

Staying Centered: A Virtual Breather for People Supporting Survivors During the COVID-19 Pandemic

CHARITY HOPE: All righty, everyone. We're going to go ahead get started today. Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy and probably unexpected schedules to join us for our staying centered, a virtual breather for people supporting victims and survivors. My name is Charity Hope. I am the deputy director of the Center on Victimization and Safety at the Vera Institute of Justice, and also one of the co-conveners of the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims.

I have just a few quick logistical items to go over today. For anyone that would like to start their closed captioning, please go to the bottom of your Zoom room, your Zoom screen. There's going to be a closed caption button down there. It says CC.

There is a little carrot arrow to the right. If you select that arrow, you're going to get a couple options pop up. The first is going to be Show Subtitle, and that's what you'll need to turn on the closed captions. What you should be seeing now are the words I'm speaking popping up underneath our video views right now. If you're having any technical difficulties, please reach out to us via the Q&A pod and we can help you get those closed captions set up right away.

A couple of other quick notes. Participants are in listen only mode. So everyone should be muted except for myself right now, and then, eventually, we're going to turn Zoe's audio on here pretty shortly. But if you're having any difficulties, once we get going with audio, with being able to see the interpreter clearly, with your captions, again, please reach out to us via the Q&A pod. We have several Vera staff members waiting to help assist you with figuring out any of those technological challenges. And if you have any questions at all that pop up for you during the session, I would be happy to answer those again via the Q&A pod. That's the best way to get a hold of us.

I would like to really keep the intro pretty short, because I want to turn it over to Zoe. But we're so incredibly excited to have Zoe Flowers here with us today. Zoe is one of our cherished partners on the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims. She has been leading our work to promote healing services for survivors from historically marginalized communities. She's a seasoned domestic violence advocate, author, filmmaker, and healer, and that's why she's here with us today to help us collectively take a breath during these trying and uncertain times. And with that, I am going to turn it over to Zoe. Thank you so much, Zoe.

ZOE FLOWERS: Let me unmute myself. Thank you. So we are going to dive right in. Hello, everyone. And we're going to just start, and I'm going to slow down.

And so what we're going to do first is we're just going to start off with some collective breathing. And so just want to make sure that you all can hear me, OK? Let me turn myself up a little bit. OK.

So wherever you are, wherever you're sitting. I am going to invite you to sit with your feet planted firmly on the ground. Roll your shoulders back. Lean back, right, so that you're supported in whatever you're sitting in.

Palms up or down, right? We say palms up to receive, palms down to ground. So if you feel like you need some grounding in this moment, which so many of us do, right, you want to just put your-- you can just take your palms and you can just put them on your knees, right, to kind of ground yourself a little bit more. If you need extra energy, like others of us do, then you leave your palms up to receive, OK? So up or down, up to you. I'm going to ground myself.

And then rolling your shoulders back. Settling in wherever you are, right? And I'm going to invite you to lower your top lid over your bottom lid. So hopefully nobody's joining from the car, but if you are, pull over, right, because we're going to be closing our eyes. OK.

So I'm going to invite you to just take three collective breaths with me. First breath, in through the nose, and we're going to

breathe out through the mouth. So one collective breath in, and exhale out. Second breath in, collective breath out. Third breath in, collective breath out. All right?

So those three introductory breaths are just to get us collectively joined together, right, and now we're going to take our breathing up just a notch. So this time when we exhale in, we want to see, sense, or imagine, see, sense, or imagine a white light traveling in through our nose. And when we exhale, we're going to exhale that white light out again, right? So we're seeing, we're sensing, or we're imagining. So inhale white light, exhale white light, OK? So inhale in, exhale out.

We're going to inhale again. White light on the inhale, white light on the exhale. But this time when we inhale and exhale, we want to get even more centered, even more relaxed wherever we are, right? So inhale in, exhale out.

What that getting centered means is your body might naturally sink a little deeper into any seat that you're sitting in, right? So on this third exhalation, we're going to inhale in that white light, and we're going to exhale out sinking further into wherever we are.

Last round of three. This time when we inhale, notice if your shoulders raise automatically. And if they do, just let them do

that, OK? So we are inhaling in, white light in, shoulders up. Exhale out, white light out, shoulders down.

Second time. Inhale in, shoulders up. Exhale out, shoulders down.

Third time, putting it all together. We're inhaling white light, we're exhaling white light. When we inhale, our shoulders are raising. When we exhale, our shoulders are lowering and we're sinking further into our seat, OK? Inhale in white light, shoulders up. Exhale out white light, shoulders relax.

