

How to reduce mental anxiety before mediation starts, through breathing and affirmations.

Introduction

As your mediation session approaches, there may be all sorts of reasons why you are feeling anxious and stressed. These feelings are all of course perfectly normal.

The challenge however is not to let your anxious state of mind get the better of you.

Ideally, you want to come into mediation with a calm, clear, open, focused and curious mindset, ready to listen, understand and engage in constructive discussion with your former partner.

After all, the overriding objective of mediation is to be able to reach joint decisions with your former partner.

This brief guide gives you a few examples of mindful, breathing and affirmation exercises to try out for yourselves.

There are plenty more you can create for yourself. We provide some references at the end of this guide for further reading if you are interested. It is important that these exercises feel personal to you and work for you, in practice.

It is a well-known fact that intentional, focused breathing and positive affirmations (see statements of intent) can have an immediate impact on your heartbeat, blood pressure, stress levels and clarity of thought.

The following breathing exercises and affirmations only take a few minutes each and will put you in a more relaxed state of mind before mediation starts.

They can also be used if things become a little heated during the mediation session and you need a short break to regain your mental composure.

Alternate nostril breathing.

1. Sit comfortably, feet planted firmly on the ground, back straight and arms relaxed, with as few distractions around you as possible.
2. Place the thumb of your right hand over your right nostril and the ring finger of your right hand on your left nostril. The forefinger and middle finger rest between your eyebrows.
3. Close the right nostril with the thumb and inhale through the left nostril very slowly (relax your stomach and diaphragm as you breath in).

4. At the top of the breath, pause briefly, holding both nostrils closed, then gently lift the thumb to exhale through the right nostril (as your breath out gently pull in your stomach and diaphragm, squeezing the air out of your lungs as your chest deflates)
5. At the natural conclusion of the exhale, hold both nostrils close for a moment, then inhale through the right nostril.
6. Continue alternating breaths through the nostrils for 5-10 cycles until you are feeling more relaxed.

As you do so focus entirely on your breath, noticing how it feels.

Affirmation

Perhaps add some mental affirmation (intentional thinking and self-talk) as you breath, such as

I am feeling calm. I take time to listen, talk and communicate. I am patient and understanding. It is worth working at and I do.

Whatever words you use, if any, make them your own. If you feel it is enough to simply focus on your breath as you fill and empty your lungs through each nostril then just do that. Do whatever works for you in the moment.

Resonant breathing

1. Sit up straight, relax your shoulders and stomach, and exhale (using your mouth or nose, whichever is most comfortable).
2. Inhale softly for 5.5 seconds, expanding your stomach as the air fills the bottom of your lungs.
3. Without pausing, exhale softly for 5.5 seconds, bringing the stomach in as the lungs empty.
4. Each breath should feel like a circle.
5. Repeat at least 10 x or more if needed to regain your composure and calmness.

Affirmation

As you inhale filling your lungs, say to yourself, visualising these elements inhabiting your mind and body:

In with calmness, peace and clarity.

As you exhale say to yourself, visualising these elements leaving your mind and body:

Out with anxiety, stress and tension.

Again, use words that are meaningful to you in your situation. The key is to fill your mind with the 'stuff' you are needing in the moment and expelling the unwanted stuff which is not serving your well, as you exhale.

Box breathing

Special forces use this technique to remain calm and focused in tense situations.

1. Inhale to a count of 4
2. Hold for a count of 4
3. Exhale for a count of 4
4. Hold for a count of 4.
5. Repeat.

Long exhales will elicit a stronger calming response, perhaps for a count of 6

4-7-8 breathing

This technique places the body into a deep state of relaxation so perhaps it is better not to use this just before mediation starts but more as an exercise to help you sleep better the night before if you are feeling anxious.

1. Take a breath in, then exhale through your mouth with a 'whoosh sound'
2. Close the mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to the mental count of 4.
3. Hold for a count of 7.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, with a whoosh, to the count of 8.
5. Repeat this cycle for at least 4 breaths.

References

Breath, appendix- James Nestor

Just Breathe- Dane Brule

A practical guide to breathwork- Jesse Coomer:

Chpt 31 Relaxation breathwork session

Chpt 34 Breathwork to induce parasympathetic State (calming)

What to say when you talk to yourself- Shad Helmstetter