



How To Regain Calm When You're Feeling Stressed Out

By Michael Linsin on September 30, 2017

Here at SCM, we've talked a lot about the importance of maintaining a calm disposition.

Because it makes you more effective – effortlessly so.

Rapport, consistency, likability. Leadership, patience, charisma.

All are made better, stronger, and easier by keeping your cool.

Two ways to accomplish this are to lean exclusively on your classroom management plan and to [shift more responsibility to your students](#).

Together, they can dramatically improve your teaching life.

But what we haven't covered yet is what to do when you're in the midst of it.

In other words, what do you do *in the moment* when you find yourself stressed out and at your wit's end.

How do you slow your racing heart and reverse the tension tightening your shoulders and inching up the back of your head?

How do you save your day and avoid bringing it all home with you?

Talking to yourself can help, certainly. Reciting positive affirmations, challenging erroneous thoughts, and reminding yourself that you're okay can indeed ease tension.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it's unpredictable. It doesn't always work well or very quickly and, too often, thoughts alone aren't strong enough to overcome the physical symptoms of stress.

Our fight or flight response – increased heart rate and blood pressure, shallow breathing, tense muscles, and hyper-awareness – is too powerful.

So, while we may be telling ourselves that everything is okay, our body is sending the opposite message. And herein lies the key to getting rid of stress:

Change the body's reaction first. *And the mind will follow.*

The simplest and most effective method I've found to do this is called box breathing. The way it works is that as soon as you start feeling stressed, begin counting to four during each of four phases of breathing.

So you would inhale for a count of four. Hold your breath for four. Exhale for four. Then hold your breath for four at the end of your exhalation.

Continue in this manner until you're feeling **calm and relaxed**, which can happen surprisingly fast.

It's important to note that when you first try box breathing it can take a little while to get the hang of it. It's common to inhale too deeply and not exhale quite enough.

If you feel like you're not getting enough oxygen, then you're doing it wrong. It should be a gentle, easy feeling. You may at first want to try it without counting.

Just inhale fully (but comfortably), hold, exhale, hold, and repeat.

Either way, once you get into a rhythm, it feels fantastic. It gets rid of the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety and sends the message to your brain that you're in control.

That everything is a-okay.

The best part is that once you prove to yourself that you can overcome stressful moments, it gives you the confidence to calmly handle any classroom situation. It can be remarkably empowering.

The US Navy Seals practice box breathing in order to train the body (and mind) not to go into fight-or-flight mode despite ever-present danger swirling around them.

It enables them to stay calm, think clearly, and perform at the highest level.

And it will do the same for you.

So the next time you're feeling stressed-out and anxious, the next time difficult students or time constraints start affecting your peace of mind, commence box breathing.

In, hold, out, hold. In, hold, out, hold. That's it.

You got it.