**Cooling the Fire**

The material is reworked from the book, *Buddha’s Brain; the practical neuroscience of happiness, love, and wisdom* by Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

Our bodies and brains are often overloaded and on firewith stress, anxiety, depression, anger, and/or mental illness. It is important to learn to “cool the body.”

The techniques in this handout send signals to the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) and the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) to calm the body and the brain. When calming signals go to the ANS and the PNS - the body and the brain “cool” down.

**4 Quick Relaxation Techniques**

Relax your tongue, eyes, and jaw muscles

Sit on the floor and feel the tension draining out of your body and sinking down into the earth

Run warm water over your hands

Scan your body for areas that are tense and relax them

**Diaphragm Breathing**

The diaphragm is the muscle beneath your lungs that helps you breathe. Actively working it is very effective for helping to reduce anxiety.

Place your hand on your stomach a couple of inches beneath the upside-down V at the center of your rib cage. Look down and breathe normally watching your hand. You will probably only see it move a little.

Leaving your hand in place, breathe in such a way that your hand moves out and back, perpendicular to your chest, Try to breathe into your hand with real oomph, so that it travels back and forth ½ inch or more with each breath.

It will take some practice to get good at this kind of breathing.

**Big Exhalation**

Inhale as much as you can, holding that inhalation for a few seconds and then exhale while relaxing. A big inhalation really expands the lungs, requiring a big exhalation to bring the lungs back to their resting state.

**Touching the Lips**

Parasympathetic fibers are spread throughout your lips; thus touching your lips stimulates the PNS. Touching your lips can bring up soothing associations and calm the mind.

**Imagery**

Imagery activates the right hemisphere of the brain and quiets internal verbal chatter.

Like relaxation, you can use imagery on the spot to stimulate the PNS. You can also develop longer visualizations that can be powerful anchors for calmness and well-being. Think of an image that is very calming for you and develop that imagery. When you are feeling upset, anxious, or angry, think of the imagery while breathing deeply. Instant relief is possible if you practice enough.

**Meditation**

Meditation can improve and increase the gray matter in certain areas of your brain, and increase your psychological health including your attention, compassion, and empathy. It can increase activity in the left frontal regions of the brain, which lifts mood and can decrease stress-related cortisol. The key to reaping the rewards of meditation is to develop a daily practice. No matter how brief.

Taking five minutes to pay attention to the breath and settle into your breathing is one of the most basic forms of meditation.