



TIPS FOR CALMING BODY & MIND

BREATHING LESSONS
COME TO YOUR SENSES
MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

KARLA HELBERT, LPC, E-RYT, C-IAYT

Tips for Calming Body and Mind

This e-book was designed especially for you.
If you are reading it, you probably
experience stress and anxiety in some way.
It is my sincere hope you find these techniques
helpful. Please feel free to share what you learn
with friends, family and clients.
Visit my website for more tips and resources.

With love,
Karla

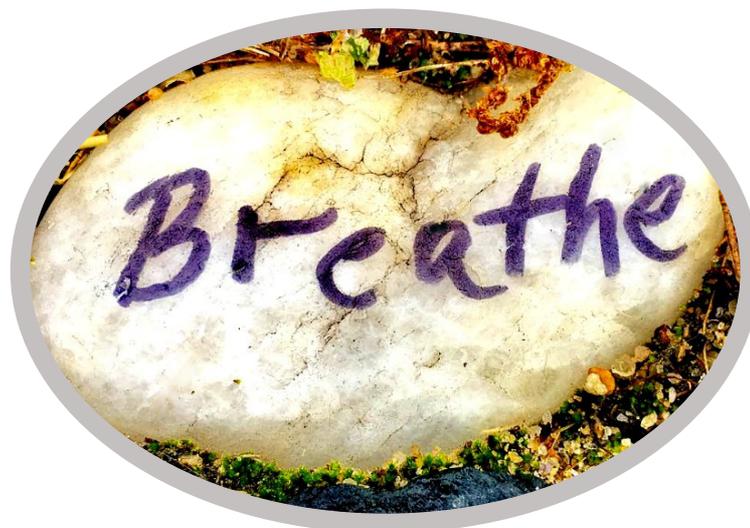
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Breathing Lessons

We breathe all the time, right?
So, what's the big deal?

Most of us are not breathing properly for optimum health and well-being. We have poor posture, we sit for long periods of time, stare at screens, and move very little. Many grieving and traumatized people have the sensation of being unable to breathe fully; sometimes you might unconsciously hold your breath until you find yourself gasping for air, not even realizing you weren't breathing. If we have been hurt, are grieving or have experienced trauma, we may feel like we want to be slumped down, curled up, protecting our hearts. This posture causes our lungs to be unable to expand fully and breathing is even more restricted than normal.





When asked to take a deep breath, most people suck in their stomachs and fill up their chests. This is actually the opposite of deep breathing. This posture restricts our lungs' ability to take in oxygen and to release carbon dioxide. The result is an excess of CO₂ in our bodies. Not inhaling enough oxygen and failing to exhale enough CO₂, can create fatigue, mental fog and decreased tissue function. For a grieving and traumatized person, this can intensify many of the normal grief reactions that we go through as part of the grief experience. Breathing deeply and fully can be a helpful tool to decrease stress, increase clarity of thought and help to counteract fatigue.

Practicing the breathing exercises shared here can help. Anytime you notice that you are feeling anxious, particularly tired, or that you are holding your breath, take a moment — right then and there—to breathe. Additionally, noticing your breath and increasing your use of breathing exercises can also help you to become more mindful of your own thoughts and feelings, giving you a sense of control and stability in an otherwise chaotic time of life. The more you notice how you feel, what your thought patterns are, how your body is affected by your responses to the world around you, your grief experience, your thoughts and feelings, the less out of control you can begin to feel.

Just Breathe.

This is an exercise in simply noticing your breath. Becoming aware and mindful of your own breath as it moves in and out of your body.

To begin, sit in any comfortable position, on the floor or on a chair, with your spine long and straight but not stiff.

Find a comfortable position for your hands, either folded gently in your lap, or resting on your thighs or knees—palms up or down, whichever feels right to you.

Close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If not, find a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you and let your gaze be soft. Begin to notice the temperature of the air on your skin.

Notice any sounds you may hear in or outside the room. Begin to notice your body's weight supported by the chair or the floor. Notice the feel of the floor beneath your feet.

Expand your awareness to noticing the sensations of your entire body without feeling the need to change anything, simply notice.

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Now, begin to notice and follow the movement of your breath as it moves in and out of your body, as you inhale and exhale.

Inhaling, notice the temperature and the feel of the air as it flows through your nasal passages, down your throat and trachea, on its way into your lungs.

Notice the different sensations of your belly, your ribs, your chest, as they expand.

Exhaling, notice the temperature of the air, the movement of the tiny hairs of your nose, the feeling of your lungs emptying of the air as it leaves your body.

