



Grounding & Self Regulation Tools

Strengthening Capacity

Part of Self-Management is emotional self-regulation— an essential skill for ALL members of a learning community to be learned proactively and to be used throughout the day. The human stress response and its impact on the brain has the power to derail learning, restrict fair judgment, strain relationships, undermine collaboration and cause physical problems. Our goal is to prevent the stresses that cause these responses, but students and adults will always need these tools in our back pockets and the tools, space and time to practice them throughout the day.

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Important Tips:

- Keep it simple: Teach students approximately 5 simple techniques and have each student pick their top three favorites.
- Create spaces and materials to support these tools right in your classroom.
- Make sure directions for the techniques you teach are clearly posted in the classroom, ideally in a calming corner.
- Collaborate with students to set up guidelines on how/when to access these techniques.
- Have a clear prompt set that invites a dysregulated student to go to the space or use the tools in their seat. Invite students to prompt each other.
- Agree on a signal that someone can use to signify how dysregulated they are. Fist to Five works or the Flip your Lid hand model sign can work well. The goal is for students to identify a need for self-regulation just by being prompted with “fist to five?” or “how’s your brain?” or “what’s your temperature.” ([ZONE of regulation](#) is a great tool for this)
- Use these techniques daily and often with students in order to model them as well as take care of your own nervous system. Think small doses with high frequency!
- Take time to reflect on the tools’ impact as a group and modify them to meet student needs.
- Share with parents and other teachers if a technique has been useful to a particular student who is needing a lot of support,

Quick & Simple: Things we can do in the moment to prevent escalation

- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can, count to 10, and then release
- Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, or the wall.
- Dig your heels into the floor-literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket, which you can touch whenever you feel triggered—worry stone, fidget, etc.
- Notice the weight of your body in the chair; wiggle your toes in your socks; the feel of your chair against your back.
- Stretch. Roll your head around.
- Clench and release your fists.
- Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left or “right” in detail to yourself.
- Count to 10 or say the alphabet. V..... y..... l..... o..... w..... .l..... y..
- Think of your favorites: favorite movie, color, place, animal, person, season, music.
- Focus on your breathing, notice each inhale and exhale. Continue for 10 slow, deep breaths.
- Eat something, describing the flavors and texture to yourself.
- Scan the room and notice five things you see, describing them in detail.
- Listen for five things that you can hear. The clock ticking, the fan humming, etc.
- Focus on five things you can feel in contact with your body (ie., your clothes, your back against the chair, your feet on the floor, your hair touching your neck, your watch on your wrist.)
- Give yourself a regulating hug: place your right hand across your heart and put your palm against your body with your hand under your armpit. Take your left arm across the body towards the right and hold your own deltoid or upper arm close to your shoulder for a calming self-hug.

More Involved: Longer techniques to teach proactively, practice together and empower youth to use in your space on their own.

SOS—Self-Regulation Tool

from <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/>

This is a technique developed by Julian Ford to help children and adolescents feel more in control in the moment. The technique involves three steps that can help individuals focus and achieve clarity of their situation, what they are feeling, and what to do next. The steps are:

- Slow down (sit back, relax, take a deep breath, pay attention to breathing).
- Orient (pay attention to where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with).
- Self-check (ask yourself how you are feeling and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 for how stressed and in control you feel.)

Hand Sensory Activity

Begin by tracing your hand on a piece of paper and label each finger as one of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste). Then take each finger and identify something safe and special representing each of the five senses; for example, butterflies for sight, pumpkin pie for smell. Bring your paper to the group and make a circle together. The group leader will hold a ball of yarn and then share his or her five things. When done sharing, the group leader holds the end of the strand of yarn and the ball is tossed to another individual in the group and that person shares. Then he or she holds onto a section of yard and tosses the ball to someone else until everyone has had the opportunity to share their responses. The leader can follow up by asking for reflections on how the activity made them feel and reflect an interconnectedness and community. The string will form a network of connection for the entire group.

Post the sketch of your hand on the refrigerator or other safe place in the class or home where it could be easily seen, and memorize it. Whenever you get triggered, breathe deeply and slowly, and put your hand in front of your face where you can really see it—stare at your hand and then look at each finger and try to do the five senses exercise from memory.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

Using your 5 senses is a fast way to bring you out of your thoughts or intense emotions into the present moment. This is a simple grounding technique you can do in the moment.

- Name 5 things you can see.
- Name 4 things you can hear.
- Name 3 things you can touch within your immediate reach.
- Name 2 things you can smell.
- Name 1 thing you can taste. (or imagine 1 place you love to be and imagine what you see, hear, touch, smell and taste there. See the 5-4-3-2-1 Imagination Vacation [script here.](#))

Progressive muscle relaxation

A rounding technique in which you intentionally focus on relaxing the muscles in your body. If you prefer guided instruction, [click here for guided progressive muscle relaxation](#).

- Tense and relax each muscle group, head to toes (or toes to head), one muscle group at a time.
- Tense (5 seconds), then let go; relax the muscle all the way. Notice the tension; notice the difference when relaxed.
- As you relax each muscle, say to yourself, “Relax.”

Sensory Narration

Describe to someone else an everyday activity in great detail. For example cooking a meal, getting ready in the morning: “First I defrost the turkey in the microwave. While it’s defrosting, I pull out a soup pot and place it on the stove. Then I begin to chop up the vegetables. When the turkey’s ready, I place it in the pot and begin to brown it....” or describe the environment in detail, using all your senses – for example, “The walls are blue, there are five green chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall....” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers and temperature. You can do this anywhere,

Fun and Easy Breathing Exercises for Self-Regulation

Coherent Breathing

If you have the time to learn only one technique, this is the one to try. In coherent breathing, the goal is to breathe at a rate of five breaths per minute, which generally translates into inhaling and exhaling to the count of six. If you have never practiced breathing exercises before, you may have to work up to this practice slowly, starting with inhaling and exhaling to the count of three and working your way up to six.

1. Sitting upright or lying down, place your hands on your belly.
2. Slowly breathe in, expanding your belly, to the count of five.
3. Pause.
4. Slowly breathe out to the count of six.
5. Work your way up to practicing this pattern for 10 to 20 minutes a day.

Playful Breaths

[Here are five presented](#) by a PreK teacher that all ages love.

- Sunshine Breath
- Snake Breath
- Ocean Breath
- Gorilla Breath
- Library Breath



Rock and Roll Breathing

When your mind is racing or you feel keyed up, try Rock and Roll breathing, which has the added benefit of strengthening your core.

1. Sit up straight on the floor or the edge of a chair.
2. Place your hands on your belly.

3. As you inhale, lean forward and expand your belly.
4. As you exhale, squeeze the breath out and curl forward while leaning backward; exhale until you're completely empty of breath.
5. Repeat 20 times.

Energizing HA Breath

When the midafternoon slump hits, stand up and do some quick breathwork to wake up your mind and body.

1. Stand up tall, elbows bent, palms facing up.
2. As you inhale, draw your elbows back behind you, palms continuing to face up.
3. Then exhale quickly, thrusting your palms forward and turning them downward, while saying "Ha" out loud.
4. Repeat quickly 10 to 15 times.

More Breathing Exercises

developed by Vermont special educator Gigi Weisman

3-2-7: Inhale for 3; hold breath for 2; exhale for 7.

Elevator or Raise Energy—Press Downward: Form "elevator" with palms up and near belly button. Raise hands while inhaling. Stop "elevator," turn palms over, and push down while exhaling. (Note: Up/inhale should be shorter than down exhale.)

Touch Head: Slowly raise hands to head while inhaling, touch head (hold breath), drop hands quickly, and swing arms gently while exhaling.

Fly Like an Eagle: Inhale and stretch arms out like an eagle's wings, pause and look down while slowly inhaling, turn head, and repeat. Students can choose which way to turn their head. Lyrics to a song which can accompany this.

Glasses Breath: Start with loose fists by your side. Raise hands, slowly opening fingers toward eyes, inhaling and making your hands into little glasses. Pause and look through the "glasses." Lower hands slowly while exhaling and opening fingers, making a loose fist by your side.

Smell the Flower—Blow Out the Candle: Hold up index (pointer) finger a few inches in front of your nose and mouth. Inhale as though smelling flower. Pause/hold breath and stretch arm in front, holding index finger up like a candle that is far away, and blow the candle out slowly.

Storm Breath: *This one can get "spitty," so step back from each other and avoid doing in a small circle!* A storm is coming (inhale) and the wind starts blowing softly (exhale). The storm is getting closer (inhale deeper) and the wind is blowing harder (exhale). The storm is right here (inhale deepest) and there is a mighty wind (exhale as loudly and as long as possible without turning red)! The storm starts to go away (inhale softer) and the wind lessens (exhale softer). The storm has passed (breathe in) and the wind is over (breathe out).

Opening the Chest: Feet apart, knees loose, elbows bent and relaxed, palms down in front of chest, fingers almost touching. Inhale and move arms out like an airplane for the count of 3 (slight pause for 2), slowly bend elbows while exhaling, and return to original position (to the count of 7). Repeat.

