
DYADIC BREATHING RELAXATION EXERCISE

- One important approach to help you deal with distressing emotions is to calm your body down using breathing strategies.
- Often couples where one or both members have experienced trauma in childhood find it difficult to calm themselves down when they are distressed about something happening in their lives or relationship, or by reminders of their traumas.
- Often couples find it difficult to turn to each other for support and help when they are feeling distressed, because turning to other people when they were little was not helpful, at best, or was even dangerous and frightening.
- The goal of this exercise, then, is to help you work together as a couple to learn how to use a simple breathing exercise together, to reduce feelings of anxiety, and to help you get grounded.

Getting started

- Sit together facing one another. Find a position in which you feel comfortable. Take turns with one of you placing one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. If you feel comfortable, let your partner place their hands over yours. Take slow deep breaths and try to focus on isolating your breathing so that only the hand on the stomach moves up and down.
- Once one partner feels that they have been able to master this first step, switch places.
- The role of the observing partner is to provide support and grounding containment and to help their partner calm down should they find the exercise triggering.
- Once you feel comfortable with this first step, take one hand and put it on your chest and put your other hand on your partner's abdomen while your partner does the same. Then, work together to breathe in deeply, hold the breath for a few seconds and then breathe out slowly, together, being aware of each other's body and twinning your breathing with theirs.

Slow down your rate of breathing

- The next step in this exercise is to slow down your breathing. For this step, continue to sit facing one another and both partners will put one hand on their stomach.
- Watching one another, and following the lead of one partner, take in a long slow breath, hold this breath for a moment, and then let it out slowly. Pause briefly after exhaling and before inhaling.
- After four or five breaths, switch the partner who is taking the lead. Practice this exercise until you find it relatively easy to slow your breathing and to follow one another. Alternate breathing through your nose and your mouth until you find which strategy allows you the most control over your breathing.
- Practice this exercise daily for at least 10 minutes.