

Coping Toolbox



What to do During Sensory Meltdowns

SAFETY IS THE TOP PRIORITY: Do what you can to keep everyone safe in the situation. Try to have the teen move to a safe area, but if you are unable to move them, make sure the people around them are able to move away to stay safe. You may need to move objects that could potentially be thrown or turned into a weapon.

Do not try to talk to the person during the meltdown as they will be unable to respond as they may be unaware of what they are doing in the situation.

As the parent/teacher/therapist, know your boundaries lines as to what you need to do in certain situations. We would love to always be able to deescalate a sensory meltdown before it happens, but when it does happen we need to understand our roles. There is a line when a bad behavior turns into a meltdown and then when a meltdown turns into a potentially dangerous situation. If at any time you feel that you cannot keep the person, yourself, or people around you safe CALL FOR HELP.

Have an understanding: Have an understanding that the teen may not understand what is going on during a meltdown and most likely does not want to be acting this way. These situations are hard and mentally exhausting as well as physically exhausting. Be present in the situation to help keep everyone safe, but when it is over do what you need to do to mentally and physically recharge. You are most likely their biggest support system and advocate and they need you to be able to be there for them.

How to Help Develop Self-Regulation Skills

Teens will have more success when they are able to self-regulate and develop emotional control. They need to learn how to choose the best ways for them to self-soothe rather than us telling them or dictating to them what they should do. They need to start to be responsible for their emotional responses.

Ways to teach self-regulation is to talk with the teenager and listen to what they are telling you. Listen to their responses and do not dictate what they should do.

Let them identify calm down tools and strategies that work for them.

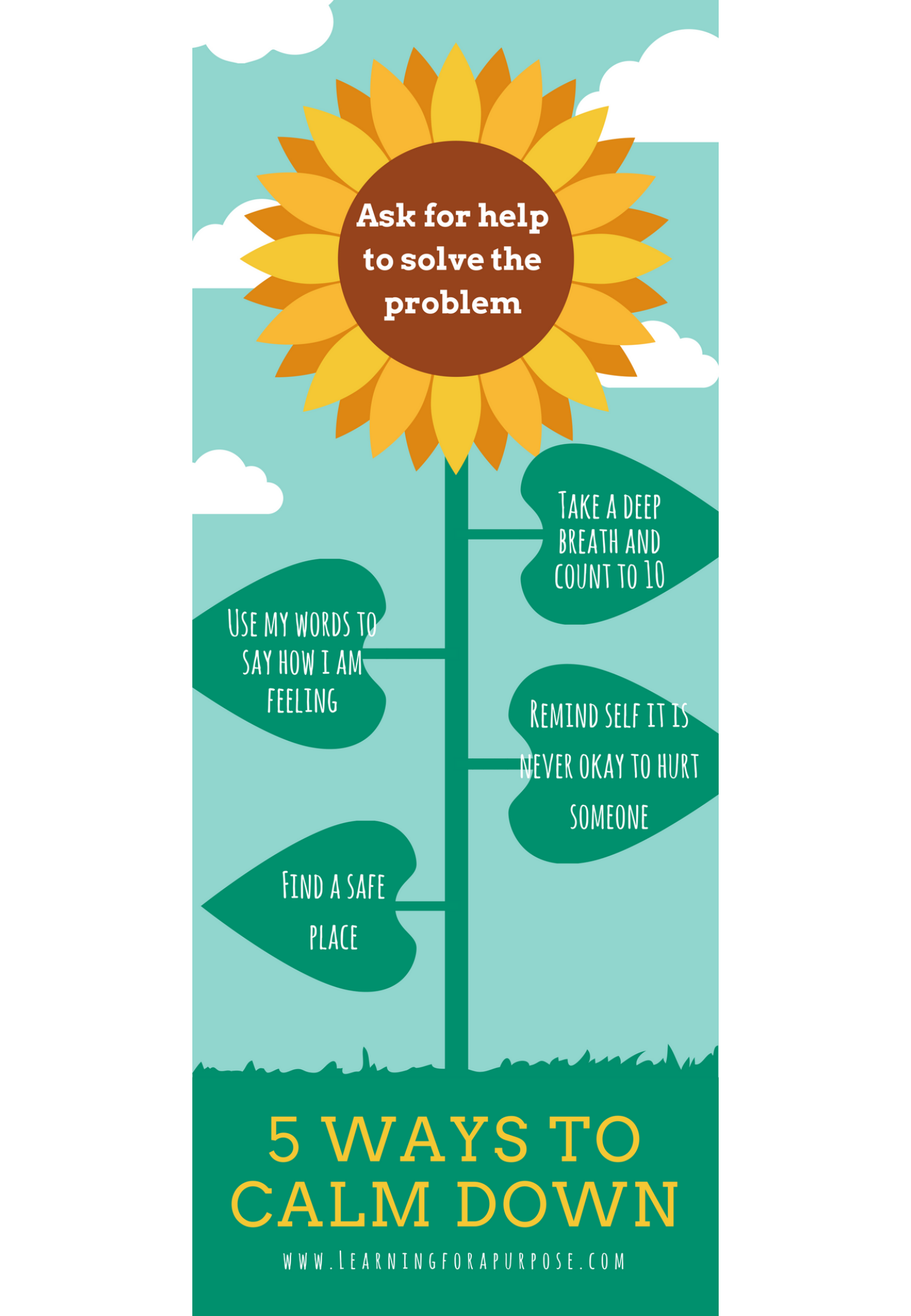
Let them identify activities that help make them feel happy and content. We all have unique preferences and activities that make us feel a certain way. We have developed a list of ideas for you to go over with your teen to help them decide what will work for them. You can be there to support them and guide them, but they need to be able to choose what works best for them. Having access to these calm down strategies during the day, and especially during times of increased frustration and overwhelm will hopefully decrease aggression and sensory meltdowns.