Simply notice these things and any other sensations that occur as you continue to breathe, easily and naturally, in and out.

Simply notice your breath as it moves in and out of your body without the need to change anything at all.

Just Breathe.

Simple Deep Breathing

Sit in a comfortable position with your hands relaxed, either in your lap or resting on your thighs or knees.

Relax your shoulders. Pull them up toward your ears, then roll them back and down, creating space between your shoulders and your ears. Allow your shoulders to relax.

Breathe normally in and out for a few breaths. Notice how your belly rises and falls easily as you breathe naturally.

If you like, you can place a hand on your abdomen to help notice the movement as you breathe in and out.



Photo by Brian Brown

On the next exhalation, breathe out slowly through your nose, counting to five. During this exhalation, pull your diaphragm in toward your spine, squeezing all the excess air out of your body. When all the air is squeezed out, pause for two counts, and inhale slowly again, to the count of five, allowing your belly to expand as you inhale.

If you are comfortable, close your eyes and continue to repeat this easy deep breath, 5-10 times.

If you find that your mind wanders during this exercise, don't worry. Simply bring your focus back to your breathing and begin your counts to five again.

You may find it helpful to think of a pleasant color or calming color as you breathe in and a dreary color as you breathe out.

You might choose to imagine breathing in a calming pleasant emotion such as peace or love as you inhale and breathing out stress or anxiety as you exhale.

As awareness of your breath increases, it becomes easier to practice without focusing so much of your attention on it.



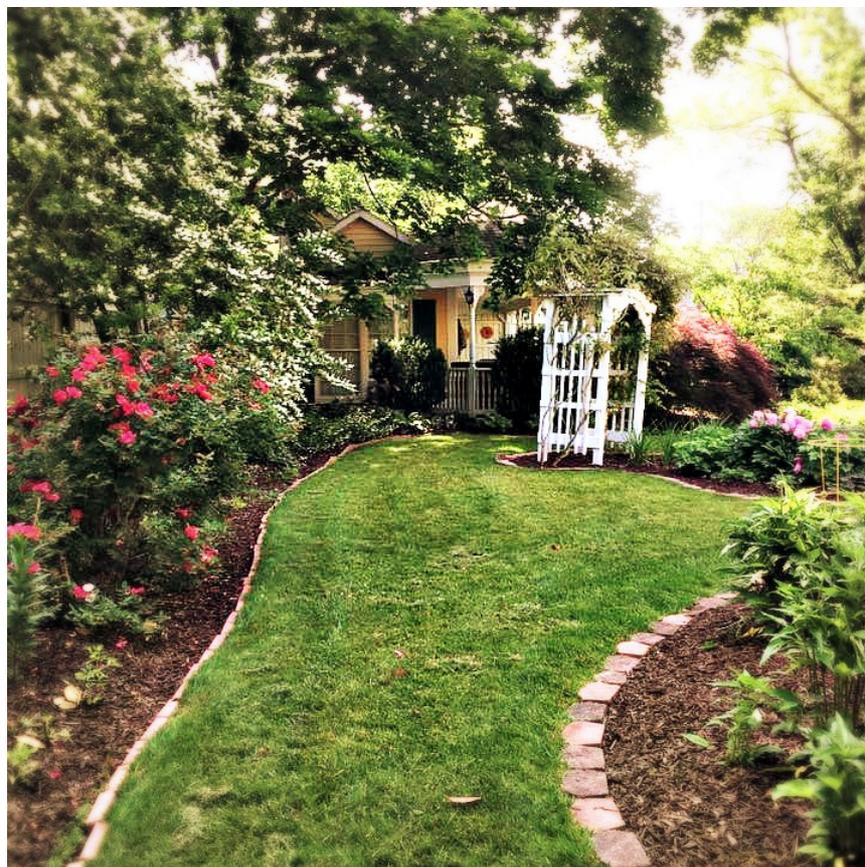
Breathe In

Breathe Out

Repeat

Come To Your Senses

This exercise is a sensory meditation and mindfulness practice that can help you manage anxiety, fear, panic, stress, nervousness--whatever you want to call the unpleasant feelings that result when our body's stress response is triggered.



Our stress response—the fight, flight, freeze mode that we are in when we are stressed, afraid or anxious—is controlled by our sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The opposite reaction is the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) also known as “the relaxation response.”

There are certain cues that our brain and body know as signals which trigger a switch from one part of the nervous system to the other--from rest and relax (PNS) to alert and stimulated (SNS) and vice versa. One signal that switches on our stress response is when the muscles surrounding our faces and neck and shoulders are tight or drawn upward. Simply releasing these muscles begins the process of switching to the PNS or the relaxation response.

