

Breathing Exercise: We have a tendency to hold our breath or hyperventilate when anxiety rises too high or during a panic attack. Simple, controlled breathing techniques are quite helpful and can go a long way in calming the body's physiological responses to stress and trauma.

What do breathing exercises actually do for us? They immediately interrupt the rising panic by giving our brain a finite point of focus (intentional breath counting), and they flood our system with precious oxygen, which is typically limited during high stress and anxiety. This response allows our bodies to feel less threatened because we can calm and relax ourselves (deep-belly breathing).

Remember the following two important things when employing this method:

1. **Make sure your inhaled breaths are pulled deep down into your belly.**
2. **Make sure your exhaled breath is *longer* than your inhaled breath.**

Because it is so simple, this method is my go-to for supporting the newly bereaved or someone experiencing acute grief who, typically, will not have the conscious ability or physical energy to learn new things or do daily exercises. They simply can't until they've had some time to heal, which makes this a wonderful tool to offer folks participating in Phase One of my *Dragonfly Wisdom* program.

The exercise goes like this:

- A. Place your hand on your belly so you can feel it expand and contract with your breath.
- B. Breathe in slowly and deeply, pulling it down into your belly, feeling your abdomen expand. Try doing this to the count of five.*
- C. Hold the breath for the same count as the inhale. (In this case, five.)
- D. Slowly exhale, expelling all the air and feeling your belly contract. Exhale for the count of eight.
- E. Repeat as needed until you achieve slow, regular breathing. (Typically, three to five rounds will do unless your symptoms are severe. Conscious breathing techniques will not hurt you, so you can repeat these steps as often as needed. The beauty is it can be done anywhere at any time!)

*The exact number of seconds you inhale, hold, and exhale is not important. The only two things you need to do for this to be effective is pull the breaths deeply into your abdomen and ensure you exhale slowly so it lasts at least a few seconds *longer* than the inhale.