8 Calm Down Strategies

- Deep Breathing: Take 3 deep breaths to slow the heart rate down
- Place the hands in the pockets or sit on them. This will keep them from throwing objects or hitting things and can help their body to become more still.
- Take notice of what your body feels like. Help the teen to recognize what their body is doing when they become upset. (Heart racing, increased breathing, sweaty hands, body feels hot, etc.)
- Make a fist and then relax the muscles in the hands. The feeling of pressure in the hands can help them understand the feeling of relaxation.
- Learn how to relax the muscles in the body. Help the teen learn how to relax the large muscle groups in the body to bring them to a more calm state. Learn by starting at the top of the body and work down or vice versa. Have them close their eyes to be able to focus on the certain areas of their bodies. Use words that make sense to the teenager to relax (let go, feel like jello, or sink into the pillow).
- Have the teen hug or squeeze themselves or ask for a hug depending on who they are with. Deep pressure throughout the body can elicit a calming response.
- Counting: Counting can be a great technique to take the mind off of the frustrating situation and help calm the mind and the body.
- Physical exercise: physical exercise can be a great way to help calm the body and allow the teen to get out their frustrations during the moment. This is another great way to provide deep pressure throughout the entire body, which can be calming.

Calm Down Toolkit Ideas

- Music player with headphones
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Stress ball
- Coloring pages
- Lavender essential oil
- Lotion for massage
- Yoga poses
- Sensory brush
- Preferred food items
- Crackers
- Hard candy
- Water bottle
- Gum
- Drinking a milkshake through a straw
- Blank journal or notebook to write
- Lego kits to build
- Mini vibrating massager
- Magazines or books to read
- Dots to dots
- Mazes
- Word finds
- Crosswords
- Sudoku
- Card games
- Puzzles
- Brain teasers
- Rubik's cube
- Weighted lap pad
- Weighted blanket
- Heated blanket
- Knitting
- Audiobooks
- Punching bag
- White noise sound machine
- Lava lamp
- Craft kits
- Mad libs books
- Eye mask
- Ear plugs
- Compression clothes
- Therapy ball/ exercise ball
- Chewy tube
- Chewy necklace
- Resistance bands
- Therapy putty
- Slime
- Squishy ball
- Fidget toys
- Scented candle
- Pony beads with string
- Nail polish
- Head massager
- Colored lights
- Items to squish in the hands
- Foam roller
- Mat to lay on or roll up in
- Oversized blanket or comforter
- Stuffed animal
- Dumbbell weights to exercise
- Hand/wrist weights
- Travel sized games to play
- Play dough
- Paint
- Clay
- Colored pencils
- Markers
- iPad
- iPod
- Computer
- Water beads
- Pillow
- Coins
- **Large items to put in a room:**
- Bean bag chair
- Large bubble lights
- Swing
- Trampoline



