

Cookie Breathing Game

Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety By Liana Lowenstein

Overview:

Making diaphragmatic breathing fun and easy to learn will motivate children to use this relaxation strategy. When first learning Cookie Breathing, clients often continue to take deep breaths through their chest rather than through their diaphragm. The practitioner can demonstrate this error by doing Cookie Breathing the wrong way (taking deep breaths through the chest) then doing it the correct way (taking deep breaths through the diaphragm). As the practitioner demonstrates deep breathing, the child can guess which is the correct method. Parents should be included in the session, as they also benefit from learning diaphragmatic breathing. As well, parents need to learn the technique so they can coach the child to practice and can cue the child to use diaphragmatic breathing when the child needs to de-stress.

Recommended Age Range: 4-12

Treatment Modality: Individual, Group, Family

Objective: Apply diaphragmatic breathing to decrease stress, anxiety, and anger

Supplies: Dice, cookies

Instructions:

When you are anxious, stressed, or angry, your body feels tight and uncomfortable. Learning how to take deep breaths is a good way to calm your body so you can feel better. Cookie Breathing is a special way of breathing that can help your body relax. Follow the steps below:

Step 1: Put your hand on your tummy, where your belly button is. Slowly breathe in and out. When you breathe in, your tummy should move out. When you breathe out, your tummy should move in. Breathe in and out like this three times and feel your tummy move in and out. When doing Cookie Breathing, make sure your shoulders and chest are relaxed and still. Only your tummy should be moving in and out.

Step 2: Continue this special way of breathing, but now when you breathe in, do it through your nose for three seconds, and when you breathe out, do it through your mouth for four seconds. To help you do this, imagine a yummy batch of cookies that just came out of the oven. As you breathe in, smell those yummy cookies! But they're hot, so you have to blow on them to cool them down. As you breathe out, blow on the cookies to cool them down.

Remember:

Smell the cookies: Breathe in through your nose for three seconds, tummy moves out.
Blow on the cookies: Breathe out through your mouth for four seconds, tummy moves in.

(When first learning Cookie Breathing, it helps to do it lying down. You can put a small toy or book on your tummy and watch it go up and down as you breathe.)

Let's do an experiment to see how your body feels when it is stressed or anxious, and how you can use Cookie Breathing to calm your body. Follow the steps below:

Step 1: Notice how your body feels when it is calm. Circle 1 or 2 below to show what you notice about your body:

(1) Heart is beating at a normal rate; body temperature is normal; I'm breathing normally.

or

(2) Heart is beating very fast; I'm hot and sweaty; it's hard to breathe.

Step 2: Do jumping jacks until you are very out of breath (at least 40 to 60 seconds). Don't worry: this is not dangerous! Notice how your body feels when it is stressed. Circle 1 or 2 below to show what you notice about your body:

(1) Heart is beating at a normal rate; body temperature is normal; I'm breathing normally.

or

(2) Heart is beating fast; I'm hot and sweaty; it's hard to breathe.

Step 3: Do jumping jacks again until you are very out of breath (at least 40 to 60 seconds). Then use Cookie Breathing to relax your body. Do Cookie Breathing until your body is back to a calm state (e.g., your heart is beating at a normal rate and you are breathing normally).

Put a checkmark beside the answer you think is best:

If I start to feel a little bit stressed, anxious, or angry, I should wait to do Cookie Breathing until I feel VERY stressed, anxious, or angry.

I should do Cookie Breathing as soon as I start to feel stressed, anxious, or angry. This will help me keep calm.

Think of your favorite kind of cookie. Do Cookie Breathing again, but this time, think about your favorite kind of cookie, hot out of the oven. Imagine you are smelling the cookies and blowing on them to cool them down.

When you are feeling stressed, anxious, or angry and you do Cookie Breathing at the same time as you are thinking of your favorite kind of cookie, you relax

your body. You also replace your anxious or angry thoughts with happy thoughts about your favorite kind of cookie!

Let's play the Cookie Breathing game to help you practice. To play, roll the dice. If you roll an even number, do Cookie Breathing properly and slowly two times. If you roll an odd number, you get one point. Play until you have earned four points. You get a cookie once you have earned four points.

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