**Focused Breathing: The Four-Count Breath**

Focused breathing is a technique in which individuals direct their awareness and attention to their breath, and to any sensations that arise during the practice. It can be practiced in conjunction with diaphragmatic breathing, once you have learned and practiced that breathing strategy. Research findings have indicated that focused breathing can help individuals regulate emotion. In addition, focused breathing has been found to help reduce anxiety and hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD.

**To practice the four-count breath, follow these steps:**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Begin to practice diaphragmatic breathing, focusing on the sensations of the breath. Notice what it is like to inhale and exhale. Note what the air feels like as you inhale – is it cool or warm? What does it feel like as you exhale? Notice your breathing – is it shallow or deep, fast or slow? Notice how your abdomen rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale.
3. Continue to focus on the breath, noticing its qualities.
4. When your mind wanders from the breath, acknowledge the fact that it has wandered, congratulate yourself on this awareness, and gently redirect your attention back to the breath. Continue focused breathing for a few minutes (2-5).
5. To begin the square breath, inhale slowly and fully for a count of four.
6. Hold your breath for a count of four, counting at the same pace.
7. Now begin to exhale slowly and fully for a count of four.
8. Repeat steps 10-15 for several breaths.

**A few focused breathing tips:**

* It is recommended that you practice this type of breathing for short periods of time, multiple times per day. Remember to try to practice it in conjunction with diaphragmatic breathing.
* When you practice this exercise, you will likely find that your mind wanders from the breath. When this happens, acknowledge that your mind has wandered and gently redirect your attention to the breath.
* This type of exercise can be used at any time, but it can be especially useful if you know you’re about to go into a stressful situation in order to remain calm.

(Adapted by Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness* *meditation in everyday life.* New York: Hyperion.)