

A Teacher's Guide

Everyday practices for Mental Health
and Well Being in the classroom

Introduction



The ***Everyday Practices for Mental Health and Well-Being in the Classroom*** is a guide designed to aid educators in embedding well-being strategies into the everyday culture of their classroom. These activities are designed to promote calm and increase engagement in learning. Each activity provides an outline, links to learning skills, and includes explicit instructions for implementation with students. It is beneficial to model the practice for the students and actively participate in the activities. Regular practice builds resilience and promotes well-being for all students.

Additional mentor texts, resource texts, and corresponding lesson plans, are available in your school library as part of the ***TVDSB Mentor Texts: Mental Health & Well-Being***.

Please visit www.tvdsb.on.ca/mentalhealth for additional information and resources.

Stretch in your Chair

Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

- The activity is completed with students in their chair.
- This activity can be used during transition times, before or after a test, after a period of sitting, as a movement break.
- Each stretch can be done more than once.
- Remind students to keep breathing and avoid holding their breath.
- Develop this into a regular routine practice; as you become more comfortable explore other stretching exercises available.
- You may choose to have a student read the script.

Instructions:



Ask students to clear their work area and push their chairs back to allow enough space.

- Sitting up tall in your chair, keep your legs flat on the ground, your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.

Mountain

- Breathe in through your nose and as you breathe out stretch both arms over your head as you connect the palms of your hands.
- Keep your shoulders down.
- Breathe in while you are in the pose... breathe out...
- Take a deep breathe in again...
- As you breathe out bring your arms down to resting position.

Owl

- Breathe in through your nose...
- As you breathe out bring your left arm behind the back of your chair while your right arm folds over your chest (like the wings of an owl).
- Breathe in as you gently turn your head and gaze to your left... Breathe out...
- Breathe in... As you breathe out return your arms to resting position and your head looking straight.

Stretch in your Chair



Instructions contin'd

- Breathe in through your nose...
- As you breathe out bring you right arm behind your chair while your left arm folds over your chest.
- Breathe in as you gently turn your head and gaze to your right...Breathe out...
- Breathe in... As you breathe out return your arms to resting position.

Rag Doll

- Breathe in through your nose and as you breathe out fold your body over to rest on your lap and let your arms, shoulders and head hang.
- Relax as you take a breath in... and a breathe out...
- Let all your tension and stress fall out and on to the floor.
- Breathe in and slowly return to sitting position... breathe out...
- Take one last deep breathe in... a breathe out...smile.



Breathe with the Bell

Time Needed

2 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

This activity can be practiced during transition times, before after test/assignments.

For this activity you can use a chime, bell, singing bowl, or app of the same.

- It is recommended to practice breathing through the nose.
- This practice can become a cornerstone to calm student's energy or collect the group.
- Over time students will gain more confidence in the practice and activity time can increase gradually.

Instructions:



Ask students to sit in a comfortable position (in their chairs or on carpet)

Pause...

- Please sit comfortably in your chair/crisscross on carpet.
- Keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed
- Relax your hands in your lap/on your thighs.
- You can close your eyes if you are comfortable or look down in your lap.

Listen...

- I am going to sound the bell.

Breathe...

- When you think the sound has stopped take a deep breath in and a deep breath out.

Sound the singing bowl/chime.

Repeat.



Four Finger Affirmation

Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Initiative

Keep in Mind

- An affirmation is a tool to promote confidence, self-regulation and resiliency.
- Encourage students to use this as a tool on a regular basis.
- You may choose to explain to students how thoughts are linked to emotions and behaviour: what you say to yourself influences how you feel which will impact how you act.

Instructions:

Provide students an explanation of affirmations:

- An affirmation is a statement that makes you feel safe and confident.

Have students write or think of a four-word affirmation.

Example:

"I can do this", "I can do division", "I try my best", "I am loved today", "I believe in me", "Today will be awesome", "I will worry less", "I can handle this".

Practice putting this into action:

- Each word you have chosen will match a finger in your hand.
- As you say your affirmation in your head, match each finger with your thumb; one finger per word.

Let students know how they can use their Four Finger Affirmation:

- This can be used to help you feel more confident in stressful situations.
- No one will know when you are using your affirmation as this can be practiced privately.



