



ENGAGE Breathing activity examples

Smell the Flowers Blow Out the Candle

Hold up your pointing finger to your nose and pretend that it's a brightly-coloured, sweet-smelling flower. When you inhale through your nose imagine that you are smelling its petals. Then move your pointing finger down in front of your mouth and pretend that it's a birthday candle with a flickering flame. When you slowly exhale, make a little gap between your lips and pretend that you're gently blowing the flame out. Repeat this several times until you feel nice and relaxed.

Tumble Dryer

Children point their index fingers out in front of their mouths, with their left and right fingers overlapping slightly. Children inhale slowly through their nose, then exhale slowly through their mouths while they spin their fingers around each other – making a nice satisfying swishy sound as their breath hits their spinning fingers. Once children have learned the actions and are comfortable with the breathing, asks them to try and make the swishing last a little bit longer with each breath out (without losing their breath, or feeling light-headed).

Tahi, Rua, Toru Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

Combine te reo counting and breathing! Inhale slowly through your nose while the teacher counts 'tahi, rua, toru' and then do a long exhale through your mouth on 'aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa' – making the 'aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa' sound with your breath (note: make sure the 'aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa' is at least as long as the time it takes to count 'tahi, rua, toru'). Repeat this several times.

Bubble Breathing

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Begin by imagining you are holding a bubble wand. Breathe in deeply through your nose, and then, as you breathe out slowly and gently, imagine you are blowing bubbles into the room. Try to breathe out slowly and gently through a little gap in your lips – if you blow too hard the bubbles will burst, and if you blow too quickly not many bubbles will come out. As you keep breathing slowly and blowing your imaginary bubbles, feel your body become calm and relaxed.

Bumble Bee Breathing

Children breathe in through their nose, then gently put their fingertips in their ears and hum out loud while they exhale. This creates a nice calming hum inside children's heads and can be a peaceful way to block out noisy distractions and pay attention to breathing and relaxing.

Hot Air Balloon

Sit in a comfortable position and cup your hands around your mouth. Take a deep breath in through your nose and slowly start to blow out slowly through your mouth, growing your hands outwards in time with your exhale as if you are blowing up an enormous hot air balloon. Hold your hand position still as you inhale again and then spread your hands further as you exhale. Once your balloon is as big as it can be, gently sway from side to side as you

release your balloon up into the sky. Once your balloon is as big as it can be (and you've finished your exhaling), breathe normally as you sway gently from side to side admiring your big beautiful hot air balloon as it soars through the sky.

Breathing balls

Another helpful breathing technique is to ask children to visualise an expanding ball or balloon inside their bellies as they inhale. As they breathe in, the balloon expands and as they breathe out, the balloon deflates. One of the best ways to help kids with this visualisation is to use a Hoberman Sphere (or breathing ball) – expanding it as kids breathe in and compressing it as they breathe out. Be sure to explain to children that the ball is in their tummy, not in their chest!

Dragon Fire Breathing

Children interlace their fingers underneath their chins and inhale slowly – lifting their elbows up to frame their faces. Then children exhale with an open mouth – lifting their heads up high and making a whispered 'hah' sound towards the sky, like a dragon breathing fire. At the same time, children lower their elbows back down to their sides again by the end of the 'hah' exhale. This breath technique builds strength and heat within so is a good energiser.

Tummy Rides

Children lie on the floor with a small toy (or other small object) resting on their tummy. Children breathe in deeply through their nose and feel the toy rise as their tummies fill with air, and then feel it lower as they slowly exhale through their mouths. Pretend to slowly rock the toys to sleep using the gentle rise and fall of the belly breathing.

Beach Breathing

Children close their eyes and imagine they're standing on a sandy beach. As children slowly inhale, ask them to imagine that they're slowly sucking a wave up onto the sand (with pulling arm actions if it helps with the visualisation). As children slowly exhale, they can imagine themselves blowing and pushing the wave back out to sea. Repeat several times.

Take 5 Breathing

Children hold up one hand with their fingers outstretched like a star, and their palms facing towards them. With the index finger of the opposite hand, children slowly trace up their thumb while they inhale, then slowly trace down their thumb while they exhale. Keep moving along each finger with every inhale/exhale, until children finish with their pinky finger (e.g. five inhalations and five exhalations in total). Remember to encourage long, slow gentle breaths, going in through the nose (where possible) and out through the mouth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSgOW879jjA>

Infinity Breathing (Figure 8 Breathing)

Tracing around an infinity symbol (a sideways figure 8), can be a helpful tool for children to achieve a smooth, even breath cycle. Ask children to inhale as they follow one half of the symbol and exhale as they follow the other half. Once children understand the action and can breathe and trace smoothly, start to increase the size of the exhale loop, to help lengthen their breaths out. You can also make the game more interactive – by driving a toy car around a figure 8 track, or walking slowly around a chalk outline while they breathe. Try to see how many nice smooth laps children can do and/or make their laps last a little bit longer each time (without losing their breath or feeling lightheaded).

Square breathing

Children trace the outline of a square while they do this breathing exercise. On their desk or table, children draw a vertical line going up for a count of 4 as they breathe in (the left side of the square), then trace a horizontal line going left to right as they hold the breath for a count

of 4 (the top of the square), then trace a vertical line going down as they exhale for a count of 4 (the right side of the square), then trace a horizontal line going right to left as they hold their breath again (the bottom of the square). Repeat several times and try to gradually make the counts a little slower each time. Teachers might need to demonstrate and count out loud to help with timing to begin with, until children can eventually count evenly in their own heads while breathing and drawing the square. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFdZXwE6fRE>

Back To Back Breathing

Find a partner and sit on the floor back to back. Sit up nice and tall and close your eyes if you want to. One person begins by inhaling deeply and then exhaling slowly, and then continues to breathe slowly and deeply. Their partner should feel their partner's back expand each time they breathe in, and then try to match-up the timing of their own breathing, so that both partners are breathing in time together. Repeat until both partners are breathing in time, with long, slow breath cycles.

Elephant Breathing

Children stand with their feet wide apart and their arms dangling in front of their body like an elephant's trunk. As they breathe in deeply through their noses, children raise their trunks up high above their heads, then slowly swing their trunks down again as they breathe out through their mouths. Encourage children to make large, slow, graceful movements with their trunks to encourage longer breaths.

Shoulder Roll Breathing

Choose a comfortable sitting position. As you take a slow deep breath in through your nose, raise your shoulders up towards your ears. Breathe slowly out through your mouth, lowering your shoulders as you exhale. Repeat slowly, rolling your shoulders up and down in time with your breath.

<https://childhood101.com/fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/>

Blowfish Breathing

Children practice slowly breathing in and out as the blowfish in the video slowly rises and sinks in the water with its own breathing. Remind children to fill up their tummies (not their chests) when they inhale through their nose, and to let their air in and out nice and slowly, instead of in big fast gulps. Encourage them to pretend they're blowing out bubbles underwater. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLbK0o9Bk7Q>

Superhero breathing

Create your own breathing exercises based on the movements of your favourite superheroes. E.g. Superman breathing – inhale through your nose and pull both of your fists into your sides, then exhale through your mouth and pretend to push off and fly with one arm outstretched. Hulk breathing – slowly inhale through your nose and raise both arms above your head (like a bodybuilder posing to show off their arms) then exhale through your mouth and squeeze your arms back down as you crouch towards the floor. See examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqrQJ-NKbAY>

Alternate nostril breathing (Advanced)

This yoga breathing technique helps children bring attention to their breathing by holding one nostril closed as they breathe out and in through their nose, then holding the other nostril closed as they breathe out and in (repeating this cycle several times). This technique is a little more advanced, with several variations, and it works best when children are able to breathe unobstructed through their nose (e.g. no blocked or runny noses). It's also a great

exercise for teachers to use when they need a little bit of peace and calmness! Watch some YouTube clips to learn more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VwufJrUhic>

4-7-8 Breathing (Advanced)

Children breathe in for a count of four, hold their breath for a count of 7, and then slowly exhale out loud for a count of 8. Repeat this cycle no more than four times. Don't worry if you feel a little bit lightheaded the first few times you do this – after a little bit of practice, four breath cycles will leave you feeling nice and relaxed (and maybe even a little bit sleepy!). Also, the timing of the counts doesn't matter (everybody has a different lung capacity), as long as the counts are even throughout the cycle. This exercise helps children to develop the skill of making their exhale breath longer than their inhale breath – which helps to calm down their stress response system. Also a great exercise for teachers to do!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8fjYPC-k2k>

Language for success in breathing games

- Try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth whenever you can
- If your nose is blocked, you can try pursing your lips when you breathe in (making them into a little circle with your lips)
- When we breathe in, we want the air to slowly fill up our tummies – not our chests
- Imagine you're slowly filling up a big balloon in your tummy
- Try to let the air in nice and slowly, and let it out nice and slowly – don't gulp it all in at once
- Make your breathing slow, smooth and gentle
- We want our face and our shoulders to be soft and relaxed
- When you exhale, imagine air slowly escaping from a tiny hole in a balloon
- Closing your eyes can help you to focus on your breathing and make you feel even more relaxed
- Doing some breathing games will help you feel better and time you feel worried, or upset

Other props and cues for breathing games

- Demonstrate tummy breathing with a Hoberman ball / breathing ball
- Use breathing sticks to help children maintain focus
<https://momentousinstitute.org/blog/the-breathing-stick>
- Use visual cues to help children develop even timing for inhaling and exhaling – make a soft toy rise (inhale) and fall (exhale) in the air for children to follow while they breathe