

INTERNAL AWARENESS PRACTICES

How am I? (3-4 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

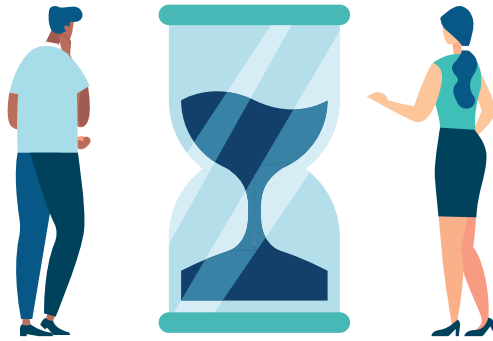
At ZERO TO THREE, we often share a quote by Jeree Pawl, “How you are is as important as what you do.” This quote conveys the understanding that the quality of our presence with others is important. The quote also recognizes that how we are doing internally impacts our ability to be open and present with others. In order to effectively work with others, it’s helpful to have a clear sense of how we are doing in the moment. This practice helps us tune in to ourselves.

- Sitting or standing, take an intentional posture that is relaxed and upright. Allow your posture to express a sense of being present, at ease and awake. Soften your gaze or close your eyes if that’s more comfortable.
- Take a few deep breaths and slowly exhale.
- Focusing your attention on physical sensations in your body, what do you notice? Are there any areas of tension or discomfort? What parts of your body feel relaxed and at ease? Can you sense areas that feel alive with energy or areas that feel dull or numb? Over the next several moments, notice how these sensations may change as you give them your attention.
- Now, bringing your attention to your mind, notice how active or settled your mind is right now. Can you notice thoughts as they pass through? Is your mind holding on to any particular thoughts or is it calm and quiet? Thoughts will always arise—that is natural. See if you can observe these thoughts come and go without getting attached or caught up in them.
- Now bringing your awareness to your emotions, notice the predominant feeling you have in this moment. Can you label that emotion? What other emotions are present? Are these feelings positive, negative or neutral? Try to notice your emotions without judging or analyzing them. Can you just be present to what you are feeling right now?
- Notice for a moment how all these factors that make up your physical, mental and emotional states are working together right now, influencing each other, and creating how you are in this moment. As best you can, bring a sense of acceptance and kindness to how you are doing right now without judging yourself.

Three-Minute Breathing Space (3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This practice comes from Zindel Segel, PhD, a Co-Founder of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. It's an internal, grounding practice that helps us shift between a narrow, single-pointed focus, and a wider focus that integrates more information. It's a brief practice that can be used any time, especially when we need a minute to check in with our self.



1. Preparation: Sitting or standing, take an intentional posture that is relaxed and upright. Allow your posture to express a sense of being present, at ease and awake. You may close your eyes if it is comfortable for you.
2. Becoming Aware (1-minute): Bring your awareness to your inner experience, asking – what is my experience right now? What thoughts are going through my mind? What emotions am I experiencing? Checking in with your body, ask what sensations are here.
3. Gathering (1-minute): Direct your attention to the sensations of breathing in the belly, focusing on the movement of the belly with each in and out breath. Gather yourself at the belly, allowing the breath to anchor you in this moment. When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the belly, noticing breathing breath by breath.
4. Expanding (1-minute) Expand the field of your awareness around the sensations of breathing at the belly to include the whole body. As best you can, bring this anchored sense of awareness into your next moments, noticing all body sensations. Finishing by bringing this centered awareness as you extend your focus to the external environment around you.

Extended Breath (4-5 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

When we take long, slow, relaxing breaths that expand our diaphragm, we shift our nervous system engagement from sympathetic (fight/flight/freeze) to parasympathetic (rest/digest). The longer exhalation also helps slow our heart rate. When we use our breathing to cultivate these sensations of calm in our body, our brain's executive functions work better. We are better able to attend to what's happening, learn new things, and problem solve.

