

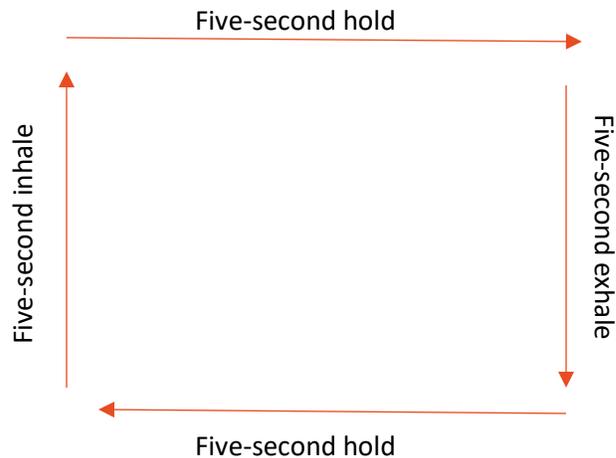
Sample Mindfulness Activities

Box Breathing

Time: 3-5 minutes

Material

Draw or display a square box shape on large newsprint



Setting the Stage

Explain to young people that:

- Focused breathing reduces stress and instills a sense of calm.
- Doing breathing exercises once a day helps people learn how to breathe from their diaphragm.
- Young people can use this activity whenever they feel anxious or stressed.

Directions

1. Instruct participants to sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor.
2. Begin by telling participants to look at or imagine the box shape and exhale completely. Start at the lower left corner of the box and prompt youth to inhale for five seconds as they move up the box. Slowly count to 5.
3. As you move along the top of the box, hold for five seconds.
4. As you move down the right side, exhale for five seconds.
5. As you move along the bottom of the box, hold for five seconds.
6. When you arrive back at the beginning, repeat.

Tips

For elementary school youth do box breathing in interval of three seconds.

To get ready to lead this practice, consider practicing box breathing for weeks. It is an easy discipline to adopt. In fact, noticing boxes or rectangular shapes in daily life can serve as a reminder to pause for a few deep diaphragmatic breaths.

Glitter Jar Demonstration

Time: 20-40 minutes

Materials

- 1 canning jar, baby food jar, or other glass or clear plastic jar with a watertight lid; filled with water
- Several colors of glitter

Setting the Stage

Explain that this is a demonstration of how our minds work.

- The mind is similar to a snow globe. At times, it is settled and calm. Other times, it is filled with flurries. People have tools to help them calm the flurries.
- The jar is similar to a person's mind. Each color of glitter represents a thought or feeling that person has.
- People do not need their thoughts and feelings to go away. They just need thoughts to settle down so they can see clearly.

Directions

1. Fill the jar with water. Ask participants to name some thoughts that seem to swirl around in their minds. Some examples may include worrying about grades, dealing with friendship issues, missing a free throw in a basketball game, learning troubling information from the news or media, and so on.
2. Add to the jar glitter of one color to represent one thought – for example, “Blue represents when we worry about who we will sit with at lunch.” Swirl it slightly.
3. Ask participants to name another thought or feeling that may swirl around in their minds. “Green represents ...” Swirl it slightly.
4. Continue the process with three or four colors.
5. Seal the jar by fastening the lid tightly.
6. Show young people that at times the thoughts and feelings are very calm, such as when they first get up in the morning. All of the glitter will be at the bottom of the jar during this explanation.
7. Begin to shake the jar while describing events that might cause their thoughts to grow louder throughout the day. For example, someone wrote something mean on the student's locker, or a new friend smiled at the student. Ask students to notice how the glitter starts swirling as these thoughts compound.
8. Invite youth to discuss how to make the water clear again. Their answers may include stillness, silence, deep breathing, meditation and so on.
9. Share an essential point of the exercise: We do not want our thoughts and feelings to go away. We just want them to settle down so we can see clearly.

Tip

In a small group, each young person could make their own glitter jar.

Thirty-Second Stretch Break

Time: 30 seconds

Setting the Stage

Explain the importance and usefulness of stretch breaks

- Our brains need oxygen to learn effectively. Oxygen is fuel to our brains.
- A simple stretch break increases our oxygen levels. This helps us focus and stay alert for learning.
- Sometimes learning or creative ideas occur while we are moving.

Directions

1. Instruct young people to stand up and shake their arms out.
2. Have youth stretch their arms up high toward the sky. Let them know it's okay to make stretching noises, such as "mmm" or "ahh."
3. Ask them to lower their arms back to their sides.
4. Tell them to tilt their heads gently to the left, roll their heads gently to the front, and then over to the right and back to the center. Repeat in the opposite direction.
5. Have them roll their shoulders to the back four times.
6. Have them roll their shoulders forward four times.
7. Finally, ask them to shake their arms out one last time and be seated.

Tip: This activity can be done with all age groups. It can be used as needed throughout the day. As energy levels lag, invite youth to participate in a stretch break. Once young people are familiar with the process, they can lead the stretch break.

Body Scans

Time: 10 minutes

Setting the Stage

Explain key aspects of a body scan:

- Taking time to be aware of the body allows people to notice stressed or tense muscles and relax them.
- Body scans help practice general focus and awareness, which can be applied to sensations in the body, thoughts in the mind, or external events.
- After learning body scan techniques, young people can use them at any time.