Turn and Glance at the Moon: Feet apart, knees loose, hands cupped like holding a small ball with palms facing each other. Move arms to the right ... right arm up toward the back with palm facing you, left hand with palm up toward right elbow (inhale), bring arms to beginning stance (exhale). Move left arm up toward the back with palm facing you, right hand with palm up toward left elbow (exhale).

You're Safe (or "I'm safe"): This breathing exercise was created by a student. sSand feet apart with knees loose. Inhale for 3 while crossing your arms. Hold your breath for 2 and then exhale for 7 while uncrossing your arms and holding them horizontally

Mindful Moments as a Group

Mindful moments vary widely among circle keepers. Begin by choosing an activity that feels comfortable and effective for you. That might simply be asking participants to take three breaths. As you get more comfortable, experiment with different mindfulness scripts. A strong recommendation is to begin with very simple mindfulness moments that include listening, movement, and strong, clear, guidance. Mindfulness activities that focus students on feelings in their bodies or emotions have the potential of causing discomfort for the inexperienced mindfulness practitioner.

The Happiness Project¹ has developed a wonderful selection of nine such scripts. Here is one sample from this resource: (Please consider supporting their work.)

Listening to the Bell

Lead this "listening to the bell" exercise to encourage mindful listening. This is a simple practice and can be repeated daily, even when you're not meeting with your Circle. You will need a "mindfulness bell," or a rain stick - anything with a sustained sound. If you don't have access to any of these, you can use this online recording: <http://www.onlinemeditationtimer.com>.

Instructions and script:

1. Read the script below aloud in a slow, gentle voice at a rhythmic pace with many pauses.
2. "Today's mindful moment is a practice in listening mindfully."
3. "Please get into your 'mindful bodies' - last time we discussed that this means being still and quiet, sitting upright, with your eyes gently closed."
4. "Now place all your attention on the sound you are about to hear. Listen until the sound is completely gone."
5. Ring the bell. As it begins to ring say, "Please raise your hand when you can no longer hear the sound."
6. When most or all have raised their hands, you can say, "Now slowly move your hand over your stomach or chest, and just feel your breathing, remembering the balloon breathing we did last week."
7. You can help your Circle stay focused during the breathing with reminders like, "Just breathing in...breathing out..."

¹"Mindful Moments - Circles - Project Happiness."

<https://circles.projecthappiness.org/documents/mindful-moments.pdf>. Accessed 5 May. 2019.

8. Ring the bell again, and have your group raise their hands when they can no longer hear it.
9. Invite feedback on mindful listening. Ask: How does listening to the bell translate into listening to people and daily conversations? In order to tune in to the very last sound of the bell, there couldn't be any other noise or interruptions. Similarly, when we are tuning in to a conversation, mindfulness allows our thoughts to stay focused on who is speaking, and to remain open to their opinion. In listening intently, we can also stay aware of our emotional landscape and what is happening within, without judgment.

Grounding: Imagination Vacation Script

I used this guided visualization often with my highschool juniors and seniors at the beginning of the year in order to support their self-management. I told students that it's normal to feel difficult emotions in the circle, or in class and that going to our "imagination vacation" place for a bit can help bring our systems back in line so we can be our best selves. Consider having students draw or write about their place and then share with partners or in a circle. Another idea is to create a collage of everyone's places to use as a circle centerpiece. Tip: Use 5-4-3-2-1 before you get started.

- Begin by feeling your feet on the floor. Imagine the bottoms of your feet touching the soles of your shoes. Sit up straight and press your feet down on the floor as you take an inhale.
- Breathing in, bring kindness to yourself.
- Breathing out, let go of what you think you need to do right now...what you think you are about to experience and just settle in this moment.
- Let's begin by noticing and naming in our minds five things that we can see. (Pause for 5 seconds)
- Now listen for four things that you can hear. (Pause for 4 seconds)
- Find three different things you can touch that are within reach. (Pause for 3 seconds)
- Two things you can smell. (Pause for 2 seconds)
- And now I invite you to bring one place to mind where you feel at ease, where you feel safe, relaxed and content. (Pause for 5 seconds)
- Now we are going to travel to that place in our minds. Imagine yourself in this place. It might be the mountains, the rivers, or the ocean. Or it might be simply your backyard or a secret place nearby. It might be a place you've only visited once or it could be a place you go to every day like your room.
- Just take a few seconds to explore this place in your mind. What do you see? Hear? Feel?
- Now look around you and name five things you can see in this place. (Pause for 5 seconds)
- Listen for four things you hear in this place. (Pause for 4 seconds)
- What three things can you touch in this place? (Pause for 3 seconds)
- What two things might you smell here? (Pause for 2 seconds)
- Now name one feeling you experience when you are in this place. Take a moment to really feel what this emotion feels like in your body. (Pause for 3 seconds)
- Finally, let's take one last look at this place.
- Now, bring your awareness to your feet on the floor in this room and gently rub your hands together. Take a breath and open your eyes when you're ready.
- If you are willing, share out to whole group (or in triads) where you went and what feeling you had when you were there.

