

Creating the Peaceable Classroom

A 21st-Century Wellness Guide for
Teachers, Students and Parents



Sandy Bothmer

Illustrations by
Jan Mercuri Grossman

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS
Brookline, New Hampshire

Copyright © 2011 by Sandy Bothmer

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Composed in Janson with Veronika Display
at Hobblebush Books, Brookline, New Hampshire

Printed in the United States of America

Book Design : Sidney Hall
Illustrations: Jan Mercuri Grossman
Photographs: Brian Woodbury and Richard Bothmer

Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data
(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

Bothmer, Sandy, 1947–

Creating the peaceable classroom : a 21st-century wellness guide for teachers,
students and parents / Sandy Bothmer ; illustrations by Jan Mercuri Grossman.

p. : ill. ; cm.

Revised and expanded ed. of: *Creating the peaceable classroom : techniques to calm,
uplift, and focus teachers and students.* Tucson, Ariz. : Zephyr Press, c2003.

ISBN: 978-0-9845921-1-1

1. Classroom environment. 2. Teaching—Psychological aspects. 3. Stress
management. 4. Exercise therapy. I. Grossman, Jan Mercuri. II. Title.

LB3013 .B63 2011

371.102/4

2010938849

Published by:

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS
17-A Old Milford Road
Brookline, New Hampshire 03033
www.hobblebush.com

Contents

Introduction	xi
<i>What's Inside</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Using this Book</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Why Should I Use These Techniques?</i>	<i>xiv</i>

Part 1 Optimizing the Classroom Environment 1

Chapter 1. Feng Shui? Feng What?	3
<i>The Three Tenets</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Five Elements</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Incorporating the Five Elements into your Classroom</i>	<i>6</i>
Chapter 2. Bringing Balance and Vitality to the Classroom Arrangement	17
<i>Arranging the Furniture and Spaces with Vitality in Mind</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Classroom Vitality</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Feng Shui Solution Process</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>What about the Walls?</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>The Smile Test</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Five Elements Adjustment Diagram and Adjustment Tool</i>	<i>32–33</i>

Part II Relaxing or Energizing Yourself for Optimum Teaching 35

Chapter 3. The Breath	37
<i>How Do You Breathe?</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Good News</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>The Role of the Diaphragm in Breathing</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>The How-to of the Complete Breath (Dirgha Breath)</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Releasing Breath</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>8-4-8 Breathing</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Square Breathing 4-4-4-4</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Alternate Nostril Breathing</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Breath of Fire</i>	<i>48</i>



Chapter 4. Meditation 51

- The Benefits of Meditation* 52
- Establishing a Meditation Practice* 53
- Mindfulness Walking* 56

Chapter 5. Yoga 59

- Relaxation Sequence* 60
- Chest and Back Stretching Postures* 63
- Grounding Postures* 66

Chapter 6. A Little Bit of This and a Little Bit of That 69

- Qigong* 71
- Acupressure* 74
- Reiki* 77
- Aromatherapy* 78
- Water* 79

Chapter 7. Get Up and Move 81

Part III Relaxing or Energizing Your Students for Optimum Learning 85

Chapter 8. Taking the Emotional Temperature of Your Class 87

- How Do You Feel Today? Chart* 90

Chapter 9. Breathing for Relaxation and Rejuvenation 95

- Introducing the Complete Breath* 96
- Breath Awareness* 98
- Learning the Complete Breath* 99
- Fire Breath* 101
- Dragon Breath* 102
- For Younger Children—Humming Breath (Bee Breath)* 102
- Other Thoughts about Breathing* 102
- Raisin Focusing Activity* 104

Chapter 10. Helping Students Relax and Revive with Yoga 107

- Lion Pose* 109
- Child Pose (Mouse)* 110
- Dog and Cat* 111
- Mountain* 113



<i>Five-Pointed Star</i>	115
<i>Hakumba (Goddess)</i>	115
<i>Volcano</i>	116
<i>Proud Falcon (Chest Opener)</i>	117
<i>Diving Falcon (Standing Yoga Mudra)</i>	119
<i>Standing Forward Bend (Ragdoll)</i>	120
<i>Fitting Yoga into Your Day</i>	121
Chapter 11. Centering	125
<i>Finding Your Center</i>	126
<i>Centering Sessions</i>	128
<i>Guided Visualizations</i>	130
<i>Follow-Up</i>	137
<i>Mandalas</i>	138
<i>Using Mandalas in the Classroom</i>	140
<i>Creating an Original Mandala</i>	142
<i>Spirals or Labyrinths</i>	147
<i>Introducing the Spiral or Labyrinth</i>	151
<i>How to Finger-Walk a Spiral or Labyrinth</i>	152
<i>Personalizing the Spiral or Labyrinth</i>	153
<i>Tips for Using Spirals or Labyrinths</i>	156
<i>The Wood Double Finger Labyrinth (Intuiopath®)</i>	158
<i>Affirmations</i>	159
Chapter 12. Increasing Concentration through Movement	163
<i>Calming Movement Activities</i>	164
<i>Energizing Movement Activities</i>	170
<i>Moving to the Beat of a Percussion Instrument</i>	179
Chapter 13. Using Music	183
<i>The Yin and Yang of Music</i>	184
<i>Selecting Appropriate Music</i>	185
<i>And Then There's Ying Music</i>	187
<i>What next?</i>	188
Resource List	189
Reference List	193
Index	199



