



# **Conscious Breathing for Trauma Recovery (CBTR)**

**A simple and safe self-help programme teaching conscious breathing to anyone suffering from trauma, anxiety, burnout and/or depression.**

**Created by the Brigitte Martin Powell and Judee Gee,  
in association with the  
International Breathwork Foundation**

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**[www.ibfbreathwork.org](http://www.ibfbreathwork.org)**

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*Netherlands Chamber of Commerce Registration Number 32080432*

## Conscious Breathing for Trauma Recovery (CBTR)

The CBTR training programme was originally designed especially for refugees, migrants and victims of natural disasters as well as health care workers, staff and volunteers of relief organisations. It has been now extended to include anyone suffering from trauma, anxiety, burnout and depression. It uses the method known as Coherent Breathing as its primary educational tool.

The training was conceived in 2017 and then piloted over a twelve-month period (2018) in Athens, where it was delivered in direct liaison with local NGO's providing on-the ground support for refugees (shelter, food, medical aid and supplies, community welfare, social services...).

**The goal of the CBTR programme is to provide free online conscious breathing education that is both simple and effective through:**

- **Giving practical instructions for developing an awareness of current breathing habits**
- **Teaching specific breathing exercises to recalibrate the autonomic nervous system**

**VIDEOS: Find the links to the CBTR training videos at the end of this document (page 11).**

### Training Developers

The Conscious breathing for Trauma Recovery (CBTR) training was developed by Brigitte Martin Powell and Judee Gee, breath specialists and breathwork trainers based in the UK and France, with permission from Stephen Elliott for the section on Coherent Breathing.

Judee and Brigitte are former Presidents of the International Breathwork Foundation, an organisation in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) since July 2016. At the time of developing this programme they were active members within the IBF, sitting on the IBF-UN working group committee which develops conscious breathing projects in alignment with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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## **The International Breathwork Foundation (IBF)**

The IBF is an international non-profit organisation open to everyone interested in conscious breathing and breathwork.

In 1994, a group of breathwork pioneers invited colleagues from around the world to join them in Sweden for one week to breathe together. This became the first Global Inspiration Conference and from this gathering the IBF was also born.

The conference has been held annually ever since, each time in a different country. It attracts a diverse range of breathwork professionals, practitioners, organisations, training schools and interested individuals from over 40 countries.

The IBF provides a platform through which all breathworkers can exchange their knowledge, research and experience in support of the development of breathwork and conscious breathing.

In 2016, the IBF was granted special consultative status by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Since then, it has been developing and delivering conscious breathing projects in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (SDGs), e.g. Conscious Breathing in the Classroom and Conscious Breathing for Trauma Recovery.

**For information on the International Breathwork Foundation: [ibfbreathwork.org](https://ibfbreathwork.org)**

### **Disclaimer**

This presentation is designed to provide helpful guidance for recovering from trauma and reinforcing natural resiliency, but should not be used to diagnose or treat any health or medical conditions requiring medical supervision. The publisher and authors are not liable for any consequences from the application by any person using the information provided in the presentation. Even though conscious breathing is simple and safe, some may find this method challenging, and are encouraged to consult a conscious breathing specialist in order to progress in the practice.

### **Donations**

We encourage you to become a member of the International Breathwork Foundation and also donate to the Breathwork Development Fund. Please feel free to share the CBTR programme with others.

To become an IBF member: <https://ibfbreathwork.org/sign-up/>

To contribute to the **IBF Breathwork Development Fund**: <https://ibfbreathwork.org/breathwork-development-fund/>

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# Conscious Breathing for Trauma Recovery Workshop

A simple and safe self-help programme teaching conscious breathing to anyone suffering from trauma, anxiety, burnout and/or depression.

## Facilitation Guidelines - 90 min workshop

For videos of CBTR presentation and demonstration go to:

Presentation: <https://youtu.be/1kFtXJxvoLc> (10:25)

Demonstration: <https://youtu.be/rOelBTjrx6s> (42:08)

### Factors to take into consideration:

Conscious Breathing is very simple, but be aware that some participants may find it challenging. Be considerate and let each person choose the extent to which they are willing to participate in the workshop.

