

Three Minute Breathing space.

The Three Part Breathing space is a mini-meditation that can put you back in control of your life when you find yourself in a challenging situation or averse to unpleasant, thoughts, feelings or physical sensations that you are experiencing.

One of the great ironies of mindful awareness is that it often seems to evaporate just when you need it the most. When you're becoming increasingly burned out or stressed you tend to forget just how useful it can be for dealing with the feelings of being overwhelmed by the world's seemingly relentless demands. When you're becoming angry, it's difficult to remember why you should remain calm. And when you're anxious or stressed, you feel far too rushed to squeeze in a twenty-minute meditation. When you're under pressure, the last thing your mind wishes to be is mindful. Tired, old thinking habits are infinitely more seductive.

The Three-minute Breathing Space was created to deal with such situations. It's a mini meditation that acts as a bridge between the longer, formal meditations practiced in the Mindfulness Based Cognitive programme and the demands of everyday life.

Its impact is twofold: first and foremost, it's a meditation that's used to punctuate the day, so that you can more easily maintain a compassionate and mindful stance, whatever comes your way. In essence, it dissolves negative thought patterns before they gain control over your life – often before you're even aware of them. Secondly, it's an emergency meditation that allows you to see clearly what is arising from moment to moment when you feel under pressure. It allows you to pause when your thoughts threaten to spiral out of control, by helping you to regain a compassionate sense of perspective and to ground yourself in the present moment.

The Breathing Space meditation concentrates the core elements of the Mindfulness programme into three steps of roughly one minute each. It's best that you practise the Breathing Space twice a day. It's up to you when you do it, but it makes sense to find regular times each day to set aside and stick to them, so that this becomes part of your daily routine. You may wish to do the actual practice while listening to a version on youtube. We would recommend listening to the one narrated by Prof, Mark Williams from the Oxford Mindfulness Centre. You may wish to practice using the track for the first few times that you do the Breathing Space, but then feel free to do it on your own, silently guiding your own practice for about three minutes,

keeping the three-step structure. It's also worth reading the printed version of the meditation detailed below, so you can familiarise yourself with its hourglass pattern.

Three-minute Breathing Space meditation

Step 1: Becoming aware

Deliberately adopt an erect and dignified posture, whether sitting or standing. If possible, close your eyes. Then, bring your awareness to your inner experience and acknowledge it, asking: what is my experience right now?

What *thoughts* are going through the mind? As best you can, acknowledge thoughts as mental events.

What *feelings* are here? Turn towards any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging them without trying to make them different from how you find them.

What *body sensations* are here right now? Perhaps quickly scan the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing, acknowledging the sensations, but, once again, not trying to change them in any way.

Step 2: gathering and focusing attention

Now, redirecting the attention to a narrow 'spotlight' on the physical sensations of the breath, move in close to the physical sensations of the breath in the abdomen . . . expanding as the breath comes in . . . and falling back as the breath goes out. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out. Use each breath as an opportunity to anchor yourself into the present. And if the mind wanders, gently escort the attention back to the breath.

Step 3: expanding attention

Now, expand the field of awareness around the breathing so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture and facial expression, as if the whole body was breathing. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, feel free to bring your focus of attention right in to the intensity by imagining that the breath could move into and around the sensations. In this, you are helping to explore the sensations, befriending them, rather than trying to change them in any way. If they stop pulling for your attention, return to sitting, aware of the whole body, moment by moment.

The hourglass shape of the Breathing Space

It is helpful to view your awareness during the Breathing Space as forming the shape of an hourglass. The wide opening at the top of an hourglass is like the first step of the Breathing Space. In this, you open your attention and gently acknowledge whatever is entering and leaving awareness.

The second step of the Breathing Space is like the narrowing of the hourglass's neck. It's where you focus your attention on the breath in the lower abdomen. You focus on the physical sensations of breathing, gently coaxing the mind back to the breath when it wanders away. This helps to anchor the mind – grounding you back in the present moment.

The third step of the Breathing Space is like the broadening base of an hourglass. In this, you open your awareness. In this opening, you are opening to life as it is, preparing you to bring a more responsive, balanced mind into the next moments of your day. This means that your mind is now in a position to **respond** mindfully to the situation or unpleasant feelings rather than **react** automatically.

If you find the Breathing Space useful, then please tell your family friends where they can get it. It's a powerful meditation tailor made for our frantic world and we want as many people as possible to benefit from it.