PARENT HANDOUT:

DEEP BREATHING

Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™

Anxiety Skill 2

WHAT IS DEEP BREATHING?

- Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **deep breathing**.
- Deep breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths in which you fill your belly with air on the inhales (i.e., the breathe *in* part) and release the air on the exhales (i.e., when you breathe *out*).
- Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

HERE'S HOW TO USE DEEP BREATHING AT HOME

- Making relaxation a family activity can help your child feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- To set an example, you can point out to your child times when you can use deep breathing in your own life (e.g., "I feel stressed when the grocery store is this busy, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths before we go in."). If you notice your child looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try deep breathing to see if it makes them feel better.

DEEP BREATHING PRACTICE

Deep Breathing Script: "Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to focus on our breathing. Start by taking some nice deep breaths, the same way you normally would. Notice how your belly rises and falls as you breathe. You can put your hand on your belly to help you feel the air going in and out. Now we are going to try to breathe in a way that will help us feel even more relaxed. Breathe in through your nose. This is the inhale. When you do this, make your belly fill with air like a balloon. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. This is the exhale and it makes you empty the air out of your belly balloon. Good. You can make a 'whoosh' sound on the exhale if that helps you. Now do that again, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to take in as much air as you can, slowly and calmly. Take your time and focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Try to make your belly balloon fill with air on the inhale and empty on the exhale. Great job. If other thoughts pop into your mind, that's okay. Just try to stay calm and start thinking about your breathing again. Now take three more slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, making your belly rise and fall three times. One. Two. Three. You can do this any time you need to relax. Great job! When you're ready, you can open your eyes."



Number Breathing

Once your child understands how to breathe more deeply, try variations such as 3-1-3. This involves breathing in for a count of three, holding it for one, and breathing out for a count of three. You can try other numbers and combinations and use whatever your child likes and finds comfortable.



Pizza Imagery

A fun image that can help you or your child practice this skill anytime, anywhere: Imagine you are breathing in the smell of a slice of hot, delicious pizza and then blowing out to cool the slice down. Or think of another hot food you love!



Stuffed Animal Belly Breathing

Have your child lie down on the floor with a small stuffed animal on their belly. When they breathe in, the stuffed animal should rise as their belly fills with air. As they breathe out, the stuffed animal should sink slightly as air flows out. Older children can use their hand on their belly to practice instead of a stuffed animal.



Bubbles

Have some fun and use bubbles to show how breathing in and blowing out calmly can help you make bigger bubbles. Show your child how fast, more anxious breathing doesn't work as well.