**Ask for help
to solve the
problem**

TAKE A DEEP
BREATH AND
COUNT TO 10

USE MY WORDS TO
SAY HOW I AM
FEELING

REMIND SELF IT IS
NEVER OKAY TO HURT
SOMEONE

FIND A SAFE
PLACE

5 WAYS TO CALM DOWN

WWW.LEARNINGFORAPURPOSE.COM

SENSORY MELTDOWNS OR BEHAVIORS - TIPS AND IDEAS FOR THERAPISTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS



Many times we struggle with our children when they exhibit difficult behaviors. Frustration creeps in and we find ourselves feeling helpless. There are many ways to help your child and provide strategies to deal with sensory meltdowns and behavioral outbursts. The plans are different for each so in this situation, knowledge is powerful! Here are some of my 'Out of the Pocket' tips, strategies, and information for you.



**Is It SENSORY or
Is It BEHAVIOR
Course**

Check out our courses for therapists, teachers, and families. www.PocketOT.com

Occupational therapists understand how to assess and create programs for our children with sensory processing differences. They use written questionnaires and watch a child interact and play in order to understand how a child processes information. Don't worry, the therapist's job is to play with your child since our kids learn critical skills by interacting with other kids and toys. Sometimes a child shows difficulty with crossing over the middle of his/her body. It can be tough and frustrating for kids when a task involves using both hands. This can actually frustrate your child and cause behavioral issues....it's true! How would you feel if you couldn't do something that your co-workers could with ease?

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

Understanding the eight senses is the first step. Our bodies take in sensory information through receptors in the skin, organs, mouth, nose, ears, muscles and so many more. We all process and interpret this information differently based on our body and our past experiences. Since we are all different, we 'see' sensory information in different ways. This is why some children love to crash into pillows and others avoid movement on the playground. Maybe you like eating crunchy food, but your child prefers soft food.

How does sensory affect behavior?

We know that sensory information forms the foundations for our entire body. How we sit in a chair, hold our posture, plan our movements and learn depends on our ability to effectively process sensory information. When a child is NOT processing effectively or is constantly fearful or distressed, he/she cannot focus on the task at hand. Simple things such as brushing teeth and completing a homework assignment may be very tough. The energy needed to focus is exhausting and sometimes frustration creeps in. Behavior also affects our ability to follow rules and make friends. If we don't feel well, we might act out. Can you remember

REGULAR SENSORY ACTIVITIES

Done regularly and every few hours, activities can improve your child's behavior! This is because keeping the body in a state of clamng 'regulation' helps to feel more consistent and decreases highs and lows in our sensory system.



What's a Calming Activity?

Many times rocking in a back and forth manner such as using a rocking chair or playground swing is rhythmic and calms us. Other ideas are using big muscle groups such as pushing, pulling, lifting, and carrying.

Ideas used in small spaces include

- Pushing up against the wall
- Carrying a heavy backpack
- Sitting under a weighted blanket or quilt
- Use of a lap pad filled with sand, rice, or poly-pellets
- Deep breathing
- Playing with dough or a fidget item.

Other activities can be calming and should be practiced on a regular basis. They include:

- Listening to calming music or those with deep drum beats
- Using deep breathing and counting to four while you take a breath in and then a breath out
- Reading a social story or book
- Time with the guidance counselor or in a calm-down room/area

a time when you were tired or had a sinus infection and felt dizzy or just grouchy. Your mood matched your body's feelings. It's the same for our children.

