**Breathing for Anxiety Regulation**

Learning to monitor and work at regulating breathing is a fundamental skill for settling the anxious body.

* Breathing is immediately affected when shifting into an anxious response. In order to move adrenaline and oxygen more quickly through the whole body, the sympathetic response shortens and quickens breathing rhythms.
* Consciously slowing down and lengthening the rhythm of breath immediately stimulates the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system.
* Becoming aware of the breath rhythm and consciously choosing to regulate it stimulates the higher brain (prefrontal cortex), strengthening the capacity to use awareness to override the reflexive lower brain that is stimulating panic or fear.

**Steps for the Use of Breath for Regulation**

1. Notice and describe your breathing rhythms in many different situations, including when anxious.

Pause and notice:

* Where can I notice my breathing? In nostrils or mouth, feeling chest rise and fall?
* What is the pace of my breath like? Shallow, jagged, gulping, even, smooth, deep, stop and start…?

1. Shift the rhythm of breath

* Place one hand on chest and other hand on abdomen. Practice breathing into each hand in order to feel the difference between chest and belly breathing.
* Use an image to help focus on taking a slow, full breath to completely expand lungs, and then to exhale fully, emptying the lungs.
  + Imagine blowing up a balloon and then watching it deflate.
  + Inhale at a pace to comfortably suck through a straw and exhale at a pace to blow off the petals of a flower one by one.
  + Use counting at a regular pace to keep inhale and exhale long and even.

It is important to learn to expand the belly when inhaling and allow it to naturally be soft and empty when exhaling.

1. Practice these techniques at many natural points in the day (e.g.: upon waking, before eating, stopping at traffic light, set a timer on phone, etc.).
2. 