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MINDFUL BREATHING

OVERVIEW

Mindful breathing is the practice of developing a deeper connection to your breath and it is a core foundation to the practice of mindfulness. It is like using your breath as an anchor to keep you in the present moment. Just like an anchor on a boat will help prevent that boat from drifting away, your breath can be something you focus on to help you stay in the here and now. This can be especially helpful when your mind naturally wanders off and you get distracted by thoughts, emotions, or different sensations in your body. When you focus on breathing, your heart rate will slow down, which will calm down your brain and your body, making it easier to deal with whatever is happening in the moment.

Please note: for some people, especially those experiencing anxiety, connecting with their breath may not feel calming or relaxing; in fact, being told to focus on their breath might be more anxiety provoking. If that is the case with the people you are working with, have them use the stuffed animal variation for the breathing exercise. Or, you can the breathing practice for now, and move onto other exercises. Note lesson #4 (body awareness) for the variation of placing your feet on the ground, which is helpful for those who have a hard time connecting with their breath.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Nothing! You already have your breath with you, no matter where you are!

Small stuffed animal (optional)

Breathing Exercise



PROCEDURES

1. Ask the students to get into a mindful body position - this means to practice sitting still in a position that is comfortable for you. If it feels okay for you, close your eyes; if you prefer to keep them open, please choose one spot on the floor to focus on. (This helps our mind from getting distracted, and tunes our awareness inwards, towards ourselves.) We are going to begin by taking a deep breath in – imagine like you are smelling a batch of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. Nice and slow...
2. Now, I would like for you to take a slow deep breath out – imagine like you are blowing a bubble...blow out nice and slow because if you blow too fast the bubble would pop!

3. We are going to practice breathing slowly a few more times, and to help you keep your attention on your breath, I would like you to say the words “breathing in, breathing out” inside your mind. This may help keep your attention from wandering.
4. On the next few breaths, we are going to practice a different way of keeping your attention on your breath. This time, try counting the length of your breath in and breath out. Imagine counting slowly in your mind, connecting it to your inhale/exhale: 1-2-3-4-5; 5-4-3-2-1. See which you like better – the words “breathing in, breathing out,” or the counting – everyone is different!
5. Continue to practice this mindful breathing practice for at least 10 breaths, and as you do, notice how your body is feeling as you slow down and breathe.
6. If your mind begins to wander, I want you to imagine that anchor holding you steady, slowing you down. You might also like to imagine a puppy on a leash – when a puppy wanders off, there’s no need to get upset with the puppy, you simply need train it to come back. It’s the same idea when getting distracted. Our breath is how we train our mind, just like pulling on that leash to come back to the present moment.

VARIATION: USE A STUFFED ANIMAL

Instruct the students to lie down on their back and place a small stuffed animal on their tummy. Say to them, “Watch the stuffed animal and notice what happens. You will see it rising up and down... this is a way to help you connect with the fact that you are already breathing, so you don’t have to do anything different other than notice that your body is breathing all on its own!”

VARIATION: PLACE HANDS ON YOUR BODY WHILE BREATHING

As the students are in a mindful body position, suggest that they place a hand on their lower tummy (diaphragm) as they practice breathing in and breathing out. Actually feeling themselves breathe is a physical way to connect with their body and can serve as that anchor or a “leash” to come back into the present moment, which is important when feeling overwhelmed or distracted.

