

Calming Techniques

Belly Breathing: This is the single most helpful technique we can reinforce with youth. The goal is to help them slowly breathe into the lower abdomen, using much less of their upper chest breathing. You can coach them to try lying down and putting a little stone or other item on their belly button and breathe so that is what moves. It is easiest to teach people by putting one hand on the upper chest and one over the lower belly and try to breathe so only the lower hand is moving. Ask youth to look down or close their eyes. We aren't watching each other. Narrate the "breathe in..... down in your belly.... Breathe out... and relax. Breath in.... down in your belly...."

Focus on Hands and Feet: Hands and feet don't have emotions. Let youth know that when they're anxious, this is great to calm down the tummy jitters. It can help now, and it can also help before or during a big test, etc. Talk them through this. Sit quietly with feet flat on the floor and hands on your desk. Breathe in your belly, and as you do, put all of your focus on your feet. What can your feet feel? The floor? The insides of your shoes? Focus on your feet.... Now, let yourself focus on your hands. How cool or warm is the desk? Feel the surface. How hard it is. Let all of your focus be on your hands and what you notice. *(Hands and feet don't have feelings, so if we focus on them, it brings us into the "now" and takes the focus off anxiety.)*

Rooting: Coach youth to be in the same posture/position as in Focus on Hands and Feet. This time, though, as you inhale, focus on your feet, and as you exhale, imagine you are sprouting roots down into the ground from the soles of your feet. Inhale, focus on your feet, exhale, grow the roots further into the earth. You might talk with them about the help it is to have a sense of being rooted or grounded or connected to the earth.

Melting Chocolate: For this exercise, have students sit in good posture, feet on the floor, hands can be in their laps. Talk them through scanning their bodies to see where they hold stress, or where they are tight. *"Focus on your head for a moment. Does it feel tight? Stressed? Now your neck. Any stress there? Now move your focus down to your chest..."* Narrate from the head down to the shoulders, down the arms, upper trunk, lower trunk, hips, legs, and feet. Remind them to belly breathe. As they scan their bodies, when they find a place that is tense, have them keep that focus on that place of tension. Give youth time to find a tense place and then suggest that the tension is like a chunk of chocolate. It is hard when you find it. Now, as you inhale, imagine you are inhaling sunshine or wonderful warmth, and breathe that warmth into the chocolate (tense place). As you exhale, relax and feel the chocolate begin to melt. Continue... inhale, breathe in warmth... exhale, relax and imagine the chocolate melting.

Spaghetti: Talk about how spaghetti in the package is very stiff. *"Look down or close your eyes. Imagine you are spaghetti and tighten your whole body. Tighten all the muscles. You might hold your breath while you do that. Now begin to breathe into your belly, and imagine you are being dipped into a very warm bath or a big tub of water. Now as you breathe, with each exhale, let your spaghetti be a little more cooked."* Keep narrating for a couple of minutes to let them release more and more tension. *"Can you feel the area where you were tight getting a little softer?"*