Listen Meditation Script (5-minute practice) by Lindsey Foreman

Find a comfortable way to sit. Breathe in and straighten your back, breathe out and settle your body (Repeat twice). In this exercise we will explore listening. Open your attention to the sounds or silence you hear in the world around you. Relax your body and listen with your full attention. (1 minute of silence) If you hear the sounds of your own thoughts, don't try to get rid of them. Instead bring your attention back to the sounds or silence in the world around you. Continue to relax your body and listen with your full attention. (About 3.5 minutes of silence) (End with a bell or a deep breath together)

LISTEN TIPS:

- To help with concentration, when you notice sound or silence say the word “hear” in your mind every 3 to 5 seconds and then listen fully.
- As you pay attention to sound, no need to figure out what the sound is intellectually. Instead listen directly to the experience of the sound with your ears.
- Have fun exploring different aspects of sound by:
- Intentionally directing your attention to listening to sounds near and far and in all the different directions.
- Allow the sounds to come to you without sending your attention out to find sounds.
- Notice the beginning, middle, and end or decrease of sounds as it is happening.
- Listen for the sounds within the sound.

Some benefits

Improved communication and relationships, increased connection with the external world, relief from the busy mind, grounding in the here and now when in emotional overwhelm.

Nurture Positive/Achieve Script (5-minute practice) Created by Lindsay Foreman

Find a comfortable way to sit. Breathe in and straighten your back, breathe out and settle your body (repeat twice). In this exercise we will set a positive and realistic goal. Think of something you want to do this week that would improve your life, someone else's life, and/or the world. (Pause 20-30 seconds). Say clearly in your mind what you want to do. Repeat it a few times until you can hear it clearly in your mind. (1 minute of silence) Then picture yourself doing this positive thing. See yourself in your mind accomplishing this goal. (1 minute of silence) Notice how it feels in your body to imagine doing this positive thing. Focus on the positive feelings that arise from imagining accomplishing this goal. (1 minute of silence) Now focus on all three together, say it in your mind, see it in your mind, and feel it in your body. Enjoy the positive thoughts and emotions and allow them to motivate you to do it! (About 1 minute of silence) (Ring the bell or take one deep breath together to close)

Tips:

- It is common for negative thoughts and emotions to come up while practicing this technique. This is no problem. No need to push these negative thoughts and emotions away or to judge them as wrong. Instead redirect your attention to cultivating positive thoughts and emotions.
- Just like the observing type practices of Relax and Listen, Nurture Positive also helps us strengthen the Focus and Relax skills. So if you notice your attention wandering, bring it back

to cultivating positive thoughts and emotions. If you notice tension or resistance, as much as possible relax your body and bring acceptance to your experience.

Some benefits

Motivate to take positive action, build compassion for self and others, transform negative thinking patterns, and help us make decisions.

Relax Script (5-minute practice) Created by Lindsay Foreman (www.growmindfulroots.com)

Find a comfortable way to sit. Breathe in and straighten your back, breathe out and settle your body. (Repeat twice). In this exercise we will pay attention to relaxation in our body. We will use our mind to help our body relax. Say the word relax in your mind and then feel relaxation in your body. Say the word relax in your mind again and again feel relaxation in your body. Make it a rhythm. Continue every few seconds to say relax in your mind and then deepen the relaxation in your body (about 2 minutes of silence). If your attention wanders, come back to saying relax in your mind and then feeling it in your body. (Demonstrate out loud saying relax three or four times every few seconds). Continue saying relax and deepening relaxation in your body. (About 2.5 minutes of silence)(End with a bell or one deep breath together)

RELAX TIPS:

- Relaxation is simply the loosening of muscle tension.
- Every time you exhale your diaphragm relaxes. So paying attention to your exhale may help with noticing relaxation in your body.
- You can also create relaxation by tightening and releasing different parts of your body. This can help to make the experience of relaxation more clear.
- If you notice tension, no need to push that away or judge that. Either try relaxing around the tension or see if you can redirect your attention to another part of your body that feels more relaxed.

SOME BENEFITS OF THE RELAX TECHNIQUE:

Stress relief, increased energy, easing physical and/or emotional pain and discomfort, and mental clarity.