



ST PAUL'S SCHOOL  
Est. 1509

**Mental Health and Wellbeing**  
**Assembly Plans**  
**Dealing with Stress**

[Click here to access the PowerPoint that can be used to accompany these speaker notes.](#)

- Using breathing to control stress
- Being kinder to yourself
- The importance of exercise

*This assembly doesn't attempt to provide a comprehensive list of ways in which you can deal with stress rather it highlights 3 practical way identified by pupils in which we can all help ourselves to feel a little happier and more confident in the face of pressure.*

**1. Using Breathing to Control Stress**

**Starter exercise – Using Breathing to control stress** ([Livestrong](#))

Four-square breathing, sometimes referred to as the box breathing technique, is a simple technique that you can do at any time that you feel stressed. Controlled breathing is an integral part of meditation and can be utilized independently to calm nerves and relieve stress by helping to regulate the autonomic nervous system

*Show figure 1. 'Square Breathing'*

**Step 1**

Sit straight up in a comfortable chair. Put your feet flat on the floor and relax your hands in your lap. You may overlap your hands or let them lie separately with palms facing up. The important factor is to maintain an aligned posture and to be at ease.

**Step 2**

Close your mouth and breath in slowly through your nose. Count to four as you inhale. Hold your breath for four seconds. You are not trying to deprive your body of oxygen, but need to allow a few seconds for the air to fill your lungs. Concentrate on your belly and notice how it also moves when you inhale deeply.

**Step 3**

Open your mouth slightly and slowly exhale to a count of four. Hold the exhale to another count of four. Ideally, you should repeat the exercise for four minutes, but two or three times will help you to achieve a more relaxed state, relieve tension and settle your nerves.

## Step 4

Allow the air to fill your belly and notice how it passes over your chest. One of the goals of boxed square breathing is to bring the respiratory system back into alignment and end the shallow breathing that results from the fight or flight response mode the body enters when feeling stressed.

*Although the pupils to practice the breathing exercise for a minute or two. Depending on the size of the group, you might like to invite comments on whether or not the breathing has helped to make them feel more relaxed.*

### **Why deep breathing helps to calm you down?**

Deep breathing relieves stress and anxiety due to its physiological effect on the nervous system. Breathing slowly and mindfully activates the hypothalamus, connected to the pituitary gland in the brain, to send out neurohormones that inhibit stress-producing hormones and trigger a relaxation response in the body. The hypothalamus links the nervous system to the endocrine system, which secretes the hormones that regulate all activities throughout the body.

### **2. Stop being so hard on yourself**

We are often our own worst critic but the way we feel about ourselves and the corresponding 'self-talk' (the critical things we say to ourselves when we mess up) can really impact how we feel. When we get angry at ourselves for making mistakes we are more likely to feel stressed in the face of a challenge.

So how can we stop being so hard on ourselves?

a) Find a kinder voice

Imagine that a friend was struggling in the way that you are, what would you say to them? Often it would be far more supportive and compassionate than the way we think ourselves. Try and adopt this 'kinder' voice when talking to yourself.

b) Don't be afraid to challenge your negative voice!

- *I carry a heavy load and I'm not going to add to it by listing my faults. Every day is a new day. Tomorrow will be amazing!*
- *I know I'm smart and capable. When did you ever accomplish anything useful, Critical Voice?*
- *I've faced tougher criticism before. You don't scare me!*

c) Think about starting a journal which focuses on the positive things

It's human nature to obsess about the negative things in our lives whilst forgetting about the positives. The way in which we hear criticism versus positive feedback reflects this. By writing some of the positive things down we can start to focus on them more. The more often we do this the better it would be. Some things you could write down include:

1. What are five things you are grateful for? (Your health, perhaps; family; etc.)
2. What are five things you are glad have occurred? (You had a wonderful weekend; your best friend came to visit; etc.)
3. What are five things you are proud of? (I'm proud of withstanding my awful boss; I'm proud of painting my bedroom; etc.)
4. What are five things you are looking forward to? (I'm looking forward to my sister's graduation; etc.)
5. What are five things you are working toward? (I'm working towards getting a good pass in my maths GCSE)

### **3. The Importance of Exercise (Young Minds)**

You and the critical voice in your head are not the same person. We all fall into negative thought patterns at times and we can consciously shift our thought patterns with some practice, very often. When the critical voice in your head gets going, get physical. Take a walk or get on your bike. Dance or exercise along with a YouTube instructor. Get back into your body and out of your brain.

*Show the youtube video: Morning Exercise and Mental Health (warning; mentions addictive qualities of certain drugs)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZBXldCxZEA>

For good mental health, you should aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five days a week. Don't panic - this isn't as bad as it sounds! The key word here is moderate.

Moderate exercise means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat, but you can still talk. It could include things like:

- walking the dog
- riding your bike
- skateboarding or roller-blading
- walking to college instead of getting the bus, or getting off a few stops early
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You can do it as one 30-minute session, or break it up into shorter 10- or 15- minute sessions. Choose something you enjoy - if you hate it, you won't stick to it. Find something that fits into your day and is right for you.

Of course, when you're feeling down, exercise is often the last thing you feel like doing. That's why it's useful to exercise with a friend, so you can motivate each other. Set goals and measure your progress, so you can see the difference it makes.

**Places you can find out more information about dealing with stress**

1. **NHS**; 10 Stress Busters

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/reduce-stress.aspx>

2. **Mind**; How can I deal with pressure?

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/stress/dealing-with-pressure/#.WNjhOhLyt4c>

3. **NHS**; Beat School Exam Stress

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/childhealth6-15/Pages/Examstress.aspx>

**Useful Materials**

*Figure 1. Square Breathing*

