

“Balloon Breathing” Activity

Goals:

- To teach youth a practical de-stressing activity.
- To highlight the benefits of grounding techniques.

Instructions:

- Have the group stand and ask everyone put their hands out in front of them a few inches apart. On a count of three, imagine that you are inflating a balloon while inhaling through your nose. On the next count of three, deflate the balloon by slowly exhaling through your mouth.
- Demonstrate this and repeat it three times with youth. Let them know they should go with the flow of their own breath and that they don't have to all be synchronized.

Debrief:

- A few minutes of abdominal breathing can have a real effect in reducing anxiety.¹ This is because deep breathing increases oxygen flow which releases tension and clears the mind, improving both physical and mental well-being. Try to do this a couple minutes every day and see how it works. This activity, practiced by many ancient traditions, is a stress reliever and can help us feel calm and grounded when things are too much.
- People have always had ways of dealing with stress and hard times. Currently we are seeing the promotion of a lot of practices that are being adapted from Buddhist and Yogic traditions from South and East Asia, such as deep breathing exercises like the one that we did together. Sometimes we may find that practices from other cultural traditions work well for us. Learning more about the history of these traditions and where they came from can help us use these practices with care.
- Ask youth, **“What are other things you already do that help you keep calm?”**
- Highlight resources like the youth friendly website Stress Hacks (www.stresshacks.ca) or the Stop Breathe & Think App.²

Endnotes

¹ Calm in the Storm: Coping with the Stresses of Life 2nd Ed. 2013 p.30.

² www.stopbreathethink.org/, accessed July 25, 2016.