Another, is that when our breathing is slow, even, and centered in our bellies, our body feels more safe. This is why the Breathing Lessons come first.

STILL BREATHING

I have shared this exercise with a lot of people to help stop anxiety and bring you into the present moment.

These are simple but effective practices that can help calm anxious, fearful, worrisome thoughts and bring your awareness into the present moment.

Moving through each of the outward physical senses, you can notice how awareness of each can help you feel more safe, grounded, calm and steady.



See.

Visually seeing that we are safe can make us feel safe. If you experience the visual input to be too stimulating, you can skip this one and move to the next sense of feeling and touch.

If you choose to do so, look around your environment. What do your eyes see? You don't need to think about it, you're just ticking off the things in your mind that your eyes can see...

I can see my computer, I can see the grained texture of the wall. I can see my salt lamp, the little stuffed birds hanging from my floor lamp, the silver arm that lets the front of my desk fold outward. I can see the crystallized formations on the piece of fossilized mud on top of the desk. I see that my bracelet is sideways on my wrist, I see a bird drinking out of a puddle outside the window, I see a red car driving down the street...

Just like that—you can continue with the visual scanning and noticing as long as you like, then move on.

Feel.



What do you notice with your sense of touch? Pressure or weight, lightness, heaviness? Where your body is touching something and where it is not?

Close your eyes if it's comfortable. If not, let your gaze be soft, unfocused. Begin with the soles of your feet and start to notice all the sensations you are feeling with your skin and body.

Notice the pressure of the floor beneath your feet. Notice the feel of the chair or floor against your legs, hips, bottom and back. Notice where you can feel the pressure and texture of your clothing against your skin. Do various textures feel different on different parts of your body—denim compared to silk or wool?

Notice the temperature of the air on your skin. Notice where all the parts of your body are touching and pressing against something else. Notice places on your body which are touching nothing, like the insides of your wrists or the back of your neck, or the arches of your feet. Notice how your belly and chest move as you breathe in and out.

Listen.

*Bring your awareness
to your sense of hearing.
What do you hear?*



First bring your attention to any sounds that you become aware of outside your space. What sounds travel to your ear from beyond the door, windows or walls. Do you hear sounds far away or close by. What are they?

Cars, traffic, a dog barking? The sound of the heating or cooling unit? Wind in the trees, voices of other people?

Then bring your attention to sounds inside your space. Do you hear the ticking of a clock? Your own breath? What sounds do you notice surrounding you?

Then bring your sense of sound within.

What can you hear within your own body? Notice the sound of your own breath, moving in, moving out, inhale, exhale. Do you notice any other sounds? Is your belly or gut making sounds you can take note of?

Can you notice the beating of your own heart, the vibration of the sound traveling through your body?

Smell.



Bring your awareness to your sense of smell.

Our sense of smell is meant to keep us safe and alive. It detects hazards, pheromones, food.

It works with our breath, and forms our sense of taste. It lets us know when we can trust food, water, even people and places.

Take a deep, belly breath, allowing your abdomen to expand with the breath, taking notice of the aromas you are breathing in.

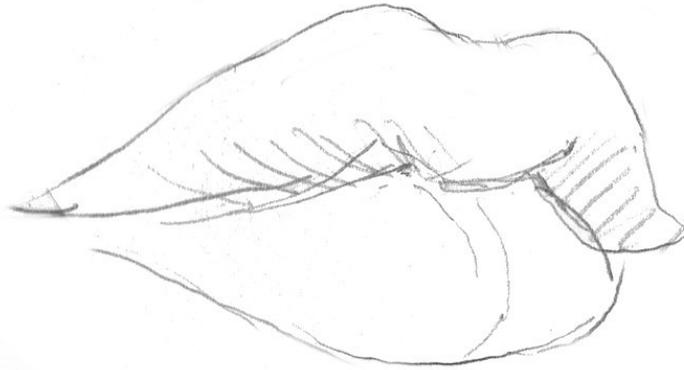
What can you smell? If you are outdoors or indoors, how many different scents can you notice?

Can you smell familiar scents of your environment? A candle you were burning earlier, coffee still keeping warm, your own soap, shampoo or other toiletries?

Your own personal scent?

Breathing in, what can you smell?

Taste.



Next bring your attention from your sense of smell to your mouth, your lips, your tongue, your sense of taste.

What tastes linger on your tongue?
Your double latte from this morning? Toothpaste?
Your chewing gum?

