

Mental Health Breaks for Students

Mental health breaks are just as important as movement breaks. They create a sense of calm, focus, and reflection, and help students recognize and manage negative feelings. When practiced in class, such as before exams, after an energy building activity, or after recess, these go-to strategies will help students calm their mind and body.

1. **Count Up** (All grades)

Activity adapted from [Toolbox Count Up](#)

Time: 5 to 10 minutes

Purpose: To create a calm and focused collective energy within a group.

Activity:

The goal is to count up to 20 (or to the number of students in the classroom) as a group. Only one person can say a number at a time. If two people speak at the same time, the group is to start over and begin counting from one again. Explain the goal to the students and let them figure out how to start!

Modifications:

- To enhance listening skills, have students rest their heads on their desk and close their eyes.
- To challenge the students, have students count by 2s, 5s, or 10s, or make it more difficult by having them count down instead of up.
- This activity is suitable for a virtual platform.

2. **Feeling Through Colours and Shapes** (All grades)

Activity adapted from [Action for Healthy Kids, Feeling Through Colors](#)

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To help students express their emotions using colours and art. Colours and art nurture emotion expression, promoting self-regulation and reflection. This use of art is a calming and grounding tool for many children.

Activity:

Have students take out their journals (or any piece of paper that they can keep from day to day). Ask them to draw one geometric figure onto the paper and use colours to show their emotions for that day (note: students may be experiencing more than one emotion and therefore may choose more than one colour or even more than one geometrical figure). Ask the students to create a legend to remind them what each colour and shape refers to.

Each day, have students take out the journal and draw another geometric figure on the same page indicating their feelings that day and colour it. As the month progresses encourage them to reflect on how their emotions are changing or remaining the same from day to day.

Modifications:

- For a single day activity, have students use a variety of art supplies to create different drawings that represent how they feel that day. These drawings could be geometric figures, self portraits, hearts, personal symbols, etc.
- Consider following up on this activity with a journal writing assignment or a small group discussion with peers to reflect on why they choose the particular colours.

3. Pinwheel Breathing (Grades 1-7)

Activity adapted from [1000 Petals, Pinwheel Breath](#)

Time: 5 minutes, initial pinwheel creation will take longer

Purpose: To help students use breath awareness to calm and refocus. This supports them with sustaining their attention as activities change and tasks increase in difficulty.

Activity:

Using this [template](#), have students create and color their very own pinwheel. When they are finished ask them to see how slowly they can spin the pinwheel with their breath without gasping for air. The pinwheel is a tool to help students focus on their breathing, and can be kept and re-visited when needed. Using this technique before a test enables the students to refocus and calm allowing them to focus on the task at hand.

4. Apples & Onions (All grades)

Activity outlined in [A Family Guide to Mental Health Week](#) (Activity #4, pg. 16)

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To help students understand that it's okay not to be okay. Teachers can use this as a check-in tool to understand how their students are feeling.

Activity:

Go around the classroom and ask students to share one really good thing about their day (an apple), and one thing that was a little bit harder to deal with (an onion) about their day.

Modifications:

- Have students identify their apples and onions in pairs or small groups first, and then have one person share the apples and onions of the group to the rest of the class.

5. My Gifts - Traits & Talents (Grades 3-7)

Activity adapted from [PositivePsychology.com, My Gifts - Traits and Talents](https://www.positivepsychology.com/my-gifts-traits-and-talents)

Time: 10 minutes, initial box creation will take longer

Purpose: To help students recognize and appreciate their good qualities and talents, and boost their self-esteem.

Activity:

Students can either create a small box using the box stencil provided in this [activity link](#) or draw a picture of a box on a regular sheet of paper. Take a few minutes daily to invite students to write down a word or phrase that represents their positive traits.

- If students build the box, they can write their word on a small slip of paper and put it inside. Each day they can add a new slip of paper with a new trait to their box.
- If students draw a box, they can write their trait directly inside the box.

Each day they can add a new trait inside their original box. As time passes, have students reread the statements that they have collected.

Encourage them to personalize their boxes with pictures that show their talents. It might be useful to provide them with example words to get started, for example: hardworking, patient, positive, helpful, etc. For more examples see the activity link above.

Modifications:

- Have students recommend positive traits and characteristics to their classmates on what they should add in their box, and/or have them write positive traits and talents for each other.
 - Caution: ensure that all students are receiving positive statements from other students.
- At home, have students fill a shoe or gift box with small items that represent their talents and positive traits.
 - I.e., a guitar pick for someone musical, a shoelace for someone good at sports, a small trophy or medal from a competition, or a friendship bracelet representing a good friend.

Invite students to bring these items to school to share with each other. They can either do a gallery walk looking at the items, or use them for show and tell, or break into small groups and discuss why they put each item in the box.

6. Finding Your Balance (K-6)

Activity outlined in [YoungMinds.org, Finding Your Balance Activity](https://www.YoungMinds.org/Finding_Your_Balance_Activity)

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To help students breathe, relax, and focus their thoughts on their bodies while balancing.

Activity: Calmly and slowly guide students through the steps outlined [here](#). The goal of these steps is to encourage students to focus on their breath and their body as they balance either on one foot or both. Students who develop a strong sense of balance will find it beneficial in traditional sports and activities.