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 teen 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., when you breathe *in*) 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 teen 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 teen feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Go over the skills with your teen, then let them lead the way. 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 teen 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 teen 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 stomach rises and falls as you breathe. You can put your hand on your stomach 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 stomach 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 stomach 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."



Check Your Form!

To make sure your teen is doing deep breathing properly for maximum anxiety relief, encourage them to check their form by placing their hand on their stomach. When they breathe in, their hand should move up slightly as air flows in. When they breathe out, their hand should sink slightly as air flows out.



Number Breathing

Once your teen 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 teen likes and finds comfortable.



Bubbles

Break out some bubbles and spend a few moments relaxing like a little kid! Notice that when you blow out slowly and calmly you can make bigger bubbles. Now try out some fast, anxious-style breathing: it doesn't work as well.



Pizza Imagery

A fun image that can help you or your teen 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!