

Breathe and ZIP IT RULE: *Do not speak in anger.*

An angry, blaming, shaming tone of voice rarely leads to positive communication. Your tone triggers others to respond with *fight, flight* or *freeze*. People become defensive, attack back, tune out, clam up, shut down or leave. **If the message you wish to convey when you are angry is truly brilliant, that message will remain brilliant when you no longer feel angry.** *Save your dignity by holding your tongue. (Zip it!)*



Zip it + Breathing = Dignity

Remember to breathe. Holding your breath is the body's automatic "fear" response. Increasing the oxygen supply to your brain allows you to regain control of your emotions and make better choices. Breathing also helps you avoid blame and allows you to "*Zip It.*" Deep breathing calms and relaxes muscles. **Just 90 seconds of mindful breathing calms your emotions and restores some clarity to your thoughts.** Take a deep breath now to feel the benefit immediately. Begin paying attention to your breathing whenever your emotions escalate.

A helpful way to avoid the blame game: ⇨ Remember that distress triggers blame. ⇨ Blame creates outward focus. ⇨ Outward focus is the opposite of insight. ⇨ Insight means wisdom. ⇨ If blame is the opposite of wisdom, then blame is not wise. ⇨ Consider yourself *stupid* each time you blame others. **It's best that you keep your thoughts to yourself when you have the urge to blame so that the stupid doesn't leak out.**

Breathing: Your 90 Second Calming Tool

Sit upright in a chair, positioned comfortably with your eyes closed, feet firmly on the ground. Now wiggle your toes. Focus your attention on your wiggling toes just long enough to take ownership of your mind and body. Become present in this moment. Relax your toes and move your attention upward, relaxing all the muscles in your body as your attention ascends from toes to shoulders. Now relax your shoulders muscles by pulling them down, away from your ears.



Now take a long, deep breath. Notice a cooling sensation around your nostrils as you inhale. As you exhale, notice the warmth around your nostrils. Mindful of your breathing and this cooling then warming sensation, calmly continue to breathe deeply. Focus on the slight temperature difference. With each new inhale, focus on the feeling of cooler air passing through your nostrils, then warming slightly as you exhale. Cool in. Warm out. Breathing mindfully stops the flow of stress cortisol. Only 90 seconds is needed to calm your brain enough to stop a new loop of anger or worry from creating more stress cortisol.

Points to Remember: relaxation and deep breathing exercises will feel awkward and difficult at first. An overwhelming urge to get up to go "do something...anything..." is normal. You are not failing when your mind races and your muscles twitch. It is all part of the process of calming down and relaxing. Practice and time make this much easier. **Just 90 seconds of focused breathing and muscle relaxation is enough to make a BIG difference in emotional self-regulation skills.** Imagine how much calmer you will feel if you give yourself 3 minutes! Or 5! Once you know how to calm yourself, you can graduate to the next tool.