



TITLE OF ACTIVITY: TAKING BREATHS, SLOWING DOWN

FILM: *ANGST*

Overview

Angst defines anxiety as “a feeling of worry or nervousness about something with an uncertain outcome.” As a response to anxiety, our bodies can seize up. Our hands may begin to shake. We feel paralyzed and might want to exit a situation immediately. When we are anxious, the brain’s amygdala switches us into “fight, flight, or freeze” mode. In this state, we cannot access the parts of our brain that help with executive functioning, or the skills that help us engage in everyday interactions and organization. In this activity, viewers of the film will practice a basic breathing exercise as a strategy to relieve a high-anxiety state.

Aims

Participants will learn a simple breathing technique as a way to counter anxiety and stress.

Materials

- ★ A chair, cushion, or mat for sitting comfortably

Getting Started

First, ask participants to share some of the ways that their bodies feel when they are especially worried or anxious. They might mention sweaty hands or palms, a sense of paralysis, or quick heartbeats.

Then, elicit some ideas: *What do you do to feel a sense of calm and peacefulness?* After hearing from a few people, let participants know that they will be practicing a simple breathing exercise, one that can be used whenever they feel some of the symptoms of anxiety.

Importantly, the facilitator of the activity should note that each person has their own level of comfort in disclosing personal information. Each activity should begin with an encouragement to participate in those activities at their own comfort level. Participants should only share voluntarily.

Activities

- ★ Ask participants to get into a comfortable, upright position. They can use a chair or sit on the floor with a cushion for support.



- ★ Direct participants to close their eyes and spend a minute noticing their breathing. What happens to their body when they breathe? How does the breath move?
- ★ Tell everyone to sit up tall. With their mouths closed, participants should breathe through their noses until they can feel their entire chests fill up with air.
- ★ Participants will be using the diaphragm, a large muscle in their abdomens, and should feel their stomachs expanding like a balloon.
- ★ Participants should hold the breath for a few seconds.
- ★ Then, slowly, have participants exhale from their mouths or noses--whatever feels most natural! They should feel their diaphragms deflating.
- ★ Repeat the breathing exercise two more times, extending the exhales each time.

Wrapping Up

Gather the group together. Direct participants to move their heads from side to side and roll their necks to ease any remaining tensions.

Ask all to reflect for a few minutes: *What did you notice happened to any worries in your mind? When might you use a deep breathing technique?* Gather some thoughts for the group.

Extensions

Participants can prepare for situations that might trigger their anxieties and other intense emotions. Make a list of possible scenarios, such as taking a test, having to talk in front of a class, or asking for help in a store. Becoming more aware of potential triggers can help ward off high-anxiety states and panic attacks.

Watch [How Children and Adults Can Build Core Capabilities for Life from Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child](#). This video reviews some of the key brain functions necessary for everyday living and how to strengthen them in the face of stressors.