



The five finger breathing technique

This strategy is suggested in the 11-14 BrainWaves lesson:

Managing worry

About the strategy

Five-finger breathing is a simple, tactile mindfulness exercise used to calm the nervous system, reduce anxiety, and refocus the mind. By combining slow breathing with the physical sensation of tracing your hand, it shifts your body out of a stress response and into a state of relaxation. This multisensory mix slows your heart rate, calms your nervous system, and stops anxious thoughts by giving your brain a simple physical task to focus on.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

Five finger breathing is a type of mindful breathing exercise, which is often studied as a group of relaxation and regulation techniques.

This study found that even one minute of deep breathing (watching a one-minute animated video) significantly reduced physiological stress and acted effectively for calming children.

- Obradović, J. et al. (2021). *Taking a few deep breaths significantly reduces children's physiological arousal in everyday settings: Results of a preregistered video intervention*. Developmental Psychobiology, 63, e22214.

This study found that deep breathing exercises are an effective and accessible method for reducing stress among adolescents:

- Jeslin, A.R. et al (2026). *Effect of breathing exercise on stress management*. Bioinformation. 2026 Jan 31;22(1):425-429.

This study found that mindfulness based interventions (including five finger breathing) as an emerging therapy can be used to improve both the physical and psychosocial well-being of young people with cancer:

- Murphy, S. et al. (2022). *Mindfulness Practices for Children and Adolescents Receiving Cancer Therapies*. J Pediatr Hematol Oncol Nurs. 2022 Jan-Feb;39(1):40-48.

Further reading

This resource provides additional context and practical guidance:

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/five-finger-breathing>