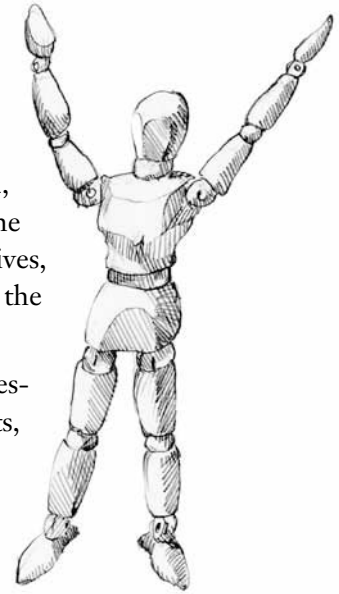
Introduction

Since the first edition of *Creating the Peaceable Classroom* appeared in 2003, virtually all of the same conditions and factors that create stress in the classroom and at home still exist, and new ones have arrived. The scenarios that make students, teachers, and others distracted, uneasy, and unable to focus on doing their best work have only grown. The success of the first edition, along with the increasing complexity of our lives, and an increased receptivity to the techniques presented in this book are the impetus for a new edition.

This book is intended to assist *you*, the community of teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, psychologists, school nurses, administrators, students, and parents, in creating calm within yourselves and your environment.

You will find this new edition richer and fuller than the first. I have included more information in the feng shui chapters along with new charts. In many cases, I have included **Hints**, suggestions on how to help your students do a particular technique or a way to increase their understanding. In some chapters, there is a **Special Education** section with thoughts and ideas addressed directly to those teachers' situations or students. The **Parent Connection** section, found in most chapters, offers parents possibilities for using the techniques at home. By engaging in some of these techniques, parents will be improving their own well-being and that of their family, and at the same time strengthening the home-school connection. A complete list of the Special Education and Parent Connection sections can be found in the index. Also included are an expanded **Resource List** and **Reference List** at the back of the book. In short, *Creating the Peaceable Classroom* is brimming with more ideas to help you create an inner and outer environment that will support and nurture optimal teaching, learning, and living. It's a win-win situation for all.

Though the techniques presented in this book come from many cultures and traditions, there is no attempt to explain the deeper context of these traditions or any spiritual component. I have chosen them because of their efficacy and proven success. Those who are interested in delving deeper into these techniques are encouraged to do so, but that is not my purpose here.



What's Inside

This book is divided into three parts, addressing the classroom space, the teacher, and the student. In *Part I*, I offer you techniques to increase the nurturing and supportive environment within your classroom so your students feel safe and at home, ready to learn. You will discover how the ancient Chinese practice of feng shui—with its three tenets of connectedness, balance, and vitality and five elements of fire, earth, metal, water, and wood—can provide simple, commonsense guidance to enhancing the learning spaces in your classroom. Creating a peaceable classroom is all a matter of assessing what is already present and then making adjustments according to the fluctuating needs of your students. For thousands of years, the people of China have brought peace and harmony into their homes through these practices, and now you can realize the same benefits in your classroom.

Part II is for you the teacher, and the other adults in the school-wide community mentioned above. In it, I introduce you to techniques that will help you

The brain stays alert and relaxed for learning in a safe and positive learning environment.

—Eric Jensen,
Super Teaching (p.26)

relax or energize your body and mind. I explain and discuss different breathing patterns, meditation, mindfulness walking, a relaxation sequence, yoga postures (some modified for the classroom setting), qigong, acupressure, Reiki, aromatherapy, and movement experiences to help you release emotions and ignore distractions that make it difficult for you to be fully present to focus and do your best work each day. You can use these techniques at school when needed or at home if you wish.

Part III, the student section, can help you tune in to the emotional temperature of your students so you can help them individually or collectively change their state-of-being, allowing them to focus and do their best work. Breathing patterns, centering activities, yoga postures, movement experiences, and different types of music are strategies you can use to help your students feel more relaxed or energized. Use them with the entire class during transition times, as pick-me-uppers when lethargy appears, or during your class meeting time. You can also help an individual student who needs calming or energizing by using an appropriate technique. As you guide your students in these techniques, you will be helping yourself as well.

