A woman with her eyes closed, meditating in a forest. The background is a soft-focus green forest. A semi-transparent grey box is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing the title and author information.

How to Practice
MINDFUL BREATHING

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PRACTICE #1

TAKING A STRESS INVENTORY

At the end of the day, take a stress assessment. Make a mental or written inventory of times during the day when you felt particularly stressed, especially during interactions with your children or family.

Note if you experienced anything in your body, thoughts and feelings as you recall or record these events.

Reflect on any connections you observe between your mental stress and your body's response.

Stress Assessment Chart

Stressful Event	Time of Day	Were you aware of stress when you were experiencing it? (Yes/No)	What were the sensations in your body?	What were the thoughts or feelings at the time?	What did you do?



PRACTICE #2

A RELAXING SIGH

After taking the stress inventory and paying attention to your body, you may notice that stress causes tightness in your lower back, stomach, shoulders, chest, forehead, jaw, and/or other areas of your body. In order to become more mindful of our stress and the mental habits that support it, it can be helpful to relax a bit.

This short practice can be used whenever you wish, especially when you notice tension from stress in your body.

How to do it:

- Take a breath in through the nose and out through the mouth, making a soft sound or sigh as you slowly exhale.
- Take one more relaxing breath, focusing on the sound and feeling of the breath as you inhale through the nose and slowly out through the mouth with a soft sigh.
- Now try it three more times silently: inhaling through the nose and out through the mouth in a long, slow, gentle breath.
- Take a moment to notice how your body is feeling right now.
- Later, you can do it silently whenever you become aware of tension. You can do this anywhere, but you could also practice this more intentionally by sitting in a chair with your eyes closed or letting your gaze fall softly a few feet in front of you.

PRACTICE #3

MINDFULNESS OF BREATH

Stop whatever you're doing for a brief period of time, find a quiet place, turn off your cell phone, and find an upright but comfortable position in a chair—feet flat on the floor, hands resting in your lap, back straight but not stiff. Close your eyes, if that is comfortable; otherwise, let your gaze fall softly a few feet in front of you. Allow your facial muscles to relax.



... Start by becoming aware of the breath.

... Notice your breath wherever it's easiest for you—moving in and out at the nostrils, perhaps at the chest, or maybe at the belly.

... Letting your breath move in and out at its own pace.

... Just feeling your breath, and letting your attention follow it from the beginning of the in-breath to the end of the out-breath.



... If you wish, place your hand on your belly and feel the movement of your breath, whatever that is like for you right now.

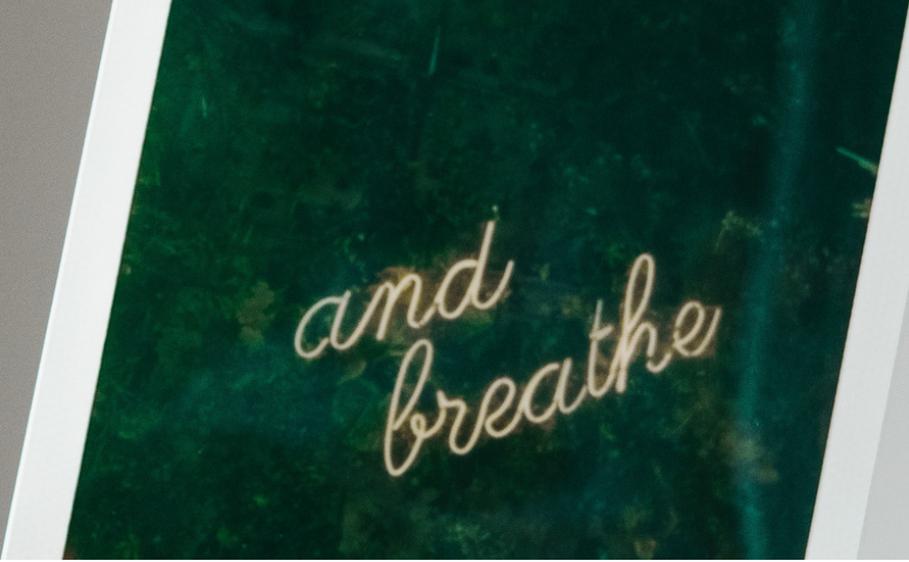
... And if your mind wanders, that's not a problem. Just bring your attention back to the breath whenever you notice it has drifted away.



... We're just focusing on one thing right now—following the breath with full attention and interest, and without changing anything.

... We're mindfully paying attention to what's inside.

... Simply allow yourself to rest your attention on the breath for a few more cycles before opening your eyes and coming back to your work.



and
breathe

PRACTICE #4

3 MINDFUL BREATHS

Once you are familiar with the mindfulness of breath practice, try taking three mindful breaths multiple times each day. You might decide to use a certain place (e.g., standing in your kitchen) or set a timer for a particular time of day (e.g., before breakfast or dinner) as a reminder for this practice.

For example, you can do this practice before you get out of bed in the morning or right before work.

How to do it:

Take a moment to let go of any thoughts or preoccupations that are in your mind right now and feel the breath in your body.

Just notice the breath wherever it's easiest for you to do so. Bring your full attention to the breath, and let it follow the in-breath and the out-breath as best you can. Notice the sensations of breathing and any thoughts or feelings that come up.

Pay mindful attention for three full breaths.



PRACTICE #5

THE ABC'S OF ON-THE-SPOT COMPASSION

Raising children and living in a family can be difficult at times. For example, parents try not to react automatically to their children's misbehaviors, but this is far easier said than done. Sometimes, we feel angry or frightened when we feel challenged or disrespected. However, our reaction may not be commensurate with the offense, given the ages and stages of our children. Our perception can be distorted and this can contribute to anger, withdrawal, or reduced feelings of connection.

Compassion practice can be a resource in these difficult situations.

This practice is intended to help ease the conflict you may feel with a child or with someone who is causing you difficulty. This practice is not intended to make you immune to misbehavior or to your responsibility to hold children accountable for their behavior. Rather, it is intended to help you become aware of all the dimensions of the struggle, to offer some kindness to yourself and your child, and then to help you take some action from a more benevolent position. Benevolence or kind regard is a more confident position for action than anger or withdrawal.

Remember that both you and your child deserve care, concern, and respect.

A: Awareness

Bring awareness to the difficult emotions you are experiencing in the moment (e.g., feeling annoyed, irritated, disrespected, powerless, frightened, angry, or inadequate) by inwardly saying:

- *This is a difficult situation for me.*
- *These feelings of _____ are very unpleasant.*
- *I'm starting to feel overwhelmed, and I can feel this in my body right now.*

B: Breathe In, Breathe Out

Use the recognition of the sensations of tightness or tension in the body to connect with the breath. Inwardly, begin to link the in-breath and the out-breath with these wishes:

- *Breathing in—I offer myself kindness.*
- *Breathing out—I offer you compassion.*

You may continue this as long as you need to help yourself restore some balance. You can also shorten the phrases to *kindness* or *compassion*, or choose your own words, like *calm, peace, safe, balance, etc.*

It may also be helpful to visualize the breath moving in and out as you offer kindness to yourself and your child.



C: Connect

When you feel more ready, respond in the moment with as much authentic concern as possible and as much limit-setting as needed.

All the practices in this guide were adapted from *Mindfulness in the Secondary Classroom: A Guide for Teaching Adolescents* by Patricia C. Broderick.