempts at deep breathing - remind them it's okay to take breaks
- Adapt the timing of each section based on group engagement and needs
- If participants seem restless, incorporate more movement or shorten the breathing exercises
- Consider sharing a personal example of when mindfulness or deep breathing helped you, if appropriate