Using this Book

How should you go about using this book? I would suggest that you read through the chapters in order because they are organized on a continuum that starts with the classroom space in Part I, creating a comfortable and inviting,

nurturing and supportive environment where optimum teaching and learning can take place. In Part II, you look at how you can remain in a good state-of-being within that space, fully focused and able to give your best to your teaching efforts. Finally, in Part III, you are provided with lessons and activities that will assist your students in maintaining or regaining their focus so that they, too, can do their best work. My hope is that you and your students will internalize some of the techniques and transfer them to many aspects of your daily living, for they are just plain “good medicine” for living a peaceable, balanced life.

Slow, deep breathing is probably the single best anti-stress medicine we have.

—James Gordon,
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
Georgetown University School of Medicine

Before teaching techniques to your students, I would recommend that you first determine which techniques you connect to yourself and want to learn for your own well-being. Try them and decide if they work for you. If they are helpful to you, your enthusiasm will spread to your students. Always consider the complexion of your class when deciding which techniques to teach them. You will certainly need a number of options to meet the needs of a classroom full of students. The book will offer you a myriad of ideas to explore, for as you know, the same technique doesn’t always work every time.

When introducing your students to a technique, you will want to explain what it will do for them—how it will assist them in relaxing or energizing so they can do their best work. (For example, “Today, we are going to learn a breathing technique that will help us to relax and calm down.”) Later when you suggest that they use a technique during the course of the day, remind them of its purpose. (For example, “I can see that some of you are nervous about this test. Let’s all do some deep breathing so we can feel calmer. Sit up straight. Breathe in . . .”)

You might introduce these techniques during your class meeting time, when a “teachable moment” arises, or during a transition time. Eventually, having a menu of techniques for your students to choose from will empower each student to use the technique that works best for him or her. Some students may spontaneously use techniques on their own when needed. That would be the ultimate outcome!



As you read, you will notice questions with a journal and pencil illustration next to them. This icon suggests that you pause to write your thoughts or observations about the questions in a journal. You may want to refer to your journal from time to time as you reassess your classroom environment.

Why Should I Use These Techniques?

Now, if you are as busy a teacher as I was, you are probably asking yourself, “How can I spend time on these techniques when I have so little teaching time to begin with?” Let me assure you that most of these strategies take only a few minutes once your children have learned them. The extra time you spend initially will go a long way toward improving your students’ abilities to focus on their work. Using these techniques, they are likely to accomplish more work in less time and improve the quality of their work as well. So check off the time element as a non-issue!

At the New England Regional Gifted Conference in 2003, James T. Webb, Ph.D. said in his address, “Don’t try to teach navigation skills in the middle of a hurricane” (Webb 2003). Gifted or non-gifted, our students are not going to learn or do their best work when they are in inner turmoil. Using the techniques described in this book will help your students create an inner climate of calm and vitality, which is essential for focus, concentration, clear thinking, confidence and self esteem. These qualities influence your students’ ability to think, create, problem solve, and produce. They impact your ability to be an effective teacher as well.

The strategies I offer in *Creating the Peaceable Classroom* increase learning success and empower you and your students to adjust your state-of-being as

needed, and the academic and social results have the potential of exceeding your expectations. It has been done in Murfreesboro, Tennessee at the Black Fox Elementary School. According to Principal Zane Cantrell, who implemented a program called “The Breathe System,” relaxation techniques resulted in improved test scores and fewer arguments between students (“Technique” 2001). Physician James Gordon, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University of Medicine and director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in the District

of Columbia, teaches deep abdominal breathing to most of his patients, including children who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. He reports that deep breathing helps to reduce anxiety and calm the mind (Krucoff 2000, 11).

Improving test scores and student performance is still a concern, just as it was when the first edition of this book came out in 2003. I have found that

Benefits

The strategies I offer in *Creating the Peaceable Classroom*:

- require minimal investment of time
- improve well-being
- improve attention and focus
- improve concentration
- increase teaching success
- increase learning success

finger-walking on a spiral or labyrinth can help reduce test anxiety. One fourth grader I worked with told me that he was scoring 40 to 50 percent on math quizzes and tests. Once he started finger walking a spiral before starting a test, his scores improved into the 80 percent range. Why? He was more relaxed, focused, and could think more clearly. Music has been shown to regulate stress, promote creativity, and energize the body and mind (Jensen 2000). Yoga has proven beneficial too. Studies done of the Yoga Ed and the Tools for Teachers programs showed promising results for children with ADHD. (Tools for Teachers is a yoga curriculum with techniques for teachers to use in their classrooms.) Students showed improved self-esteem, academic performance, and an increased ability to relax (Tomasko 2006).

