



# Respectful Futures

## Shaping Healthy Relationships



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### A Mindful Handbook

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# Introduction

We invite you to incorporate any or all of these exercises into your facilitation of the Respectful Futures modules. Doing so can offer students/participants an opportunity to gather their thoughts and settle into the learning process in the best way possible.

The exercises are intended to promote calm and set the stage for healthy reflection and discussion. The first two exercises are considered to be optimal starters; however, we encourage you to select the option you believe will work with your learners.

# Rationale

We live in busy environments and face many demands. Extra-curricular activities, social media, and school and work commitments can mean that we have little time for ourselves. As a result, we may lose sight of what is happening inside us and find ourselves reacting without thinking to the world around us. This can lead to an imbalance in our wellness among mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical facets of our health. Finding balance between these aspects requires us to take responsibility in nurturing all four areas holistically.

Grounding is the practice of focusing our attention on one thing at a time. It provides us with an opportunity to increase our understanding of where we are and enable us to feel without judgement.

Taking time to pay attention to ourselves helps increase awareness. It creates opportunities to manage stress and emotions such as anger and frustration. Grounding exercises have also been proven to slow heart rate and breathing, reduce oxygen consumption, and even change brain waves. This opens the mind to learning, including the concepts presented in the Respectful Futures modules. It also builds an understanding of how important the emotional facet of our health is to our wellbeing.

# Ways to Get Started



<https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/FNHA-First-Nations-Perspective-on-Health-and-Wellness-Poster.pdf>

Introduce the importance of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical facets in our health and wellbeing. Emphasize individual responsibility and the significance of finding balance between these four aspects. Afterwards introduce the concepts of grounding and relaxation, feel free to lead a short discussion about their benefits and how they can promote a balanced life.

Briefly review the other remaining circles in the poster and their importance in our wellbeing using the information provided on the First Nations Health Authority website.

<https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-and-the-first-nations-health-authority/first-nations-perspective-on-wellness>

Normalizing the use of such techniques can inspire students/participants to continue practising the exercises even when they are away from the learning space. Remind them that as we practice, we become more comfortable with our thoughts and can begin to “drive our own bus.” Highlight the fact that thoughts are part of the grounding process. Encourage students/ participants not to be concerned about what they are thinking, but rather simply to become more aware of their thoughts. Whatever happens during the exercise is “right” for them.

For these exercises to be successful, it is suggested that students/participants have:

- A relatively quiet environment
- Something to focus on
- Enough room to settle into a comfortable position
- A relaxed mindset



## Two Minutes to Start

Please sit comfortably in your chair. This is a two-minute opportunity simply to focus on your breathing. I will let you know when the two minutes have ended and we will move into an exercise after that.

You may close your eyes or keep them open. When you notice that you are breathing in, please count “ONE” to yourself.

When you are breathing out, please count “ONE.” Do this for two minutes, and when the two minutes are up, reflect on the sensations in your body and on your thoughts.

All right then, breathing in, count “ONE” to yourself, and breathing out, count “ONE” to yourself for two minutes.

BEGIN.



# Calm Breathing

Calm breathing is a technique that helps you slow down your breathing when you are feeling stressed or anxious. Newborn babies naturally breathe this way; singers, wind instrument players, and yoga practitioners also use this type of breathing.

Why is calm breathing important? Our breathing changes when we are feeling anxious. We tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths, or even hyperventilate; this is called “over-breathing.” It is a good idea to learn techniques for managing over-breathing because this type of breathing can actually make you feel even more anxious.

Calm breathing is a great tool you can use wherever and whenever you are feeling a difficult emotion. However, it does require some practice. The purpose of calm breathing is not to avoid emotions at all costs, but just to take the edge off or help you “ride out” the feelings.

How is it done? First, we must recognize our emotional state, which means what is happening inside us. If I am uncomfortable, I can remind myself that there is something I can do about it. Calm breathing involves taking smooth, slow, and regular breaths.

Sitting upright is usually better than lying down or slouching because it can increase the capacity of your lungs to fill with air. It is best to take the weight off your shoulders by supporting your arms on the side—arms of a chair or on your lap.

1. Breathe from your diaphragm or abdomen. Your shoulders and chest area should be fairly relaxed and still.
2. Place one hand on your abdomen. Watch the hand on your abdomen rise as you fill your lungs with air, expanding your chest.
3. Take a slow breath through the nose, breathing into your lower belly (for about 4 seconds).
4. Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds.
5. Exhale slowly through the mouth (for about 4 seconds).
6. Wait a few seconds before taking another breath.

Take about 6–8 breathing cycles per minute. These cycles regulate the amount of oxygen you take in so that you do not experience the fainting, tingling, and giddy sensations that are sometimes associated with over-breathing.

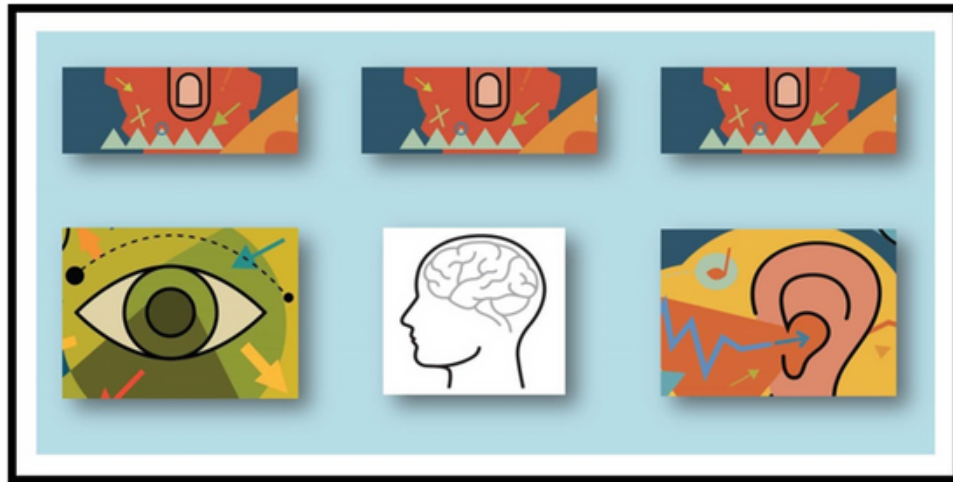
# Three Senses

Another helpful grounding tool is simply to notice what you are experiencing right now through three senses: sound, sight, and touch.

Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself:

- What are three things I can hear? (e.g., clock on the wall, car going by, music in the next room, my breath)
- What are three things I can see? (this table, that sign, that person walking by)
- What are three things I can feel? (the chair under me, the floor under my feet, my phone in my pocket)

Think of these answers to yourself slowly, one sense at a time. It's impossible to do this exercise and not be present and mindful.





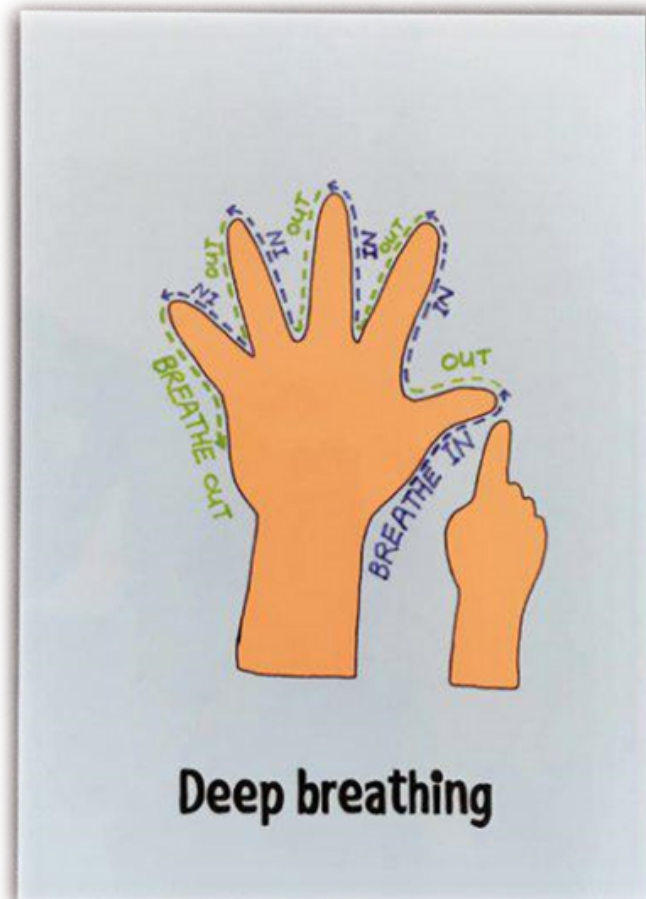
# Deep Breathing

As you sit comfortably in a chair, place your palm on your lap face down. Using your other hand, take your pointer finger and trace the outline of the hand on your lap.

As you trace the outline, practise some deep breathing.

Start with the outside of your thumb. Breathe in as you move your finger up the outside of your thumb. Breathe out as you move your finger down the other side of your thumb. Breathe in as you move your finger up the outside of your pointer finger. Breathe out as you move your finger down the inside of your pointer finger.

Do this for the remaining fingers on your hand.



# 10 Steps

Starting at the number 10, I will count down to 0.

I take a deep breath with each number and let it out with each statement, making myself more relaxed ...

- 10 I say to myself: My breathing is deep and regular ...
- 9 I'm becoming more relaxed ...
- 8 I am calm and relaxed ...
- 7 With each breath, I become more relaxed ...
- 6 My heartbeat is strong and regular ...
- 5 I am calm ...
- 4 I am relaxed ...
- 3 Relaxed ...
- 2 Calm ...
- 1 Relaxed, and alert ...
- 0 Relaxed, and alert ...

I scan my body to check for any tension areas. If I find one, I think about it getting WARM and HEAVY, becoming more and more relaxed.

I take a second deep breath, and as I slowly let the air out, I say to myself: I am calm and relaxed.

Now I simply breathe slowly and regularly, willing myself to relax with each breath.

I scan my body again to look for tension areas, and breathe.

## Feet to the Floor

While standing, become aware of your feet, noticing your connection to the floor/ground.

Imagine your feet as if deep roots tap into the earth, embedded in solid, strong, stable earth that supports you.

Notice how your weight is distributed between your feet; perhaps one foot feels like it has more pressure or feels different from the other; maybe you are leaning more into your toes or your heels.

Continue to feel into your feet, breathing out through your feet into the earth, breathing in from the earth to your feet.

Now stamp your feet and feel how solid, strong, and unbreakable the ground is beneath you, no matter how hard you stamp.

Stretch and flex your toes, and take a few slow, deep breaths.



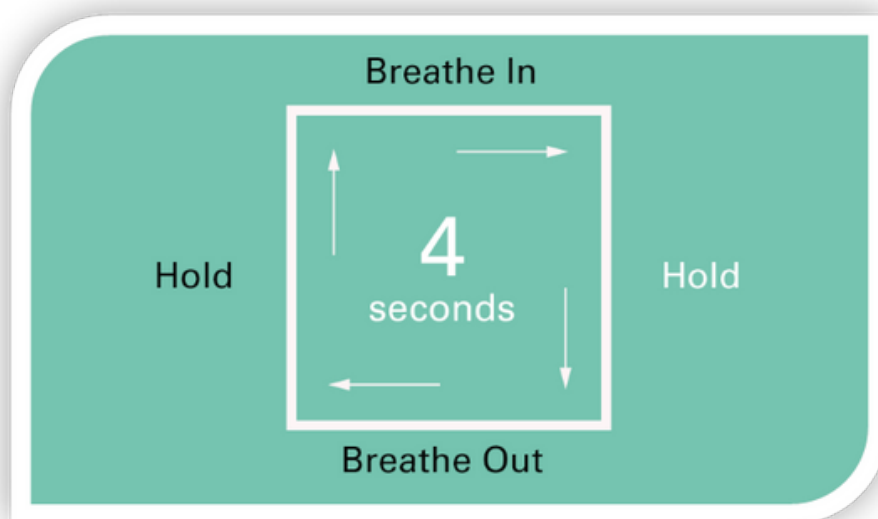
# Managing Big Feelings and Grounding Ourselves

It is important to remember that it is okay to have strong emotions; what is important is how you manage them.

One way to do that is by accessing our breath and taking a few seconds to calm ourselves, thus helping ourselves to respond in a way that we can feel good about. It can also be helpful to practice grounding exercises before a stressful conversation you know you will be having. Exercises like Square Breathing (described below) can help us to relax. This may mean that we are less likely to be overwhelmed by strong emotions.

## **Square breathing**

Practice this with your eyes open or closed. You can do this exercise on the bus, in a classroom, or even while in the shower. This and other grounding exercises enable us to manage the stressors we encounter and help regulate the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in our body. In addition, when we begin calming ourselves physically, our mind will follow.



Inhale, and hold for four seconds. Exhale for four seconds, and hold for another four. Repeat the cycle for several seconds to promote relaxation and clearer thoughts.

# 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

The “5-4-3-2-1 game” is a commonly used sensory awareness grounding exercise that can help you relax or get through difficult moments.

In your mind:

1. Describe 5 things you see in the room.
2. Name 4 things you can feel (e.g., my feet on the floor, the air in my nose).
3. Name 3 things you hear right now.
4. Name 2 things you can smell right now (or 2 smells you like).
5. Name 1 good thing about yourself.

You should feel calmer and more at ease by the end of the exercise.

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## Cross Over

Place both feet flat on the floor and sit back comfortably in your chair. Notice the feeling of the chair under you and against your back. Think of a place that is calm and relaxing.

Then, do one of the following:

- Cross your arms over your chest. Slowly and gently tap your shoulders (left hand on right shoulder and right hand on left shoulder), alternating one side at a time for about 6-8 taps on each side.
- Place your hands on your thighs. Slowly and gently tap each leg, alternating one side at a time for about 6-8 taps on each side. Take a couple of breaths.



# Taking It In

1. Relax. Take a deep breath.
2. Look at the room around you. Focus on the size of the room. Let the deep breath out.
3. Take a deep breath in, and focus on the colour and texture of the walls. Let that breath out.
4. Take a deep breath in, and notice the height of the ceiling. Let that breath out.
5. Take a deep breath in, and notice the lights. Let that breath out.
6. Take a deep breath in, and notice the windows, if there are any. Let that breath out.
7. Take a deep breath in, and look at the doors. Let that breath out.
8. Take a deep breath in, and look at the furniture. Let that breath out.
9. Take a deep breath in, and pay attention to any pictures on the walls or objects in the room. Let that breath out.
10. Take a deep breath in, and think of today's date. Let that breath out.
11. Take a deep breath in, and think of what time it is. Let that breath out.
12. Take a deep breath in, and think of what city you're in. Let that breath out.
13. Take a deep breath in, and focus on yourself. Think of your name. Let that breath out.
14. Take a deep breath in, and think of your age. Let that breath out.
15. Take a deep breath in, and think of the grounding activities you've done recently. Let that breath out.

# Those Roots

While sitting or standing, become aware of your feet, noticing your connection to the floor/ground. (Pause for a minute.)

Imagine your feet as if deep roots tap into the earth, embedded in solid, strong, stable earth that supports you. Continue to feel into your feet, breathing out through your feet into the earth, breathing in from the earth to your feet. (Pause for a minute or more.)

Remember that your wellness is within your control. Wellness doesn't have to take a long time; a couple of minutes of breathing, visualization, or other exercises can help you take control of your thoughts and your behaviour.



# Visualizing the Life Balance Scale



A “life balance scale” is another way for us to increase self-awareness and recognize what we want out of life. If any of the areas in our scale is out of place or lacking balance, our structure (our self) will lose strength and could fall.

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Where are you now? Do you feel balanced?

# Visualizing the Positive

Visualization is a technique for creating a detailed image in our minds of a positive outcome or event in the future. Visualization is used by many people in different situations to improve their performance by increasing their focus, concentration, and confidence. It is used mostly by professional athletes but can be used by anyone to imagine achieving a goal. Research shows that visualizing an event activates many of the same areas of the brain that would be activated if you were actually performing the action. It creates a memory of the event so that your brain is prepared for the moment when you actually perform the action.

Close your eyes gently and get comfortable. You should have no distractions for the next few minutes. Give yourself this time to focus and be relaxed. Notice some key areas in your body where tension tends to build. Scan your body now for any areas that are tense. For each one, imagine directing your breath to that area: your shoulders, hands, back, neck, and jaw. Imagine breathing in relaxation and breathing out tension, inhaling a feeling of relaxation and exhaling all the tension.

Feel your muscles relaxing with each breath.

Start to relax your body. Take a deep breath in, hold it gently, and then let it out.

Breathe in again

Pause

And exhale fully

Breathe in

Pause

And out

In ... out

In ... out

# Visualizing the Positive

Keep breathing naturally. With each breath, you become more and more relaxed. If any anxious thoughts linger, leave them where they are for the moment. You can tend to them later.

Now you are feeling calm and relaxed. Your whole body feels relaxed and heavy.

Now, begin to imagine finding balance in your life. You feel very motivated to set goals and do well. Fully imagine this feeling, and allow yourself to experience it completely. Feel the motivation.

What does it look like?

What are your thoughts about the steps you will take?

How do you feel about the future?

Take in a deep, slow breath and let it all out. Good. You feel your body relax and allow your mind to remain calm.

Slowly begin to return to the room. Return your awareness to the present. Wiggle your fingers, then your toes. Feel your hands and arms waking up. Turn your head from side to side. Feel your body waking up.

When you are feeling awake and alert, you can return to your usual activities, feeling energized, motivated, and confident.

# Belly Breathing

1. Sit back in your chair. Your legs should be straight but relaxed and slightly spread; your arms should be out the side, away from the body, palms facing up.
2. Inhale and exhale completely a couple of times.
3. Focus on your breathing. Place one hand on the area that seems to rise and fall the most.
4. Place both your hands or else a book on your stomach and follow your breathing. Just notice the rise and fall with each breath.
5. Place your tongue up against the roof of your mouth and breathe through your nose. Now drop your tongue from the roof of your mouth.
6. If you find it hard to breathe into your stomach, press one hand down on your stomach as you exhale. Let your stomach push your hand back up as you inhale deeply.
7. Is your chest moving with your stomach, or is it rigid? Spend a couple of minutes letting your chest follow the movements of your stomach.
8. Practice this once or twice a day until it becomes easy for you.
9. Once you have mastered this while sitting, try it while standing.