Tip Sheet on Diaphragmatic Breathing – Calming Breathing

How can the way we breathe help us cope with stress?

For both adults and children breathing can play an important role when we are experiencing challenging feelings such as worry, sadness or anger or when we are experiencing stress. During an event that we find stressful, our rate of breathing often changes. For example when we experience a shock or fright; we might find that our breathing becomes shallow and quick, and that we even feel a little breathless, or experience other sensations in our body, such as tingling in our arms/hands and legs.

When we are feeling worried, we also tend to breathe more quickly and less deeply and these results in an imbalance in the amount of oxygen we take in, with the body tending to take in too much oxygen (this can be referred to as ‘over-breathing’). When this imbalance is noticed in the body, the body takes actions with chemical changes that can produce dizziness, light-headedness, confusion, breathlessness, blurred vision, increase in heart rate to pump more blood around, numbness and tingling in the extremities, ‘clammy’ hands and muscle stiffness.

Continually ‘over-breathing’ can lead to a cycle of feeling tired and consequently being more susceptible to feeling stress, and therefore being more reactive to stress throughout the day. By teaching children calming breathing techniques such as those taught in activities such as ‘Candle Breaths’ and ‘Bubble Breathing’ we can help children practise slowing their breathing down and reducing feelings of worry or stress. With lots of practice and support children can even use calm breathing techniques to help them cope better when they find themselves in challenging situations.

Reference: