

## **Breath Coach Training Course**

The way we breath impacts our emotional, physical, and mental health. I am thankful to The Foundation for PSA from whom I gained access to funding that allowed me to complete Breath Work in Schools Coach Training. This training focuses on developing skills and understanding in the science and benefits of breathwork with young people (YP) as well as offering weekly demonstrations of practical application of breathwork from different breathwork coaches, 1:1 coaching and breathing techniques. The resulting award was the title of Breath Work in School Coach

Research tells us that Breathwork can improve focus, health, energy, and regulation for young people if they practice it regularly and over time.

I currently have 20 years' experience of working in both Primary and Secondary SEN schools. I have a Post Graduate diploma in Play therapy from PTUK and have been working as a Play Therapist since 2019. My plan was to be confident and competent to use Breathing techniques in individual and group work settings in my role as Play Therapist in both Primary and Secondary schools. I had a particular focus group of 11-year-old SEN pupils approaching their year 6 to year -7 transitions.

My Breath Coach training was online self-paced over several weeks and initially began with the science I needed to understand the importance of breath impacting physically on the whole body. I learnt that the medulla (part of the brain) communicates to our diaphragm; telling it when to inhale and when to exhale and this creates a regular breathing rhythm. This process facilitates the air coming into our lungs which provide every cell in our body a continuous supply of just the right amount of oxygen needed to help us to feel good.

Once my training was complete, I began to put it into practice to develop my own breath technique. School Breathe provided a monthly breathe drop with Lead Coaches guiding me expertly into developing a better breath technique. I became more aware of my breathing and noticed that I tended to under breathe or stop breathing for short periods of time when concentrating on computer work. I learnt that the impact of this can prevent us from thinking clearly so was something I needed to change.

Within my role as Play therapist, I noticed that many of the children I worked with were 'mouth breathers' inhaling and exhaling through their mouths rather than through their noses. This breathing behaviour is called 'over breathing' and can increase levels of anxiety rather than helping us to feel calm. When I work with pupils feeling anxious around transition maybe I could share the benefits of changing their breath technique and reduce some of their anxieties during this big time of change.

The catch phrase offered by the Breathwork in schools training is.

' The nose knows and the belly glows.

This reminds us of the important role our nose has of filtering the air we breathe so it is in the cleanest and healthiest form it can be when we take it into our lungs. Nose breathing can help

to balance the nitric oxide in our bodies which has a positive impact on our immune systems, our regulation and memory.

This is where I started. In our first meeting we took the role of breath detectives exploring our own breathing techniques -noticing if we were nose or mouth breathers. We then worked on developing our awareness of nose breathing by smelling different smells and then I guided the group through some mouth breathing exercises. I used simple nose breathing exercises that encourage breathing to a counting rhythm. When working with YP with additional needs adding rhythm to an activity can help to maintain the YP's attention.

Belly breathing is also part of a good breath technique. 'Under breathing' is a term that means that we don't bring the air into our bellies. This can impact our physical regulation.

In our next session I added visual and tactile objects to again maintain attention as well as interest. I used an expanding ball to demonstrate and explain the rise and fall of our bellies and offered a beanie toy to place on YP's stomachs so they could watch it rise and fall with each breath they took.

After 2 session there was already a visible improvement in nose breathing within the breath exercises that we practiced. The group began to feel comfortable with each other and started to share situations they were worried about that were linked to transition e.g., travelling in a minibus for the first time, being in a new environment, meeting new children and adults etc... and we practiced breathing to calm our nervous systems and create a feeling of regulation.

As the weeks progressed some children began to feel confident to take on the role of demonstrators. This meant that when I recalled different breathing techniques, they volunteered to demonstrate the technique to the other children in the group - for example laying down in the group and showing their peers the belly expanding and contracting with each breath.

We used Breath counting as a technique to regulate our emotions and this seemed to be the most engaging for my group. This technique involved counting in for 3 as we inhale and out for 3 as we exhale. As our breath length increased, we moved to counting in a 4:4 pattern – we added multisensory aspects for example using pens and paper to draw patterns that helped us to count and regulate the rhythm of our breath and visualisation to support concentration.

The YP were happy to come to the session each week and responded with statements such as 'what a lovely 20 minutes' 'I feel good' and 'I feel relaxed'.

By week four I was ready to encourage a generalisation of the breathing techniques they were developing. I set them a target to try one of the breathing techniques in their classroom or at home when they were feeling worried. For children with additional needs generalising skills into everyday life can be a big step. Children identified different scenarios that they would feel happy to try out their breathing techniques e.g., the minibus– or when waiting to go to an exciting party or just when things go wrong.

When I wondered if anyone had been using the technique over the week at home or at school; I was pleased to discover some success in the generalisation of skills. One child had been using it at bedtime counting breath to help himself to go to sleep and another child reported that he had been breathing through his nose when he had to 'keep on trying' with work in class.

The group will continue to the end of the term providing more YP with a space to share their worries around transition and to support them to generalise skills around breathwork into their everyday life.

The training was excellent and not only helped me to feel confident in my own breathwork technique -it also gave me the skills to plan and deliver sessions to a group of YP. Breathwork is now integrated into my wellbeing toolbox, and I use it regularly in my individual play therapy session for YP who have exam related anxiety or have trouble going to sleep etc....

I am extremely grateful to the FPSA for the funding that allowed me to develop this skill that has and will continue to provide evidence-based support for the young people I work with.

Play Therapist