Supporting Behavior and Learning

Individual Body Breaks

Occupational Therapy
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

Table of Contents

This resource was designed to assist learning resource teachers, classroom teachers and educational assistants recognize the need for, plan, implement and monitor an individualized body break for a student. When implementing a body break, choose two or three activities. Start with heavy work and include vestibular and proprioceptive work. End the body break with a more organizing activity (such as weighted blanket, thera-putty, fine motor in rice, etc.). Always note the students' arousal level both before and after the body break.

The Occupational Therapists at the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division would like to thank Kara Libke, Occupational Therapy student from the University of Alberta in 2009, for all of her work in getting this document from idea to reality.

Thank you also to the Grade 2 students at St. Volodymyr School for allowing us to take pictures during their body break.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact one the division Occupational Therapists:

BEFORE the Body Break….

Before considering an individual body break the school team needs to consider initial universal level strategies to assist students with self- regulation.

The progression below is a good guideline to consider when problem solving a student's needs.

1. **Classroom Strategies that need to be considered first:**

    - Involves teaching and discussion of arousal zones or levels
    - Develop a class or school wide self-regulation meter so that consistent language can be used and taught. *This concept must be supported throughout a student's day.*
    - Provide whole classroom body breaks involving movement and heavy work (pushing, pulling, moving against gravity – See Top 25 Classroom Body Breaks in Appendix) or calming routines. *This should be done a minimum of 4 times per day.*
    - Provide teaching and support for classroom *techniques* that individual students can do as needed. (stand to work, push-pulls, desk and chair push-ups, deep breathing, pressure dots, pretzel position)
    - Provide classroom *tools* to support self-regulation (sit fits, noise reducing headphones, hand fidget tools, thera-putty, gum, thera-band on desk legs, lap pads)
    - Classroom corner for individuals to access quick movement breaks independently (yoga mat in a designated spot, focus moves poster, chin up bar, thera-band stretches, wall pushups, trampoline)
    - Classroom quiet / cave/space (small tent with beanbag chair, study carol to decrease visual and auditory distractions / possible with hand fidgets and noise reducing headphones available, may have a ball chair as well or sit fit/ movement chair/stool to provide movement input)

2. **Hallway micro-breaks, supervised as necessary (may involve many of above techniques)**

3. **Individual take out body breaks with supervision, goal planning and monitoring.** ***If you reach this point the rest of this booklet will support your understanding of and planning for Individual Body Breaks. As a school team, you need to identify your goals and plans. This needs to be identified within the child's Personal Program Plan.***

WHAT is an individual body break?

A common misconception is that body breaks can come in many forms:

- Transition from one activity to another
- Going to the bathroom
- Going for a walk (downtime)
- Going to get a drink

HOWEVER: Occupational Therapists define body breaks as incorporating the vestibular and proprioceptive senses into heavy work activities to increase/decrease levels of alertness. This provides organization to the body to achieve a just right level so the student is available for learning and able to regulate behavior.

A good body break should include:

- Huffing and puffing
- Increased heart rate
- Heavy work
- Model and demonstration
- Multi-sensory activities
- Routine and change/progress
- Challenge
- Choice

HOW do you use this resource and develop a body break?

- After you have determined the need for an individual pull-out body break you develop a goal as a school team and document on the one page PPP format. (Examples of goals: increase attention from 2 minutes to 10 minutes; decrease sensory overload incidents (fright, flight, fight – be specific) from 3 to 1 per day; decrease self abuse incidents (pinching, hair pulling, head banging) from 3 to 0 per week.
- Meet as a school team involving the classroom teacher, EA, LAT and others as appropriate. (See appendix for sample of one page Goal Sheet, Body Break – Student Planning Record

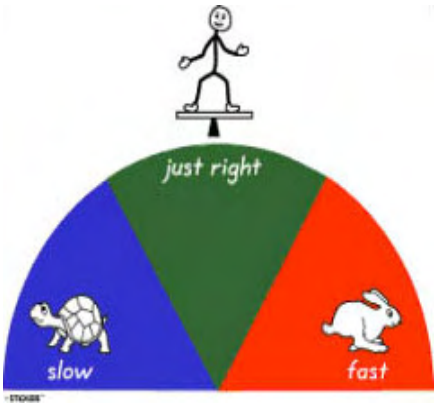
form). Complete and determine student needs, goals, plan and follow up reflection of body break success.

