

LESSON #3: Focussed Breathing Technique

Introduction to the Focussed Breathing technique

Focussed breathing is a well-known technique that is simple for children to learn and use. Breathing is a natural, inevitable phenomena that can be utilised to create a pathway towards a state of relaxation and focus. In focussed breathing slower, rhythmic breathing induces a sense of relaxation and self-control and facilitates the introduction of any number of hypnotic interventions. It is an effective yet simple technique that can be adapted for the individual child. Children who experience anxiety, are undergoing frequent procedures, or have difficulty managing emotions like fear or anger, may find focussed breathing a helpful tool. It can be used in children as young as 5, through to teenagers and adults.

Brief outline of the Focussed Breathing technique

Introducing imaginative techniques

- Explain and obtain permission from parents and child using the GREAT structure from the language and communications lessons
- Build rapport with the GREAT and LAURS approach from the Language and communication lessons 1-3
- Open the door to doing something differently

An invitation to use your imagination

- Take them to an internally focussed place

Intensification

- Use an intensification (deepening) technique if required (eg muscle relaxation, using the breath, pacing and leading)

The technique – brief description

- Through paying attention to their body, focussing their mind on the breaths they take and controlling their rate and rhythm, a sense of relaxation and self-control can be invoked in the child.
- The parents or clinician can help guide the child through the use of suggestions, such as *“notice how your body feels when you breath, and how you can make that breathing slow and comfy, and that can make you feel comfy and relaxed”*, and by pacing the child’s breathing by talking in a slow and rhythmic manner.
- The child may find using their imagination to link their breathing with images or ideas helpful. For example *“blowing away”* feelings of distress or fear.
- The child can use focussed breathing on its own, for example to calm themselves in a stressful situation or for self-hypnosis, or as part of other techniques.

Come back to the room

- Congratulate, encourage practice

Self-hypnosis and recordings

- Focussed breathing is an excellent self-hypnosis technique that can be taught
- Consider leaving a recording of the technique

Detailed instructions for the Focussed Breathing technique

Introducing imaginative techniques

- Explain and obtain permission from the parents and child using the GREAT structure from Language and Communication lessons
- Build rapport with the GREAT and LAURS approach from the language and communication lessons 1-3
- Encourage the child to have fun with something new, and suggest that they may be pleasantly surprised that this technique helps them feel better

An invitation to use their imagination

- *“Our minds are amazing. We can use them to be in control of our own bodies and get them to help us feel better and in control of ourselves. I can teach you a way you can do this - does feeling better sound like a good idea?”*

The technique - detailed description of the script

- Encourage to child to allow themselves to be as comfortable as possible. They can keep their eyes open or closed - whatever they prefer.
- Invite them to pay attention to their breathing: *“Notice how your body feels when you breath... with each breath in... and each breath out... and how you can make that breathing slow and comfy... and that can make you feel comfy and relaxed”*.
- Suggestions of slow, comfortable breathing, given in a voice that is soft and rhythmic, encourages the child to slow their breathing down. If the child is anxious and they are breathing quickly, you can use your voice to pace the child’s breathing; initially matching the child’s respirations, then slowing and softening your voice to encourage the child to slow their breathing and find a comfortable rhythm.
- For the child having trouble focussing, suggestions such as *“just notice the breath and come back to it when the mind wanders”* can help (Yapko, 2011).
- Depending on the desired outcome, you can use the child’s imagination to link their breathing with ideas or images. Examples include;
 - Linking breathing with muscle relaxation: *“Each time you breath out.. let yourself notice the little waves of relaxation spread down your body.. each time you breath out let your body relax just a little bit more... feeling more comfy..”*
 - Linking breathing with emotions: *“Each time you breath out... imagine you are blowing away sad feelings.... Breath out and blow away things that make you unhappy... blow them right away. And each time you breath in... breath in happiness... let yourself breath in lovely comfy good feelings... like when you go riding on your bike...”*

- Be open to the preferences of the child- for example some may like to visualise their breath as a colour that reflects their emotions, whilst others prefer to simply “blow away” their negative feelings. Ask them what they prefer.
- Ensure the words and language used are suited to the child and their age. A 5 year old might find it easier to understand *“let your body feel like jelly - all wobbly and floppy”* instead of *“let your body feels waves of relaxation....”*
- Every child is different, and so some children may prefer explicit instruction whilst others prefer only gentle guidance.
- Younger children have short attention spans - don’t be dismayed if they only engage for a short period. Aim for 1 minute per year of age (e.g. 7 year old = 7 minutes).

Come back to the room

- Congratulate, encourage practice

Self-hypnosis and recordings

- Teach self-hypnosis - focussed breathing is an excellent self-hypnosis technique. Encourage the child to use the technique not just in immediate response to a stressful event, but also leading up to one. For example, the child may have a planned blood test. Focussed breathing can be used prior to the appointment to help develop a sense of calmness and self-control and avoid escalation of negative emotions.
- Consider leaving a recording of the technique

Links to video demonstrations

Further reading