PHYSICAL SIGNS of STRESS

Our bodies show stress in different ways. When we see something we interpret as painful, upsetting, or dangerous a chemical reaction releasing adrenaline occurs. When this happens, we are powerless to stop it! There's no 'shut off' button. The goal is to keep the child safe and avoid injury. He has NO control since at this time; his brain is not in thinking mode, it's in SURVIVAL mode! Look for the following:

- Red face with a look of discomfort
- Sweating and increased heart rate
- Increase in self-stimming behavior
- Rigidity in behavior or tightening of body/muscles
- Shutting down of social interaction
- Physical movement to avoid the situation such as fleeing.

There can be several types of reactions to stress. Some people leave or flee the situation and have no idea where to go, Their body's goal is to move to safety.

Others feel a freeze response, thus they cannot move.

Many people fight or use their body to defend themselves. So hitting, biting, kicking, and spitting would fit into this category.

****Whichever way a person reacts, the ultimate goal is SAFETY!**

- Eating crunchy or chewy foods such as dehydrated fruit.

What types of interventions/preventions are there?

Being pro-active is so important. When a person has experienced a bad thing or sensation, there can be a great deal of worry and anxiety. This is the case for many of us with and without special needs. In fact, anxiety can be paralyzing!

It's a very real feeling, and teaching children to feel and understand their bodies is very important. *But how?*

- Draw a picture of what worry looks like. Is it a monster, fire, or animal?
- Ask the child where in their own body they feel worry. We know that worry affects heart rate, stomach, causes headaches and so many more symptoms.
- What makes your body feel better when you worry? Let the child tell you in a CALM time what they experience in times of anxiety. Write it all down.
- Make a plan with options that you've chosen and let the child choose which will be in the plan.



Use BREAK cards. Create your own or use cards in our Pocket OT store.



Cards should be small and should have a few options for sensory breaks.

- Get a drink of water
- Go to the guidance office
- Go to the calming area
- Take breaths
- Walk to the office or designated room.

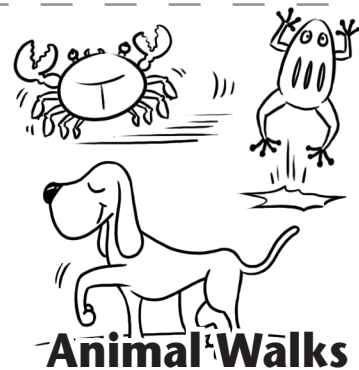
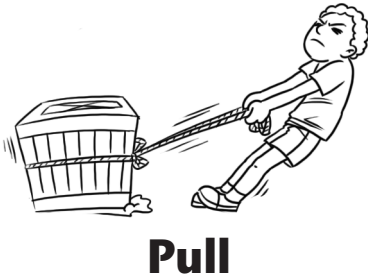
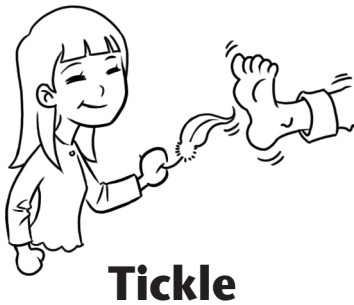
What to include in calm-down areas:

- Fidget items
- Weighted lap pad or blanket
- Headphones that cancel noise
- Calming music
- Books
- Visual glitter bottles or liquid timers
- Soft squeeze balls or putty/dough

Remember that any plan should be reviewed and rehearsed with the child & team.

Please visit www.PocketOT.com for more resources.

