

# First Steps To Calming Anxious Clients

Learning deep breathing exercises can prove to be a crucial skill for clients with anxiety. Clients are often unaware of how their breathing actually affects their anxiety. Shallow breaths exasperate their symptoms. A technique like abdominal deep breathing can help lower their heart rate, increase their oxygen intake, and slow down their thoughts. While it does not change the cause of the client's anxiety, it will create space between the trigger and their ingrained automatic thoughts.

## Step 1: Deep breathing exercise

1. Have your clients scan their bodies from the top of their heads, down to their toes.
2. Have them notice any tension or tightness they are feeling.
3. Ask them to place one hand on their abdomen right under their rib cage.
4. Guide them to inhale slowly through their nose. Ask them to watch their hand rise as they breathe in, and watch their hand lower towards their body as they exhale.
5. Have them place their other hand over their chest.
6. Have them take another deep breath. As they do, the hand over their chest should only slightly move.
7. Direct them to exhale slowly.
8. Tell them to take a slow deep breath and pause for 3 seconds, then slowly exhale through their mouth or nose.
9. As they exhale, have them envision their whole body letting go and relaxing in the areas they are tense, with each deep breath.
10. Have them repeat 9 more times.

Encourage your clients to do deep breathing exercises daily. They can take deep breaths in anxious moments and also start or end their day with deep breathing exercises – working up to 15 minutes at a time over the course of a few weeks.

Once your clients are able to slow down their heart rate, their self-awareness can increase, and they may begin to notice the thoughts that have cycled through their minds. Our self-talk (our inner conversation), is so subtle and automatic that it rarely goes unchallenged.

Once they are more aware of their thoughts, it is important to help clients chart their thoughts. A rhythm of regularly charting negative self-talk during anxious moments will allow them to identify themes and root causes for their anxiety. This exploration will allow clients to then counter negative thoughts with positive counter-statements.

## Step 2: Charting Thoughts

Encourage your clients to chart out their thoughts with corresponding positive counter-statements over the course of 4 weeks straight. Once your client identifies the negative thoughts, they should challenge the irrational thoughts with positive counter statements.

Guidelines for positive counter-statements:

1. Keep the statements in the present tense.
2. Keep your statements in the first person.
3. You should have some belief in the statement, even if it's very little.
4. Keep the statement brief.

<b>Day</b>	<b>Emotions:</b> Specify the emotion you are experiencing: anxiety, sadness, etc.	<b>Automatic negative thoughts:</b> Write the thoughts that precede the emotion	<b>Positive counter-statement:</b> Write a response to counter the negative thoughts
Example... <i>Monday</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>	<i>I am so incompetent, I am going to get fired.</i>	<i>I am working to learn more at my job; it is OK to ask for help.</i>

Once you go over your client's chart for the week, notice any themes, or reoccurring thoughts and walk with your client on processing where they originate from, which may possibly be pointing to deep fears or past hurts.

Ask your clients to use deep breathing exercises and chart out their thoughts with counter statements for 4 consecutive weeks. Consistent practice will help challenge the negative self-talk that may have dominated their thinking for years.