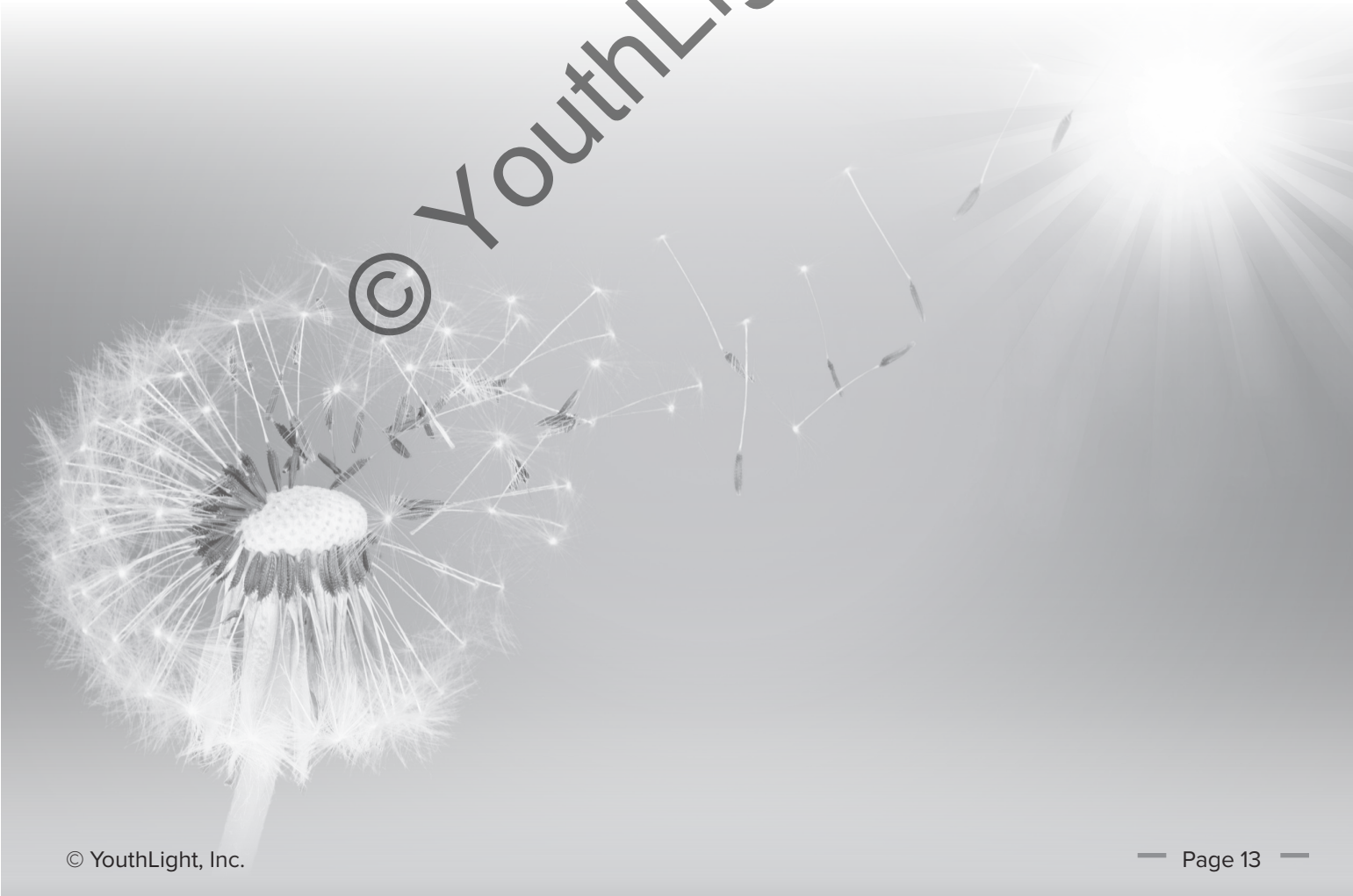
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to slow down and focus on your breath? Did you feel calm, relaxed, tired, energized, distracted...?
- Think of why you have a fire drill...it’s to help you prepare in case there is an emergency! How do you think practicing taking deep breaths can help prepare you for when you feel overwhelmed or stressed out?
- When are times throughout your day that you can practice taking 5 mindful breaths?
- What do you think are some options you can do if you are too overwhelmed to slow down and focus on your breath?

FOLLOW UP

Breathing is a foundational practice of mindfulness, and is helpful to calm down the brain, calm down the body, allowing you to respond and not react to whatever is arising. It is an easy practice because it can be done anytime, anywhere and no one even has to know what you are doing. The hardest part is to remember to breathe when you feel like you are getting overwhelmed, distracted, or stuck in a cycle of negative emotions. It's also important to know that you don't need to change the way you are breathing – you don't want to sound like Darth Vader breathing heavily and loud; this will not be relaxing to your brain or body! You have a 100% success rate at breathing since you've been doing it your whole life! Mindful breathing is simply about noticing that your body is breathing all on its own, and when you can choose to focus on your breath, you have a better chance at self-soothing, focusing, calming down and being present.

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BREATHING EXERCISE



Select from the list below, words that describe a place or an object in which you feel calm or peaceful. And then in the frame, draw a picture that best describes the words you chose. You can then use this image to focus on when you are practicing mindful breathing.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> Rainbows | <input type="checkbox"/> Being barefoot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunset | <input type="checkbox"/> Flowers | <input type="checkbox"/> Grass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pillow | <input type="checkbox"/> Pajamas | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balloons | <input type="checkbox"/> Waterfalls | <input type="checkbox"/> Your bed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunrise | <input type="checkbox"/> Animals (or your pet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Clouds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trees | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Summertime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snow | <input type="checkbox"/> Stuffed animal | <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Full moon | <input type="checkbox"/> Fuzzy socks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hot chocolate | <input type="checkbox"/> Your birthday | <input type="checkbox"/> Your best friend |