ZONES Tools Menu



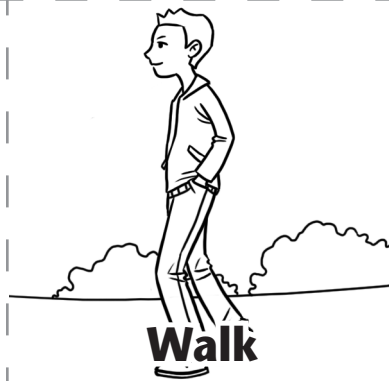
ZONES Tools Menu



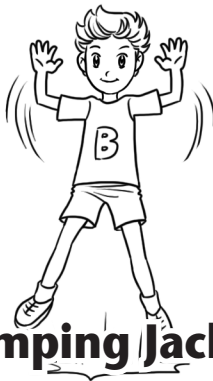
Listen to Music



Squishes



Walk



Jumping Jacks



Shoulder Rub



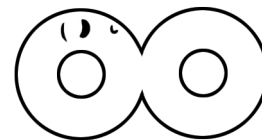
Belly Breath



Inner Coach



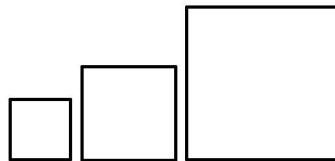
Take a Break



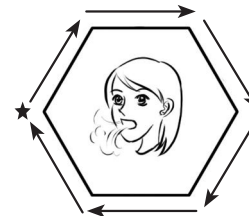
Lazy 8 Breathing



Fidget Ball



Size of Problem



Six Sides of Breathing

Anywhere Body Break	Picture
Arm-Pretzel	
Bubble Breath	
(Give Myself a Hug) stop Squeeze + Breathe	
Arm Massage	
Hand Massage	
Finger Pull	
Palm Push	
Seat Push-Up	
Count to Ten and Take Deep Breaths	

Coping Skills Categories

<p>Diversions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write, draw, paint, photography • Play an instrument, sing, dance, act • Take a shower or a bath • Garden • Take a walk, or go for a drive • Watch television or a movie • Watch cute kitten videos on YouTube • Play a game • Go shopping • Clean or organize your environment • Read • Take a break or vacation 	<p>Social/Interpersonal Coping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to someone you trust • Set boundaries and say “no” • Write a note to someone you care about • Be assertive • Use humor • Spend time with friends and/or family • Care for or play with a pet • Role-play challenging situations with others • Encourage others
<p>Cognitive Coping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a gratitude list • Brainstorm solutions • Lower your expectations of the situation • Keep an inspirational quote with you • Be flexible • Write a list of goals • Take a class Act opposite of negative feelings • Write a list of pros and cons for decisions • Reward or pamper yourself when successful • Write a list of strengths • Accept a challenge with a positive attitude 	<p>Tension Releasers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise or play sports • Catharsis (yelling in the bathroom, punching a punching bag) • Cry • Laugh
<p>Physical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get enough sleep • Eat healthy foods • Get into a good routine • Eat a little chocolate • Limit caffeine • Deep/slow breathing 	<p>Spiritual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray or meditate • Enjoy nature • Get involved in a worthy cause
<p>Limit Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop some involvement • Prioritize important tasks • Use assertive communication • Schedule time for yourself 	

Calm Down Strategies for Kids

<http://www.andnextcomesL.com>

- o Blow bubbles
- o Chew gum
- o Chew on a chewy toy
- o Complete a puzzle
- o Use a fidget
- o Use a weighted lap cushion or stuffed animal
- o Wear a weighted vest
- o Use stretchy resistance bands
- o Crawl through a sensory tunnel
- o Wear noise reducing ear muffs
- o Suck on hard candies
- o Diffuse essential oils
- o Use Rescue Remedy spray
- o Listen to music
- o Listen to audiobooks
- o Do some yoga
- o Lay or bounce on a ball
- o Sing ABCs forwards or backwards
- o Build with blocks of LEGO
- o Go for a run
- o Swing
- o Pet a cat or dog
- o Draw with chalk
- o Go for a walk
- o Go to a quiet place
- o Paint a picture
- o Do a maze, dot to dot, or word search
- o Read a book
- o Count slowly forwards or backwards
- o Ask for a hug
- o Take a drink of water
- o Wrap up in a blanket
- o Invert head or hang upside down
- o Close your eyes
- o Hum or sing a song
- o Do some deep breathing
- o Go for a bike ride
- o Draw a picture
- o Play hopscotch
- o Jump on a trampoline
- o Climb a tree
- o Play an instrument and make music
- o Do a heavy work activity
- o Use a calm down bottle
- o Do animal walks
- o Dance
- o Skip
- o Do a cartwheel
- o Take a bubble bath
- o Drink a smoothie through a straw
- o Make silly faces in a mirror
- o Drink a warm beverage
- o Look at an hourglass, lava lamp, or aquarium
- o Rip tissue paper
- o Bend and twist pipe cleaners
- o Have a snack
- o Pop bubble wrap
- o Play with play dough, slime, or silly putty
- o Look at a photo album
- o Blow a pinwheel
- o Squeeze a stress ball
- o Tightly hug or squeeze a pillow or toy
- o Wear an eye mask
- o Listen to nature sounds
- o Spin a top
- o Use a mini massager
- o Climb into a body sock
- o Make a craft
- o Play a one player board game
- o Rub some scented lotion on
- o Wear sunglasses
- o Light a scented candle
- o Journal
- o Color a picture in a coloring book
- o Play with shadow puppets
- o Blow a feather
- o Blow a pom pom around using a straw
- o Take a bath with Epsom salts
- o Ask for a break
- o Push against a wall
- o Play with a sensory bin
- o Crash into a crash pad
- o Take a shower
- o Suck on ice
- o Do some joint compressions
- o Brush hair and/or skin
- o Blow bubbles in a cup of water
- o Smell scratch and sniff stickers
- o Turn off the lights
- o Read with a flashlight
- o Play I spy
- o Braid your hair
- o Climb a ladder or rock wall
- o Use positive affirmations
- o Hug someone
- o Doodle on paper, whiteboard, or similar
- o Use visual calm down cards or posters
- o Stretch
- o Play with a pet
- o Trace your hands with your finger