I see greater confidence and more relaxation in my students as they approach and go through the state testing process. I attribute this in part to their use of deep breathing and affirmations. Many of my students do better as well.

—Third grade teacher

In my work with children on the autistic spectrum, I have found that teaching them relaxation and rejuvenation techniques, combined with yoga and energy balancing, has made them better able to manage their emotional state, with and sometimes without adult reminders. This, of course, depends upon the child, his or her age, and the extent of the condition. It is clear to me that “calming the hurricane inside” is essential for our students’ optimum performance.

By adopting these techniques, you will enhance your own well-being and teaching success. As you take care of yourself, you will improve your students’ well-being and learning success. You will launch your students on a path of self-empowerment, for as they internalize these techniques and make them a part of their daily lives, they will grow into adults who are well equipped to face the challenges and stressors in their lives, both personal and professional. Parents, if you adopt these techniques, you, too, will be preparing yourself and your children for facing life’s challenges in a more relaxed and thoughtful manner.

I have never had a parent take issue with the relaxation and energizing techniques I have taught to their children. In the unlikely event a parent expresses concern to you, I suggest you simply explain how and why these techniques are beneficial. You might invite the parent into your classroom to observe the techniques in action, or perhaps, to participate in them during a class meeting. Seeing and doing is believing. Such a visit will reassure the parent that these techniques are, indeed, worth learning.

Now, it’s time to sample the diverse menu of techniques for creating a peaceable classroom.

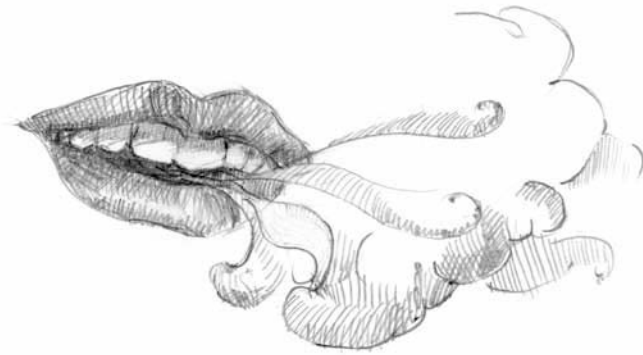
Part 11

Relaxing or Energizing Yourself for Optimum Teaching



You have created a supportive and nurturing classroom environment. You smile from the inside out when you walk in the door. You're ready to go! But it doesn't take long before you start to feel overburdened and stressed with paperwork, assessments, meetings, and unforeseen, incredibly important must-have by 3:30 four-page surveys, not to mention the challenges of your personal life. None of this emotional clutter disappears in a puff of smoke just by wishing it away! So what can you do when stresses and challenges in your life cause emotional upsets that distract you from your teaching? Read on for some answers.

The Breath



To my way of thinking, the most important technique you can learn to help yourself move through your emotions and distractions is the regulation of the breath. It is part of your every moment, day in and day out, wherever you are. The breath is your anchor to life, bringing you energy, vitality, clarity, and good health. By learning to work with it, you are able to change your state-of-being so you can function in a more balanced, efficient, and productive way.

Not only will improved breathing help to change your state-of-being, it has physical benefits as well. Julie T. Lusk writes about the physical benefits of deep abdominal breathing in her book *Desktop Yoga* (1998), citing these changes:

- » slowed heart rate
- » increased lymphatic flow and transfer of oxygen from the blood into the body's tissues
- » improved return of blood to the heart through the veins
- » normalized flow of blood to the lungs
- » increased blood and oxygen flow to the brain and the heart
- » reduced tension and stress in the muscles
- » pain reduction

How Do You Breathe?

Breathing is something we do automatically, day in and day out. Because it is automatic, we don't generally pay attention to it unless we are out of breath for some reason or have an illness that causes labored breathing. So take a few moments to notice how you breathe. You may do this sitting or lying down. If you choose to sit, make sure that you sit toward the front of your chair with your spine straight and your feet planted firmly on the floor. Sitting with a straight spine gives the lungs room to expand fully. If you choose to lie down, you may wish to bend your legs at the knees to put less strain on your lower back and place a rolled towel under your neck to support it, especially if you have neck problems.



Now close your eyes and relax in this position. Breathe normally. Quiet your mind and pay attention to the sensations inside your body. Feel the breath going in and out, in and out, in and out . . .

Notice your inhalation, how you draw breath in. With each breath, you receive oxygen and life-giving energy. How do you take in life? Where do you feel the breath as it goes in? Are you relaxed as you breathe in? Or are you tense as you breathe in? If so, where do you feel tension? Do you breathe through your mouth or through your nose? What part(s) of your body expand with the inhalation?



Notice your exhalation, how you let out the breath. Each exhalation is a release, a letting go. How do you let go? Where do you feel the breath as it goes out? What part(s) of your body contract as you exhale?

