

5 Senses

Introduction

When we experience big feelings such as fear, stress, or worry, it can be helpful to focus our attention on our surroundings. When we tune into our senses, we shift our focus back to the present moment. This helps us manage stress and anxiety in times of distress.

Steps of the Activity

1. Prompt students to take a collective deep breath.
2. Tell the students they will be using their 5 senses to focus on things they notice in their surroundings.
3. Ask students to note:
 - 5 things they can see,
 - 4 things they can touch,
 - 3 things they can hear,
 - 2 things they can smell,
 - 1 thing they can taste.

Pause for 30 seconds to a minute between each step to ensure students have time to note what they noticed.

4. At the end of the activity, guide students through several deep breaths.

Reflection

- What about this activity was easy or hard for you? What did you notice?
- What strategies did you use?
- When could you use the “5 sense” strategy outside of school?
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:

Emotion and body regulation



Materials:

None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Modify the prompts to help students notice what they smell, taste, etc. If helpful, have them imagine or remember their favorite smells, tastes, etc.
- After the search, encourage students to share what they noticed and observed in small groups.
- Invite students to find various objects in the room (e.g., according to the colors of the rainbow; certain geometric shapes; similar to a ball; items found in a certain season, etc.)

For students in grades 5-6:

- During the activity and in your debrief, have students notice changes in different parts of their body as they connect with the different sensations (e.g., slower heart rate, relaxation of the shoulders, disappearance of tension in the legs, etc.).

Belly Breathing

Introduction

Belly Breathing helps us to calm our minds and bodies. By taking slow, deep breaths, you can slow down your heart rate and actually change the way your body reacts to something stressful or upsetting. Belly Breathing can help you feel more relaxed or comfortable in a stressful situation. When we feel relaxed and calm, it's easier to manage our feelings, communicate and get along with others, learn, and play. Today, we're going to practice Belly Breathing as a group.

Steps of the Activity

1. Have students put their hands on their bellies. Ask students to take a long, deep breath through their noses while you count slowly from 1 to 5. Encourage students to notice their bellies expanding outwards as they fill up with air. Tell students they can try to fill up their bellies all the way (e.g., like a balloon or basketball).
2. Have students exhale slowly through their mouths, feeling their belly muscles fall inward as they let the air out. Repeat 3-5 times.
3. You may choose to have students do this activity while standing, sitting, or lying down.
4. When challenges arise in the classroom or throughout the day (e.g., tests, difficult tasks, strong emotions such as fear, anxiety, etc.), remind students to use their belly breath.

Reflection

- What did your body feel like before you took some breaths? (e.g., tense, heart beating fast, etc.) What about after? Did you notice a change in how your body feels?
- When are some other times during the day that you could use Belly Breathing?
- How does being self-regulated help us in our everyday lives? At home? At school? On the playground?
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:

Emotion and body regulation



Materials:

None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- **Provide** students with a visual cue, such as breathing in the smell of hot cocoa and blowing out air to cool it down, or breathing in the smell of a flower and then slowly blowing out a candle, etc.
- Guide students through a series of simple stretches while they practice belly breathing. Example stretches include shoulder rolls, neck rolls, or side stretches. Adapt the stretches based on the needs of your students.
- **Build body awareness.** Invite students to notice where they feel the breath in their bodies before it reaches their bellies. They may imagine tracing their breath through their noses, down their throats, and into their bellies.
- Have students lie on the ground with a stuffed animal or other object on their belly. As they breathe in and out, they can watch the stuffed animal go up and down.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Students can lead Belly Breathing in small groups or with the whole class. They can practice using a calming voice to help their classmates let go of any tension.

Body Scan

Introduction

Body scans helps us to calm our minds and bodies. By focusing your attention on the way your body feels, you can slow down your heart rate and feel more relaxed or comfortable in a stressful situation. When we feel relaxed and calm, it's easier to manage our feelings, communicate and get along with others, learn, and play.

Steps of the Activity

1. Have students put their hands on their bellies, and ask students to take a long, deep breath through their noses while you count slowly from 1 to 5.
2. Guide students to notice different parts of their body, beginning at their feet and ending at their head. Ask students questions to bring their attention to different body parts, such as:
 - Do your legs feel heavy or light?
 - Do your arms feel hot, cold, or just right?
 - Do your fingers feel tingly or still?
 - Do you notice any tension?
3. Encourage students to notice the sensations in their body for several breaths before moving to the next body part.

