

BIRTHDAY CANDLE BREATHING TECHNIQUE



Breathing calms children by slowing them down—deep breaths can literally slow a racing heart and help kids respond to stress in a healthier way (in fact, it works for everyone—adults, too). When hard feelings arise, try this simple exercise to help your little one feel calmer.

How to do it:

1. Simply get the child to hold their pointer finger on either hand and pretend it is a birthday candle, holding it in front of their mouth.
2. Explain that it is important to breathe in deeply through their nose (like smelling a flower) and blow out through their mouth as gently as possible so the flame stays alight. Make this a fun activity so it encourages them to use it when needed.
3. Children from three years up generally can relay their age on their fingers, so ask them to do this the number of times they are old (five breaths are optimal but not essential).

When to do it.

Introduce these ideas when your child is happy and calm (explaining birthday candle mid-meltdown in the grocery store is not a recipe for success). Ideally we want the children to use these or other breathing techniques when we see their lower intensity emotions (just starting to get upset or notice frustration). After this has been practiced and learnt it can be also helpful to use mid melt-down to help a child regulate back to calm.

Practice makes perfect (and keep it fun).

Add the breathing exercise they like best to play time. Maybe you draw cupcakes and blow out crayon candles, explain that it's a lot of fun and that it's also a good thing to do when he/she are feeling bad because it'll help them to calm down.

How to use it in the moment.

When tough feelings come, help them through their favourite breathing exercise with the following steps:

Connect: Get down to her level and connect. Try looking her in the eye or gently touching her shoulder.

Name the feelings: Sometimes big feelings like anger or disappointment can feel scary (even to grown-ups!), so acknowledge her big feelings to help her understand what's happening. Try something like, "You look like you're really upset" or "You seem angry that your brother took your toy."

Find a quiet space: Whether it's a cosy spot in her bedroom or a café corner, a quiet space lets her step away from the situation and gives her a little bit of privacy to gather herself and calm down.

Breathe together: Start doing the breathing exercise together. Help her by talking through each step: "Let's blow out some birthday candles. Breathe in...and...out. Let's do another one."

Give her a comforting cuddle (if she's ready): Some kids welcome a hug, but others may need a moment to settle down—follow your child's cues and your own instincts.

Model mindful breathing yourself.

When you get angry or frustrated, try taking deep breaths—or use the technique above. Explain what you're doing simply by saying, "I am feeling really angry right now. I'm going to take some deep breaths to help me calm down before we talk more about this." Your child is a keen observer, and when she sees you using breathing to calm yourself, she'll learn that this is a good way to manage big feelings.

It may take a little time, but eventually he'll be able to do this all by himself—and he may even start reminding you to use your "Birthday Candle" or "Star Fish" when your temper wears thin in traffic!