DEEP BREATHING
This is the story of Dani who uses a technique called deep breathing to help cope with anxiety and stress. Many people use deep breathing to help them relax and calm down when they're feeling upset or stressed. Follow Dani's story to learn how deep breathing works.
Dani is excited about starting at a new school this year. It's an opportunity for Dani to learn, make new friends, and play sports.

Dani will be attending classes at school and some virtual classes from home.

On the morning of Dani's first virtual class, Dani wakes up early.
AFTER BREAKFAST, IT'S TIME FOR DANI TO LOG IN TO CLASS. DANI SEES THE TEACHER AND A COUPLE OF STUDENTS ON VIDEO.

BUT, THEN DANI NOTICES SOMETHING VERY UPPSETTING.

THE ONSCREEN NAME LISTED IS DANI'S BIRTH NAME, NOT THE NAME DANI IDENTIFIES WITH.

WHAT THE...?

DANI FRANTICALLY SEARCHES FOR A WAY TO CHANGE THE NAME ONLINE. THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY WAY TO CHANGE IT! DANI QUICKLY MESSAGES THE TEACHER.

OH GOOD! SHE'S WRITING BACK! HOPEFULLY, SHE CAN FIX IT.
I'm so sorry, but it's school policy to use a student's legal name. I can't change your name unless it's been legally changed.

This is so unfair! I shouldn't have to deal with this.

You've got to be kidding me!

People are going to make fun of me!

Over time, Dani suffers a lot of anxiety. The buildup of tension and stress causes Dani to breathe more quickly. Dani also develops neck and shoulder pain.

Despite this, Dani has to continue attending virtual classes.

When you're upset, you tend to breathe more rapidly and take more shallow breaths. This sends a signal to your body to be on alert for danger and leads to more stress.

Deep breathing is a special way of breathing that tells your body to do the opposite: relax.

• Helps you feel more calm
• Eases aches and pains caused by tension
• Allows you to think more clearly and better handle situations
Breathing in your belly, rather than in your chest, allows your lungs to expand and take in the oxygen they need. That signals your body to relax.

First, choose a comfortable position. Sit, stand, or lay down on your back.

Next, place one hand over your heart and the other on your belly, just below your rib cage.

Now it’s time to do the breathing. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose while thinking the phrase “I am calm.”

Next, hold your breath while you count to five. Then, breathe out through your mouth while thinking the phrase “I am breathing stress out.”

The goal is to have the hand over your heart remain still, while the hand on your belly moves with each deep breath you take.

As you continue to breathe in and out slowly, notice how your hands rise and fall.
Imagine filling your belly with the air you breathe in, like a balloon.

Then, as you exhale, imagine pushing all of that air from your belly out through your mouth.

To allow your body to completely relax, repeat the belly breathing for 10 breaths.

1...2...3

This feels really awkward. I'm not sure it's even working.

That's normal! Deep breathing takes practice. Over time, it'll become more natural. It's also important to practice often so it becomes part of your routine.

Oh, I see.
AND, ONCE YOU'RE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH DEEP BREATHING, YOU CAN DO IT ANYTIME, ANYWHERE WITHOUT PEOPLE EVEN NOTICING.

THAT'S COOL.

I ALSO FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO FOCUS. I KEPT GETTING DISTRACTED.

READY TO TRY ONCE MORE?

SURE! BUT I'M GOING TO TRY IT ON THE COUCH THIS TIME.

OK, NOW, DEEP BREATH IN. BREATHE IN CALM. FEEL YOUR BELLY RISE.

NOW, VERY SLOWLY BREATHE OUT. BREATHE OUT STRESS. FEEL THAT STRESS LEAVE YOUR BODY OUT THROUGH YOUR MOUTH.

THAT'S NORMAL TOO! WHEN YOU NOTICE YOUR MIND WANDERING, BRING YOUR THOUGHTS BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT — TO YOUR BREATHING!
IS IT NORMAL TO FEEL DIZZY AFTER BREATHING SO MUCH?

IT SURE IS. IF YOU FEEL LIGHT-HEADED AFTER BREATHING THIS WAY, TAKING A FEW DEEP BREATHS INTO YOUR HANDS SHOULD HELP. IT'S ALSO A SIGN TO TAKE A BREAK.

AND STAYING CALM IMPROVES THE WAY YOU FEEL AND MAKES HANDLING STRESSFUL SITUATIONS A LITTLE BIT EASIER!

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT DEEP BREATHING IS IT HELPS YOU STAY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT AND REMAIN CALM.

MAYBE I CAN MEET WITH THE PRINCIPAL TO TALK ABOUT CHANGING THE POLICY.