Reflection

- What did your body feel like before you did a body scan (e.g., tense, heart beating fast, etc.) What about after? Did you notice a change in how your body feels?
- When are some other times during the day that you could use a body scan?
- How does noticing how our bodies are feeling help us in our everyday lives? At home? At school? On the playground?
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:
Grounding



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Younger students may need more support visualizing their body. Consider asking students to lightly touch their body as the body scan progresses.
- Encourage creative imagery by asking students to imagine painting their entire body from the tips of their toes to the top of their head. Students can visualize the color of the paint changing as it moves up the body.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Students can lead a body scan in small groups or with the whole class. They can practice using a calming voice to help their classmates let go of any tension.

Drawing About Yourself

Introduction

When we take time to reflect on who we are, how we grow and develop, and what is special to us, we build an awareness of our strengths and beliefs that we can go back to when we need them.

Steps of the Activity

1. Ask students to take out their journals (or a piece of paper) and draw a picture or write in response to a prompt.
2. Sample prompts include:
 - Who are important people in your life?
 - What activities do you like to do?
 - Which types of songs, movies, books, etc do you enjoy?
 - Which parts of yourself are most important to you?
 - What are three things that went well today?
3. Turn on calming music and give students 5-10 minutes to draw or write.
4. Optional: Give students the option to share their drawing or writing with you privately or with the class. Write an affirming note back to the student with a smiley face, sticker, or stamp.

Reflection

- How did your reflection go? Was it easy or hard to reflect and think about yourself?
- How do you know what you care about, or what you like about yourself?
- How do you think about your thoughts? Can you see other people's thinking?
- When do you feel your best? Why?
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:
Self-awareness



Materials:
Journal/paper/digital journal,
art materials, and music
(optional)

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Invite students to be creative and to use any materials to create a sculpture or comic strips which represents their interests and responses.
- Offer time on a daily or weekly basis for students to reflect. Students can create a “Reflection Journal.”
- Each time you play, offer new questions for self-reflection. Encourage students to reflect on the drawings they created during the activity and write what they notice.
- Invite students to decorate the cover of their notebook with pictures of their favorite foods, songs, hobbies, family members or friends, etc.
- Invite students to create a picture as an entire class. Have students share examples of things that went well during the day, activities they enjoy doing together, and positive aspects of the classroom community. Write and display the classroom note.

For students in grades 5-6

- Modify prompts to support students in thinking about their strengths and future. Invite students to create new prompts that they would like to share with the class. For example, students can answer:
 - How do you see your best future?
 - Who will you be when you grow up? What will you do?
 - What do you like about that future person? Why are those things important to you?
 - What can you do today for your future?

I Can See

Introduction

We are going to play a game called I can see. In this game, we practice looking carefully so you can find the object I'm thinking of. When we look carefully, we are practicing focusing and paying attention to the environment around us. Noticing the environment around us can help us calm down in times of stress. You can play this game at home and at school when you feel big feelings like worry, anxiety, or stress.

Steps of the Activity

1. Choose something in the room for students to find, for example, the clock on the wall, a letter written on the blackboard, or an object sitting on a desk. Say "I can see, something that is ..." (give one clue about the color, size, position in the room, use/purpose of the object, etc.)
2. Students take turns guessing until someone identifies the correct object.
3. If students are having trouble finding the object, the teacher can give additional clues. To make this game more challenging, the teacher can choose something that is small or difficult to notice or give subtle clues.
4. After students have found the object, invite students to close their eyes, take a deep breath before beginning the next round.

Reflection

- What about this game was easy or hard for you?
- What helped you to find the objects?
- Are there other times in the day when noticing different things in the space around you might be useful?



Target skills:
Grounding



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Give students hints about where they should look. If no one has guessed after about a minute, give a second clue (e.g., location, size, etc.).
- Add more rounds and choose different types of clues (e.g., color, shape, texture, first letter/sound of the word, etc.).

For students in grades 5-6:

- Choose items or features of items that reinforce academic content and current learning goals (find something that: rhymes with X, lays eggs, has perpendicular lines, etc.)

Self-Talk Superhero

Introduction

During times of stress, it can be difficult to remind ourselves of all of the things that we can do. Today, we will learn a strategy called Self-Talk Superhero which we can bring to our mind whenever we need it. Our Self-Talk Superhero will help us practice using positive self-talk so we can appreciate our strengths and be able to harness them in times of distress.

Steps of the Activity

1. Start this activity by having a discussion with students about what self-talk is (e.g., the way we speak to ourselves in our own mind).
2. Have students share times when their self-talk helped them to do something hard (e.g., I was nervous before speaking up in the circle and then I told myself I could do it.).