BREATHING

DEEP BREATHING

We are going to practice deep breathing. As I count from one to three, you will take a slow, smooth, deep breath in through your nose. As I count from three to one, you will slowly breathe out through your nose.

Sit up straight and comfortably in your chair.

Rest your hands on your desk or in your lap.

Close your eyes.

Feel your feet flat on the floor.

Relax your shoulders back and down.

Let your whole body be still.

Feel the air moving in and out of your nose.

[Wait 10 seconds]

Remember, when you breathe in, you will fill your lungs completely.



EXTERNAL COUNTING

We are going to practice external counting. You will listen to and focus on my voice as I slowly count down from ten to one.

Sit up straight and comfortably in your chair.

Rest your hands on your desk or in your lap.

Close your eyes.

Feel your feet flat on the floor.

Relax your shoulders back and down.

Let your whole body be still.

Feel the air moving gently in and out of your nose.
[Wait 10 seconds]

Listen to my voice as I slowly count down from ten to one.

Notice the increasing amount of silence between the numbers.

10...9...8.....7.....6.....5.....4.....3.....2.....1

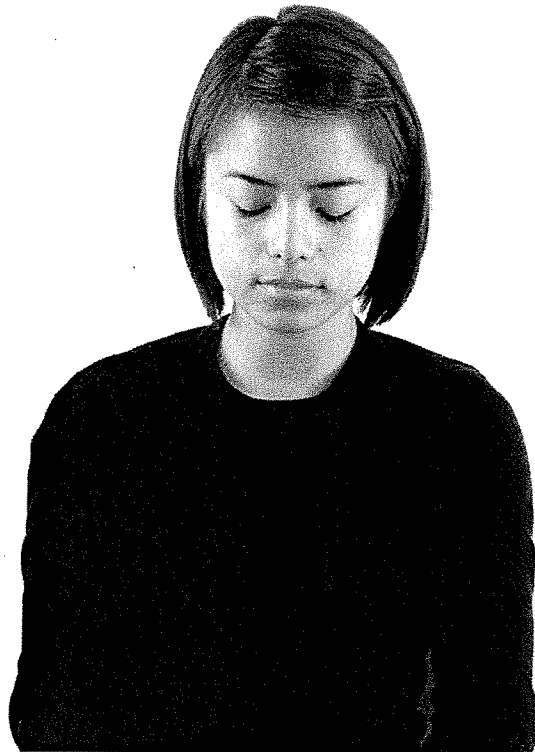
[Create longer periods of silence between each number as you count down]

Feel the air moving in and out of your nose.
[Wait 20-30 seconds]

Now, take a deep breath in, hold and exhale slowly.

Notice how you feel.
[Wait 10 seconds]

Slowly open your eyes.



QUICK TENSE AND RELEASE (cont.)

Tighten your feet and legs.

Make fists and tighten your hands and arms.

Take a deep breath in and tighten your legs and arms even more.

