

ACTIVITY DURATION:

- **Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes
- **Implementation Time:** 5-10 minutes

BREATHING THROUGH IT

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

School days, and life in general, can feel tiring and exhausting sometimes. With constantly being on the move and learning, middle schoolers might not feel like they can regulate or calm themselves, whether that is mentally and/or physically. Trying to stay grounded during school can be exhausting in and of itself. Luckily, we all have a tool built into us that can be used to stay focused and well: the simple act of breathing. Breathing helps us regulate our bodies when we are emotionally or physically worn out and calms us down when we need it. Taking a moment to focus on the breath can help us decrease intense emotions and work our way through them, allowing us to move forward with our day.

For this activity, ***Breathing Through It***, we invite you to implement some breathing techniques in your classroom. Taking a moment to stop and breathe can help students center themselves and work towards being calm. These exercises can be done at any time. You can practice them before the beginning of class, during a test, or even following a lesson or test. This is also an activity that students can practice on their own, which helps empower them to continue taking care of themselves and learn to regulate their minds, bodies, and overall being.

SUPPLIES:

- **Breathing Exercise** (see options below and their required materials and instructions)
- **Projector Screen** (optional)

ACTIVITY PREP INSTRUCTIONS:

1. To prepare for this activity you will first need to decide on what day you will be implementing it.
2. Decide which breathing technique you would like to use with your students. There are two different methods we recommend using:
 - **4-7-8 Breathing Exercise Instructions**
 - **Optional Supplies:** *Connect To Your Breath Animation* & Projector Screen
 - For this breathing exercise, you will breathe in through your nose for **four seconds**, hold that breath for **seven seconds**, and then release the breath out of your mouth for **eight seconds**.
 - To do this exercise with your students, you can utilize the *Connect To Your Breath Animation* found on [TWLOHA's Self-Care page](#), or you can simply count the seconds out loud to your students or use your fingers to display the count.
 - This method is very simple and easy to implement into your day.
 - **Box Breathing Instructions**
 - **Optional Supplies:** *Box Breathing Sheet* or a Whiteboard/Chalkboard
 - Another method that you can use is Box Breathing where you use the image of a square box to practice breathing in and breathing out.
 - To do this exercise, use the *Box Breathing Sheet* found on the last page of this document. You can also draw a box on a whiteboard or chalkboard with the arrows pointing in the directions mentioned below. *If using the Box Breathing Sheet, you will need to print off a copy for each student and yourself and/or provide a digital copy if using computers, tablets, or projecting it on a screen.*
 - On the sheet, you will find a box with arrows surrounding it pointing in a clockwise direction. Each side of the box represents a different four-count step in the breathing exercise process.
 - Starting in the bottom left-hand corner follow the arrows up to the top left-hand corner of the box, and as you do that, **breathe in** for four counts. Continuing across to the top right side of the box, you will **hold** that breath for four counts. Following the arrows from the top right to the bottom right of the box, you will **breathe out** for four seconds. Then going from the bottom right across to the bottom left of the box, you will **hold** for four counts. Repeat the same steps as you go around the box again.
3. Whichever method you choose, make sure to read over the exercise's instructions beforehand and gather any needed supplies.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS:**Introduction:**

On the day that you implement the activity, you can use the following script to help introduce the activity to your students:

*The activity that we will be participating in today is called **Breathing Through It**. We know that sometimes during the school day, we can get overwhelmed or stressed out and our bodies and minds might feel irregular or out of sync, which can make it difficult for us to feel calm or stay focused on our work. Stress may cause our hearts to beat faster and panic may set in. Intentional breathing helps regulate our heartbeat and allows oxygen to get to all parts of our body, allowing us to calm down both physically and emotionally. Just a few minutes of practicing breathing exercises can help us go about our day feeling better and more centered.*

Practicing the Breathing Exercise:

To begin, have your visual aid ready to go and have your students settle themselves in their seats or have them pick a spot in the room to sit while being able to see you or the visual aid. Students can also stand up if they feel more comfortable doing so.

Then, practice the breathing exercise for at least two minutes or for at least three to four times in a row.

Make sure to go at a slow and steady pace when practicing these exercises. It may take some students a few tries to focus on the activity or they might start breathing heavily and begin to distract others. If your students are struggling to relax or participate, you can encourage them to focus on the motion of their breathing, the sound of their breathing, or a focal point in the classroom. Ask them to give it their best effort—there is no right or wrong way to practice breathing.

To help students who aren't willing to participate or aren't settling into the practice, you can encourage them to be aware and respectful of those around them in the class who are trying to participate, which may ultimately help them to focus.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED):**Wrapping Up:**

After completing the exercise, check in with your students to see what they thought of the activity and how they are feeling. You can ask them questions like:

“What did you think of this breathing exercise?”

“Do you physically feel calm or feel like your mind has calmed or slowed down?”

“Did you notice any changes in your emotions, thoughts, or attitude after the exercise?”

“How could you add these exercises to your day?”

You can utilize these breathing exercises whenever you see fit and let students know where or how they can practice outside of the classroom. Here are some recommendations on when you can engage in these exercises:

- Before class starts
- Before a test
- In between topics or class activities
- End of the period to prep them for their next class
- When your students seem overwhelmed, exhausted, or unfocused—or even when you feel off!
- At home or during after-school activities

TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER

To take this activity further, we recommend doing this activity every day before your class starts for two weeks in a row. See if you notice any differences in your students' behavior, grades/assessments, etc. Practicing these breathing techniques can provide some long-term benefits. We also encourage you to implement these techniques as well in your day-to-day as we know teachers need support with focusing and calming down their minds, too.