- Determine a specific plan (i.e. frequency, duration time of day, who to supervise, where body break will occur)
- Discuss when the Evaluation will occur (when will the goals be reviewed)
- Another form may be used by the EA to track the individual body break activities, arousal levels and overall progress on goals (see appendix for Body Break Daily Record Sheet).
- Start by choosing two or three main activities. The body break itself should begin with heavy work and include vestibular and proprioceptive work. The body break will end with a more organizing activity (such as weighted blanket, thera-putty, fine motor in rice, etc.). Always note the students' arousal level both before and after the body break.

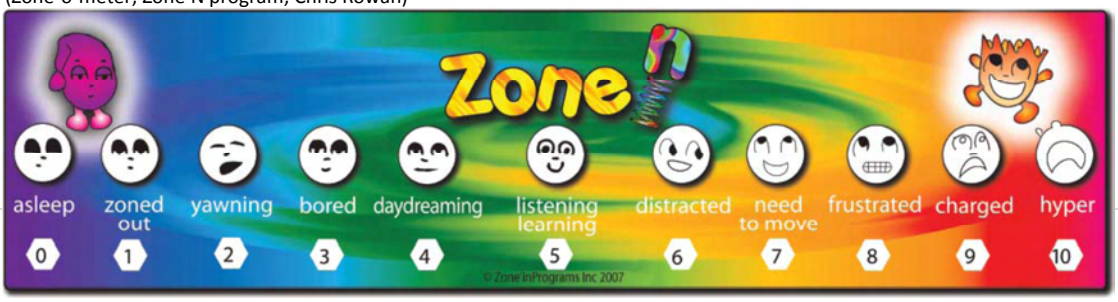
WHY do we need body breaks?

- The nervous system impacts students' ability to focus and learn.
- Different situations require different levels of alertness and if alertness is too high or too low a student cannot learn.
- A "just right" level of alertness is required for learning.
- There are various resources and tools to assist students in learning about their "just right" or "zone" of alertness. For example:

(Levels of alertness from " Stickids")



(Zone-o-meter; Zone'N program, Chris Rowan)



- "Self-regulation" is the ability to attain, maintain, and change arousal appropriately for a task or situation" (How Does Your Engine Run, 1996)
- Students may have trouble changing their degree of alertness and therefore have trouble functioning optimally. (For example, unable to sit at their desk or on the floor, wandering around the classroom, excessive movement, unable to initiate tasks, maintain attention on tasks or complete a task.)
- At any age, the nervous system may need sensory input in order to maintain attention.
- Some common strategies that an adult might use include fidgeting with jewelry, shifting in the chair, bouncing one leg, or chewing gum.
- Self regulation should be incorporated into the classroom in a universal way however a child may need greater input to sustain attention, which is why an **individual body break** may be needed.

- Body breaks incorporate our senses to help organize the nervous system.
- Five of our senses are obvious: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste.
- We also have two *hidden* senses: vestibular system and proprioception.

Vestibular System

- The vestibular system is located in the inner ear
- This system constantly communicates with the brain to tell us where our body is in space.
- Among other things, it helps to keep the level of arousal of the nervous system balanced.

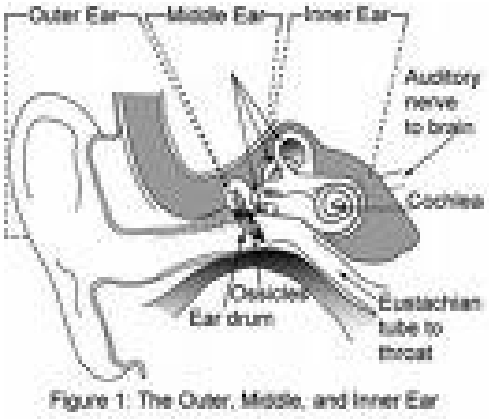
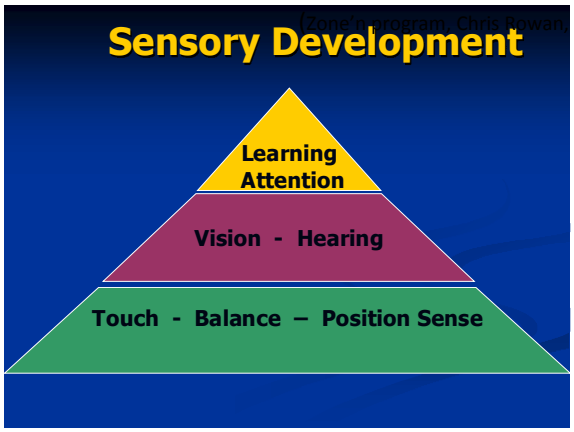


Figure 1: The Outer, Middle, and Inner Ear

Proprioception

- The brain is stimulated through proprioceptive input.
- There are many ways for the brain to receive this input including pushing and pulling games, lifting or carrying heavy objects, tug of war, pushing hands together, standing and pushing against a desk, manipulating stiff putty, and laying under heavy blankets.
- All these "heavy-work" activities are very useful in helping the *nervous system* to regulate arousal states.

