

Social and Emotional Learning

Lesson Title: Calming Down

Grade Level: Middle School

Project and Purpose

Students practice exercises for calming down and apply them to situations they have experienced.

Essential Question

Why is it important to practice calming down?

Materials

- Open space
- Washcloth, basin, water, and demonstration table/space
- "My Favorite Things" worksheets
- Writing implements (**Note:** it is important to use paper and writing tools, not computer writing programs for this exercise)
- Chairs

Teacher

1. Explain that in this session, students will try several simple practices for calming down, a skill that can come in handy for many different situations. To illustrate this, use the popcorn strategy of going around to each person in the room to have students share examples of times during their day when they need to calm down.
2. Gather the group in open space for the first two exercises.
3. Lead students in the Deep Belly Breathing exercise. Narrate the following steps:
 - Stand straight up with feet shoulder-width apart. Relax your arms and hands and extend them downward. Relax your body. Close your eyes.
 - Focus on your lower abdomen (belly) and imagine a small balloon in that space. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nostrils, imagining the balloon inflating (getting bigger/larger/growing) slowly, hold a few seconds.
 - Slowly exhale through your mouth, imagining the balloon gently deflating and getting smaller and shrinking; blow out of your mouth as if you are blowing out a candle.
4. Repeat the process several times, then ask students how this exercise helps to calm them down. Ask students when they might use this strategy for calming down.
5. Have students bring a chair to the space, leaving room between the chairs, and sit where they can see your demonstration area. Show students the dry washcloth and the basin of water. Dunk the washcloth in the water, being sure to fully soak the cloth. Explain how this is a metaphor for tension or stress in our bodies, and it is a sign that we need to calm down.

6. Ask students how to get rid of the “tension” in the washcloth, and demonstrate that the best way is to wring it out by twisting and squeezing the washcloth—adding more tension and stress—until most of the water is out. It will still need time to fully dry, but most of the water or “tension” is gone. Sometimes to calm your body, you need to add tension or stress in a different way. Put the demonstration materials aside and sit in your own chair.
7. Demonstrate and have students join you in a Muscle Calmer exercise. Narrate using the following script: (**Note:** In the narrative, ellipsis, or the three dots, denote moments of silence, giving time to implement the narration.)
 - Notice your body in your chair, uncross your legs. You can close your eyes or keep them open. First, scrunch your toes – tight...tighter...tighter...relax. Bend your toes up toward your face – tight...tighter...tighter....relax.
 - Now, your calves, hold your lower legs up under your chair, now let them down. Tighten your thighs and your bottom and feel yourself rise up in your chair. Now, relax.
 - Tighten your abdominal muscles. Good job, now, relax them.
 - Pull your shoulders in toward each other...relax.
 - Scrunch your hands into a fist – tight...tighter...tighter...relax. Now pull your hands in and cross them while scrunching your shoulders up toward your ears. Good job, now, relax.
 - Tighten your jaw. Relax. Scrunch up your face really tight...tight...tighter...tighter...relax.
 - Now go back through your whole body and let go of any tension you might still feel in each place as you move through it. Notice the difference in places that are still tight and do your best to relax it.
8. Ask students how this exercise helps and when they might use this strategy for calming down. Discuss how the washcloth image connects to this exercise, especially now that they have experienced it.
9. Have students bring their chairs back to their desks and distribute the “My Favorite Things” worksheet and a pencil or pen.
10. Explain that sometimes writing lists helps our brains get organized and it calms things down. When we concentrate on positive things, it also calms us down.
11. Encourage them to complete any or all three of the “Favorite Things” boxes. Have them think of a title for the fourth box and complete that list.
12. When they are finished, ask students how this exercise helps and when they might use this strategy for calming down.

Conclusion

Ask students which of the three exercises appeals to them most and explain their answers. Then ask: Why is it important to practice calming down?

Notes

My Favorite Things

My Favorite People

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

My Favorite Places

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

My Favorite Foods

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

My Favorite _____

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