

Simple & Quick Self-calming Strategies for Teachers

Establishing sound life habits such as getting proper sleep, eating well and exercise are essential factors in one's personal wellbeing. Further enhancing these aspects of life through additional approaches such as practicing mindfulness or yoga can have an even greater positive effect on one's perspective on their quality of life. While these factors establish a foundation to overall vitality, it can be helpful to also identify some quick, simple things that one can do to calm-down when starting to feel overwhelmed by stress. Provided here are a few strategies to embrace along these same lines.

Quick Strategies to Feel Grounded

- **Timed Breathing Using an Application** such as "Calm" or "Breath": You can use this type of application privately throughout your day for brief intervals as it can have a positive grounding effect based on your preventive use. Relatedly, you can also utilize these types of applications within the context of your classroom with students and have the students (on a voluntary-basis of course) engage in brief breathing exercises with you at targeted times through the day (e.g., at the onset of class following major transitions). Practicing breathing in this manner several times a day (for brief time periods) can help increase alertness and reduce feelings of anxiety and stress.
- **Box-breathing & Grounding (Devoid of software Applications)**: In a parallel manner to the use of self-calming applications, you can gain a positive effect without such software through the following steps:

Step 1: Breathe in, counting to four ... slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.

Step 2: Hold your breath for 4 seconds ... try to avoid inhaling/exhaling for these 4 seconds.

Step 3: Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds.

Step 4: Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.

An additional feature that can further enhance your use of Box-breathing is to perform these steps with your eyes closed while seated or lying-down to experience a deeper self-grounding. This method can be utilized proactively throughout your day as well as to calm yourself when feeling increasing degrees of stress associated with a given event or series of events that have recently occurred. Here is a brief video describing [Box-breathing](#).

- In a parallel manner to Box-breathing, an additional evidence-based breathing strategy is known as the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique. This technique involves breathing in for 4-seconds, holding your breath for 7-seconds, and slowly exhaling for 8-seconds. This breathing pattern helps reduce feelings of anxiousness and has also been proven to help people fall asleep at night when feeling restless. Here is a guided [4-7-8 Calm Breathing Exercise](#)
- Self-guided Imagery: In an aligned manner with breathing exercises, Self-guided Imagery is a self-regulation technique that involves sitting or lying-down quietly and visualizing yourself in a peaceful setting such as a flower garden in the summer, the beach by the ocean, or in a forest. To illustrate, with your eyes closed visualize the waves gently lapping the shore-line you are visualizing or the light filtering through the leaves of the trees in your forest. Feel the sun, hear the birds and the leaves rustling as a calm breeze caresses your face. The basic steps of guided imagery include:
 - Sit or lie down in a quiet comfortable space.
 - Close your eyes.
 - Take a few deep breathes so your body begins to relax.
 - Visualize your peaceful, calm setting.
 - Immerse yourself into your visualized space and add more details as they come to life.

Here is, as well, a 15- minute [Guided Meditation Session](#) that reflects this approach

Reframing When Things Are Not Going as Desired

- Reframing is the process of changing the focus of a problem situation to examine it from a different perspective ... or vantage-point. To illustrate, when interacting with a student that is exhausting your patience and in your mind's eye you are thinking "I am fed-up with the way this child is acting!" reframe the situation by thinking "How can I help this child calm them-self down at this moment so I have time to think about what has this child experienced that is triggering them to act in this manner". Applying reframing as an emotional regulation strategy requires a combination of your own self-reflection and a shift in mindset given the current situation at hand. Reframing allows you to view setbacks as temporary in nature and changeable rather than something that is destined to continue. Reframing can, as well, help you as a teacher to not take student misbehavior personally as if the student of concern is deliberately trying to upset you through disrespect. One approach to reframing is as follows:
- Awareness-Pause-Reframe (APR) Technique: Shifting your mindset is an essential skill to develop as an educator. First, being in touch-with your feelings along with being aware as to how your current mindset effects your own behavior when you are experiencing a stressful situation (e.g., a student engaging in behavior/actions that are concerning). Then ... pause to create the time and space for you to choose to constructively engage / problem-solve the situation. Do this by taking a few cleansing-breathes (e.g., box-breathing) to help you process the importance of exercising your own self-control. After pausing, engage in some brief but specific reflection questions focused on reframing your mindset in to one that best helps you to see the challenge at hand as an opportunity (or perhaps "problem-tunity") to successfully navigate (e.g., helping the student of concern learn self-calming and regulatory skills for current and future use).

Reframing can have a positive impact in navigating the many challenges associated with being an educator. However, a couple of words of caution are also important when considering reframing. It is important to not inadvertently force positive thoughts by invalidating your own feelings when navigating stressful situations. In other words, accept and embrace the reality of the challenge ... and allow yourself the grace of experiencing your feelings. Don't minimize or dismiss your feelings... acknowledge and accept them... just don't get stuck dwelling on those feelings to the degree that it becomes counterproductive to change moving forward.

Additional resources on self-care for educators can be found through the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)