

Relaxed Breath

People who stutter may display maladaptive breathing patterns that interfere with relaxed speech production (Bloodstein, 1995; Denny & Smith, 1997). These patterns can involve behaviors such as:

- holding the breath
- breathing shallowly
- taking a quick inhalation before attempting to speak
- inhaling and then exhaling most of the air before speaking
- speaking while squeezing out the last bit of air
- breathing with excessive muscular tension



Students who have difficulty initiating and/or maintaining airflow while talking can benefit from direct instruction regarding relaxed breathing techniques (Adams, 1990; Cooper & Cooper, 2003; Ramig & Bennet, 1997; Runyan & Runyan, 1999).

Essentially, the Relaxed Breath strategy is relaxed diaphragmatic breathing. It establishes beneficial breathing patterns and provides a foundation for other fluency-enhancing skills. Using this strategy can facilitate fluent speech production and make it easier to initiate and maintain voice and articulation without tension or stuttering.

Relaxed Breath can be taught in the following way:

1. Explain the rationale (described above and on page 21 of the Student Workbook).
2. Briefly review the breathing process. Gear your description to the age level of your students.

» Highlight the fact that, when we breathe in a relaxed way, movement occurs down low near our stomach. There should not be appreciable movement in the upper chest or shoulders.

3. Guide students as you go through steps 1–5 of “How to take a Relaxed Breath” (see pages 21–22 of the Student Workbook). Provide models as indicated.

» If students have difficulty producing a Relaxed Breath while sitting, you can have them try to do so while lying on their backs. Lying in a supine position will stabilize the upper chest and accentuate the movement of the stomach.

After students have learned to produce a Relaxed Breath, teach them to gently add voice and articulation.

Voice and articulation can be added in the following way:

1. Guide students as you go through steps 1–6 of “How to put your Relaxed Breath together with voice” (see pages 22–23 of the Student Workbook). Provide models as indicated.
2. Remind students that the Relaxed Breath sets the stage for relaxed, smooth speech. Tell them that, although they are practicing the Relaxed Breath very slowly now, later they’ll learn to do it more quickly.

A/V Resources for Relaxed Breath

Audio Files

[Track 1.14](#): Relaxed Breath [0:53]

[Track 1.15](#): How to take a Relaxed Breath [1:19]

[Track 1.16](#): How to put your Relaxed Breath together with voice [2:12]

Video Files

[V31](#) Therapist Instruction #1: Younger Student [1:34]

[V30](#) Therapist Instruction #2: Older Student [2:12]

[V33](#) Student Example #1: Breath Only [1:43]

[V32](#) Student Example #2: Breath with Voice [2:22]

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