NOW THAT YOU'VE LEARNED THE STEPS FOR DEEP BREATHING, EXPLORE OTHER SKILLS IN THIS SERIES THAT CAN BE HELPFUL TO YOU.
THIS RESOURCE WAS DEVELOPED BY ICF, AN INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY CONTRACTOR, WITH OVERSIGHT FROM A GROUP OF EXPERTS acting in their individual capacities convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 200-2011-38807/75D30120F00087). Any findings, recommendations, or conclusions in this resource are not necessarily endorsed or adopted by the Expert Panel Members, the National Academies, the CDC, or ICF.

These tools are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read on this website.

*For more information about the group of experts, go to https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/promoting-emotional-well-being-and-resilience
1. WHY AND HOW WERE THESE TOOLS DEVELOPED?

**Why?** Many children and teens struggle with feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly during the pandemic. These tools were created to promote the mental and emotional well-being of children and youth – during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

**How?** The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) made this project possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). NASEM brought together a group of experts to develop ways to help children and youth with difficulties they face every day. Together with experts at ICF, they created tools, based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), to help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. The tools are meant for children and youth directly, and for parents to help children and youth with stress, anxiety, and depression. Teachers and other caregivers may also be able to use these resources.

More information about this project and the group of experts is available on the project webpage: https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/promoting-emotional-well-being-and-resilience.

2. WHAT IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) works by helping a person notice how their thoughts affect how they feel and behave. CBT helps them turn unhelpful thoughts around to more helpful thoughts so they feel better. Experts tell us that CBT is the gold standard of therapy for children, teens, and adults who are experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression.

The word “cognitive” refers to what we think, and the word “behavioral” to what we do. CBT can help children and teens...

- “Catch” thoughts that are not helpful, “check” them, and “change” them to feel better.
- Learn to notice and do the things that help them feel better.
- Learn helpful skills like deep belly breathing and mindfulness.

CBT won’t be able to fix all the things that make someone feel stressed, anxious, or depressed, but it can help them cope with those feelings and feel better.

These tools don’t teach every part of CBT, only some of the most tested and easy-to-use skills. Although these tools can’t take the place of a mental health provider, they can help children and teens learn how to better cope with everyday stress and anxiety.

**Note:** It takes time to learn a new habit, usually 30 to 60 days, so it’s important for children and teens to keep practicing these skills regularly. They will not only benefit today, but will build resilience and help manage future stress throughout life’s journey.
3. WHY ARE THE PRONOUNS “THEY,” “THEM,” OR “THEIRS” USED TO REFER TO A SINGLE PERSON IN THESE TOOLS?
THE LANGUAGE WE USE TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCES IS IMPORTANT. IT SIGNIFIES HOW WE EXPRESS OURSELVES AND HOW OTHER PEOPLE SEE US. MANY TIMES, IN ENGLISH OR SPANISH, WE USE DIFFERENT FORMS OF NOUNS, PRONOUNS, OR ADJECTIVES THAT ARE BASED ON ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT A PERSON’S GENDER. MANY PEOPLE MAY NOT VIEW THIS AS A PROBLEM, BUT, FOR SOME PEOPLE, ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GENDER ARE NOT ACCURATE, AND CAN BE HARMFUL. GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS USED THROUGHOUT THE MODULES TO ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN AND TEENS CAN CONNECT TO OUR SCENARIOS. THEY, THEM, AND THEIRS ARE PRONOUNS FREQUENTLY USED TO REFER TO A SINGLE PERSON WHEN WE ARE NOT AWARE OF THE PERSON’S GENDER, AND/OR WHEN A PERSON DOES NOT IDENTIFY AS A BOY/MAN OR A GIRL/WOMAN. FOR EXAMPLE, IF A PERSON NOTICES THAT SOMEONE LEFT AN ITEM IN A CLASSROOM BUT THE PERSON DOES NOT KNOW WHO IT BELONGS TO, THE PERSON MIGHT SAY “OH NO, SOMEONE LEFT THEIR WATER BOTTLE” USING “THEIR” AS A GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUN. IN SPANISH, GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS SOMETIMES CREATED USING AN –E, RATHER THAN A FEMININE –A OR A MASCULINE –O.

4. WHERE SHOULD I GO IF I NEED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OR HELP?
IF YOU OR YOUR CHILD OR TEEN ARE IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE SUPPORT, THE LIFELINE NETWORK IS AVAILABLE 24/7 ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. YOU CAN CALL (800) 273-8255 OR TEXT 741741.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO FIND A PROVIDER WHO CAN SUPPORT YOU OR YOUR CHILD’S MENTAL HEALTH, YOU CAN CALL THE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION’S NATIONAL HELPLINE AT (800) 662-HELP (4357) OR VISIT THEIR WEBSITE: HTTPS://WWW.SAMHSA.GOV/ FIND-TREATMENT.


FOR ADDITIONAL HELP, VISIT OUR RESOURCES PAGE.