The leftover taste of the last thing you ate?
Move your tongue around your mouth, feeling the texture of your teeth, gums, palette, the shape of the inside of your own mouth.

What do you notice?
What can you taste?

Open your eyes or look up from your downward gaze.

Bring your sense awareness back into the room and be present to the environment around you.

Notice how you are feeling.

Do you feel calmer, less anxious? What are you feeling?
If you choose, write about your experience in a journal.

Any of these can be practiced separately or in series. You can practice the entire sensory awareness exercise as a practice in mindfulness and self-awareness, or use it when you need it to help with calming and grounding.

Being aware of what you are directly sensing, feeling and experiencing with and in your body can bring you more fully into the present moment.

This can help you know that you can be safe and secure in your own body.



Mindfulness Meditation

This practice will help you learn to become more aware of the thoughts that come into your mind at any given moment. It can help you become more adept at noticing them when they come at other points throughout your day, when you aren't engaged in practicing meditation. Over time, this practice can help you become better at not getting involved, or hooked into, every thought that might come at any given moment.

There are many different meditation techniques and none is necessarily better than the others; it depends on individual preference. Because the breath is always there with you, I recommend using the breath as a returning point. I suggest labeling the thoughts as they come because it helps you to notice them more easily when they come during non-meditation time, and also because labeling the thoughts as separate, helps to break self-identification with thoughts. You are not your thoughts. You don't have to believe everything you think.





If you prefer,
you can listen to
the meditation.
Click here to access
the recording at
[SoundCloud.com](https://www.soundcloud.com)

This is a version of Vipassana meditation, an ancient Indian practice which means insight, “to see things as they really are.”

I suggest starting with a goal of 5 minutes a day and work up slowly, adding a minute on to your time weekly.

If 5 seems like too much, start with 3 or 4.

Use a timer so you don't feel you need to check the clock

Turn off your phone and other technological devices that could interrupt you. Find a comfortable spot. You can sit in a chair or on the floor. If you sit on the floor, use a cushion or meditation bench to sit on so that your hips are higher than your knees. If you choose to sit in a chair, let your feet be flat on the floor. Allow your hands to rest in your lap on or your knees in a comfortable position.

Allow your spine to be long and tall, but not stiff. Roll your neck from side to side to release tension. Take a few deep, cleansing breaths deep into your belly.

Allow your breathing to return to normal.

Then, simply begin to notice. Notice how the floor feels beneath your feet. Notice the feeling of your body at the points where it rests either on the floor or against the chair, how your clothes feel on your body. Notice the feeling of the material of your clothing against your skin. Notice whether you feel any tension in any area of your body.

Simply notice.



Begin to notice the temperature of the air, notice how it feels on the parts of your body that are uncovered. You don't have to do anything to change, just notice. Begin to notice the sounds that you hear around you; in the room, outside the room. Note any sounds you may become aware of within your own body. Bring your awareness to your breath. Notice how it feels as it moves in and out of your body. Allow your attention to remain with your breath, in and out, notice the temperature of the air as it enters your nose, moves down your trachea and into your lungs. Notice that it is warmer and more moist as it gently leaves your body. Notice the movements of your abdomen, your ribs and your chest as your breath moves in and out of your body.

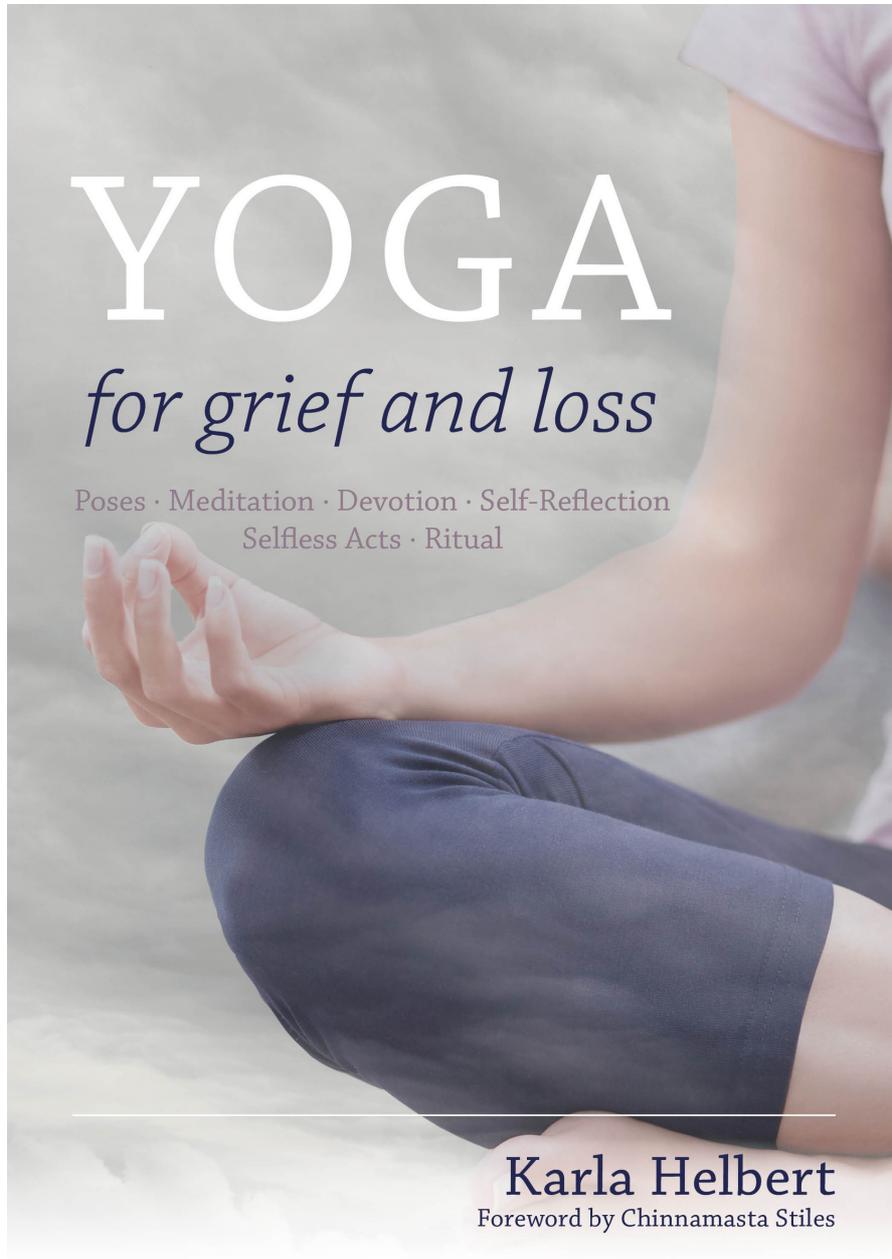
Continue to simply stay with your breath. If you wish, you can count your breaths, in and out, 1, in and out 2, and so on to ten and then return to 1. You might want to use color visualizations with your breath—breathing in a color you associate with a feeling state you would like to achieve, such as peace or calm, then breathing out a color you associate with a feeling you would like to be rid of such as fear, stress, anxiety, or pain. You might want to use a mantra with your in/out breaths. On an in breath, think, “I am....” and on an out breath: “calm.”

Come up with whatever works for you to help you stay with your breath. Eventually, you will notice you are no longer aware of your breath and instead, you are thinking about something else. This is ok, and it will happen, this is what the mind does. When you notice that you're thinking or an emotion rises, simply label it and gently bring your focus back to your breath.

Label your thoughts and emotions what they are: thinking, worrying, planning, doubting, judging, fantasizing, anxiety, fear, impatience, irritation. Then bring your attention back to your breath. "Thinking"...come back to the breath... "Planning"...come back to the breath... "Anxiety"... come back to the breath... "Judging"...come back to the breath. If you are distracted by a sound, label it—"birds," "car," "people outside"—and come back to the breath.

The returning and returning to the breath is concentration. Continue in this way until your time is completed for the day's practice. After your timer goes off, take a moment to notice how you are feeling.

Take a couple of deep breaths and go on with your day. You will notice the more you practice, the faster the time goes by and the longer the spaces between thoughts and feelings that rise.



This meditation is from Chapter Six of my book
Yoga for Grief and Loss.

I hope you enjoyed it.

About Karla

Karla Helbert, LPC, E-RYT, C-IAYT, is a licensed professional counselor, yoga teacher and therapist, Compassionate Bereavement Care® provider, and award-winning author. Karla's therapy practice has a special focus on loss, grief and bereavement. She works in particular with those affected by trauma and traumatic death. Her life was changed when her son died of a brain tumor in 2006.

Her award winning book *Yoga for Grief and Loss* is endorsed and used as a teaching tool by leaders, teachers and experts in the fields of yoga, grief, loss, and trauma. Also the author of gold medal winning *Finding Your Own Way to Grieve*, her next book, *The Chakras in Grief and Trauma* will be available 2018. Karla lives in Richmond VA with her husband and daughter.

Thank you so much. With Love, Karla