When participants who don't know each other are gathered into the small breathing groups, take a little extra time in the beginning to help everyone feel more comfortable. Simple questions such as: Where are you from?, What is your mother tongue?, help people to relax and feel secure.

Depending on cultural traditions, you may choose to keep men and women separated for part of the exercise.

### Programme and timeline

*Before you enter the venue to meet with your group, you may wish to take 20 slow connected breaths to help centre and prepare yourself.*

**1. Welcome, facilitator introduction, participant first names** **5 min**

**Quick overview of the themes to cover:** **5 min**

1. Theory: Conscious breathing
2. Individual breath observation in small and/or large groups
3. Questions & Answers
4. Coherent breathing exercise
5. Downloading Breathing Apps and testing them
6. Closure

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## 1. Theory: Conscious Breathing

5 min

There are many types of conscious breathing. The specific method for this training is Coherent Breathing, an ancient breath practice validated by neuroscience thanks to refined measuring tools (see annexed document for more about Coherent Breathing).

### Benefits of Conscious Breathing:

- Recalibrates the sympathetic & parasympathetic systems (*fight/flight versus rest/digest*)
- Restores calmness and inner security
- Increases optimism, motivation and hope
- Builds up resilience (physical, emotional, psychological)

### Can improve conditions such as:

- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- High blood pressure
- Depression
- Bed wetting

## 2. Breath observation

30 min total

Demonstration of the exercise by the facilitator on an assistant or on him/herself.

*The facilitator has to assess which approach will suit the participants best and decide whether the Breath Observation will be done:*

- *in small groups, up to 6 people (2a. below), with the breather lying on a mat and the others sitting around observing, or*
- *individually (2b. below), all together and breathing while seated, observing themselves, or*
- *a combination of 2a and 2b i.e. first a round of 2b, then asking for volunteers to demonstrate 2a, and then facilitate more people with 2a or another round of 2b.*

### Breath observation main points

The facilitator invites participants to:

- Bring awareness to the act of breathing
- Focus on expanding the inhale and relaxing on the exhale
- Maintain awareness on physical sensations (ignore thoughts)
- Stretch open the breathing range
- Gradually extend the breathing to 5 breaths per minute (6 seconds in, 6 seconds out)

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## Facilitation guidelines

### 2a. Breath observation in small groups, breather lying on a mat (5-7 min/participant)

1. Ask which participant (“the breather”) would like to go first, thank them and ask their name.
2. Invite the breather to lie down comfortably with a pillow under their head and possibly a cushion under their knees.
3. Lying on their side or sitting comfortably in a relaxed position is also fine.
4. Invite them to breathe through the nose, and to connect the in and the out breath.
5. Observe their breathing. Where do you see their breath moving in their body?
6. In the chest? Belly? Lower abdomen? Both sides of the ribcage? Up towards the neck? Reassure them that their breathing is fine (do not criticize their breathing in any way).
7. Count out softly in seconds the length of the in and out breaths.
8. Suggest to the breather to focus on the inhale and relax on the exhale and give them some time to apply your suggestion.
9. Consider whether there is room for expanding the breath: In the upper chest? All the way up to behind the collarbones? Laterally on each side of the ribcage? Further down towards the lower belly?
10. Ask permission to touch lightly and invite them to expand their breathing into specific zones by placing your hand gently but firmly on the zone, checking with the person that the pressure is okay, and asking them to breathe into your hand.
11. Be appropriate, considerate and gentle. Do not force them to do anything. Alternatively ask them to put their own hand on these zones and breathe into them.
12. Allow the breather time to get used to this conscious way of breathing and in the meanwhile, invite the other participants to stay aware of their own breathing.
13. After exploring the expansion of their breath in the upper chest, laterally in the ribcage and in the belly, suggest they visualize breathing all the way to their feet. Allow them time to experience this type of approach.
14. You may also slide your hand underneath their chest (behind their heart) and ask them to breathe towards your hands. Stay until you can feel the movement of their breath reaching your hands. Repeat with your hands underneath the sacrum zone.
15. Count softly (second by second) the length of each in and out breath and bring their attention to how their breathing is progressively slowing down. Give them time to enjoy the experience, bringing their attention to any inner sensations and feelings.
16. If there are areas of physical discomfort, invite them to breathe into these areas while relaxing at the same time. Emotions may surface (e.g. sadness). Let your participant know that this is fine and continue to encourage soft and slow breathing.
17. When ready, ask your participant to move their fingers and toes, open their eyes, and to sit up and reflect on their experience if they’d like to. Congratulate them for their progress and thank them for their participation.
18. Repeat with every willing breather in the group.