Pay attention to your breathing. Notice your “in” breath. Notice your “out” breath. Learn about your breathing self. Are the inhalations and exhalations the same or different lengths? Are there times when you pause between the inhalation and exhalation? Are you relaxed as you breathe? Or are you tense as you breathe? Are you breathing from your upper chest or from down deep in your belly? Notice. Increase your awareness. Know your breathing self.



What did you notice about your breathing?

Perhaps you noticed that you were breathing into your upper chest rather than deep into your belly. If so, you are an upper chest breather. Only a half-teacup of blood per minute flows through the upper part of your lungs, which is the least efficient place for oxygen to be transferred to the blood for circulation through the body. If you breathe deep into your belly, more than a liter of blood per minute flows into the bottom of your lungs, where the most efficient oxygen transfer takes place (Hendricks 1995).



Your body will satisfy its oxygen and blood-flow needs. If you take shallow breaths into the upper lungs, you will take multiple, tense breaths. If you take deep breaths into the lower lungs, you'll take fewer, more relaxed breaths. How would you prefer to breathe?

Good News

Like many of us, you may have just discovered that you are a half-teacup breather. Don't panic. All is not lost. You were once a liter breather and can become a liter breather again. It just takes remembering and practice.



Some of us who have been around a good while have to go a bit farther back to remember than others. For a quick reminder of what liter breathing looks like, observe a newborn baby. A baby's belly rises and falls with each breath. It uses its lungs fully. So, you may ask, "If we come into the world as liter breathers, why do we end up as half-teacup breathers?"

One answer is life. As we grow, we have life experiences that cause various feelings and sensations within our bodies. Feelings and sensations like tension and anxiety elicit a physical response that causes us to tighten up. This tightening brings our breathing into the upper chest and the upper part of the lungs. When we have another similar, stressful experience, cellular memory kicks in, and we go right back to that restricted breathing pattern. So the longer we have been alive, the stronger the cellular memory we have to repattern. But it can be done.

Our fast-paced lives, rushing from here to there, huffing and puffing along the way to get things done on time, also contributes to restricted breathing. Combine that hurried state with other possible dynamics, such as poor posture, tight clothing (Sarley and Sarley 1999), or a belief that we should hold our bellies in, a belief handed down from many mothers to their daughters and ever present in magazine ads showing flat-bellied male and female fashion

models. Now we have multiplied the negative effects of cellular memory. Breathing deep from the belly is rare.

In order to change your breathing pattern, it is helpful to understand the role the diaphragm plays in your breathing health. Let's take a look.

The Role of the Diaphragm in Breathing

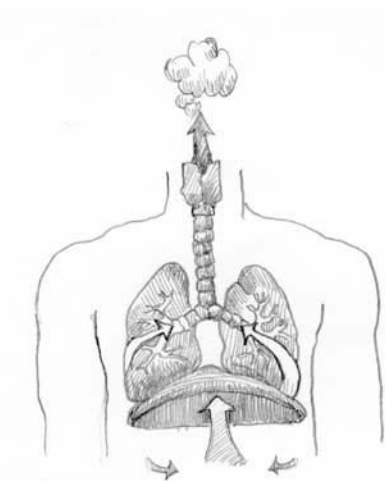
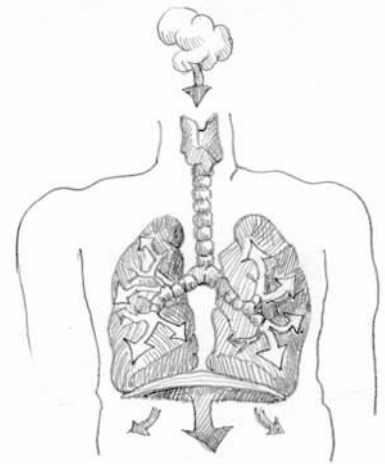
The diaphragm is a thin sheet of muscle fiber that separates the thoracic region (chest cavity), where your heart and lungs are housed, from the abdominal region (the belly), where other vital organs are housed. Shaped like a dome, it extends from front to back and from side to side. Gay Hendricks, the author of *Conscious Breathing*, compares the diaphragm to the drumhead on a snare drum, albeit a very loose drumhead (Hendricks 1995).

Inhalation

As you breathe in, the dome of the diaphragm flattens, tightens, and is pulled downward. When the belly muscles are relaxed, the abdomen expands and the diaphragm tightens with each inhalation. This allows the lungs to expand fully and take in the maximum amount of oxygen. If the belly muscles are not relaxed, the diaphragm will not fully flatten, the belly will not fully rise, and the lungs will not receive as much oxygen (Hendricks 1995).