Now, exhale through your mouth and drop your legs and arms.

Relax your whole body.

Feel the air moving in and out of your nose.

[Wait 20-30 seconds]

Now, take a deep breath in, hold and exhale slowly.

Notice how you feel.

[Wait 10 seconds]

Slowly open your eyes.



STRETCHING

SEATED MOUNTAIN

We are going to practice seated mountain.

Sit up straight and comfortably in your chair.

Feel your feet flat on the floor.

Rest your hands on your desk or in your lap.

Relax your shoulders back and down.

Let your whole body be still.

Stretch your arms straight over your head with your palms facing each other.

Close your eyes.

Feel the air moving in and out of your nose.

Keep stretching up with your elbows and fingers straight.
[Wait 10 seconds]

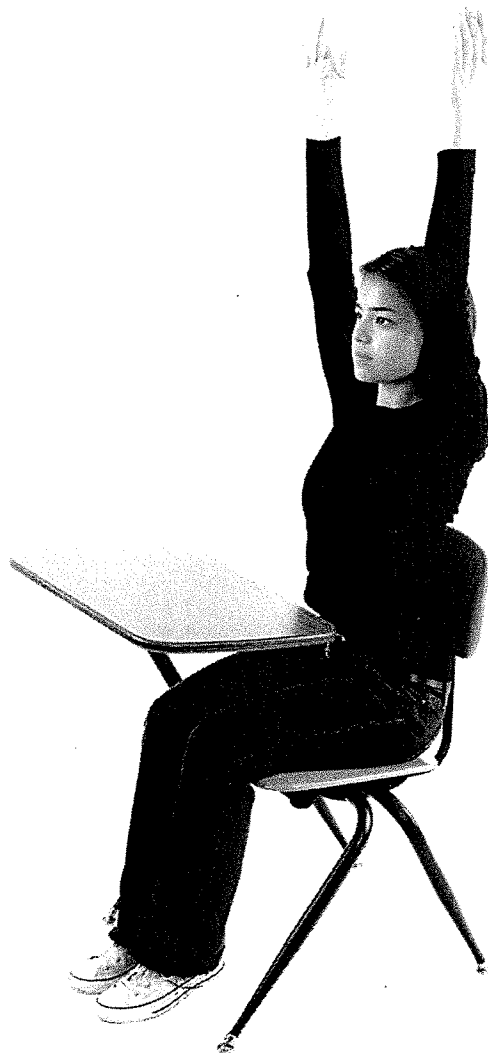
Slowly lower your arms and rest your hands
on your desk or in your lap.

Bring your attention back to your breathing.
[Wait 20-30 seconds]

Now, take a deep breath in, hold and exhale slowly.

Notice how you feel.
[Wait 10 seconds]

Slowly open your eyes.



STANDING MOUNTAIN

We are going to practice standing mountain.

Stand up straight and comfortably with your feet together.

Feel your feet flat on the floor.

Rest your arms by your sides.

Relax your shoulders back and down.

Let your whole body be still.

Stretch your arms straight over your head with your palms facing each other.

Close your eyes.

Bring your hands together.

Feel the air moving in and out of your nose.

Keep stretching up with your elbows and fingers straight.
[Wait 10 seconds]

Slowly lower your arms.

