



Content developed by

from Nemours

### Learning Goals

- A calm breath is a slow, easy breath that feels relaxing.
- Take calm breaths on purpose to calm your mind and emotions.
- Practice calm breaths so they become a habit.
- Learn to finger-count four calm breaths.

### Print Out Before Class

#### Bring copies for everyone:

- *Finger-Count Breathing* handout
- *Tips From Michael Phelps* handout

## Lesson 3: Take Four Calm Breaths

### TEACHER NOTE

*In an earlier lesson (im healthy 'Stress') we taught that taking a deep breath is a way to ease stress. Today, we'll teach kids to use their fingers to count four slow, mindful breaths. We'll invite kids to notice more about their breath. Breathing changes with activity and emotions. We can use calm breathing to calm the mind.*

### QUICK TIPS

- *In a difficult moment, taking a deep breath and letting it out can help us feel calm. It lets us pause to think before acting or prepare for a challenge.*
- *When mindful breathing skills are practiced regularly, they can:*
  - *reduce worry*
  - *increase confidence*
  - *regulate difficult emotions*
  - *increase self-control*
  - *improve attention*
  - *build resilience*

### START THE DISCUSSION

#### 1. Our breathing tells us how we are feeling.

*Instructor: All italicized text is intended as notes to teachers. All other text may be read out loud to your class.*

Breathing happens so naturally, we don't even have to think about it. It's part of being alive.

You've probably noticed that your breathing changes depending on what you're doing. If you're running around or swimming your fastest, you breathe faster too.



### Take It Home!

Kids will take the *Finger-Count Breathing* handout home. We'll encourage kids to practice this breathing skill often — anytime they want. This makes it more likely they'll use this skill well when they need it most.

### Resources

#### KidsHealth:

- Relaxation Exercises: Breathing Basics
- Yoga: Meditation and Breathing

(Lesson 3: [Take Four Calm Breaths](#), continued)

When you stop and rest, your breathing slows down again. As your body relaxes, so does your breathing.

Raise your hand if you've noticed this about your breathing.

*Show of hands.*

Have you also noticed that your breathing changes depending on how you're feeling? If you're calm and relaxed, your breathing is slow and easy. If you're stressed or nervous, your breathing is faster.

You might even hold your breath if you feel tense, scared, or mad.

When you start to feel better, your breathing gets slower again. When your mind is relaxed, so is your breathing.

How many people have noticed that our breathing changes with our feelings?

*Show of hands.*

## 2. We can breathe slowly and calmly on purpose.

When we DO think about our breathing, we can learn to use our breath in different ways.

For example, you learn how to use your breath when you swim. At first, it doesn't come naturally. You have to think about doing it and practice to get the feel of it. When you learn and practice enough, it becomes a habit.

When it's a habit, your brain remembers the way to use your breath when you swim. You don't have to think about it so much anymore. You just breathe that way. And you keep growing into a stronger swimmer.

We can learn to use our breath for other things too.

Today, we'll learn a breathing exercise called four calm breaths. You can use it to relax your mind and calm your feelings whenever you need to.



(Lesson 3: [Take Four Calm Breaths](#), continued)

### 3. What is a calm breath?

A calm breath is a slow, easy breath. It's a breath that takes its time. Another name for a calm breath is a mindful breath. It's called mindful because we put our mind on the breathing as we do it. We just notice how it feels to breathe.

Taking four calm, mindful breaths might not seem natural at first. It's a new skill. But as you learn and practice, it will feel more natural. It can become a habit.

### 4. Let's try it.

For this skill, we use our fingers and thumb to keep track of counting four calm breaths. Like this.

*Use your hand to demonstrate the four finger positions — touching each fingertip to your thumb one by one — without doing the breathing, just counting 1-2-3-4.*

Remember that a calm breath is one that's slow and easy. We let each breath take its time. We don't rush or push. We count the breaths in our heads and on our fingers. Let's try it now.

Sit up in a comfortable way. Rest the back of your hand on your thigh or in your lap. Let your hand relax. Touch the tip of your first finger to the tip of your thumb. Like this.

*Demonstrate.*

With your fingers like this, take a nice, slow breath in.

*Pause and breathe in.*

Now, breathe out, slow and easy. *Pause to breathe out.* That's one breath.

Now, let the tip of your middle finger touch the tip of your thumb. Breathe in, nice and slow.

*Pause to breathe in.*

Breathe out, nice and slow. *Pause to exhale.* That's two.

Now, let the tip of your fourth finger touch the tip of your thumb. Breathe in (*pause to breathe in*) and breathe out (*pause to breathe out*). That's three.

Now, let the tip of your pinky touch the tip of your thumb. Breathe in (*pause*) and out (*pause*). That's four.



(Lesson 3: [Take Four Calm Breaths](#), continued)

How did it feel to breathe like this?

*Let them answer.*

Let's all try it again. We'll take four more calm breaths. This time, count them to yourself. Notice as you take each breath in and out. Count them in your head and on your fingers. Let each breath take its time. You can do this with your eyes closed or keep them open.

*Give time to let kids do this.*

You don't need to just do four breaths. You can keep going and do four more — as many as you need to feel calm and relaxed.

## 5. What have we learned?

- Taking four calm breaths can help your body and mind feel calm.
- You can use this skill anytime you feel stressed or upset. You can use it before you take a test. You can use it to help you fall asleep.
- This skill needs practice. After you learn it, do it often so it can become a habit. Then you'll be ready to use it when you need it.
- If you practice calm breathing a lot, you might notice that your emotions feel easier to handle. You may feel more patient. You might find it's easier to concentrate.

## 6. Take the next step.

*Pass out the Finger-Count Breathing and Tips From Michael Phelps handouts.*

The next step is to keep practicing four calm breaths using your fingers to count them. Take this handout home with you. It will remind you of what we learned today.

Practice doing four calm breaths at home so you can get used to doing it. When you need to calm your mind, your new habit of four calm breaths will be there for you.

Michael Phelps has plenty of experience when it comes to calming his mind so he can focus on doing well. The second handout has advice from Michael to help you feel strong and confident.