



TAKING BREATHS, SLOWING DOWN | *ANGST*

Overview

This curriculum is part of a series of interactive activities associated with the documentary film, *Angst*. In line with the mission of David Legacy's Foundation, the curriculum aims to support healthy habits and interactions among young people online. Recognizing the anxiety-inducing stage of young adulthood in the age of social media, this curriculum module cultivates strategies for listening among parents, caregivers, and their children, as well as within classrooms. These activities are also designed to combat the pressures involved in having online identities and the mental health impact of cyberbullying on young people.

Angst explains that anxiety is "a feeling of worry or nervousness about something with an uncertain outcome." As a response to anxiety, our bodies can seize up. Our hands may begin to shake. We feel paralyzed and might want to exit a situation immediately. When we are anxious, the brain's amygdala switches us into "fight, flight, or freeze" mode. In this state, we cannot access the parts of our brain that help with executive functioning, or the skills that help us engage in everyday interactions and organization. In this activity, viewers of the film will practice a basic breathing exercise as a strategy to relieve a high-anxiety state.

Disclaimer

The activities in this package are provided to support family conversations around the topics shared in the *ANGST* screening and can be used at your discretion.

If at any time there are concerns about the well-being of a participant, please feel free to discontinue the activity



Aims

Participants will learn a simple breathing technique as a way to counter anxiety and stress.

Materials

- ★ A chair, cushion, or mat for sitting comfortably

Getting Started

First, ask participants to share some of the ways that their bodies feel when they are especially worried or anxious. They might mention sweaty hands or palms, a sense of paralysis, or quick heartbeats.

Then, elicit some ideas: *What do you do to feel a sense of calm and peacefulness?* After hearing from a few people, let participants know that they will be practicing a simple breathing exercise, one that can be used whenever they feel some of the symptoms of anxiety.

Importantly, the facilitator of the activity should note that each person has their own level of comfort in disclosing personal information. Each activity should begin with an encouragement to participate in those activities at their own comfort level. Participants should only share voluntarily.

Activities

- ★ Ask participants to get into a comfortable, upright position. They can use a chair or sit on the floor with a cushion for support.
- ★ Direct participants to close their eyes and spend a minute noticing their breathing. What happens to their body when they breathe? How does the breath move?
- ★ Tell everyone to sit up tall. With their mouths closed, participants should breathe through their noses until they can feel their entire chests fill up with air.



- ★ Participants will be using the diaphragm, a large muscle in their abdomens, and should feel their stomachs expanding like a balloon.
- ★ Participants should hold the breath for a few seconds.
- ★ Then, slowly, have participants exhale from their mouths or noses--whatever feels most natural! They should feel their diaphragms deflating.
- ★ Repeat the breathing exercise two more times, extending the exhales each time.

Wrapping Up

Gather the group together. Direct participants to move their heads from side to side and roll their necks to ease any remaining tensions.

Ask the group to reflect for a few minutes: *What did you notice happened to any worries in your mind? When might you use a deep breathing technique?* Gather some thoughts for the group.

Extensions

Participants can prepare for situations that might trigger their anxieties and other intense emotions. Make a list of possible scenarios, such as taking a test, having to talk in front of a class, or asking for help in a store. Becoming more aware of potential triggers can help ward off high-anxiety states and panic attacks.

Watch [How Children and Adults Can Build Core Capabilities for Life from Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child](#).¹ This video reviews some of the key brain functions necessary for everyday living and how to strengthen them in the face of stressors.

¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. "How Children and Adults Can Build Core Capabilities for Life.." <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/video-building-core-capabilities-life/>