

WHAT WORD COMES TO YOUR MIND?

Look at the partial word below. Before trying to solve it, notice the first word, image, sensation, memory or feeling that comes to mind.

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What came to mind first?

What was happening in your body as you looked at the word?

NOW REVEAL THE WORD

BREATHE

Breathing happens automatically, yet it is also something we often notice when stress, anxiety, overwhelm, pain or strong emotion changes its rhythm. This reflection is not about forcing a perfect breathing technique. It is about noticing what a pause, a breath and a little more space might mean for you.

If focusing on breathing feels uncomfortable, dizzying or activating, you can skip any breath-focused prompt and ground yourself through sight, sound, touch or movement instead.

PAUSE, NOTICE, BREATHE

When we are under pressure, the body may become tense and breathing can become quicker, shallower or simply feel different. Rather than judging the response, begin with observation.

Right now, without changing anything, I notice...

The places I tend to hold tension are...

I most need space to breathe when...

Something that helps my body feel a little safer is...

Breathing is not a test

There is no requirement to take a huge breath. For some people, deliberately deep breathing can feel uncomfortable. A gentler option is simply to allow the exhale to become a little easier or longer, without straining, and notice whether that suits your body.

Other ways to pause

You can look around and name what you see, press your feet into the floor, hold something with texture, stretch, move, listen to a familiar sound, step outside or take a sip of water. Regulation is individual; breathing is only one possible tool.

CREATING A LITTLE MORE SPACE

Sometimes 'breathe' is less about the breath itself and more about giving yourself a moment before the next demand, decision or response.

A situation where I would benefit from pausing is...

The early signs that I am becoming overwhelmed are...

If I gave myself 60 seconds of space, I might choose to...

Something or somebody that helps me regulate is...

Today I want to give myself permission to...

Try a 60-second reset

If it feels safe and comfortable: stop what you are doing, let your shoulders drop if they want to, notice the support beneath you, and allow your breathing to find its own rhythm. Look around the room. Remind yourself where you are and what you need next. The aim is not instant calm; it is creating a little space for choice.

When slowing down is difficult

Stillness does not work for everybody. Walking, rocking, stretching, repetitive movement, music or another sensory strategy may be more regulating. Choose what supports your nervous system rather than what you think relaxation is supposed to look like.

A MESSAGE FROM MAGGIE

Sometimes 'take a breath' sounds far too simple for what somebody is carrying. A breath cannot remove grief, solve a crisis or make a difficult situation disappear.

But a pause can sometimes give us a tiny bit of room between what is happening and what we do next. That space may be enough to notice that we are overwhelmed, ask for help, move away from something, set a boundary or choose a different response.

I also want you to know that you do not have to use breathing exercises if they make you feel worse. Regulation is personal. Movement, sensory input, quiet, connection or simply orienting yourself to the room may work better for you.

Use this word as an invitation rather than an instruction: where in your life might you need a little more room to breathe?

Maggie Learoyd MNCPS - Space to Breathe Therapy

THERAPEUTIC CONTEXT & FURTHER READING

Breathing and grounding practices are commonly used within stress-management, mindfulness and therapeutic approaches to support present-moment awareness and regulation. ACT also emphasises making room for internal experiences while choosing values-led action. Person-centred practice keeps the individual's experience and preferences central rather than prescribing one technique for everybody.

Suggested reading: Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*; Russ Harris, *The Happiness Trap*; Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*; Deb Dana, *Anchored*.

This resource is for reflection and psychoeducation. It is not a diagnostic tool or a substitute for individual medical or mental-health care. Stop any exercise that makes you feel unwell or significantly more distressed.