Now we're going to do a little bit of stretching. So we're going to take our left ear down to our left shoulder, right? Inhale in, bring head over. Exhale out, bring it back to center.

We're going to go over to the right side on the inhale. And on the exhale, inhale in. Exhale out. You might feel a bit of a stretch on the opposite side, and that is the goal. Bring the head back to center.

Inhale in, left ear over left shoulder. Exhale out, bring it back to center. Right ear, right shoulder. Inhale in. Exhale out. Head back to center.

Now we're going to take our chin to chest. Inhale in. Exhale out. Now you might feel the stretch in the back of your neck, down your spine.

Bringing head back to center. Inhale in. Lower chin to chest.
Bringing head back to center slowly.

We're going to do one more round of that. So we're going to take our left ear over our left shoulder, breathing as we do that. Inhale in. Bringing it back to center. Exhaling out as you come up.

Going to do that again on the left side. Inhale in. Exhale out.
Bring it back to center.

Right side. Inhale in. Exhale out. Back to center.

One more time. Inhale in. Exhale out. Back to center.

Rolling our shoulders back, right? Widening knowing our heart.
Remembering that everything here is an offering, right, so only do what your body allows you to do. Only do what you feel comfortable doing, right?

So shoulders back. Heart as open as your body will allow it to be.
You might feel a little stress in the chest area, right?

Shoulders back. And then we're going to bring those shoulders back forward slowly. Shoulders back. Shoulders forward.

One more time. Shoulders back. Shoulders forward.

And then we're going to just turn to the left and to the right a couple of times, OK? So first we're turning to our left. Again, only turning as much as your body will allow you to turn.

So turning to the left. Back to center. Turning to the right. Back to center.

Turning to the left. Back to center. Turning to the right. Back to center.

Head back down to chest. Rolling our shoulders in a full circle this time.

Bringing our head back to center. Rolling our heads back, and bringing our shoulders forward. Bringing our head back to center. And then we're going forward and back, forward and back, forward and back, forward and back.

For those of you that are able, we're going to move our wrists in a circular motion. For those of you that are not able to do this, feel free to just move your head from side to side. That is the modification, OK? So some of us are doing this, we're rolling our shoulders. Some of us are doing this. It's totally OK.

We're just going to do that a couple more times. Maybe flexing the fingers a bit, and then bringing them back down to the knees. Paying attention to how we're feeling now. Just doing a quick check in with the body.

OK. Great. We're doing good out on time. Amazing. OK.

So now we are going to go into a guided meditation, right? So wherever you are, whatever you're doing, however that stretching was for you, I want you to just be in a place of observation. No judgment. Just checking in, seeing how you are, seeing what your heart is doing.

Breathing silently to yourself. How's the nose-- how's the breath coming in and out of the nose? How is your breathing? Is it shallow? Is it smooth? Is it cool? Just paying attention to the breath.

Maybe you're sinking a little deeper into your seat. Maybe your shoulders are folding forward a bit. That is OK.

Letting the eyes relax completely. Letting the ears relax. Letting the skin of the face relax. The skin of the throat relaxes.

The bones of the throat relax. The bones of the shoulders relax. Arms relax, elbows relax, wrists relax.

Letting the chest relax. Letting the lungs slow down. Taking time to breathe. We all need to slow down, allowing ourself to have a little bit of a breather.

Allowing the stomach to relax, the internal organs relax, pelvic muscles relax. Thighs, knees, shins, feet.

So now we're going to do a little bit of imagining together. At your feet, I want you to see, sense, or imagine two balls of light in each of the feet. And I say see sense or imagine, because one of the keys to calming the central nervous system and finding our way to peace lies in the ability for us to imagine. Playing make believe. Acting as if.

Act as if that ball of yellow light is emanating from the bottom of your feet or your shins. Emanating up to the knees, thighs, chest, arms, heart, shoulders, head so you are a big ball of yellow light. A big ball of yellow light that is connected to all that is, all that was, and all that ever will be.

And as that ball of light, you become lighter. Lighter and lighter, and lighter, and lighter, and lighter. So light that maybe you begin to drift a bit. Drifting higher and higher, and higher, and higher. A beautiful ball of light.

And as you rise, you notice other yellow balls of light rising higher and higher and higher. Up, up, up so high that you actually begin to see the Earth below. Just you and hundreds and hundreds of other balls of light floating peacefully. Blue sky above, beautiful Earth below.

