

Breath-O-Meter

Show students how their breath can act as an indicator of their feelings and how to breathe to regulate strong emotions.

Objective

Students will learn key SEL skills (self-awareness, emotion regulation) and practice writing and critical-thinking skills.

Time

45 minutes (steps 1 and 2 can be done separately from steps 3 and 4)

Materials

- Paper
- Markers and pencils
- A timer

Instructions

1 Explain to students that we take more than 17,000 breaths a day, but we rarely stop to notice a single one. Ask them to take a minute (set your timer) to pay attention to their breath. Do they notice if their breath is deep? Shallow? Fast? Slow?

2 Discuss how the breath can be different depending on our feelings. Ask students to give examples of how they breathe when they experience different feelings. If they can't think of any, provide these examples: When you're scared, you draw in a short, sharp breath called a gasp; when you're angry, you might breathe heavily; when you're nervous, you might take shallow breaths.

3 Give every student a blank piece of paper and a marker. Tell them to think about the last time they were worried. Maybe they were afraid of getting in trouble or that they were going to get a bad grade. Can they remember how their body felt? Did their stomach hurt? Did their hands get sweaty? Now ask students to put their marker tip in the bottom left corner of the page. Instruct them to move their marker with their breath. They should draw an upward line as they inhale and downward line as they exhale. Give students a minute or two to fill the page.

4 Have students sit tall, rest their feet flat on the floor, place their hands on their belly, and close their eyes. Read this relaxation passage:

Imagine there is a balloon in your belly, just underneath where your hands are resting. Breathe in through your nose and feel the balloon filling up with the air you're breathing in. Notice your belly growing bigger as the balloon inflates. Breathe out through your mouth and imagine the balloon deflating. Notice how your belly gets smaller. Continue breathing in through your nose and out your mouth, feeling the imaginary balloon in your belly grow and shrink. As your breath moves in and out, let the rest of your body feel heavy. Let your feet feel heavy on the floor and your legs feel heavy on your chair. Your belly feels light, but your hands on your belly feel heavy. Let all the muscles in your face relax. Just breathe and notice your belly rising and falling underneath your hands.

Give students a minute or two to breathe quietly. Then instruct them to open their eyes, pick up their markers, and trace their breath on the other side of the paper.

5 Lead the class in a short writing exercise. On a separate sheet of paper, have students compare their two breathing graphs: How do they look different? What do they think caused them to be different? (The graph drawn after the relaxation exercise should show longer strokes, indicating deeper, more relaxed breathing.) Explain that checking in with your breath is one way to check in with your feelings.