- Begin by taking a comfortable and upright seat with your shoulders over your hips. Close your eyes if that's comfortable or gently lowering your gaze. Sit tall to make space in your body for taking deep breaths.
- Taking in a deep breath down into your belly, then slowly exhale. Focusing your attention on the breath in your belly, noticing the sensations of breathing — the waves of expansion and contraction.
- Staying with this deep belly breathing for a few breaths (pause).
- Now begin counting your breath. Noting how many counts it takes to inhale. Noting how many counts it takes to exhale.
- Staying with this natural pattern of your breath, continuing to notice the sensations of breathing in your body (pause).
- On your next breath, begin to direct your breathing, using the same count for your inhalation but extending your exhalation 2 counts longer than your original count. For example, if your exhalation count was 4, it will now be 6.
- You may need to slow the action of your exhalation or engage your abdomen to extend the exhalation.
- Our goal is to work toward extending our exhale at least two counts longer than our inhale. For example, if your inhale count was 5, your exhale count should be 7. Over the next several breaths, work toward or with this extended exhale breath.
- If this feels challenging today, you can work with an equal count of inhalations and exhalations.
- If this feels easy today, you can work toward extending your exhalations to double your inhalations. For example, if your inhalation count is 5, your exhalation count will be 10.
- Stay with your extended exhalation for a few more breaths (pause).
- Now, letting go of the controlled breathing and coming back to a free, natural breath.
- Notice how you feel after this practice. Have there been any changes in your body sensations, your feelings, or thoughts?



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Breathing
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Calm breath, Clear Mind (5-10 Minutes)

As we become calm, we cultivate presence and refine our perceptions. We see that the mind is always changing. Learning to calm the breath and create stillness, we can begin to see our minds more clearly. This practice of calm presence prepares us for the difficult work of seeing the way we distort the truth. As we become more adept at seeing our perceptions with clarity, our capacity to make choices instead of simply reacting emerges. We can be more skillful in our choices, more able to discern when unconscious perceptions are directing our actions, and more likely to direct our will with intelligence.

- Find a comfortable seat with your spine tall and extending upward. Close your eyes or allow them to remain open with a soft gaze looking down in front of you. Elongate the back of your neck so that you can feel the length of your spine from the tailbone all the way up your back to the top of your head, straight and tall.
- Be aware that you are in a safe space. Take a moment to appreciate this opportunity for self-care. Recognize that you have everything you need in this moment.
- Make any small adjustments in your posture to feel completely relaxed and supported and then come into a soft stillness. For the next several minutes, commit to being focused on the present as you explore your internal landscape. Set aside thoughts of the past or the future.
- Allow your focus to turn inward to the sensation of your breath moving in and out of your nose. Feel the movement of the breath along the skin of your nostrils.
- Now bring your focus further down into the body as you place a hand on your belly. Hold your attention on this point of connection between hand and belly. Feel the warmth of your hand and notice the hand as it rises when your breath moves into your belly and moves closer to the spine as the breath flows out and your belly contracts inward.
- Welcome each inhalation and the moment when it turns into an exhalation. Take delight in the subtle shift when your in-breath becomes your out-breath. This is your resting breath. Settle into this space of ease. This is your normal resting breath – the breath that breathes itself. If your mind begins to wander, return to the point of contact where your hand rests on your belly.
- Silently count the rhythm of your inhalation. Once you have this number, make your exhalation the same length as your inhalation. Settle into this new symmetrical rhythm. Allow your attention to stay with your breath as you explore the experience of this new rhythm. See if you can even out any pauses so that your breath is smooth and even. Allow this to be effortless and comfortable.
- If you feel stress or strain at any point, return to the resting breath and the sensation of your hand on your belly.
- Notice the quality of your mind. To continue to build on your capacity for calm, add a count of one to each part of the breath so that you continue to hold the symmetry, but you have expanded the capacity. Your breath should remain smooth and even with a rhythmic flow reflecting a quality of calm and ease.
- As you continue with this practice, bring the image of a calm clear lake into your mind. Focus on the stillness of this lake. See the full moon over the lake and see the reflection of the moon clearly reflected in the calm still water. Hold this image in your mind as you continue with the rhythmic breath practice. Remain in silence for a few moments to allow this practice to have its full effect. (Pause.)

- Let go of any efforts to alter your breath. Return to your resting breath.
- Bring your hands together and rub them back and forth quickly to create heat and then cup your palms over your eyes. Allow your eyes to open and adjust. Feel the sensation of your hands on your face.
- When you are ready to transition, remove your hands slowly and blink your eyes a few times. Allow yourself time to notice the effects of this practice. Be aware of the quality of your mind as well as the overall sense of energy in your body. What lingers from this practice?