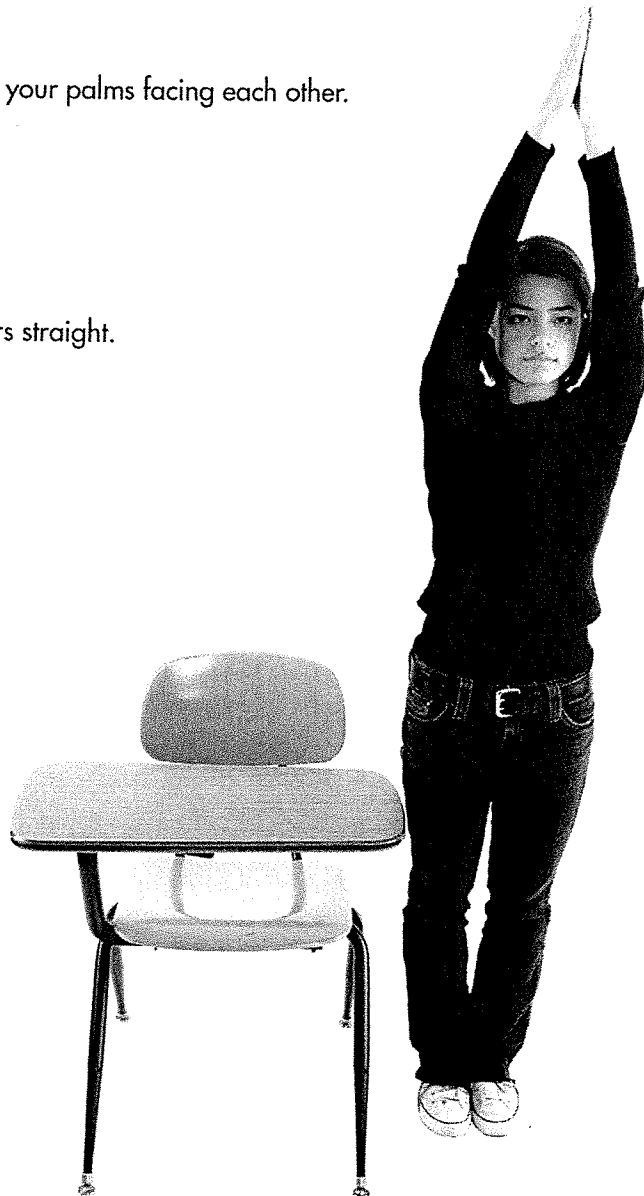
Rest your hands by your sides.

Bring your attention back to your breathing.
[Wait 20-30 seconds]

Now, take a deep breath in,
hold and exhale slowly.

Notice how you feel.
[Wait 10 seconds]

Slowly open your eyes.



Body Scan Mindfulness Exercise

1. Sit in a chair as for the breath awareness or lie down, making yourself comfortable, lying on your back on a mat or rug on the floor or on your bed. Choose a place where you will be warm and undisturbed. Allow your eyes to close gently.
2. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair or bed. On each outbreath, allow yourself to let go, to sink a little deeper into the chair or bed.
3. Remind yourself of the intention of this practice. Its aim is not to feel any different, relaxed, or calm; this may happen or it may not. Instead, the intention of the practice is, as best you can, to bring awareness to any sensations you detect, as you focus your attention on each part of the body in turn.
4. Now bring your awareness to the physical sensations in the lower abdomen, becoming aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the abdominal wall as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
5. Having connected with the sensations in the abdomen, bring the focus or "spotlight" of your awareness down the left leg, into the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Focus on each of the toes of the left foot in turn, bringing a gentle curiosity to investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, or no particular sensation.
6. When you are ready, on an inbreath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs, and then passing down into the abdomen, into the left leg, the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Then, on the outbreath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up, out of the foot, into the leg, up through the abdomen, chest, and out through the nose. As best you can, continue this for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes, and back out from the toes. It may be difficult to get the hang of this just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.
7. Now, when you are ready, on an outbreath, let go of awareness of the toes, and bring your awareness to the sensations on the bottom of your left foot—bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (e.g., noticing the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" the sensations—being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations of the lower foot.
8. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot—to the ankle, the top of the foot, and right into the bones and joints. Then, taking a slightly deeper breath, directing it down into the whole of the left foot, and, as the breath lets go on the outbreath, let go of the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg—the calf, shin, knee, and so on, in turn.
9. Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity, to the physical sensations in each part of the rest of the body in turn - to the upper left leg, the right toes, right foot, right leg, pelvic area, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head, and face. In each area, as best you can, bring the same detailed level of awareness and gentle curiosity to the bodily sensations present. As you leave each major area, "breathe in" to it on the inbreath, and let go of that region on the outbreath.
10. When you become aware of tension, or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can "breathe in" to them—using the inbreath gently to bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of their letting go, or releasing, on the outbreath.
11. The mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.
12. After you have "scanned" the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole, and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.
13. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down.
14. You can adjust the time spent in this practice by using larger chunks of your body to become aware of or spending a shorter or longer time with each part.