



We start 'here' with your breath

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series, which gives parents and carers across the North West, from Southport to Sandbach and from Halton to Heswall, a bit of a breather and a chance to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and those around them.

My name is Cath Slomka and I am mindfulness teacher and mum of two boys, living in Liverpool. I find mindfulness really helpful as I look after my family and myself– and I hope you will too.

So let's begin this series by settling into the here and now, with a short meditation called "we start here with the breath".

Before we start, I'd just like to begin by saying well done on committing to your own and your family's wellbeing and happiness through the practice of becoming quiet and present: the practice of mindfulness.

In this first practice we are going to get ourselves comfortable, focusing on our posture, and to start to pay a little more attention to our breathing and how we feel our breath.

Comfort is everything to begin with when we start meditation because if we are uncomfortable, for example, our back hurts or our knees are sore these things will distract us, in a kind of nagging and annoying way and make the practice a little harder.

Our breath is key to this practice. It's what we use to help focus the mind, to become present and to physically calm down.

We start each meditation practice by finding a comfortable position to be in. We can meditate lying down, sitting or even standing if it's a shorter meditation.

If you're lying down ensure that you have something soft underneath your body like a carpet, a rug or a yoga mat if you have one. You can place a pillow or a cushion underneath your head. If you find your back is sore you can bend your knees and stand your feet if that feels better for you.

A more common meditation posture is to sit, either on the floor on a cushion, crossed legs or leg out in front, or you can sit on a seat.

Spend some time finding a comfy position now for you.

If you are sitting, it can help to bring your attention to the base of your pelvis, where your sitting bones are, and feel as though you are sitting right at the front of those sitting bones so that your pelvis tilts forwards just a little, causing your spine to grow tall.

The spine is upright like a stack of cookies, but not tense or stiff. Check that your head is evenly balanced, so your chin is not lifted or lowered. And it's your choice; you can gently close your eyes fully, or just a little. This will help you focus more.

Take a moment to remind yourself that you are not about to do anything strange or serious; you are just sitting and breathing.

So, let's start by taking three deep breaths in through the nostrils and out through the mouth, slowing your out-breath down by pursing your lips a little. And then let your breathing come back to its natural rhythm. Relax your facial muscles. Allow your jaw to release and soften into your shoulders.

And begin to gently invite your attention inside now, so moving from the stuff outside, and begin to notice how things are inside for you right now: how your body feels, feeling which parts rest upon the seat or the ground most clearly, and how your body rests there. Is there a softness or a firmness? Can you feel your feet on the floor? Maybe you notice a reaction to move or fidget. Maybe you're beginning to notice some tension, or some fizzing or tingling in your hands or feet. All of this is okay, it's all normal, let it be there. Feeling into your inner environment without judging things to wanting it to be any different.

And because the mind has a tendency to wander away after a few moments, maybe to thoughts, going back over the past or into future plans, you begin to give it something to focus upon. So, can you bring your attention to your breath? The breath flowing in and the breath flowing out - maybe through the nostrils, maybe through the mouth. In and out. In and out.

There's no need to change or control your breath in anyway - just notice the breath as it is, flowing inwards and flowing outwards in the most natural way.

Can you notice where in your body you feel your breath the most? Where do you feel the movement of your breath? Maybe a rising and falling in the chest area, or in your lower ribcage? Or can you feel the filling up and emptying of your belly as you breathe?

So you're feeling the breath, not thinking about it, and that is very different.

And don't worry if your mind becomes distracted, busy with thoughts or images: that's totally normal. It's how our minds are. As soon as you notice the mind has drifted away to something else you can say to yourself silently, "oh, it's gone again" - no need to judge it.

Then bring your attention back to your breath in your body in this room. Notice what's happening in your body as you breathe. The rise and fall of your chest, or maybe the stretching of the skin your belly as you breathe in and the softening as you breathe out. There's no right way to feel here. It's just your feeling of breathing.

And you might need to bring your attention back over and over again - especially in the beginning - and that's okay. Our minds have a habit of getting dragged back into the past or pulled into the future, it's just how our minds work. So notice when your mind gets taken away and as soon as you do without any reaction, or self-criticism, bring your attention back to the breath in your body, back to the present moment. Breathing in and breathing out.

This could happen 50 times. The practice is to notice it happening and inviting yourself back to your breath and your breathing body.

Let's practice that for a minute - this mindfulness of breathing.

Remember, you might be new to this, so it can take time to learn this skill. Sometimes we might only notice our mind has drifted when it's travelled off into a very long rabbit's hole and might have been gone for a long time; other times we might catch the mind before it travels too far away. Both are fine; the 'noticing' of this is the practice, it's the attention we are trying to create at first.

Take this moment to notice how you feel now, and again, anything is fine. Maybe you feel a little more present in the here and now, quieter, or calmer, or maybe not. Just notice.

Begin to take a few deeper in breaths and a few longer out breaths. When you're ready, gently blinking your eyes open if they've been closed, come back into your surroundings.

Now thank yourself for giving yourself this little bit of time out today.

I'll see you next time.

Thank you for joining today. Subscribe to find all our sessions and visit relationkit.co.uk for more for you and your family.