How it is all related to learning....



(Zone'in program, Chris Bowan, www.zonein.ca)

ONLY when our touch, balance and position sense channels are working well together can we integrate and process vision and hearing.

ONLY when we can integrate and process vision and hearing, are we able to learn!!

WHO needs an individual body break?

While everyone can benefit from a body break, some students may struggle to get their level of alertness "just right" and may need input of greater intensity, longer duration and more frequently. Examples of such students include:

The ""Tiggers"

- Students whose engines are constantly running on high.
- Their behaviors often get them into trouble in class.
- Often end up in people's space, breaking things, and are not focused on learning.
- It is important that if our engines are high like tiggers, we need to slow it down.

The "Eeyores"

- Students whose engines are often running on low.
- They often appear sluggish and have trouble getting started and completing tasks.
- These students too are not at the optimal state for learning, and their engines need to be sped up.

Remember!!! Before initiation of individual pull-out body breaks outside of the classroom, the use of classroom based movement breaks and self regulation techniques and tools (e.g. alternative seating, gum, headphones, study carols, etc.) to help support learning **must** be implemented.

If the student does require more intense input and individual pull-out breaks are deemed necessary, then the school team should meet to determine the individual student's needs based on their personal program plans(i.e. one page goal statements for all students not just intensive needs students. See Appendix for sample of one page goal and Body Break Student Planning Record.) A consultation with an Occupational Therapist can be requested if needed; however, the decision to initiate a pull-out body break does not necessitate a referral.

WHEN do we need individual body breaks?

After the school team (including Teacher, LAT, EA, and administration if necessary) has meet to develop goals (i.e. related to the PPP) around the need for body breaks for a specific student then specifics such as time of day, frequency and duration will need to be discussed. These aspects vary depending on the student's needs. (See Appendix A for a one page goal sample.)

Always discuss/teach the purpose of body breaks with the student -- it is not just "play time".

The most important consideration for scheduling:

**** Prevent****

Be proactive, schedule regular body breaks before known difficult times – don't wait for behavioral responses to occur first.

****Don't React – Prevent****

WHEN student is too low:

Use activities that increase arousal levels using sensory tools that are attention getting for the nervous system.

- Body (move- vestibular)
- See (bright lighting)
- Hear (upbeat music, irregular beats)
- Mouth (spicy, resistive chewing)
- Touch (gooey, resistive)

WHEN student can't sit still:

- Need to move
- Provide body break while seated or allow them to get up and move around
- Provide movement while seated (air cushion, chair ball, other seating alternatives)
- Use other sensory tools to extend focus

WHEN in doubt, do heavy work for both low and high arousal states.

WHERE do we do body breaks?

While a separate room set up with equipment is ideal for body breaks, there are many creative ways to use even the smallest space to provide students with these needed breaks. Make use of separate rooms, hallways, classrooms, gymnasiums and playgrounds.

HOW do we do body breaks?

A goal within body breaks is to teach a student to self-regulate and understand their own body. A body break can be started by using various materials such as; speedometers, zone-n-meter and other visual charts in which students can indicate their level of arousal. This is recommended at the beginning and end of breaks. A goal is for students to end up with a "tool box" of their own ideas and strategies to self-regulate and to initiate this on their own. We want to remove the outside reminders and structure (visual tools, teachers, etc.) as being their "external brain" and ultimately have the student rely on their own body cues and respond appropriately to self-regulate.

Keep in mind the ultimate goal would be for the child to self-regulate within the classroom environment by recognizing the need for intervention early and applying self-regulation techniques and tools as needed. This will be possible for most children over time.