Seeing things from a higher point of view. From a point of view where you can actually breath, letting those lungs expand. What

does it feel like to just be able to breathe and slow down and float?

Maybe as you're floating, you take notice of friends and neighbors smiling at you as you all just float together. High, high, high, high. Love everything.

Allowing the breath to get more shallow. Blue sky above, Earth below. Nothing to do but be at one, being at peace. Being you, the you that is all that there ever was, all that ever will be, and all that is to come.

Tapping into a universal force, a universal energy, and an energy of pure love. See, sense, or imagine what pure love might feel like. What might it feel like, as you float in your yellow ball? Maybe you're spinning in that ball. Maybe it's like one of those big silver bouncy things and you're just rolling around and around and around.

Knowing that you are the truth, you are the peace that you seek. You are the answer. You are everything, and everything that's happening on the earth below is so far beneath you, because you are one, you are powerful, you are peace. You are all that is, all that has been, and all that ever will be.

There is no thing more important than you. There is no thing that can touch your peace in this moment. It's just you, your ball, and your friends floating and floating and floating.

Taking a deep breath in and just letting that breath out. And with that exhalation, you're getting lighter and lighter and lighter, and the things of this earth get farther and farther and farther. And the noise of this earth gets farther and farther and softer and softer, and it is just you. It is just you. You and your love and your friends.

And when you're ready, and only when you're ready, allow yourself to begin coming back down to the Earth. Slowly floating back down in your yellow ball. And as you come down, the Earth gets closer. Maybe your state comes into view, your town, your city, your street. Maybe some of the familiar places that you go begin to come into view. Your home.

You begin to sink back down. Back down into the room. Back down into the chair. Back down into the body. Maybe the noises of the room come back into view.

Maybe at this time you flex your palms, you flex your hands and unflex them. If that is not possible for you, maybe you move your head from side to side like we did in the beginning. Or maybe you take a few breaths to yourself as you come back.

And we're going to see, sense, or imagine that that gold light which is still all encompassing gets drawn into your heart. So the light comes up through your feet, up to your knees, up to your chest, and settles in your heart. Comes down from the head, up from the arms, down from the chest, and it all settles in your heart. Fully accessible to you at any moment. At any moment you can return to this place.

And maybe now we lower our chin to our chest again. In gratitude to our heart. Giving gratitude to our heart for showing up every day. Giving gratitude to our heart for showing up on this call, for following the call, for following the need, for following your own guidance. Not knowing what you are in for, but showing up anyway.

Thank yourself for showing up anyway. For being present no matter what. For doing the work no matter what.

Celebrate yourself. Thank yourself. Thank your heart.

Lifting your head back up to center. Either placing your hands on your chest or just sending your intention to your chest, right, to the lungs, because we know that this issue is a lung issue that's happening. So this is a call for all of us to breathe deeply and to give space to our lungs.

So let's just give thanks to our lungs. Give thanks to our throat that allows us to speak our truth. Give thanks to our mouth for allowing us to say the things.

Giving thanks to our nose, giving thanks to our eyes, ears our central nervous system, our stomachs, our legs. Just thanking every part of our body no matter what state it's in. We are here. We are together.

Giving thanks to everyone on this call. Giving thanks to all, even those that made it difficult. Because in this moment, we just need a breather.

Taking one more collective breath together. Bringing air into the lungs. Exhaling through the mouth again.

And when you're ready, and only when you're ready, allow your eyes to open. Maybe bringing your arms out in front or just bringing your shoulders, front, right? Flexing those fingers. Maybe wiggling the toes. Moving around a bit just to get ourselves back into the present space. Excellent.

Taking our two fingers, or one, and we're going to just tap at the top of our head to bring ourselves back, right? We're not going to touch our faces, but we're going to use our imagination. And we're going to take our hands and just tap in front of the space between our eyes, which we call the third eye, right? Or if we

can't do this, we can do this again with our imagination. Imagine our third eye just spinning, right? Tapping the area in front of our nose. Tapping the area under our chin.

Again, if this is not possible for us, we do this with our mind, right? We imagine. We are imagining. We are in a space of imagination and possibility. Tapping our throat chakras, our hearts, our stomach, our pelvis area, right?

And then we're going to take our hands and we're going to brush it all away. Brushing all of it away, right? Cleansing the energy from our space.

And maybe we want to wake ourselves up a little more by just gently tapping our left shoulder. Tapping our right shoulder. Bringing our shoulders, front to back. Turning our head from side to side again. Taking a final breath in and relaxing it out.