Calm with Colour

Time Needed

10 – 25 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Independent work, Initiative

Keep in Mind

- Various colouring/mandala resources are available on line and in the **TVDSB Mental Health Diversity Kit**.
- You may choose to have colouring resources available in the wellness space in your classroom so that students have access to them when needed.
- The activity can be used during transition times, before or after a test, as an independent tool for regulating emotions.
- You can do this as a regular on-going practice that is built into the routine of your day; this might be a nice way to end the day or come back from a nutrition break.
- You may choose to expand this into a “pay it forward” activity by decorating the hallways.
- You may choose to do this in partnership with another class or younger buddies.

Instructions:



Start by taking a minute to complete a short breathing exercise.

Have colouring pages available to students.

Let students know that colouring is a way to calm your breathing and regulate your body when it is under stress.

- Colouring helps you feel more calm and in control of your body.
- While you colour you become more focused.
- This will help you distract any unpleasant thoughts.

Let students colour quietly or while calm music is playing (such as nature or relaxation sounds).

- There are a variety of subject/interest specific colouring pages/mandalas that may appeal more to your students or fit in with your teaching subject.



Tense and Relax

Time Needed

5 – 15 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

- You may choose to do this activity during transitional times or before and after a test or after a sitting activity.
- Feel free to do each exercise more than once and vary the order.
- Once this is an established practice in your classroom, you may choose to have students lead the activity.
- You may choose to start the activity with a deep breathing exercise.
- It is helpful to have students notice how different their body feels when relaxed vs. when tense.

Instructions:



Hands/Lemons

- Squeeze your hands together into fists (as if you were squeezing lemons).
- Hold this for the count of 1-2-3.
- Now relax your hands slowly for the count of 1-2-3.

Neck/Turtle

- Push your shoulders up to your ears (as if you were hiding inside a turtle shell)
- Hold this for the count of 1-2-3.
- Now relax your shoulders slowly for the count of 1-2-3.

Stomach/Fence

- Squeeze your stomach in (as if you were trying to squeeze through a fence).
- Hold this for the count of 1-2-3.
- Now relax your stomach slowly for the count of 1-2-3.

Feet/Mud

- Push your feet down into the floor (as if you were squishing mud).
- Hold this for the count of 1-2-3.
- Now relax your feet slowly for the count of 1-2-3.

Deep Breathe

Time Needed

2 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

This activity can be practiced during transition times, before after test/assignments.

- Each breathing activity can be repeated as often as you wish.
- Know your audience and select a breathing practice that will appeal to your student group and will feel comfortable for you.
- A regular practice this will support student self-regulation, mindful awareness and resiliency.
- Over time students will gain a deeper connection between mind and body.
- Be adventurous and discover the various other breathing activities available.



Instructions:



Deep Belly Breath

- Stand/sit with back tall and your shoulders relaxed.
- Keep your head relaxed and your gaze looking forward.
- Close your eyes if you feel comfortable.
- Place your hands flat on your belly (stomach).
- As you breathe in deeply through your nose, send this breath all the way down to your stomach.
- Feel as your stomach expands and your hand moves out...
- Breathe out...
- Feel your stomach contract and your hand move in..

Feel free to practice this breathing a few times

Feel free to try this exercise with students lying on their back.

With younger students, you may even choose to have them place a stuffy on their tummy to watch it go up and down as take a deep breathe into their belly.

Alternate hand breathing

This can be done sitting or standing

- Stand/sit with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.
- Keep your head relaxed and your gaze looking forward.
- Close your eyes if you feel comfortable.
- Place the palms of your hands together and centre them at your heart.

Deep Breathe

Instructions contin'd

- Breathe in through your nose and send your breath down into your belly while at the same time raise your right hand straight above your head.
- Breathe out and return your hand to centre.
- Breathe in through your nose and send your breath down into your belly while at the same time raise your left hand straight above your head.
- Breathe out and return your hand to centre.

Feel free to practice this breathing technique a few times

Hot Chocolate

- Stand/sit with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.
- Keep your head relaxed and your gaze looking forward.
- Place your hands together as if there is a cup of hot chocolate between them.
- As you breathe in pretend to smell the hot chocolate.
- As you breathe out pretend to blow the steam
- Let's do that again...
- Breathe in and smell the hot chocolate...
- Breathe out and blow the steam...
- One more time...

Instructions contin'd



- Breathe in and smell the hot chocolate...
- Breathe out and blow the steam...
- (Now tilt your cup and take a little sip, your body feels warm and relaxed).