The following are activities and materials that are suggested as a start up kit for schools to have available for individual body breaks:

Elementary School

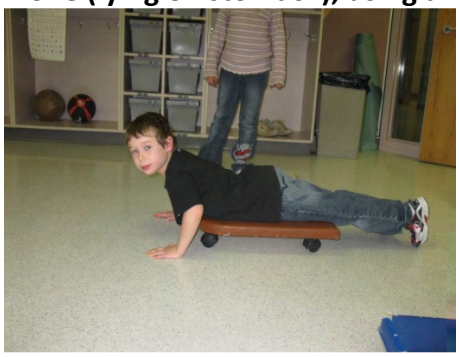
Visual Tools (speedometers, etc.)
Scooter boards
Rep bands
Therapy ball
Wall/Doorway activities
Weighted ball
Zoom ball
Ribbed tunnel
Water worm
Co-operband
Wrist/ankle weights
Focus moves
Body moves (animal walks)
Balance board
Breathing

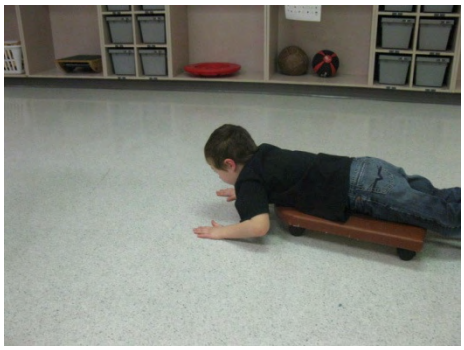
High School

Visual Tools (speedometers, etc.)
Rep bands
Therapy ball
Wall/doorway activities
Weighted ball
Zoom ball
Stairs/Shooting baskets
Steam roller
Water worm
Wrist/ankle weights
Focus moves (Level 2 & 3)
Balance board
Bike riding
Weight room
Breathing

Scooter Board

Prone (lying on stomach), using arms to walk



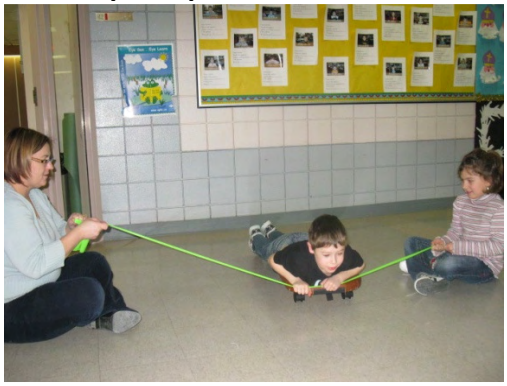


- ensure pelvis is on center of board and that feet are not dragging on the ground
- stretch out arms and pull body and scooter forward

Prone – push off wall like superman

- bend knees and put feet on wall
- push off wall and place arms like “superman”
- could have student throw bean bags at a target, or play another activity

Prone – push/pull with theraband



- have two people hold the ends of a band tight
- student on the scooter then pulls their body towards the band, and pushes away (using only their arms, no feet)

Puzzle or other activity while prone

- Students can work on school work, puzzles, or other activities
- Try to be forward enough on the scooter so feet do not touch the ground – allow rest periods as per child's lead

Rep Bands

Arm stretches

Side to side

diagonal

Behind back

Pirate Walk

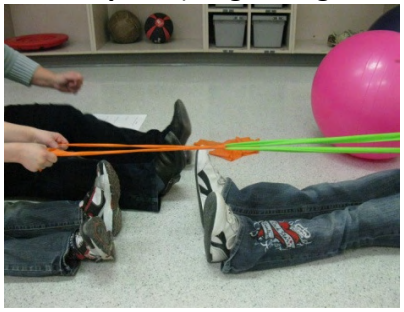
- wrap band under one foot
- walk while wrapped foot remains straight, like a “peg leg”
- switch legs halfway through activity

Pull ups

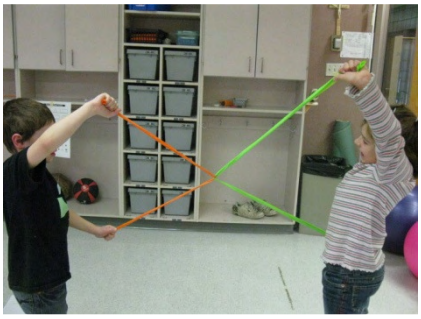
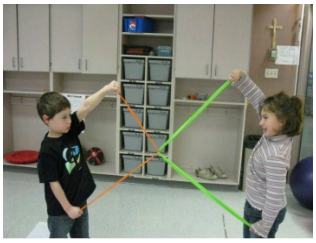


- stand with both feet on band
- pull up with both arms (elbows out to side)
- keep shoulders down

Partner pulls (long sitting row, standing make X, right arm pushes down/up)



- loop two bands through each other and hold onto ends
- start in long sitting position (legs straight out in front)
- One student pulls band towards them and leans back
- The other student gets pulled forward and stretches (hands to toes)
- take turns, so it becomes a “rowing” motion

