

Focused Breathing and Mindful Distraction for Pain Management



You can teach this simple mindful technique on admission and prior to procedures; this will boost your confidence using the technique with children and adolescents during painful or distressing treatments.

‘Just notice your breathing... take a nice BIG breath in’ - you breathe with the child, and breathe OUT with a slow releasing breath.

Breathing – one hand on your tummy, the other on your upper chest, slow deep breath in through the nose, upper hand still, lower hand moving out as you consciously push your diaphragm down - tummy out. Then gently blow out through pursed lips. Repeat this three or four times.

Then start with the following mindful distraction sequence:

- 🌀 Toes (wiggle) feet on the floor (or dangling), back to heels – top of feet, where laces would be... Ankles
- 🌀 Lower legs, up to your knees... notice the sensations, touch, position...
- 🌀 Upper legs... bottom... your weight on the chair
- 🌀 Notice your breathing... the breath that goes in... and out (time this with the child's breath)
- 🌀 Lower back and back against the chair... (adjust according to child's position)
- 🌀 Up to your shoulders... let them drop a little... (that's good...)
- 🌀 Into your neck area, noticing sensations, maybe gently look to the left and right
- 🌀 Up the back of your head and ears, up to your *tallest point* on top of your head
- 🌀 Notice your breathing... the breath that goes in... and out (time this with the child's breath) *repeat any time*
- 🌀 Around the front to your forehead and eyes... (eyes can be open, closed or alternate, child's choice)
- 🌀 Down through your jaw and down your neck... notice the sensations... hair, clothing, pillow etc
- 🌀 Across to shoulders... right out to the tips of your shoulders
- 🌀 Now down both arms together... through elbows, wrists and fingers (can pause at elbows, then on down)

Variations:

Left side, up and down then the right side. Reverse the order and work your way from fingers to toes. Breathing in a soothing colour and ‘sending’ it around your body, ask the child where she/he is ‘sending it’ ‘Mindful Tracing’ around fingers and thumb – first one hand then the other - let the child choose. Generally done with eyes open but can be done with eyes closed.

Finish with a deep breath in, and out and a stretch of arms and legs.

If the child/adolescent has closed eyes and drifted then a deep breath in and think backwards 4,3,2,1 then open eyes and all finished. Follow this with a stretch of arms and legs. Don't stand up immediately, take a few moments to ‘collect and reorientate oneself’. You can use this technique with children as young as 4yrs but they are unlikely to respond to ‘relaxation’, which is why we use the term ‘mindful distraction’.

This technique should only be used in a safe environment where the child could fall asleep without any risk of harm. It is one technique that can be added to other distraction techniques such as blowing bubbles, iPad, music, video, games etc. The child may feel sleepy or experience altered sensations... watery eyes (not crying), overall warmth or a cool feeling, light-headedness; emerging emotions in older adolescents and adults.

Talk with the child about his/her experience. If the child had a procedure, remember, in a child-centered approach the end of the procedure is not defined by technical aspects. The immediate post-procedural period is a crucial opportunity for building and reconstruction; don't waste it by walking away. Remember, any gain is a gain. Lots of encouragement and ‘Achievement’ stickers and rewards rather than ‘Bravery’.

TDPC Workshops

- 🌀 Distraction, Pain and Guided Imagery
- 🌀 Emotions and Stress in Health Care
- 🌀 Pain, Stress and Emotions in Paediatric Palliative Care

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