NEXT STEPS

Teaching Calming Techniques

Introduce the different calming techniques one by one, doing each together as a class before releasing students to do the technique on their own. Use the following chart to help you plan.

Calming technique focus (belly breathing, stretching, body scan)	How will you teach the technique?
Week 1: _____	
Week 2: _____	
Week 3: _____	

Reflection

Think about students' experiences with the three calming techniques.

- Which technique are students most comfortable using?
- Which seems the most challenging for students?
- What refinements or further teaching might be needed?

"We need quiet time to examine our lives openly and honestly—spending quiet time alone gives your mind an opportunity to renew itself and create order."

Susan L. Taylor, journalist

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interactive Modeling: A Powerful Technique for Teaching Children

Articles available on the *Responsive Classroom* website

Responsive Classroom® QUICK COACHING GUIDE™

Calming Down in Quiet Time



Effective Management

In this Quick Coaching Guide:

- Getting Started
- Taking Stock
- Making Quiet Time a Positive Experience
- Next Steps

GETTING STARTED

What Are Techniques for Calming Down in Quiet Time?

Quiet time provides a bridge back into the classroom after recess and lunch. For 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of the afternoon, students engage in silent independent activities such as reading, writing, drawing, playing a solitary game, completing unfinished classwork, beginning homework, or simply resting.

Once students become accustomed to quiet time, most look forward to this pause in their day. But it can be hard to calm down after morning and midday activities. Belly breathing, stretching, and body scan are techniques that students can use to calm themselves and focus on whatever quiet time activity they choose to do.

Why Are These Calming Techniques Important?

Students often lack experience in working independently and quietly. Without the ability to calm themselves, students might fidget and talk, undermining the benefits of quiet time for themselves and others. Learning how to calm down and focus will benefit students throughout the school day.

TAKING STOCK

Think about your classroom atmosphere during quiet time:

- What are students' attitudes toward quiet time? Do they welcome the break in their day, or are they impatient and restless?

- How do students behave during quiet time? Are they calm? Quiet? Fidgety?

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Making Quiet Time a Positive Experience

To ensure that students get the most benefit from quiet time, it can be helpful to explicitly teach them a repertoire of calming techniques that they can turn to if they're feeling restless or having a hard time quieting their bodies and minds. You could have all students engage in one or more of these techniques at the beginning of quiet time to make the transition from lunch and/or offer them as a choice for individual students.

Three techniques that can be easily incorporated into the 10 to 15 minutes set aside for quiet time are:

- **Belly breathing**
- **Stretching**
- **Body scan**

Teach each of the techniques separately from quiet time, perhaps during Morning Meeting or as a break in the academic day. Interactive Modeling is a great structure to use for teaching them (see Here's an Idea sidebar.)

Belly Breathing

Many of us, children included, breathe shallowly, quickly pulling air into the upper portions of our lungs and quickly exhaling. Students of all ages can benefit from learning how to breathe deeply and slowly.

In shallow breathing, body movement occurs mostly in the upper chest and shoulders—the upper chest might expand, or the shoulders might rise on the breath in and drop on the breath out. And most likely these movements will happen rapidly—a couple of seconds in and a couple of seconds out.

In belly breathing, the movement primarily happens in the lower torso, just above the waistline. To help students make the shift to belly breathing, have them:

1. Put one hand on their waist and breathe in slowly through their nose as they expand their abdomen and push their hand out
2. Hold the breath for a few counts
3. Breathe out through their mouth, feeling the abdomen relax and their hand move in

After students are comfortable with the movements of belly breathing, you can add counting. For example, have them breathe in while counting to four, hold the breath for one or two seconds, breathe out while counting to four, pause, and repeat.

Stretching

Stretching helps ease tense muscles and quiet a restless body. Stretching can be done seated or standing quietly by a chair with minimal disruption to other students. Teach the following stretches, and then release students to use them whenever they need to move and ease tension.

- **Reach for the sky:** Stand or sit forward in a chair with your back straight and your feet shoulder width apart. Raise your arms straight overhead. Then, breathing slowly, alternate arms reaching for the sky. Feel the stretch along the sides of your body. Do this a few times, then lower your arms back to your sides.
- **Shoulder rolls:** Sit with your back straight. Lift your shoulders, and then roll them back. Repeat this four or five times, then reverse direction.
- **Stretch like a cat:** Sit straight. Put your hands on your knees. Keeping your arms straight, hunch your back and drop your chin toward your chest. Then with your hands still on your knees, arch your back into a mini-backbend.
- **Relax and rest:** Sit back in the chair and slowly let your body bend forward until your chest rests on your legs. Let your arms dangle and relax. After a few seconds, slowly sit up.

Body Scan

A body scan can calm students by helping them locate areas of stress and focus on the here and now rather than past or future events.

In a body scan, students mentally survey their bodies, noting the range of sensations. Is there tension? A feeling of relaxation? Warmth? Coolness? Tingling? Pressure?

For younger students, you might start with just one body part, such as the feet.*

1. Have children stand or sit in a chair with their feet on the floor. They can have their shoes on or off.
2. Ask them to breathe normally. They can close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so.
3. Ask them to push their feet softly against the floor for a moment. What do they notice? How does it feel? Soft? Hard? If their shoes are on, can they feel the shoes? Can they feel their socks?
4. Continue to ask questions: How do their heels feel? Their toes? Ask them to wiggle their toes. How does that feel? Are their feet warm? Cold? Do they feel a tingling sensation anywhere?
5. See if they can focus on their feet and nothing else.

For older students, you can have them do a full body scan.

1. The scan can be done with students either sitting or lying down. Ask them to take a couple of deep breaths to help relax. They can close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so.
2. Start at the top of the head and talk them through noticing sensations in their face and head. Do they feel warmth? Cold? Tingling? Tension? Relaxation? Pressure? You could ask them to scrunch their face into a frown, then relax and notice the difference.
3. Proceed to scan down the body with the same kind of attention. Ask them to explore the neck, torso, arms, lower back, legs, ankles, and feet.

Adjust the detail of the scan depending on students' attention spans. Interject reminders to breathe slowly and deeply. Let them know it's OK if their mind wanders, but remind them to bring it gently back to a focus on the body.

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*Adapted from Chris Bergstrom, "Mindful Feet—Body Scan for Children," September 6, 2016, Blissful Kids, blissfulkids.com/mindful-feet-a-body-scan-for-children.

HERE'S AN IDEA

Use Interactive Modeling to teach these techniques.

The following is an example of how to model belly breathing.

1. **Say what you will model and why.**

   "One of the ways we can calm down is by shifting our breathing so we're breathing deeply and slowly. When we breathe deeply, our belly (put a hand in the area of your waist) moves out each time we inhale and then in when we exhale."

2. **Model the behavior.**

   "Watch what I do as I take a few deep belly breaths."

3. **Ask students to share what they noticed.**

   Possible student responses: "Your hand moved out, but it wasn't a big movement." "You were quiet; you didn't make a lot of noise when you breathed." "You opened your mouth to breathe out."

4. **Have all students practice.**

   "Now you can try belly breathing. Put your hands on your waist so you can feel your belly moving. Breathe in slowly; now breathe out."

5. **Provide feedback.**

   "You were quiet. I saw your hands moving out and in. Your breathing slowed down."