## Facilitation guidelines

### 2b. Individual breath observation, with the group breathing together while seated

Invite everyone to sit comfortably in a relaxed way (leaning back or with their spine self-supported). Invite them to close their eyes if they are comfortable in doing so.

1. Invite them to breathe through the nose, and to connect the in and out breath.
2. Ask them to observe their breathing. Where do you they feel their breath moving in their body?
3. In the chest? Belly? Lower abdomen? Both sides of the ribcage? Up towards the neck? Reassure them that their breathing is fine (do not criticize them in any way).
4. Ask them to silently count (second by second) the length of the in and out breaths.
5. Suggest they focus on the inhale and relax on the exhale and give them some time to apply your suggestion.
6. Consider whether there is room for expanding the breath: In the upper chest? All the way up to behind the collarbones? Laterally on each side of the ribcage? Further down towards the lower belly?
7. Suggest they put their hand on specific zones of their body and invite them to breathe into their hand.
8. Be appropriate, considerate and gentle. Do not force them to do anything. It's okay if they just want to keep their eyes open and look around.
9. Allow them time to get used to this conscious way of breathing.
10. After exploring the expansion of their breath in the upper chest, laterally in the ribcage and in the belly, suggest they visualise breathing all the way to their feet. Allow them time to experience this type of approach.
11. You may also ask them to breathe towards the back of their chair (behind their heart) or into their sacrum area.
12. Have them silently count (second by second) the length of each in and out breath and notice how their breathing is progressively slowing down. Give them time to enjoy the experience, bringing their attention to any inner sensations and feelings.
13. If there are areas of physical discomfort, invite them to breathe into these areas while relaxing at the same time. Emotions may surface (e.g. sadness). Let them know that this is fine and continue to encourage soft and slow breathing.
14. When ready, ask them to move their fingers and toes, open their eyes and reflect on their experience if they'd like to. Congratulate them for their progress and thank them for their participation.



### 3. Questions & Answers

15 min

In this section, we create an open space for sharing, questions, comments and any concerns participants may have about their experience or the technique they are learning.

### 4. Coherent Breathing explanation and practice

15 min

Why is it called “coherent”? Because it calibrates both the heart and the nervous system. The scientifically proven optimal breathing rhythm is 5 breaths per minutes, i.e. 6 seconds for the inhale and 6 seconds for the exhale.

Get the whole group breathing for 2 minutes at a rate of one second slower than their average rate as observed earlier. Check with them that they are comfortable.

To help with focusing suggest they rise their palms open towards the sky while inhaling and lower them towards the earth while exhaling. Alternatively, they can rise and lower their heads gently, while breathing in and out.

**Suggestion for next step:** Practice coherent breathing 3 times a day at the rate of 6 sec/in, 6 sec/out for 5 minutes each time (think **365**) or take a few coherent breaths throughout the day whenever you can (waiting around, doing tasks, on public transport, using your phone ...).

### 5. Download and demonstration setting of the “IBF Breathing App” 10 min

Free app for both Androids and Apples smart phones for the CB practice: “IBF Breathing App”.

