

Happy Tree Meditation

Close your eyes. You can put your hands over your eyes if you want to. Now take a deep in-breath. When you breathe back out, feel your body relaxing. We'll take two more breaths. Deep breathe in and relax your legs as you breathe out. Deep breathe in and relax your arms and neck as you breathe out.

Imagine a tree. The tree has fruit on it. The tree can have any kind of fruit you want on it. Do you see the fruit? Some of the fruits are happy and some are sad. The happy ones are different than the sad ones. Can you tell which are sad?

Ask the sad fruits, "Sad fruit, what do you need to be happy?" Listen quietly. Can you hear them speak to you? Do they want to go somewhere or need something? (Pause.) Great, do that for them. (Pause.) How do the fruit feel now? Now look at the tree. How does the tree feel? Does the tree need anything? (Pause.) Good, help the tree with that. (Pause.)

See the sun shining down on the tree. Feel the rays of sun help the tree. Put some of your favorite things into the sun. What would you like to put into the sun? Smiles, love, fun, maybe your favorite toy? Okay, go ahead and put some things into the sun that make you feel good. You may see these things as a color or a picture, or maybe they make sounds. Take in a deep breath. As you take in this breath, feel the good energy from the sun go into the tree. Take another deep breath and see more good energy go into the tree.

You did a great job. We're almost done. Now, thank the tree and yourself for all your great work. (Pause.) You can open your eyes whenever you are ready.

After Meditation Questions

1. How do you feel? Do you feel different?
2. How did the sad fruit look different from the happy fruit?
3. What did the sad fruit need?
4. What did the good energy look or sound like?
5. Do you think you could do this on your own when your feeling upset/sad/or anxious?

Learning to invite the bell

Ask the children to sit cross-legged. We can only invite the bell when we are calm and peaceful, because the sound of the bell reflects our mind. We can only help others be peaceful when we are also peaceful. So we recite this poem before we invite the bell:

Breathing in: I am here with my mind and body

Breathing out: I am calm and happy

Breathing in: and I want this sound of the bell

Breathing out: to help others feel calm and happy

The children really enjoy this and they are always incredibly quiet as they breathe three times in respect for each child's sound of the bell. They often forget to wake up the bell, so you need to remind them.

You can also encourage them to have a bell at home so that whenever the atmosphere in the family is tense, angry or carried away by forgetfulness, they can invite the bell and remind their parents and siblings to breathe. Many children do use the bell in this way at home.

Breathing with the bell

Now invite the children to count how many breaths they take during one sound of the bell. Then they can share how many in and out breaths they took during the sound of the bell.

You can share them the poem for listening to the bell:

Breathing in: listen, listen

Breathing out: this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

We have a beautiful, safe place inside of us, where we can always go to, that is full of peace. The bridge that takes us to this island within us is our breathing. That's why the bell is so important, because it helps us go back to this true home, this island of peace inside of us.

You can play a game where the children walk or run or dance around the room and when they hear the bell, they stop and breathe at least three times. Then continue moving.

Awareness of Breathing

To help the children identify their breathing, ask the children to put their pointer finger horizontally under their nose to feel their breathing. What does their out-breath feel like? (Warm, moist?) Can you feel it? What does the in-breath feel like? You can share that we breathe all the time, but we are usually not aware of it and we take it for granted. But breathing is so important! What would happen to us if we couldn't breathe?

You can also ask them to put their hands on their belly (with or without an object: beanie baby) and notice what happens to their belly when they breathe in and what happens when they breathe out? (Tummy rises when I breathe in and falls when I breathe out). Feel this rhythm for a few moments in silence. Ask them how they feel when they just pay attention to their breathing. Often children share that they feel more peaceful and calm. (Sometimes it also helps to invite the children to lie down with their hands on their belly so they can feel its rise and fall more distinctly.

You can share how learning to notice your breathing has helped you in difficult moments and how breathing with awareness like this can help them to calm down when they get upset or nervous and also can help them focus better at school, like when they take a test. Any time we are aware of our breathing, whatever we experience in the moment improves-if we are happy, we become happier and if we are suffering, breathing helps us suffer less, to calm down and see things more clearly.