

Secondary



# A Teacher's Guide

Everyday practices for Mental Health  
and Well Being in the classroom

BE WELL

LEARN WELL

LIVE WELL

# 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](http://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 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.
- As you become more comfortable explore other stretching exercises available.

## 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.

### Hand Stretch

- 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.

### Torso Stretch

- 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.
- 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.
- Breathe in through your nose...

# Stretch in your Chair



## Instructions contin'd

- 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.

## Back Stretch and Release

- Breathe in through your nose and as you breathe out fold your body over 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.





# Deep Breathing

## Time Needed

2 – 5 minutes

## Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation



## Keep in Mind

- This practice can become a cornerstone to calm student's energy and collect the focus of the group, a tool to recommend during times of stress.
- A regular practice this will support student self-regulation, mindful awareness and resiliency.
- Over time students will gain more confidence in the practice and activity time can increase.
- This activity can be practiced before after test/ assignments.
- Each breathing activity can be repeated as often as you wish.
- Be adventurous and discover the various other breathing activities available.

## Instructions:

### Breathing with the Bell

For this activity you can use a chime, bell, singing bowl, or app of the same. Ask students to sit in a comfortable position. Pause...

- Please sit comfortably in your chair.
- 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.
- When you think the sound has stopped take a deep breath in and a deep breath out.

Sound the singing bowl/chime. Breathe.

### 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.
- Breathe in through your nose and send your breath down into your abdomen 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 abdomen 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.

# Four Finger Affirmation

## Instructions:



### 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 discuss with your students how affirmations strengthen synapses between neurons in the brain: the more you say this to yourself the stronger that connection becomes and the more you will feel that what you say is true.
- 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.

You may choose to start with a quick discussion of what affirmations are:

- 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.

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 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 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.
- May choose to expand this into a “pay it forward” activity by decorating the hallways.

## Instructions:



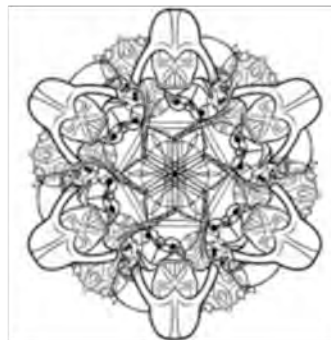
Have colouring pages available to students.

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

## Instructions:



### Time Needed

5 – 15 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 before or after a test, after a period of sitting, as a movement break.
- Each exercise can be done more than once.
- 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.

### 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.



# Gratitude Moment

## Time Needed

5 – 10 minutes

## Learning Skills and Work Habits:

Self-Regulation, Initiative

## Keep in Mind

- It is recommended that you establish this as a regular practice.
- 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.



# 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.





# 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.”*



# 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.”*

# Add your Own

## Time Needed

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## Learning Skills and Work Habits:

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## Keep in Mind

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## Instructions:



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# Add your Own

Instructions:



## Time Needed

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## Learning Skills and Work Habits:

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## Keep in Mind

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