Feel free to practice this breathing technique a few times.

Breathing Kindness

- Stand/sit with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.
- Keep your head relaxed and your gaze looking forward.
- Close your eyes if that feels comfortable.
- As you breathe in – breathe in kindness.
- Send this breath of kindness all the way down to the centre of your body.
- As you breathe out – breathe out disgust.
- Send this breath out and away from you.
- Let's try that again...
- Breathe in kindness...
- Breathe out disgust...

Feel free to practice this breathing technique a few times.

You can change the words kindness/disgust to meet the needs of your students or change the focus. You can also do several different ones at a time.

Other examples: love and dislike, calm and worry, peace and stress, confidence and doubt.

Mindful fingers

Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

- It is recommended that you review and practice these exercises before you share them with your students.
- Let your students know that while these are challenging – you can train your brain to be better at them the more you practice.
- These exercises help to balance the right and left hemispheres of the brain.
- These exercises serve as a way to help centre, ground, provide focus, and a fun way to distract your brain from unpleasant thoughts.

Instructions:



Finger Countdown

Ask students to sit comfortably and collect their attention to their hands.

Start with...

Right hand points to the left hand.

While at the same time the left hand has one finger up for the “count of one”.

Now switch the action of each hand to the opposite action simultaneously, yet the right hand is now has two fingers up for the “count of two”, while the right hand is the pointing hand.

Now switch the actions simultaneously again, yet this time the left hand has three fingers up for the “count of three” while the left hand is the pointing hand.

And so on in this pattern till you count up to five fingers.

Then challenge yourself to count down from five back to one.

Mindful fingers

Instructions contin'd

Point to Thumb

Ask students to sit comfortably and collect their attention to their hands.

Start with...

Right hand points to the left hand.

While at the same time the left hand has a *"thumbs up"*.

Now switch the action of each hand to the opposite simultaneously.

Left hand is the pointing hand (pointing to the left hand).

While the right hand has a *"thumbs up"*.

Keep switching back and forth – see how fast you can do this.



Instructions contin'd



Pointer Finger – Pinky

Ask students to sit comfortably and collect their attention to their hands.

Start with...

Right hand points to the left hand.

While at the same time the left hand has the pinky out.

Now switch the action of each hand to the opposite simultaneously.

Right hand now has the pinky out.

While the left hand is the pointing hand

Keep switching back and forth – see how fast you can do this.



Gratitude Moment

Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Initiative

Keep in Mind

- A regular practice will allow students to focus their attention on encouraging moments and validate their own resiliency.
- This is a great way to finish the day with a reflection of the day and encouragement.
- You might choose to do this as a “community circle” activity.

Instructions:



While students are at their desk, on carpet or in a community circle introduce the Gratitude Moment.

- *We are going to take a few minutes to share what we are grateful for today.*
- *I will start. Today I am grateful for...*

Give everyone a chance to contribute.

Some students may choose to “pass” as this may be a new experience and will take time to feel comfortable with it.

Feel free to adapt the idea to suit the needs of your classroom, example:

Instead of sharing gratitude out loud, you may choose to have students write 1-3 things they are grateful for in a journal at the end of each day.



Facial Relaxation

Time Needed

3 – 5 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Initiative

Keep in Mind

You may include a gentle two-finger tapping motion when massaging jaw and under eyes. You can encourage students to feel gratitude for the body part they are massaging: eyes for seeing, ears for listening, head for thinking, jaw for chewing or talking, hands for writing, building or texting.



Instructions:



Have students sit comfortably.

Invite them to take a gentle breath in through their nose and slowly let it out.

Next have students use their fingers to gently massage the top of their head. Still in a massaging motion, bring fingers towards ears and then use fingers to massage ears, gently pulling down on earlobes as you massage.

Bring fingers to temples, massaging in a circular motion. Slowly massage down around the jaw and then underneath eyes.

Next have students rest their left hand and use their right hand to massage the left.

You can take time to go through each finger, palm and the ball of your thumb. Switch hands and repeat.

Now invite students to hug themselves (arms wrapped around, hands on back) and squeeze gently. Have students take a slow deep breath and smile.

Visualization

a Forest Walk

Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

Your voice should be calm and slow. Pause between sentences. You may also choose to complete this activity with students lying down on the carpet or with their heads down at their desk.



