

Working Towards Wellbeing: Square Breathing

This video is part of a series designed to help health practitioners learn evidence-based skills which enhance mental wellbeing and resilience.

If you are a health practitioner, why not try these techniques for yourself? We encourage everyone to look after their mental health and emotional wellbeing in ways that we know work.

Video Transcript:

I wonder if you've tried teaching people to use controlled breathing techniques? This is not "learning to breathe" - it is "learning to use special, anxiety reducing breathing techniques".

Just in the same way singers need to learn breathing techniques, stressed and anxious people, whose breathing is affected by their anxiety, need to learn special techniques as well.

There are many techniques that have similar success rates. But only if they are practiced regularly!

The first technique I learnt involved six second breathing cycles. Three seconds for the in breath and three for the out breath. That always felt too fast for me. Not to be deterred, I went looking for another technique that might work for me. It's important to remember that if the first breathing technique doesn't work for you, don't give up. Just look for another.

My favorite technique is sometimes called "square breathing". I use it all the time. It helps me go to sleep at night and stands me in good stead when things get stressful at any time of day. The best part is - nobody knows I'm doing it!

Teaching square breathing is easy and quick. Here's how it goes:

1. Settle comfortably in a chair with your hands on your abdomen to feel the movement of your breath. Close your eyes if you are comfortable to do so and count yourself through the exercise.
2. Breathe in for four seconds, then hold for four seconds. Breathe out for four seconds, then hold for four seconds. Repeat this three or four times.

If you are teaching someone else how to do square breathing, it's a good idea to do the exercise with them.

After the exercise talk about how you both feel and whether that little bit of slow breathing has made any difference. Talk about whether it might be possible to do it three or four times a day, and what times of day might be appropriate. Plan to get together in a week or two to talk about whether they think these regular slow breathing exercises have been useful.

Remember, before you teach someone this technique try it for yourself. If you benefit from it you will do much better teaching it to others.

Further reading and resources:

- [The Effectiveness of Diaphragmatic Breathing Relaxation Training for Reducing Anxiety](#)
- [Square Breathing video](#)
- [Square breathing for children](#)
- [Reach Out Breathe App](#)