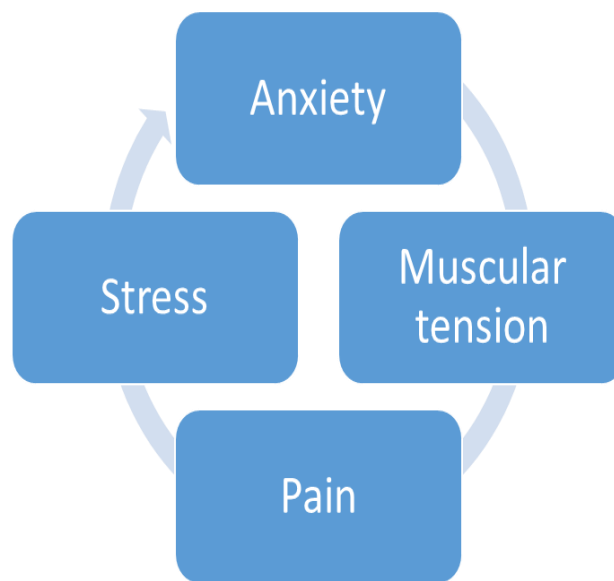


Breathing for comfort

Have you noticed how your breathing may change when you are feeling angry or scared? You may take deep rapid breaths when you are feeling angry or hold your breath when you are afraid. It is interesting that how you feel can affect your breathing. The good news is that how you breathe can affect how you feel and behave. Physiologically, controlled breathing may positively affect our metabolism, heart rate, respiration rate and blood pressure. Psychologically, controlled breathing can positively impact on our ability to concentrate, focus energy and shift feelings of fear or anxiety (Kuttner, 2004).

How can I use breathing to help reduce pain?

You may have noticed how when experiencing pain, it can be instinctive to hold our breath or to breathe in short shallow breaths so we do not cause more pain. Unfortunately, this kind of breathing tends to maintain stress, contribute to muscular tension and to increase anxiety. This cycle then can amplify the pain experience.



Using the breath is useful in the management of pain as not only is it accessible and portable, it also turns on the restorative, calming branch of the nervous system, known as the parasympathetic system. One focused breath can help to close the pain gates, stimulate the brain to create natural pain relieving chemicals and balance the fight or flight response that is responsible for the transmission of pain through the nervous system.

How can I encourage a child to use breathing to promote comfort?

Learning to recognise, regulate, and manage breathing is surprisingly easy for children to learn. Following are some descriptions of breathing techniques to encourage the use of rhythmic and focused breathing in toddlers, children and teenagers ¹.

**Breathing
technique**

Suggested teaching strategies

**Blowing away
the pain**

Young children enjoy blowing out candles. Ask the child to pretend that they are blowing out the candles on a birthday cake. Demonstrate to your child taking a slow and steady deep breath in then and then blow out the breath in a steady slow manner as if blowing out the candles on a birthday cake. Repeat the process, then you may like to suggest to your child that with the next breath in, they gather up any fear or pain in their body and as the breath out, to blow away the pain.

Blowing bubbles

Utilising bubbles and pinwheels can help a child's breathing to become regular and focused. Children enjoy blowing bubbles. You can also provide your child with the challenge of seeing how many bubbles that they can blow at once, whether they will be big or small and how many they can pop.

Remember that a wide age range of children may find bubble blowing an enjoyable and helpful activity in reducing discomfort.

Calming breath

Have the child find a comfortable position sitting or lying down. Ask them to rest their hand above their belly button. This should position the hand above the diaphragm.

Diaphragmatic breathing involves learning to move the diaphragm more fully as you breathe, encouraging deep breathing, rather than keeping breathing high in the chest and shallow.

Ask your child to breathe in slowly and deeply through their nose as you count slowly from 1 to 3. They should feel their hand begin to rise as they do, once you see it move, provide positive reinforcement.

Once your child has fully inhaled, ask your child to slowly breathe out as you count backwards from 3 to 1 and as you do they should see and feel their hand lower back down.

**Four square
breathing**

Involves making a square in the breath cycle. Inhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of four, exhale for a count of four and hold again for a count of 4.

Repeat this for a total of 10 breath cycles

**Circular
breathing**

Ask your child to imagine that their breath flows up one side of their body as they breathe in and goes down the other side of their body as they breathe out.

**Purifying
breathing**

Ask your child to imagine that their body is surrounded by a pleasant light or colour. Ask them to imagine as they breathe in that they are sending that light or colour all through their body and as they breathe out, they can breathe out any feelings of discomfort, tension or fear.

1 L Kuttner, 'Pain - an Integrative Approach', in *Oxford Textbook of Palliative Care for Children*, ed. by R Goldman, R Hain and S Libe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).