You can prompt this discussion by asking:

- What was something challenging or hard that you did recently?
 - When you knew you had to do ____ (challenge), what did you tell yourself to be successful?
3. Praise students for using positive self-talk and explain that they are already listening to their own self-talk superheroes. Then have students imagine their own tiny little hero on their shoulder, always ready to encourage them.
 4. Have students go around the circle and share what their Self-Talk Superhero's favorite words or phrases are!
 5. When challenges arise in the classroom or throughout the day (e.g., tests, difficult tasks, strong emotions such as fear, anxiety, etc.), remind students to conjure up their self-talk superhero and ask them to say aloud what the superhero can tell them to help them be successful!

Reflection

- When is it helpful to use Self-Talk Superhero throughout the day?
- What words are most helpful for you to hear? (e.g., "You can do it!"; "I believe in you"; "You got this!"; "You're so close!" etc.)
- What does your Self-Talk Superhero look like?
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:
Self-confidence



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Invite students to use art or building materials to have students draw, paint, and create their self-talk superheroes. Share the images in the classrooms or in individual notebooks.
- During read aloud you can ask about characters' own self-talk superheroes and what they might be saying to them throughout the story.
- Invite students to create a model of their superhero from classroom materials (e.g., creating an online model, building a model, making a sculpture, etc.).
- Create a map of words and phrases students can use to feel confident and think positively about themselves, even in the face of challenges. Post this in your classroom and remind students to revisit it when needed.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Role-play challenging situations and have students say aloud what their self-talk superheroes can say to get them through.

Stretch!

Introduction

Stretching is a way to focus our minds and slow our breathing and movement. Using slow and calm motions can help us get rid of stress, tension, or boredom. Everyone has different ways of dealing with tension, and stretching is one option or strategy that we will learn and practice together so you can use it at other times.

Steps of the Activity

1. Guide students through the following exercises:
 - Tilt the left ear toward the left shoulder and hold this position for several seconds. Lower the chin to the chest as low as possible and hold this position. Repeat all movements 3-4 times.
 - Raise your shoulders to your ears as high as possible. Then move your shoulders back in a circular motion and then forward.
 - Raise both arms up and bend your upper body to the right and then to the left. Return to a straight position and stretch upward.
2. During the exercises, remind students to take deep breaths.

The suggested movements are a guide, you can suggest other slow exercises as you see fit.

Reflection

- How did you feel before doing stretches, and how did you feel after? Did anything change?
- Can you think of other times you might stretch to help you feel calm or relaxed?



Target skills:
Grounding



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Encourage students to do additional movements. For example, students can touch their toes, reach for the sky, turn their hips, etc.
- Younger students may enjoy creative visuals to hold their attention as they stretch. For example, students can roll their neck like a turtle slowly peeking out of its shell; stretch to the sides like a squirrel reaching for nuts on a tree branch.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Invite students to come up with their own movements for the activity.
- Ask a student to lead the stretches for the class.
- Older students may be interested in learning about the science behind stretching and relaxation. Describe how gentle stretching can reduce stress and anxiety and even leads to feelings of calmness and relaxation.

The Power of Yet

Introduction

Learning new things can be hard and sometimes creates big feelings like frustration. It helps to remember to use the Power of Yet to remind ourselves that with practice, our skills will grow and grow. When we cannot do something now, it just means that we cannot do it YET, but with practice and help, we will learn to do it.

Steps of the Activity

1. The teacher shares a story about a time she or he wanted to do something but didn't yet have the skills to achieve the task. For example, she or he might say:
 - "When I was your age, I wanted to ride my bike with my sisters. Every time I tried to pedal, I would tip over! I realized I didn't have the skills the bike with my sisters. My sisters reminded me about the Power of Yet. They told me that I didn't have the skills yet but that I would grow my skills over time. I kept practicing pedaling, and now I can ride my bike wherever I want to go!"
2. The teacher facilitates a conversation about the Power of Yet. The teacher asks students to reflect on skills they have learned For example:
 - Students can share a skill they are proud to have learned or developed (e.g., play an instrument, read a chapter book, learn a new language, etc.).
 - Students can share a skill they can do now but that they couldn't do a year ago.
3. Then, the teacher invites each student share something they cannot do yet, but would like to learn. Anytime a student says "I cannot _____," the class responds by saying "YET" all together, as a reminder that with practice they will learn.

Reflection

- How does it feel to use your Power of Yet?
- When else can you use the Power of Yet?
- How might you help others to use their Power of Yet?



Target skills:
Positive thinking



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Remind students that they aren't alone when they get discouraged when learning something new. You can remind them of their Power of YET by sharing experiences like: "You don't know how to do it YET. I also didn't know how to do ____ when I was your age. We can do it together until you're ready to try it on your own."