So it might be good after this, or maybe tonight before bed, to think about, maybe journal about, or voice memo about, however it is to express yourself, some of the things you felt, some of the things you heard. Was it hard for you to get into the meditation? Was it easy for you to slip into it? Just start to think about was anything I said, was it hard for you to wrap your head around, right? Just to start to get some of those things out, because this is a time of increased awareness about wherever we are with ourselves.

So we are at 12:33. And I am totally open to answer any questions that folks might have, or if folks have some initial reactions. It looks like we have about 114 folks on the call. So folks can-- I'll turn it over to Charity, and they can tell you how they want to engage, actually.

[LAUGHS]

I can't-- Charity, you're on mute.

CHARITY HOPE: Thank you, Zoe. Thank you so much.

We're gonna-- I'm just gonna switch the interpreters real quick. Hold on just one second. All righty.

Yeah. We Would love to open it up for any questions for Zoe, after we give you our huge thanks for leading us through those exercises, Zoe, through that meditation in a time where I think we all probably really collectively need that breather. So thank you.

ZOE FLOWERS: Mhm. And I can also talk about some of the things that I've been doing around my house just to keep the lungs open maybe. I know we're going to get together again next week. So next week I'll probably be down in my mom's kitchen and I can show you some of the concoctions I've been forcing her to drink. But so yeah. So I can do that, but I want to hear from folks first.

CHARITY HOPE: All righty. And I'm just going to keep myself, my video not going so I can-- we can focus the video on you, Zoe, and on the interpreter. Let me see over here. We have someone who, unfortunately, is also experiencing earthquake this morning on top of everything else, which I'm having a really hard time imagining. But we're thinking about you. I don't have that person's name, but we're really thinking about you.

Any other questions for Zoe right now? Looking at the Q&A pod.

ZOE FLOWERS: OK.

CHARITY HOPE: Just a bunch of tanks, Zoe. So maybe you could talk a little bit about what you are doing--

ZOE FLOWERS: Sure.

CHARITY HOPE: --around your house.

ZOE FLOWERS: Absolutely. Absolutely. So some of the things I'm doing is just a lot of old school remedies. Steaming. So-- and again, this is not for everyone. I'm not a doctor. I'm just telling you what I do.

My mother has COPD, which is like a chronic lung thing, they say. And so one of the things that I've been doing is like old school, in addition to like her inhaler and all that stuff that she does, but just taking a pot, filling it up with water, and putting in

eucalyptus oil and ginger oil, letting it come to a boil. And I just go from room to room just to clear out the energy in the house. Also leaving the windows open, trying to keep everything as ventilated as possible.

I'm also-- she doesn't do it, but I'm also steaming a lot with that eucalyptus. So just like old school putting the towel over the head. And I'm like, there's nothing wrong with me, but I'm just doing it anyway just to keep-- you know, just to keep the lungs open and just to just keep everything moving. Just breathing in that eucalyptus. So that's something I'm doing. Also breathing in the ginger oil, though not as much.

I'm also putting the eucalyptus on my chest when I wake up in the morning, and I put the ginger oil on my shoulders. Because I carry a lot of tension in my shoulders, and so I'm putting the ginger oil on my shoulders.

I also--

CHARITY HOPE: Actually Zoe, we do have a quick question about how-- any quick relaxation exercises folks can do with clients during our in-house or remote phone sessions? So thinking about quick relaxation exercises that you could possibly do over the phone.

ZOE FLOWERS: Mhm. Mhm. So definitely, maybe not as involved as the technique that I took you through, but definitely, you know, inhale, turn to the left, exhale, center. Inhale, turn to the right, exhale, center. Just getting people present.

But again, it depends on your client, right, because sometimes getting quiet for people is hard. Sometimes it takes them to another place. So just being careful with that, right?

But some quick breathing 1, 2-- like inhale 1, 2, 3, 4. So when you inhale, pushing the stomach out, and when you exhale bringing the stomach in, right? So just-- [EXHALING QUICKLY] --right, doing that, but slower than I did it, right? So--

[INHALING AND EXHALING]

Right? So doing that and taking them through a series of maybe five to 10 rounds of that.

CHARITY HOPE: Right. So I think, Zoe-- again, this is Charity-- that's known as the breath of fire, right, in some circles, in some, yeah, kundalini yoga circles. So what I'm hearing you talk through is some grounding breathing techniques, which would be really easy to do over the phone. Any other suggestions for sort of this, you know, what might be our new normal for a while as far as like remote grounding techniques?

