

GATE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELING RESOURCE NEWSLETTER

October Edition, 2017

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Greetings,

This is the October edition of the monthly GATE resource newsletters. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide educators with information, practical ideas, classroom interventions and strategies related to the specific characteristics and needs of GT middle school students.

Anxiety

Anxiety, this month's newsletter topic is prevalent among gifted students and thus worthy of addressing. Gifted children are more susceptible to anxiety due to perfectionism, asynchronous development, and overexcitabilities. When students experience chronic anxiety, it may show up as fear, irritability, headaches, stomach aches, social withdrawal, missed school, and oppositional behavior. The book "Mindfulness Skills for Kids and Teens" describes anxiety as being "characterized by chronic worry, restlessness, irritability, trouble concentrating, muscle tension, fatigue, and sleep disturbance."

Mindfulness is an easy to use and highly effective tool for improving all the symptoms mentioned above. Although often taken for granted, breathing is a powerful tool for calming ourselves during times of stress, worry, and distress. Regular, slow, deep breathing tricks our mind into feeling calm. The attached featured resources include 2 step-by-step belly breathing exercises with scripts and a quick "Learning to Relax" tip sheet.

References:

Burdick, D. (2014). *Mindfulness Skills for Kids & Teens. A Workbook for Clinicians & Clients with 154 Tools, Techniques, Activities & Worksheets*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media

Fonseca, C. (2011). *Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students. Helping Kids Cope With Explosive Feelings*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc.

Peters, D. (2013). *Make Your Worrier a Warrior. A Guide to Conquering Your Child's Fears*. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.

<u>Featured Resources (attached):</u>	<u>Recommended Books:</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. "Three Ways to Tell if you are Belly Breathing"2. "Belly Breathing Core Practice with a Stuffed Animal or Smartphone"3. "Tip Sheet 4: Learning to Relax"4. "Examples of Accommodations that can Reduce Anxiety "	<p>For Parents and Teachers:</p> <p>Peters, D. (2013). <i>Make Your Worrier a Warrior. A Guide to Conquering Your Child's Fears</i>. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.</p> <p>For Children:</p> <p>Peters, D. (2013). <i>From Worrier to Warrior. A Guide to Conquering Your Fears</i>. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.</p> <p>Collins-Donnelly, K. (2013). <i>Starving the Stress Gremlin. A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Stress Management for Young People</i>. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.</p>

Tool 6-6: Three Ways to Tell if You Are Belly Breathing

BACKGROUND: Belly breathing has been shown to be an important part of decreasing the stress response. It increases the oxygen intake and generally increases awareness of breathing, which is a basic concept in mindfulness.

SKILL BUILDING: Use Handout 6-6 to teach clients how to know if they are getting a belly breath. Explain and demonstrate these three techniques and watch clients try each of them in session. Encourage them to practice several times a day between sessions until they can readily tell they are belly breathing.

REFLECTION: Learning to belly breathe takes practice for most clients. These three easy ways to tell if you are getting a belly breath help clients gain mastery over this technique very quickly. Explain and demonstrate the three techniques, do them with clients, and then follow up at subsequent sessions by asking them to show you how they are doing with them.

THREE WAYS TO TELL IF YOU ARE BELLY BREATHING

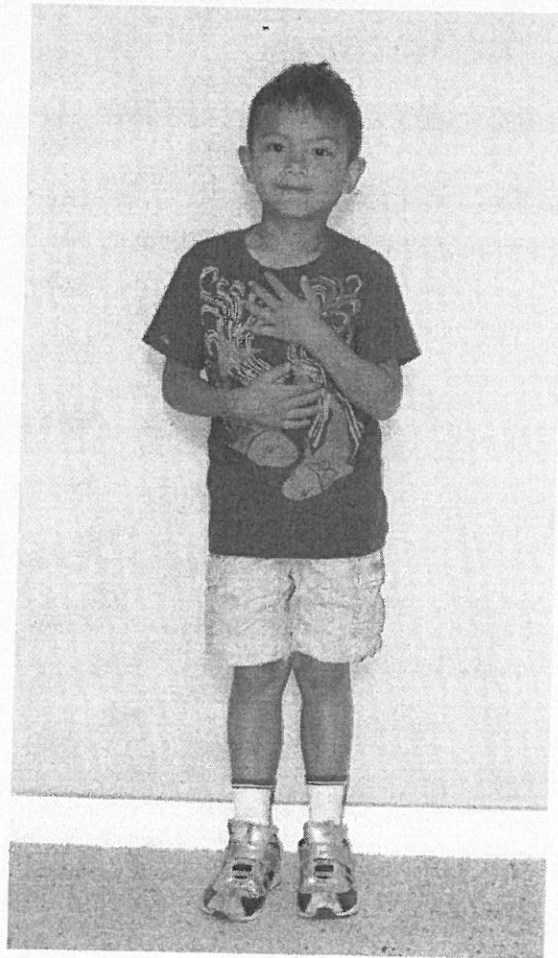
There are three easy ways to tell if you are belly breathing or chest breathing.

