

Diaphragmatic Breathing (R)

Time required: 5 minutes.

Materials required: None.

Indications for use: Use when the primary need is to enhance physical coping skills in the Safety and Stabilization stage of trauma recovery.

Counter-indications: Any respiratory complications.

If we watch an infant sleep, we will see the rhythmical movement of deep belly breathing. This is the ideal breathing for relaxation and the nourishing of the body with the breath.

When we feel upset or anxious about something our breathing is often the first thing to change. It is likely to become shallow, rapid and jagged or raspy. If on the other hand, we were to practice an intentional diaphragmatic breathing, we would be more able to consciously regulate our breathing when we became upset.

Delivery of Approach

Find a comfortable, unrestricting position to sit or lie in. Place your hands on your belly as a guide to the breath. Begin to consciously slow and smooth out the breath. Just notice the rhythm of the breath through the inhalation and exhalation. Is it smooth, deep and full or jagged, shallow and slight? Now focus on bringing a deeper breath into the belly. Let a full breath be released on the exhalation. Inhale fully, not holding the breath at any time. On the exhalation release completely and pause, counting to three after the exhalation is complete. Then inhale slow full and deep. Continue to focus in this manner on the breath.

Gentry, suggests placing one's clasped hands behind the neck. This opens the chest through the lifting and spreading of the elbows. As this occurs, breath moves much more freely, deep into the belly. This procedure is an excellent alternative (to hands on the belly) for those just learning deep breathing exercises.

At first, the individual is taught to deep breath in sets of five. Then this is increased to 10 inhalations and exhalations. Finally, an instruction is given to practice two times each day for 5 minutes per day. In this way, the individual is learning to relax through deep breathing.

5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding and Containment (R)

Time required: 7 minutes.

Materials required: None.

Indications for use: Use when the primary need is to enhance physical and emotional coping skills in the Safety and Stabilization stage of trauma recovery.

Counter-indications: None.

This technique assists the trauma survivor in developing the capacity to “self-rescue” from the obsessive, hypnotic and numinous power of the traumatic intrusions/flashbacks. It is based on the assumption that if the survivor is able to break his/her absorbed internal attention on the traumatic images, thoughts and feelings by instead focusing on and connecting with their current external surroundings through their senses (here-and-now), the accompanying fight/flight arousal will diminish. This technique will assist the survivor in understanding that they are perfectly safe in their present context and the value of using their sensory skills (sight, touch, smell, hearing, and even taste) to “ground” them to this safety in the present empirical reality.

Delivery of Approach

1. Begin by asking the client to tell part of their trauma narrative and allow them to begin to experience some affect (e.g., reddening of eyes, psychomotor agitation, constricted posture).
2. When they have begun to experience some affect (~ 5 on a SUDs Scale), ask them “would you like some help out of those uncomfortable images, thoughts and feelings?”
3. If they answer “yes,” ask them to describe, out loud, five (5) objects that they can see in the room. Make certain that these are physical, not imaginal, objects.
4. Ask them to identify, out loud, five (5) “real world” sounds that they can currently hear sitting in the room (the sound can be beyond the room, just make certain that they are empirical and not from the traumatic material).
5. Hand them any item (a pen, notebook, Kleenex), and ask them to really feel it and to describe, out loud, the texture of this object. Repeat this with four additional objects.
6. Return to objects that they can see and ask them to identify now four (4) objects that they can see. Do the same with things that they can hear and feel (instead of handing items to the client, ask them to reach out, touch, and describe the texture of two