

SHAKE IT OFF

To support students in feeling comfortable and relaxed in the classroom, we can help their nervous systems find a state of rest. When there is a lot of dysregulation among students, we can use specific practices to help them relax and regulate. Here we explore some fun ways to bring awareness to our stress to find relaxation. We can also create cognitive flexibility by shifting between chaos and stillness.

Learning Objectives

**Stress reduction, impulse control,
cognitive flexibility, contentment**

Preparation and Considerations

Be particularly conscious with shaking practices that you are setting up a learning environment in which students will not bump into each other or hurt themselves. Find a big enough space for students to stand up and extend their arms in a circle without touching anyone or anything.

A rattle works well to begin and end the shaking time. You can use a shaker, a key chain, or extended sound such as a recorded song to signal when the movement should start and stop.

Lesson

We can begin by having students tighten up their bodies with each inhale and release with a big sigh on the exhale. We can have them tighten their fists, faces, and bodies as they inhale and then, as they breathe out, relax everything so that they are as loose as a noodle. Let them try tightening and relaxing for about 10 breaths. Then ask them to feel 10 breaths without tightening but while staying totally relaxed. Ask them how this felt.

Once they can tighten and relax, we can graduate to shaking. Have students stand up and start to shake their feet. Then have them shake their legs, up through the hips, the belly and chest, the arms, the head and neck, until their whole bodies are shaking. It can be nice to shake a rattle while they are moving.

At various moments we can call “freeze,” or simply ask students to stop moving when the rattle stops. During these moments of pause, we can ask the group to notice what is happening in their bodies. Then we can “shake” or begin rattling, and everybody will shake. Invite students to notice what it feels like inside their bodies when they are shaking, in stillness, in transitioning between states.

If the class is up for it, you can add blithering. This is when we let our tongues wag and make nonsense sounds. We can blither and shake our bodies at the same time. After a few alternating sessions of shaking and being still, ask the students what they noticed.

Dialogue Questions



Inspiring Quote

“The mind should be allowed some relaxation, that it may return to its work all the better for the rest.”

-Seneca

Journaling Prompts



Drawing: Draw one side of the paper in chaos and the other side of the paper calm and relaxed.

Writing: Write about some moments in your life when you regularly feel stressed and some moments in your life when you feel calm.

Mindful Life Practice

Ask students to identify moments in their day when they feel tense or relaxed, chaotic or still. Ask if they can notice these moments when they occur and consciously switch from chaos to calmness. When they find themselves tense, they can mindfully relax; when they notice a lot of chaos; they can take a mindful pause.

Age and Stage

Grades K-5: Younger students generally enjoy these exercises, especially when they are framed as games or when the practices go along with a story. Whenever we invite younger kids to shake their bodies and make silly noises, we need to ensure they don't knock into each other and that the class is regulated enough to come back to stillness after the shaking has begun.

Grades 6-12: Adolescents and young adults need to understand the reason behind the practice. We can explain the neuroscience and health effects of stress and relaxation. Some students may feel too insecure to shake and blither. It's helpful to remind everyone to avoid looking at each other and that no one is required to do the practice.