1. Place one hand on your belly above your belly button and one hand on your upper chest. Just breathe as you usually breathe and notice which hand moves more. If the bottom hand moves more, great, that's a belly breath. If the top hand moves more, that's a chest breath, which is the same as anxious breathing.

Deliberately move your stomach in and out just below your rib cage and above your belly button to get the feel of a belly breath. Notice your bottom hand moving.

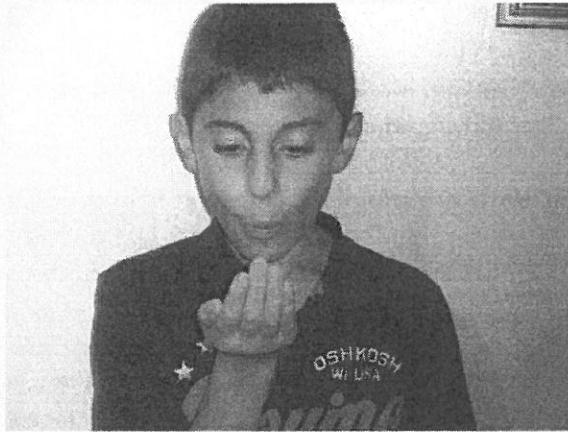
Now breathe normally and notice which hand moves more.

- Bottom hand moves more = belly breath—great
- Top hand moves more—chest breath = same as anxious breathing

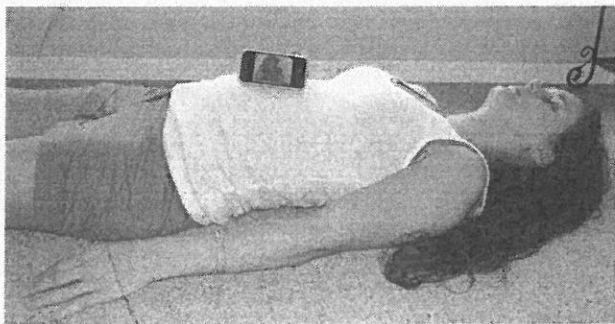
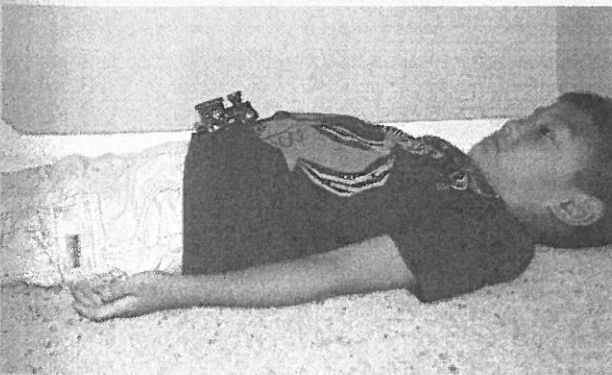
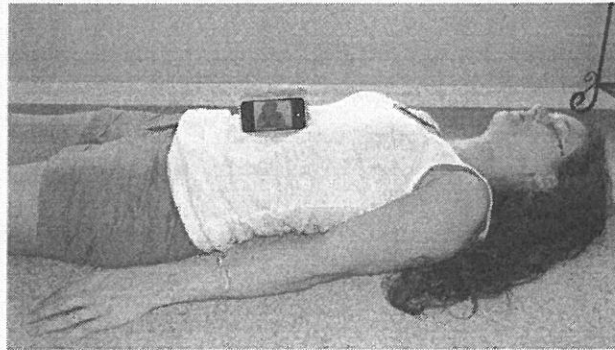
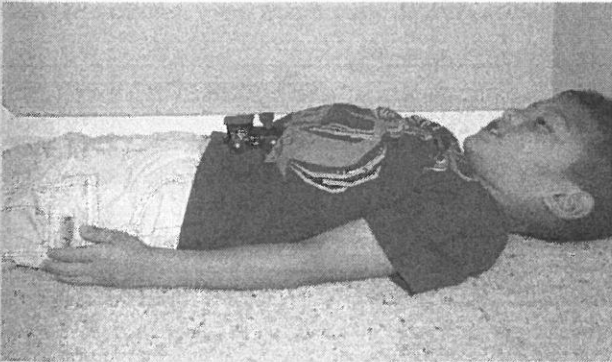


2. **Intentionally take a chest breath and blow on your hand.** Notice the temperature of the air as it flows across your fingers. Now, intentionally take a belly breath and blow on your hand. Again, notice the temperature of the air as it flows across your fingers. You will notice that the air feels warmer when it comes from a belly breath.

