

# 31 meditation

## for you to know

Meditation is an exercise that helps you train your brain to let go of anxiety and come back to a peaceful state. When you practice meditation regularly as a prevention exercise, you will find that you are better able to stay calm in situations that used to make you anxious. You will also have a lower level of anxiety in general.

Jared went to his counselor, Mr. Brent, to try to get some ideas on how to feel less anxious. Mr. Brent suggested that Jared try meditation. When Jared heard the word “meditation,” he pictured an elderly, bald, religious man in a long robe sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed on top of a mountain. Jared said, “Oh no; that’s not for me.”

Mr. Brent said that the picture Jared imagined portrayed a common stereotype about meditation but that it was not completely accurate. While meditation *can* be a spiritual practice, it can also simply be a highly effective exercise to calm the mind.

Mr. Brent explained that the basic practice of meditation involves focusing your attention on something peaceful, and then when your mind wanders, bringing it back to that focus of peace again and again. As you take your thoughts away from anxiety and focus on peace, your body will respond by relaxing and releasing tension. As you continue to practice day after day, your mind will get better and better at letting go of stress and staying centered and calm. This ability will help you all throughout every day, no matter what situation you are in.

At first Jared was very skeptical about trying meditation. He thought that sitting still with his eyes closed would just make him feel more anxious. Mr. Brent said it was normal to feel that way at first, but with practice, Jared would get used to it. He suggested Jared try the exercise in his office first, for just thirty seconds to start. After a few thirty-second tries, they moved up to one minute, and then two and three. After

a few weeks, Jared was comfortable meditating for five minutes at a time. Jared was surprised that he actually liked meditation. He liked the fact that while he meditated his whole body would relax and his mind would stop racing. He could let go of all feelings of anxiety and also feel more peaceful for a couple of hours afterward. Mr. Brent explained that the greatest benefits of meditation were cumulative: the more regularly Jared practiced, the more focused he would be, the better able to control his emotions, the more deeply he would sleep, and the easier it would be to let go of anxiety.

## activity 31 \* meditation

### directions

To practice meditation, you will need to focus on something peaceful. You can choose a word or a mental picture; you can focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body; or you can try to simply clear your mind of any thoughts at all and focus on the “blackness” behind your eyes.

To help yourself choose a peaceful word or image, circle any of the words below that bring up a feeling of relaxation within you. Use the blank lines to add your own.

|        |       |        |        |       |
|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| sunset | water | nature | clouds | _____ |
| peace  | God   | smile  | relax  | _____ |
| free   | one   | love   | flow   | _____ |
| sky    | float | calm   | sail   | _____ |
| summer | sleep | quiet  | rest   | _____ |

Choose one of the words you circled to focus on during your first try at meditation, or decide to focus on your breath or the darkness. Then follow the steps below:

- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- Sit in a position that is comfortable for you.
- Set a timer for one minute.
- Close your eyes.
- Focus your attention on your chosen object of peace.

As you try to focus, it is normal for your mind to wander. When that happens, simply notice it without judgment, and then bring your focus back to your peaceful object again. Know that it is completely normal for your mind to wander again and again and again. Continue refocusing until the time is up.

The goal for meditation practice is to work up to twenty minutes a day, nearly every day. It will not be possible at first. Let yourself start by doing thirty seconds or one minute every few days. As you become comfortable, build up to five minutes, adding thirty seconds or one minute at a time. Add time and days to your practice as you are able. You may add time easily and quickly, or it may take you a year or more to build up to the goal. It doesn't matter how long it takes you. The benefit is in the continued practice of moving your mind away from anxiety and back to peace.

## more to do

What did you know or think about meditation before you read this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe how trying to meditate affected your anxiety level. \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe anything that you liked about it. \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe anything that you didn't like about it. \_\_\_\_\_

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Many people say that they are too busy to meditate. However, when you take time to meditate, you actually end up having more time in your day; regular meditation helps you stay peaceful, so you waste less time being anxious. It helps to you focus, so you complete tasks in less time. You make fewer mistakes, so you spend less time doing things over again. Meditation helps you let go of irritation, so you spend less time in petty arguments. When you compare the amount of time it takes to meditate with the amount of time you waste on these anxious activities, you realize that when you meditate you come out ahead.

Think about realistic times when you could fit meditation into your day. Morning or evening? Right after school or every night before you start your homework? Right after you brush your teeth? As you practice meditating, experiment with different times and different peaceful words or images. Find the way to meditate that works best for you.