For students in grades 5-6:

- Students can create a poster in the classroom with the skills they would like to learn. When students have learned a particular skill, they can check off a box next to the picture or description of the skill.
- Introduce a method of goal planning called "SMART." The purpose of the planning method is to clearly understand what steps need to be taken to make the desired goal a reality. The students can discuss their progress toward the desired skills together, and support and motivate each other.

Visiting a Beautiful Place

Introduction

When there are stressful times in our lives, we can shift our focus away from our surroundings and imagine a beautiful place. This allows us to focus our attention inside of our thoughts and feelings and helps us to regulate our emotions and bodies in times of stress.

Steps of the Activity

1. Have students lower their gaze and sit in a relaxed position as you guide them through the meditation. Start with deep breathing (e.g., Belly Breathing).
2. Use this guided imagery to help students to relax:
 - *“Imagine that you’re standing on a beach. See the beach in your mind. Think about a beach you may have visited, or you could use an imaginary beach if you like. Feel the sand beneath your toes and the warm sun on your face. Look around you. In front of you is a huge ocean. It looks a silvery-blue color and the sunlight sparkles like tiny stars dancing on the surface. You look at the ground and in front of you in the sand is the most beautiful shell you have ever seen. You pick it up. It feels warm. Notice how smooth it is. Feel it with your fingers. As you hold your shell close all you can feel is calm and happiness. You feel peaceful all the way from the tips of your toes, to the tip of your nose. Notice how it feels.”*

Reflection

- How easy or difficult was it for you to focus during this practice? Why or why not?
- Could you imagine a place like the one I described? How did you feel when you imagined that place?
- Are there other calm, relaxing places that you can imagine? Can you describe what they’re like?
- When else would it be helpful to imagine a calm and relaxing place?



Target skills:
Grounding



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For primary school students:

- Invite students to imagine they are drawing numbers or letters on warm, wet sand and then the image is washed away by a wave (for example, students can imagine writing the numbers 1 to 10 one by one)
- Consider using a guided meditation which meets the needs and interests of your students.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Consider using a guided meditation which meets the needs and interests of your students.

Wiggle Cool Down

Introduction

After we experience stressful situations, our bodies can feel tense. What does your body feel like when you are stressed? How does your body feel after physical activity? To help our bodies relax, we can complete a series of movements to relieve the tension. By relieving the tension in our bodies, we will be able to regulate our bodies and our emotions in times of stress.

Steps of the Activity

1. Prompt students to take a collective deep breath.
2. Have students each find their own space in the room, where they can move around and respect the space of others.
3. Say, "We are going to count down from 10 to 1, doing different motions that help us release extra energy to get our bodies and brains calm, focused, and ready to learn."

"Ten, nine, eight, seven - the thunder in the sky is silent (for example, students perform chaotic movements, making different sounds, gradually slowing them down). The clouds are flying here and there. Then the number six comes. (The teacher speaks more quietly, turning to a whisper). The grass is mowed in the meadow - five, four, three and two... (e.g., students take a deep breath, straighten their backs and shoulders and exhale). After a two comes a one..."
(students take another deep breath and exhale).

4. Frequently repeat the activity to help students build the ability to regulate their body and mind.

Reflection

- How did you feel while doing this activity? Did your feelings change as the movements changed – from fast and exciting, to slow and calm?
- What are other times when it might feel good to do a calming or relaxing activity? (*E.g., before you take a ride in a car, when recess is over and we need to get our minds and bodies ready to go inside.*)
- How would you change this activity for the next time we play?



Target skills:
Emotion and body regulation



Materials:
None required

My Notes

Ideas for expansion and adaptation

For students in primary school:

- When first learning the activity – and continually with younger students – practice each move one by one: wiggle, get quiet, sit silently, breathe deeply, roll shoulders back. Over time, see if students can remember the sequence without the directions; try just counting down the numbers aloud.
- Encourage students to take the lead. After students are comfortable with the chant, encourage students to try leading the chant for their peers.
- Invite students to write new chants or stories that the class can use for this activity.

For students in grades 5-6:

- Invite students to create their own original name for the activity (e.g., “The Kettle is Cooling,” etc.)
- Increase the challenge level by starting at the number 15 or 20 and inviting them to create new motions for the different numbers.
- During the introduction or debrief, describe the science behind using movement to reduce stress and anxiety. Share with students that exercise may boost a neurotransmitter called endorphins which makes the brain feel good, and exercise can improve your mood by helping you relax and lowering systems of anxiety.