

Breathing Exercises

Traumatic experiences feel overwhelming, so we try to block feeling by making our breath shallower. Our throat, and diaphragm contract. These breathing practices are not only designed to bring tranquility and balance but to promote the resolution of trauma memories and restore the natural respiratory cycle that may have sustained long-term disruption due to traumatic experiences.

Ocean Breathing: 5 breaths in, 5 breaths out, without a pause in between. This creates an inner sense of balance and peace because mindful breathing without pause between the inhale and exhale initiates a physiological energetic state allowing for a shift in consciousness. The result is dynamic and energetic yet calming and centering.

Earth Breathing: this is excellent for activating grounding breath which connects us to nature and to the earth and prevents dissociation. Ask the body which side should receive energy, then imagine spiraling the energy from the bottom of the receiving foot and up the leg to the base of the spine, holding the breath there for 4 or 5 second. Then exhaling down the other leg and foot back to the earth. Be aware of any tightness of any place that the energy feels blocked. You may stop to breath into these places asking if there is anything that needs to be expressed.

Fire Breathing: this is an excellent modality for releasing emotions especially when the patient was afraid of releasing them as a child. Fire breathing moves energy and gets into deep layers. In interpersonal relationships, when we feel rage and want to yell, scream or throw things or just shut down, fire breathing can be used to break the reinforcing feelings of shame and give us time to respond to anger in a more productive manner. Also, one must be mindful to not engender too much sympathetic overdrive if that happens one should stop. Go to the source of pain in the body or where the body feels numb and exhale with all your force: HAA, HAA, HAA. Try this with your tongue out and down toward the chin for more effect.

Heart Breathing: this provides an opportunity to give and receive love. Particularly useful for those who find love as something to be avoided and not to be trusted. This is accomplished by breathing in from the sky through the crown of the head into the heart while simultaneously breathing in from the ground through both feet into the heart. The breath is held in all 4 chambers of the heart for 4

seconds and then exhaled out from the front and back of the heart at the same time, sending the exhalation with intention to whoever or whatever recipient.

Breathing Without Breathing: this is a less conscious form of breathing, useful for those who dissociate immediately while attempting intentional breathing of any kind. This has been found to be an effective way to take advantage of the adage “where awareness goes energy follows” while allowing for organic respiration. Natural breathing is guided by imagery, language, or movement. This is a good place to start for those who are unable to engage in mindful breathing.