Exhalation

As you breathe out, the flattened diaphragm relaxes and returns to its resting, arched position (Hendricks 1995). Completely exhaling releases the maximum amount of carbon dioxide from the lungs. Stale air is replaced with fresh air. By taking deep abdominal breaths, you allow your diaphragm to function optimally. The increased amount of oxygen taken into your lungs improves the oxygenation of all your body's organs, glands, and systems. Your heart doesn't



have to work as hard to pump blood, and your brain has more oxygen to help you think and create. What's more, your vital organs receive a healthy massage!

By controlling your breath, yogis believe, you can calm and relax your body.

—Dinabandhu and Ila Sarley,
The Essentials of Yoga (p. 67)

By relearning to breathe deeply, you will enhance your circulation, your energy level, and your ability to concentrate (Sarley and Sarley 1999). You will be empowered to change your emotional state when you want to feel more calm and relaxed. Breathing deeply will turn you into a healthy liter breather once again!

The How-to of the Complete Breath (Dirgha Breath)

Yogic Complete Breath is the foundation of all breathing techniques and can best be learned in three stages. It is easiest to learn while lying on your back, but you may sit in a chair or stand up if you prefer. If you choose to sit or stand, make sure that your spine is straight with the tailbone reaching back and your feet are planted firmly on the floor. Again, sitting with a straight spine provides the lungs with room to fully expand. If you prefer to lie down, you may be most comfortable if you bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor, to ease lower back strain (as illustrated previously). Placing a rolled towel under your neck can ease neck strain.

Stage 1: Abdominal Region Inflation

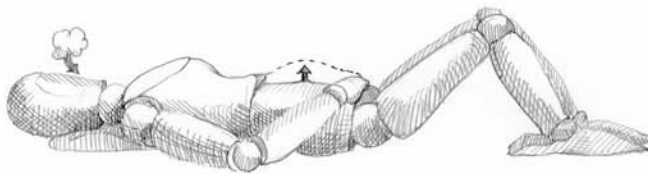
Once you are in a comfortable position, place your hands on your belly at your navel with the fingertips touching. You may wish to close your eyes.

Imagine that there is a balloon inside your body, filling your chest and belly. As you breathe in through your nose, visualize filling the lower part of the balloon, the lower lobes of your lungs, with the breath. Feel your belly expand as you gently breathe in. Your fingertips will separate slightly on the inhalation. If your belly muscles are too tight to let your belly expand, gently push the belly out until your muscles relax and soften (Rutt n.d.). If you are still having trouble, place one hand about half an inch away from your belly and inhale to make your belly touch your hand.

Hint: This method also works well if you notice that your clavicular region (chest) inflates before the lower abdomen. This is called paradoxical breathing.

It's where the inhalation begins in the chest rather than the lower abdomen and the exhalation begins in the lower abdomen rather than the chest. This is quite common in adults. Learning the Complete Breath will be a first step in bringing this to your awareness and changing it over time.

Exhale through your nose and visualize the balloon deflating as your belly flattens. Your fingertips will once again be touching and the navel will pull back toward the spine.



Repeat several times, noticing the expansion of your belly as you breathe in and the flattening of your belly as you breathe out.

Stage II: Thoracic Region Inflation

Now let's attend to the expansion of the chest cavity as you inhale.

Continue in the same position as for stage I. Place your hands against your sides, a couple of inches above your waist. Feel the ribs under your hands.

Inhale through your nose, filling up the abdominal cavity and the lower lungs (the lower part of the balloon). Then imagine the breath moving up and filling the middle area of the balloon, the chest cavity as well.

Notice how your hands move outward as the diaphragm flattens and the rib cage expands to fill the middle part of your lungs, the chest cavity. It is the intercostal muscles between the ribs that allow this expansion to take place.

Now, notice your hands moving inward as you exhale through your nose and your diaphragm rounds again (Rutt n.d.). Remember, exhalation is a releasing process. Just let your breath flow gently out, rather than forcing it.



Continue breathing this way until expanding up to your chest feels natural and easy.

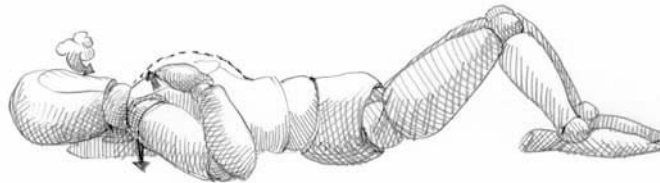
Stage III: Clavicular Region Inflation

Now let's pay attention to the upper lungs. This is probably where most of your inhalation has been occurring if you are a half-teacup breather:

Continuing in the same position, place your fingertips on the clavicle (collarbone) with the palm or heel of your hand resting on your upper chest (Marina Walker, personal communication).