Instructions:

Have students sit comfortably and take a slow breath in through their nose. Then say “breathe out and close your eyes. Imagine you are standing in a peaceful forest. Birds are tweeting in the trees and bushes all around you. You can hear the soothing songs behind you, to your left, to your right, in front of you and in the trees above. You breathe in deeply and your nose tells you that it has rained recently. Everything smells alive and full.

Instructions contin’d



Up ahead you notice flowers growing under the trees. Walk over and lean in to look more closely at one flower. Notice the colour of the petals. Is it different from the colour at the flower's center?

Now a butterfly dances into view and lands on a flower. Perched on the flower, the butterfly's wings slowly open and close while you slowly breath in and out and enjoy this moment. Notice the colour and pattern of the wings. Gently, the butterfly lifts off the flower and flies up and away. You follow it with your eyes until the wings disappear into a maze of tree leaves.

The large green leaves seem to be waving ‘hello’ as a gentle breeze moves through the forest. You notice the branches of the tree and its strong trunk. Your eyes follow the trunk down until you notice a small rabbit nearby. Her ears perk up straight when she notices you. The rabbit sits up tall, moving only her nose. Fast as lightning, the rabbit takes off. You decide to follow. You watch the rabbit run far up ahead and dart under a bush and disappear from sight.

Looking around, you notice you have walked into a clearing filled with tall grass and a rainbow of flowers. Looking down at your hands, you notice the warm glow of sunlight on them.

Close your eyes and bring your hands full of sunlight to your heart. Breathe in calm. Breathe out calm. When you are ready, open your eyes.”

Let Go and STRETCH

Time Needed

3 – 5 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation

Keep in Mind

It is recommended
to practice this activity
on your own first.



Instructions:

Model these movements as you say:

“Stand tall with your shoulders relaxed. Take a slow deep breath and let it out with a sigh. Try to let go of anything bugging you as you sigh one last time.

Now breathe silently. Bring your palms together above your head and stretch them as high as you can. Relax your shoulders as you breathe out.

Instructions contin'd



Breathe in and gently lean from your hips to the right. On your next breath out, stretch just a little bit further. Breathe in and out as you come back to center. Breathe in and lean from your hips to the left. On your next breath out lean a little further then come back to center.

Now bring your hands down a bit to the side, so your arms are bent at the elbow, remembering to keep your shoulders down. Bring your weight onto your right foot and lift your left foot off the ground. Gently put your left foot to the inside of your right leg. DO NOT put your foot on your knee. Imagine you are a tree and grow your branches out toward the sun. Bring your left leg down and place your foot on the floor. Switch your weight over to your left foot. Lift your right foot and gently place it on the inside of your left leg but NOT on your knee. Take a slow breath in and grow toward the sun. Breath out and relax your shoulders.

Bring your right foot down beside your left. Make your hands into fists and put them on your hips. Breathe in and stand tall, shoulders relaxed. Now twist from your waist to the left, as you breathe out. Take another breath and then twist a little further as you breathe out. Breathe in as you come back to centre. Breathe out and twist from your waist to the right. Twist a little further on your next breath out. As you breathe in, slowly come back to center.

Bring your hands to your heart. Notice that you feel a little more relaxed and strong.”

End of Day

Time Needed

2 – 5 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Responsibility,
Organization

Keep in Mind

It would be beneficial to establish this as a daily routine. In time you can try it without words, just modelling the actions. Modify the script as needed.

Instructions:



Have students stand in front of their desk.

Say *"it's time to organize our work stations to be ready for tomorrow's learning.*

First let's take a quiet breath in through your nose and slowly let it out through your nose. .

Stand tall and now let's take two more breaths this way. (PAUSE) Please take anything from the top of your desk that is not going home with you and place it inside your desk. (PAUSE).

Think of all that you have accomplished today. You may wish to give yourself a pat on the back. When your desk is clear (except those things you are taking home) move so you are standing behind your chair

Hold your chair with both hands. As you take another slow breath in, lift your chair and breathe out as you place it on top of your desk.

When your chair is safely on your desk, stretch your arms up over your head as you breathe in again

Stretch your arms to the left as you breathe out.

Breathe in as you stretch your fingers to the sky.

Breathe out as you stretch your arms to the right.

Breathe back to center.

Continue breathing gently as you lower your arms to your sides.

Roll your shoulders, stand tall and smile."



Instructions:



Time Needed

Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Keep in Mind



Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Keep in Mind

[illegible]