

Why Mindfulness Belongs in the Inclusive Classroom

Learners with and without disABILITIES are capable of learning when their academic, emotional, social, and behavioral strengths are honored within a nonthreatening inclusive school and classroom climate. However there are challenges in inclusive classrooms.

Realities of inclusive classrooms:

- Students with and without IEPs are sometimes distracted by internal and external factors that impede the brain's ability to process information and interfere with attention and self-regulation.
- Special and general educators often feel overwhelmed, racing to accomplish each day's agenda, barely taking the time to breathe.
- Anxiety and other stressors make teachers and students more reactive, less receptive to others, and less aware of their surroundings, feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Benefits of Mindfulness:

- Allows people to recognize and attend to their surroundings, feelings, and thoughts with increased awareness, non-judgment, and empowerment.
- Helps students and adults deal with negative emotions and stressful situations, enabling a calm state that allows positive thoughts to flow and grow.
- Fosters empathy, self-regulation, and self-confidence.
- Helps teachers slow down and pace instruction to honor student levels.
- Can be a shared practice for families of K-12 students with and without special needs.

Mindfulness is more than breathing, however the physical action of slowing down to be conscious of one's breath has mind-body benefits for students, families, and educators. The path to starting a mindful journey in an inclusive classroom begins with an invitation for students and adults to **BREATHE**.

- B**reathe in and out through your nose with deliberate and controlled pauses between the inhale and the exhale.
- R**espect, concentrate on, and respond to the now: hear, see, touch, and smell your surroundings.
- E**rase any negative thoughts as you envelop yourself in your breathing.
- A**llow your mind to simply be in this given moment, and accept yourself in this place and time.
- T**rust your feelings, without judgment.
- H**ear your inner thoughts, but shelve them so you can experience the present.
- E**volve, as you calm your body and mind with messages of kindness and acceptance.

The THINK acronym offers a less complex version of the ideas in BREATHE.

THINK Adaptation

- T**ake time to breathe.
- H**ear, see, smell, and touch this moment.
- I**ncrease happy thoughts.
- N**ever think you can't learn or be better at something.
- K**now that you are an important person.

Additional breathing strategies and calming resources:

A. Ocean Waves – Students close their eyes and imagine themselves as waves coming to the shore as they exhale and returning to the ocean as they inhale. Explore: mindfulteachers.org

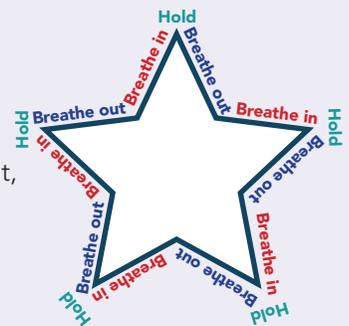
B. Animal Breaths – Students replicate the breathing and actions of animals. For example,
– puffing cheeks like a fish
– cupping hands on top of their head to mimic a whale's blowhole
– inhaling through their nose and buzzing like a bee
Explore: <https://kiddingaroundyoga.com/blog/kids-breathing-pranayam-teach>

C. Grounding Mantras – For example, "Om." This chant, pronounced "awe-ooo-mmm," has a physical effect on the body by slowing down the nervous system and soothing the mind, similar to meditation. (See www.mindbodygreen.com/0-7565/om-what-is-it-why-do-we-chant-it.html)

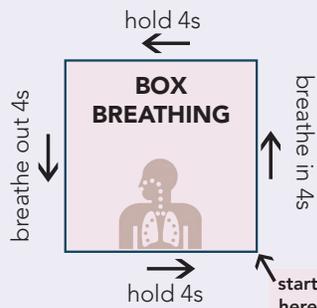
D. Breathing Shapes

– Star Breathing:

Learners trace the outline of a star as they breathe in and out, and hold their breath as they touch each point of the star.



– **Box Breathing:** Starting at the bottom right corner of a square, breathe in for four counts while tracing the first side (moving up); hold the breath for four counts while tracing the second side (moving left); exhale for 4 counts while tracing the third side of the square (moving down); hold breath for 4 counts while tracing the fourth side of the square (moving right); repeat.



Explore: <https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing>