

TIP SHEET 8.4

Breathing

Focusing on breathing slowly and deeply can help clients manage severe distress, because it not only directly reduces tension, but also distracts them from focusing on their distress.

‘Controlled breathing’ is easy for clients to learn and do, and is very effective in helping calm anxious responses.

When introducing controlled breathing:

- Ensure the client understands the rationale behind it.
- Explain that some people may experience dizziness when they first try controlled breathing, that this is normal and will pass.
- Encourage the client to sit comfortably, with their eyes closed or focused softly towards the floor – whichever is more comfortable.
- It can be useful to have them put their hands, facing outwards, with the tips of their middle fingers just touching, and lay them across their bellies. As they begin to breath deeply, you (and they) will see their fingers come apart slightly as their lungs fill with air, before coming back together as they expel the air.
- Explain that the 3 x 3 breathing cycle can feel a little strange, particularly the extended hold in-between breathing in and out. Explain that this cycle actually mimics our sleeping breathing pattern, and so forces the body to relax.
- After trying controlled breathing during session, ask clients for feedback and problem solve any issues that arise.

Instructions for the client:

Just breathe through you nose, noticing the air going in. . . and out. . . and noticing time for each in and out breath. . . That’s it, just noticing the air going in. . . and out. . . (allow the client to do this for 5-6 breaths)

Now breathe more into the bottom of your lungs so that your abdomen rises. . . and falls. . . Imagine the air filling your belly first, then rising to the top of the chest cavity. You don’t need to take big breaths, just normal size breaths that go deeper into your lungs. Just breathe deeply into your lungs, filling your belly first, before it rises to

the top of your chest cavity. . . (allow the client to do this for 5-6 breaths)

Now you are belly breathing into your belly, see if you can slow the breathing down. . . 3 slow counts in, hold for 3 counts, 3 slow counts out, hold for 3 again. . . that's it. . . 3 slow counts in. . . and hold. . . and 3 slow counts out. . . and hold (allow clients to do this for 5 – 6 breaths).