Directions

Body scans can be conducted in any order. The following eleven steps progress from the feet up to the head.

1. Ask youth to lie comfortably on the floor or to sit up straight in their chairs. If seated, they should aim for the middle ground between being rigid and being relaxed. Ask them to rest their palms gently on the floor beside them or on their laps face up.
2. Invite youth to take three or four slow belly breaths in and out.
3. Ask them to bring attention to their right foot. Have them notice the toes, the arch, and the heel touching the floor. Ask them to gently bring that awareness up to the calf and the thigh. Have them notice the feeling of the calf. Have them notice the pressure of the thigh against the floor or chair. Repeat with the left foot and leg.
4. Remind them to breathe in and out, slowly and gently, allowing their abdomen to rise and fall. Ask them to notice their torso, feeling their back against the carpet or chair, feeling the gentle rise and fall of their stomach.
5. Bring their attention to the ribcage. Ask them to feel their lungs expand and contract with each breath, in and out, in and out.
6. Invite them to notice the heart and how it beats on its own, without any conscious effort.
7. Invite them to move their attention to their right fingers and palms, their right wrist, arm, elbow, and shoulder. Repeat with the left arm.
8. Ask participants to bring their awareness to their neck muscles. Invite them to relax their neck muscles. Ask them to notice their jaw muscles. Are they tight? Can they relax?
9. Invite them to notice their mouths, noses, eyes, and foreheads and relax the muscles of the face.
10. Ask them to notice their bodies as a whole. Invite them to outline their bodies in their minds starting at the crown of their head and imagining the outline traveling the course of the arm, down the right side, all the way around and up the left side, and resting again at the crown of the head.
11. Ask them to breathe deeply a few times. When they are ready, ask them to rejoin the class and calmly return to their seats.

Tip

This activity is very easy to prepare for: it requires no materials, although developing a script may be helpful.

Eating a Raisin

Time: 10 minutes

Material

- One raisin for each young person

To conduct this ten-minute activity, each student needs to have one raisin. We suggest explaining the activity to students before passing out the raisins to ensure that they do not eat them before the activity has begun. Teachers should also be sure to accommodate any students with food allergies or dietary restrictions, and should substitute an acceptable and appropriate kind of food.

Setting the Stage

Explain the activity to young people before passing out the raisins and alternate foods.

- People often do things without paying much attention to them.
- Doing familiar activities slowly and deliberately allows us to see them from a new perspective.
- Many areas of life can benefit from the focus and attention practiced in this activity.

Directions

1. Participants should begin by holding the raisin in their hand and just looking at it, as if they are seeing a raisin for the first time. Ask them to pretend they are a one-year-old, looking at and wondering what this wrinkled little item is all about. If their minds wander while doing this activity, ask students to gently return their attention to the activity.
2. Ask them to feel the raisin and rub it between their fingers. If they feel comfortable, ask them to close their eyes to limit the sensation to only that of touch.
3. Then ask them to place the raisin in their mouth without chewing it. Ask them to notice how it feels. Again, if they are comfortable, ask them to close their eyes for the experience.
4. Ask youth to slowly chew their raisins. What does it taste like? Smell like? Feel like? Ask them not to rush into swallowing it. Finally, ask them to swallow it.
5. Lead a discussion of what it's like not to rush through experiences. Where else might they be able to slow down and experience events with such attention?

Mindful Walking

Time: 5-10 minutes

Setting the Stage

Explain that:

- People have control over their bodies.
- People have full control of their movement and actions.
- Young people can honor others' personal space by walking mindfully, with intention, and by noticing what they are doing.

Directions

1. Calmly ask or gesture to students to rise from their seats.

2. Ask them to begin walking around the room and to be conscious of every step.
3. Remind them to notice what they are doing with each step.
4. Provide cue words such as to walk *calmly*, *carefully*, *gently*, and *thoughtfully*.
5. Ask them to watch each step they take.
6. Ask them to pause, take only one step, and freeze. Repeat this several times.
7. You may want to include phrases such as, “You are leaving footprints of kindness wherever you go,” “We want to be respectful and mindful of other people’s space,” and “Be mindful; be gentle.”
8. Ask students to gently, mindfully return to their seats. Ask them to mindfully pull out their chairs and be seated.

Tip

In addition to using this activity with the whole group, you can also remind youth to walk mindfully at any time in the classroom, in the hallway or other areas of the school, and at recess.

Mindful Movements

- Use balancing activities to improve focus. Have young people balance on one leg, or leg stretched out.
- More advanced: have them balance something on their head like a bean bag while they stand on one leg.

Group activity (elementary & middle school youth)

Divide the group into four teams. Each team gets a spoon, a cup of water, and an empty cup. The object is to fill the spoon with water, walk it from one point in the room to another, and dump the water in the empty cup.

Explain that this activity is a bit like a relay race, but speed is not important—mindful balance is. Introduce the terms *balance*, *steady*, and *stable*. Tell youth that each member of the team will get a chance to walk with the spoonful from the beginning point to the end point. If each team does not have an even number of participants, choose someone who will go twice.

Discussion

Which group has transferred the most water into the empty cup? What was your best strategy for holding the spoon steady? How did you keep it stable in your hand? What did you learn about mindful balance from this activity?

Sources

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