Inhale through your nose, filling the abdominal and thoracic regions as before and allowing the breath to fill up the top part of your lungs, the clavicular region, completely filling the balloon (Rutt n.d.). You will notice that as your upper chest expands, your collarbone rises slightly at the end of a full inhalation. If you have difficulty feeling this slight movement, place your fingertips on the top part of your sternum (the breastbone). Be sure that your shoulders remain relaxed as you inhale.

Exhale through your nose letting the lungs release the breath down through the clavicular, thoracic, and abdominal regions, deflating the balloon from the top down. Pull your navel in toward your spine at the end of the exhalation for full deflation of the lungs. Your diaphragm returns to its rounded position.



Repeat, combining the abdominal, chest, and upper chest parts together in a smooth, full inhalation and exhalation of the breath. Make each inhalation and exhalation the same duration. Start by breathing in for a count of four, then exhaling for the same count. Work up to eight counts in and eight counts out. As you breathe, continue to grow the spine longer, breathe the ribs wider, and feel the crown of the head reaching toward the ceiling (Clough, personal communication). Pull your navel in toward your spine at the end of the exhalation.

Hint: Bring your attention to the exhalation as opposed to the inhalation. A full exhalation brings the navel back toward the spine, completely deflating

the lungs, preparing space for full lung expansion on the inhalation. Complete deflation of the lungs automatically promotes complete inflation of the lungs, bringing in maximum oxygen for distribution throughout the body.

Remember that each inhalation is nourishing your body, energizing it with fresh oxygen for distribution throughout. Each exhalation is cleansing, releasing stale air, making room for new, fresh air to fill the lungs on the next inhalation. By inhaling and exhaling completely, you are giving yourself a ticket to better health and it doesn't cost a cent!

For relaxation and rejuvenation, incorporate the breath into a swinging motion, **Swinging Breath**. Start in a standing position with your arms hanging loosely at your sides. Breathe in swinging your arms up over your head alongside your ears. Then swing them down along your sides and behind on the exhalation, bending your knees as your torso bends over your legs. Repeat six times (Clough, personal communication). When done, after the upswing, exhale your arms down to your sides. Stand in stillness and notice the aliveness within.

Refer to the book *Breathwalk*, by Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, Ph.D., and Yogi Bhajan, Ph.D., to find out how using primal sounds or phonemes (the simplest speech unit) can increase the effectiveness of the 4-4 and 8-8 breathing patterns.

Releasing Breath

Breathing in fully then forcefully expelling the breath from deep in the lungs is a great way to release anger and frustration from your body. This breath has the added benefits of cleansing, strengthening, and stimulating the lungs (Lusk 1998). It is much like taking a deep sigh that many of us do automatically when upset or frustrated. In the students' section on breathing, I have called this Dragon Breath.

Sit or stand (see Low Mountain on page 66) with a straight spine and inhale deeply through your nose from the belly to the clavicle.

Exhale forcefully from the belly through an open mouth. For maximum benefit, be sure to pull the navel in toward the spine so that all of the air is expelled.

Repeat three times.

Doing this breath once in a while even if you are not frustrated or angry is a good way to cleanse your lungs, removing built up toxins.

8-4-8 Breathing

This breathing technique is very easy to master and offers a number of benefits (Rutt, personal communication). It helps keep the nervous system healthy, has a calming effect on the emotions, and encourages balanced functioning of the body's systems.

Begin by sitting on the floor in a comfortable position with your legs crossed. You may want to sit on a cushion or pillow to elevate your hips. Sit with your spine straight. If sitting on the floor is uncomfortable, you may prefer to sit forward in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Imagine a string pulling up from the top of your head, straightening your spine. Use the Complete Breath as you learned earlier in this chapter.

Close your mouth and inhale for a silent count of eight. Feel the sternum, or breastbone, lift as you inhale.

Suspend the breath for a silent count of four. This is best accomplished by raising the chest slightly so that the throat and neck are not tight (Khalsa and Bhajan 2000). Keep your shoulders relaxed rather than letting them rise up toward your ear lobes.

Place the tip of your tongue on the ridge of soft tissue that separates your teeth from the roof of your mouth and exhale through your nose for a silent count of eight. Feel the sternum fall, returning to the resting state, as you exhale. This completes one breathing cycle.

Repeat the 8-4-8 breathing pattern in smooth, flowing cycles.

Are you wondering what the purpose of suspending the breath is? According to Gurucharan Singh Khalsa and Yogi Bhajan, suspending the breath “increases the utilization of oxygen in your system” (Khalsa and Bhajan 2000, 269). As you master this breathing pattern, you may gradually make each component the same length, eight counts in, eight counts suspended, and eight counts out. In addition to increasing the oxygenation benefits to your body, this longer suspension will be more relaxing as well.