ZOE FLOWERS: I don't know how, you know, quick it would be but also just having people bringing their awareness to every part of the body could also be useful. So in the way that I said, you know, letting the muscles of the eye relax, letting the ear relax, letting the nose relax, letting the mouth relax, letting the throat. So taking people through each part of the body and letting that relax could be helpful.

Conversely having people tighten and loosen different parts of the body can also be useful, right? So flexing the feet, unflexing them. Tightening the feet, loosening them. Tightening the ankles, loosening them. Tightening the shins, loosening them.

That's something that I learned to do, because I used to have insomnia. And so before I would go to bed, I would lay out and I would tighten each part of the body and loosen it to help me fall asleep.

CHARITY HOPE: That's fantastic, Zoe. I'm also seeing just some questions and comments sort of around the idea of just everyone acknowledging that we're not in sort of the typical time in the world, right? Just sort of how to kind of acknowledge that everyone's world has been sort of turned upside down and sort of, you know, maybe some techniques or tips for doing that.

ZOE FLOWERS: So I think that really just, number one, recognizing that however people are processing this is OK. And

understanding that it makes perfect sense to feel however we're feeling and to not judge other people and not judge ourselves. And recognizing that, you know, this is bringing up very primal concerns for folks, especially folks who may have trauma histories, as most of us do, right? So this is bringing up a lot of childhood things. This is bringing up a lot of things for people.

And so, again, just bringing that awareness. Slowing down. And just recognizing that, whoa, this instability, what is this reminding me of? Is this reminding me of the instability I had when I was growing up? Is this reminding me of the instability I had when I was in that abusive relationship? And just making space for all of that, and just practicing techniques that will move you through that.

CHARITY HOPE: That's fantastic. Thank you, Zoe.

ZOE FLOWERS: Oh wait, I have one more thing. And also, you know, that's one of the reasons why I wanted to take folks higher in sort of the meditations that I'm doing and having people look down at the Earth. And so that is just an overall message to take things from a higher perspective and try to raise your vibration above all of what is going on.

And so tips, which I think lots of folks are talking about, to keep your vibration kind of high is to limit the social media, limit the news. Like I'm not even like saying the words about what that

thing is that's happening right now, right? Just looking from a higher perspective and separating yourself from all of the conversations. Like when people start to get to whatever with me, now I'm just saying, cancel and delete, cancel and delete, cancel and delete.

Because we are here to-- we're like holding the line, right, and so we have to keep our vibrations high, as high as we can. No judgment if we can't do it all the time. But I feel like, in this time, it's important for us to try to do the opposite of reacting in ways that our program is like expecting us to, so being in judgment, being angry with each other, doing all of those things, right? I feel like it's-- we need to take a breather from that and take things from a higher perspective.

So keeping your vibration as high as possible, and the essential oils can help with that. And burning sage can help with that, right? Burning incense can help with that. Ringing bells can help with that. So even listening to Tibetan chimes and things like that on YouTube. Just separating ourselves as much as we can from just the lower vibration conversations that are happening.

Turning off our cell phones at night. Turning off our TVs. Like not watching the news all the time. Those are things that are going to keep you in that vibration, that low vibration, and keep you in a space of worry.

CHARITY HOPE: Thank you so much, Zoe, for leading us through these exercises today, for helping us keep our breath front and center of what we need. We absolutely have to have that. And for giving us these sort of tips and tools to use with, you know, folks that are reaching out to us that need our support more than ever. So thank you so, so much, Zoe.

We did get a couple questions about if we're going to be doing these sessions again. We are. We're going to do another one next week with Zoe. Thank you so much. We'll also be putting the recording from the session up on reachingvictims.org. We'll also be sending out some emails about where you can find this information about our upcoming sessions and resources that all of our partners are working to pull together that we can collectively utilize during these times.

So thank you. Thank you again, Zoe. Thank you to all of our participants.

Everyone be well. Stay well. And we will see you in future sessions.

ZOE FLOWERS: And I also just wanted to say that you all can find me on social media. I'm pretty much [iamzoefflowers](https://www.instagram.com/iamzoefflowers) everywhere. So if you just type it in, you can find me and you can check in with the Vera folks. If you want more in-depth stuff from me, I'm available.

CHARITY HOPE: Thanks, Zoe.

ZOE FLOWERS: Thanks, y'all.

CHARITY HOPE: Be well everyone.