

Chapter 23

Dip Your Toe In Blue Smoke Breathing Script

Sometimes people struggle with breathing exercises because these exercises feel too slow, they do not notice a relaxation response during or after, or because they are unsure what they are supposed to be doing during the exercise. In this exercise, I will ask you to take one breath with me. This breath does not need to be deep or slow.

On the out-breath, I will ask you to try to imagine the breath as colored smoke. Do all parts of you think that trying one breath with me is an okay thing to do? Good.

What color will you try to make the smoke? Good.

Whenever you are ready, take a breath at a rate that is comfortable. Again, it doesn't have to be deep or slow and just try to visualize your out-breath.

How did that go? Did that make anything worse?

If the breath was an okay experience, try another. I typically do not ask the client to do more than three breaths total. If the client notices a small relaxation response, normalize that as success and anticipate that it is about to return to baseline in a few moments.

Notes:

- The purpose of this breath is to find a disconfirming way to breathe and hopefully to avoid anything getting worse. This is particularly true when deep breathing has always caused an anxiety response.
- The purpose is not to generate a strong relaxation response, since that may not be identified by the client's system as safe. We are

just briefly tapping the brake and noticing that it does not make things worse or that it causes a brief and mild relaxation response.

- If clients struggle with this breath, try hand breathing later (next chapter). Hand breathing is generally better tolerated.
- As a modification to this breath, you can ask the client to quickly check the pace of their thoughts while she is visualizing the blue smoke. We are asking the client to visually construct their out-breath, and this often takes the parts of the brain needed to ruminate offline. This breath has the side-benefit of sometimes slowing the pace of thoughts on the out-breath.