Square Breathing 4-4-4-4

When you are feeling anxious, excited, nervous, or fearful, Square Breathing will help bring you to a place of calm. Try it before an important meeting or when you are short on time to complete a task such as finishing your report cards.

Again, sit with a straight spine on the floor, using a pillow or cushion to elevate your hips, or on the edge of a chair and follow this breathing pattern:

- » inhale for a count of four
- » suspend the breath for a count of four
- » exhale for a count of four
- » suspend the breath for a count of four

Just as in the Complete Breath, the belly, ribs, and chest expand on the inhalation and contract, top down, on the exhalation. Be sure to inhale and exhale completely.

Hint: To feel more comfortable doing this breathing technique, raise the chest slightly on the suspension of the breath just as you did with 8-4-8 breathing. The chin will rise a bit, alleviating tightness in the throat, making you feel more at ease.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Alternate Nostril Breathing is a balancing technique that alternates the inhalation and exhalation between the nostrils. It is an effective stress reducer.

Begin by practicing the finger movements for this technique. Gently place your right thumb on your right nostril. Then gently place your right index finger over your left nostril as you lift the right thumb up. Repeat this a few more times to get the feel of the motion. (If you are left dominant, you may want to use your left hand. In that case, the left thumb closes the left nostril and the left index finger closes the right nostril.)

Once you have the idea, try breathing in and out of one nostril at a time. Begin with gently closing off the right nostril as you breathe in and out of your left nostril. Do this several times so you get the feeling.

Hint: Breathing out the left nostril is a good way to quiet the body, mind, and emotions if you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

Next, gently close off the left nostril and breathe in and out of your right nostril several times to get the feeling of it.

Hint: Breathing out the right nostril is a good way to wake up the body and mind when one is tired.

Once you feel that you have the finger technique down, try putting it all together.

- » Breathe in through your right nostril.
- » Cover your right nostril and breathe out of your left nostril.
- » Breathe in through the left nostril.
- » Cover the left nostril and breathe out of your right nostril.

Repeat this until you begin to feel more at ease and balanced. Afterwards, sit silently for a bit and be with your stillness.

Hint: Breathe slowly and deeply. Always pay attention to your body. Stop if you begin to feel light-headed.



Breath of Fire

Another yoga breathing technique is called **Breath of Fire**.

Unlike the Complete Breath, it is strong and forceful, a revitalizing breath. Once again, begin by sitting with a straight spine. Because this breathing pattern is a little bit more difficult to do and learn, I will pass along the instructions yoga teacher Rev. Stephanie Rutt gives her students to help ease them into this pattern.

Begin by doing the Complete Breath with inhalations and exhalations of equal duration. Gradually shorten the length of each inhalation and exhalation, allowing your breaths to become shallower and more rapid. Keep the inhalations and exhalations of equal length. Let your breath find its own rhythm. It should be effortless yet powerful.

With practice, the rhythm of your breath will quicken, becoming no deeper than sniffing. Throughout, the chest remains still and should be slightly raised. All the movement when inhaling and exhaling is in the abdomen, as the navel point is pulled in toward the spine. (Hint: Think of exhaling with enough energy to blow out a candle.) If you begin to feel dizzy, slow the pace and become aware of your inhalations and exhalations. Make sure that they are of equal duration. If necessary, stop the breathing pattern.

Continue this breathing pattern for one minute at first, gradually working up to three minutes.

To ensure that you are doing this breathing technique correctly, Khalsa and Bhajan (2000) recommend that you place one hand on your chest and the other between your navel point and your solar plexus. The solar plexus lies a couple of inches below your sternum, the tip of your breastbone. As you do the Breath of Fire, the hand on your chest should remain still and the hand on your upper abdomen should move in and out. Should you find it difficult to learn this breathing technique, consider taking a kundalini yoga class to learn it.

Why use Breath of Fire? The benefits are many. In *Breathwalk*, Khalsa and Bhajan (2000, 82) list these:

- » stress release
- » expanded lung capacity and vital breath
- » expulsion of toxins from the lung tissues
- » clearing of the mucous membranes
- » alertness, energy, and strength
- » “signature of wellness” in your body rhythms, such as your heartbeat
- » balance in the autonomic nervous system
- » loss of addictive impulses



Parent Connection

Your job as a parent has its joys and its challenges. In fact, your emotional temperature can swing dramatically within hours or even minutes. Using the breath can help you better handle those downswings and help you maintain balance in your life as well. If you haven't explored the benefits of breath work before, start with the Complete Breath and make it a regular practice. When you feel comfortable with it, expand into other breathing techniques. Your improved state-of-being, and most likely improved health, will benefit the family as well.

The breath is fundamental for personal health and well-being. It is the anchor that brings you back to stillness in meditation, the self-help technique I will present in chapter 4.