Demonstrate to participants how to find, download and choose the settings of their app.

### 6. Acknowledgments and closure

5 min

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# Coherent Breathing

## The Autonomic Nervous System

A major component of the stress response system is the autonomic nervous system, which manages the automatic functions of the body, including the cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, hormonal, glandular and immune systems. The autonomic nervous system has two main branches: the sympathetic nervous system – the *fight or flight* system - and the parasympathetic nervous system – the *rest and digest or feed and breed* - system.

Ideally, both systems are required to intervene for specific actions through our daily life, but in the long run a balance between the two is necessary. A body that is constantly under mental, physical or emotional stress (sympathetic system) without time to rest, integrate and replenish (parasympathetic system), will not be able to function optimally and will suffer the consequences.

There is one automatic function of the body that can be voluntarily controlled through our breath and that is the respiratory system. Conscious breathing techniques provide easy access to the autonomic communication network and by changing our breathing patterns, we send specific messages to the brain that have powerful effects on our thoughts, emotions and behaviors. For example, when we feel anxious, just a few minutes of Coherent Breathing can calm our worried mind and foster more rational - rather than impulsive - decision-making.

## Coherent Breathing Practice

Breathing at the rhythm of 5 breaths per minutes is the optimal breathing rhythm for rebalancing the body and accessing an inner state of relaxation that is both peaceful and restful. Five breaths per minute corresponds to breathing in for 6 seconds and out for 6 seconds, linking the in-breath and out-breath in a relaxed way.

## How to practice

Start progressively, breathing consciously and in a relaxed way for 3 seconds in and 3 seconds out, until it feels comfortable. Then move on to breathing for 4 seconds in and 4 seconds out and progress at your own rhythm up to 6 seconds in and 6 seconds out. Taller people might want to breathe more slowly.

## Where to practice

Start by finding a quiet spot where you can be undisturbed for several minutes. Soft light conditions or darkness will help you to relax. Have a light blanket on hand to be sure you stay warm. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position and start your practice. Once you feel comfortable with the practice you can apply it in a wide range of situations (sitting, walking...).

## When to practice

Three times a day for five minutes (365) is a great beginning, and if you can apply the practice daily for a few weeks, you will reap the most benefits. Even one minute of coherent breathing will help rebalance your nervous system.

Stephen Elliot suggests 20 min per day for a period of 21 days in order to recalibrate the nervous system and install the coherent breathing reflex as a default practice.

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## IBF Conscious Breathing App

Free app for both Androids and Apples smart phones: “IBF Breathing App”.

### CBTR Videos

**Trailer:** <https://youtu.be/FzOeaORLqRU> (1:26)

**Presentation:** <https://youtu.be/YJkpa4jkHmE> (10:25)

**Demonstration:** <https://youtu.be/1kFtXJxvoLc> (42:08)

**Play list "IBF CBTR: Conscious Breathing for Trauma Recovery":**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCz-OLgKrU1X-IJ73TsW3ushOKwhdSUKZ>

The script for the above listed videos is detailed in the present document.

### Further reading

#### Coherent Breathing

##### For more information about Coherent Breathing

The New Science of Breath, by Stephen Elliott: [www.coherence.com](http://www.coherence.com)

Coherent Breathing, by Dr W. Ehrmann: [wilfried-ehrmann.com](http://wilfried-ehrmann.com)

Conscious Breathing in Everyday Life, by Joy Manné, Ph.D [www.joymanne.org](http://www.joymanne.org)

Burnout to Breathing, by Dr Ela Manga: [www.drelamanga.com/books/](http://www.drelamanga.com/books/)

The Complete Breath, by Jim Morningstar, Ph.D., Editor

[www.jimmorningstar.com/TheCompleteBreath.html](http://www.jimmorningstar.com/TheCompleteBreath.html)

#### Keywords for Internet search

Conscious Breathing

Breathwork

Coherent Breathing

Stephen Elliott

Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous System

Heart Rate Variability (HRV)

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