



PANIC, or EXTREME DISTRESS?: Use the ‘Emergency Brake’.

Panic attacks are often managed using the AWARE technique, but can breathing also help? The answer is yes, but, **4:6 slow gentle breathing** is not really something that people experiencing panic attack, or intense distress, feel able to do straightaway - there is just too much fight and flight in the system to allow it.

However we can use a modified breathing technique to apply an “Emergency Brake”

- 1) Take a very deep breath
- 2) Hold it for a few seconds - you can also clench your fists as you do this
- 3) Purse your lips very tightly then push the air out against your pursed lips. This should be a bit of an effort and take a long time. As the air gradually escapes unclench your fists (if you clenched them!)

- 4) Stop as soon as you feel noticeably calmer. One or two of these will usually do it.
- 5) You can then go for slow gentle 4:6 belly breathing or any other technique.

Dealing with a Situation that is likely to make you Stressed

This could be anything from dealing with a difficult colleague, customer, family member, going somewhere that makes you feel anxious, or any challenge. The trick is to use the 4:6 breathing to get really calm before you do it, continue the breathing as much as you whilst you are in the situation. Another very useful thing you can do ahead of time, is to get very relaxed using the breath and then continuing to feel calm, relaxed and breathing slowly, **imagine yourself** dealing calmly with the situation. Just like a sports person using visualisation you could practice a way you would LIKE to react or behave beforehand.

When you NOTICE you’ve started to get upset, experience unhelpful thoughts, or generally ‘loose the plot’.

So you **noticed** - very well done. That is often the hardest bit. Now just drop your attention into your chest and belly and go into the slow breathing pattern you’ve learned. Just focus on the the breathing for 3 - 6 breaths, then ask yourself - what shall I do now? You might need to breathe a little longer, redirect your attention, or do something different.



Recalling a positive emotion

Sometimes it has been a while since we felt some positive feelings. When we are slow gentle breathing these feelings can come back to us more naturally. You can deliberately recall all the different sensations that go with a good feeling like gratitude, affection, love, confidence, contentment whilst you breathe. Recall the feeling in all different parts of your body, all the different sensations and even what the space around you feels like. Just practice and soak in that feeling.

A situation that doesn’t seem to have a solution

Sometimes we’ve got a situation or person in our life that brings up lots of difficult feelings and it is very hard to see how it can improve. Many people find that after 10 - 15 minutes slow breathing, particularly if they have practiced a positive emotion like gratitude, affection or acceptance, they can just imagine that person or situation ‘in the bubble’ of the good feeling. Things can change after this.