- Chest breath → colder air
- Belly breath → warmer air



3. **Lie down on your back.** Place an object on your belly such as a small stuffed animal if you are a child or a book or a smartphone if you are a teen. Now make the object go up and down as you breathe; rock the stuffed animal or smartphone.



Tool 6-9: Belly Breathing Core Practice with a Stuffed Animal or Smartphone

BACKGROUND: At the heart of mindfulness is the Core Practice as described in Tool 6-8. This tool provides another great way for kids and teens to get the benefit of the core practice combined with a fun way to get the hang of the belly breath.

SKILL BUILDING: Use Handout 6-9 to teach clients another version of the Core Practice. A fun way to help kids and teens get the feeling of the belly breath is to have them lie on their back with arms and legs uncrossed while they do this skill or many of the other skills. Place a stuffed animal on their belly and ask them to 'give the stuffed animal a ride'. For teens who are way too cool to use a stuffed animal, suggest they place their smartphone (silenced) or tablet on their belly and give it a ride up and down.

Modify the length of the silent period near the end to suit the needs of the client and lengthen it as they practice and gain mastery. This might range from 10 seconds for a beginner or hyperactive or anxious client, on up to 15 minutes for a more advanced client.

REFLECTION: Teach the client to reflect on the process of breathing. Ask them: How did you feel as you breathed in and out? Did you feel the air going in and out? Did you notice if it was warm or cold? Could you rock the stuffed animal (smartphone)? What did it feel like to pay attention to breathing? Did your mind wander? How did you stay focused on breathing?

HANDOUT 6-9

CORE PRACTICE BREATHING MEDITATION WITH A STUFFED ANIMAL OR SMARTPHONE

Find yourself a comfortable position lying flat on your back with your arms and legs uncrossed after placing a small stuffed animal on your belly. (For teens, use their smartphone (sound turned off), tablet, or book if they are too cool for a stuffed animal.)

Close your eyes if you like or just look gently up at the ceiling.

Check in to see how your mind and body feel

Now pay attention to your breathing

Take a nice deep belly breath in through your nose and, while you do this, let the air fill your belly and raise the stuffed animal (smartphone)

Now blow gently out through your mouth and lower the stuffed animal (smartphone)

Now breathe in and out and give the stuffed animal a ride up and down (smartphone)

Take a nice deep belly breath in through your nose to the count of four and then blow out gently through your mouth to the count of eight

Now just breathe normally

Notice your breath but don't change it

Notice how your belly moves the stuffed animal (smartphone)

Relax your shoulders

Picture the air coming into your body and then going back out again

Notice how the air feels as it comes into your nose and down into your lungs

Then notice how it feels when the air comes back up into your mouth and out across your lips

If you start to think about other things, that's ok, just bring your attention back to your breath

Feel your belly rising and falling

Can you feel the stuffed animal (smartphone)?

Just keep paying attention to how it feels as you breathe

Now check in with how your mind and body feel

Keep paying attention to your breath for a few moments

Silence (vary the length as appropriate)

When you are ready, open your eyes

Bring your attention back to the room

Take another slow, deep belly breath with your eyes open



TIP SHEET 4: LEARNING TO RELAX

- ✓ **Deep Breathing:** Take several slow, deep breaths. Imagine the stressful physical symptoms to "melt away."
- ✓ **Breathing Colors:** Take several deep breaths. On the inhalation, picture your favorite color. I use blue or pink. On the exhalation, imagine a dirty color. This is the color of the stress in your body. Continue slow steady breathing until the color you inhale matches the color you exhale.
- ✓ **Mini Vacations:** Picture your favorite place in the world. Imagine everything about that place—how things look, how they feel, how they smell. The more vivid, the better.
- ✓ **Mental Rehearsal:** This is particularly helpful before a test or performance-based activity. Imagine taking each step of the activity successfully. For example, if you are preparing for a piano recital, you may picture getting ready for the recital, walking on stage, sitting on the piano bench, hearing the music in your mind, playing the music perfectly, and hearing the applause at the end. During each step, take several slow breaths to remain calm.

Accommodations that can Reduce Anxiety

- ✓ More time for tests
- ✓ Ability to take tests and work in a distraction-free environment
- ✓ Less copying and writing
- ✓ No public reading or speaking until ready to do so
- ✓ Use of a keyboard and/or voice recognition software
- ✓ Audio books
- ✓ Reduction of homework, particularly work that has been mastered
- ✓ Differentiation and acceleration in coursework for advanced areas (language arts, math, science)

Source:

Peters, D. (2013). *Make Your Worrier a Warrior. A Guide to Conquering Your Child's Fears*. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.