- loop bands through each other and hold onto ends
- have students open arms up/down so they make an X
- Then switch so other hand is on top

Therapy Ball

Prone (stomach on ball)




- Stomach on ball
- use arms to walk body out
- keep back straight
- then walk arms back in
- be creative: have students touch targets, throw something at a target etc.
- This is an intense vestibular position that helps to organize the nervous system and works postural control

Sitting bounces moving in circle both directions


-make small bouncing movements up/down
- bounce in a circular direction until a complete circle is made
- switch directions
- This rhythmical bouncing can be very calming

Sitting, cross crawls

- Start with both feet planted flat on the floor
- bring one knee up and touch with opposite elbow
- go back to staring position
- switch sides and repeat pattern

Rainbow painting, holding ball with 2 hands standing

- while standing, hold ball with both hands
- move the ball in an "arc" pattern, like you are painting a rainbow
- be creative, students can paint letters or shapes etc.

Play Game/Activity

- This position provides intense vestibular input that can help to calm and organize the nervous system
- have students work on school activities, play a game etc.

Wall/doorway activities

Wall push-ups



- have students do push-ups against the wall
- Tape feet and hand pictures on floor and wall to encourage proper positioning
- They could count, read a poster, or do a S'cool moves poster to ensure they slow down the pace of their push-ups

Wall rolls (standing, keeping contact with wall)


- start in a standing position
- bend down into a squat position
- Then stretch back into standing position
- keep contact with the wall the entire time, so you are "rolling" up/down

Chair push-ups

- These are resistance exercises that can easily be done in the classroom
- push arms down to lift body off the seat
- try to keep feet off the floor so your arms are doing all the work
- Student could hold position for a few seconds (their age)
- Or could bounce up/down in a “popcorn” motion

Push with each arm stretched out on door frame

- This is a great quick resistance exercise
- tell the student the walls are collapsing and they need to “push” them back up

Weighted Ball

****use caution when choosing the weight of the ball – especially for overhead activities. Start with an unweighted ball for overhead exercises below****

Transition to/from body break (carry ball)

- have student carry a weighted ball (medicine ball) to and from their body break

Catch with partner

- Gently toss ball back/fourth
- ensure feet are flat and stable on floor
- have students count out loud how many they have done/are left etc.

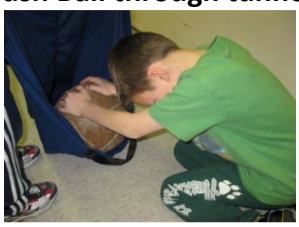
Pass (over, under, rotating to side)

- do not throw ball, you are passing the ball into the hands of your partner
- With stretched arms, pass ball overhead

- pass ball through legs
- try not to let the ball touch the ground

- pass ball by rotating upper body
- try to keep feet stationary
- ensure students make eye contact when passing ball; may say a simple sentence to maintain a conversation or simple story.

Push Ball through tunnel



-therapy balls may be used for this activity to provide more resistance.
-push through a coiled tunnel or a ribbed tunnel

Zoom Ball

Arms side to side

- This is a great bilateral activity that helps communication between the two hemispheres of the brain
-it is ideal for visual tracking and convergence and divergence training
- This is a good activity to learn rote concepts such as spelling words and math concepts
- encourage students to keep their arms up and away from their body
- encourage them to keep their body stable (core stability) and to only use their arms
- try zoom ball with arms up/down (like an alligator mouth) for a change

Use varied surfaces such as sitting on ball, balance board, trampoline, kneeling



Ribbed Tunnel

Crawl through (forwards/backwards)


- be creative, tell students to “slither” like a snake, or count how long it takes them to make it through
- This is a tunnel made of stretchy material

Push weighted ball through


- This adds a lot of resistance, it is very heavy work
- Students could even push two exercise balls through for more of a challenge
- hold onto the end tunnel for the student

Can have it on/over beanbag/foam mountain to vary resistance

- It is an extra challenge to climb over obstacles while in the tunnel
- Or try making it part of an obstacle course

Water Worm

Side to Side

Step Overs

Circles

- Water worm is filled with water (add food coloring for a fun visual)

These exercises are good for bilateral integration

- creating a rhythm can be very calming/ organizing
- It is also heavy work (weight)
- Step over the water worm (similar to a skipping rope)
- ensure to use both legs

Weighted wrist & ankle weights

-Wear ½-1 pound wrist and/or ankle weights while walking to body break

-May put on at body break and wear during activity

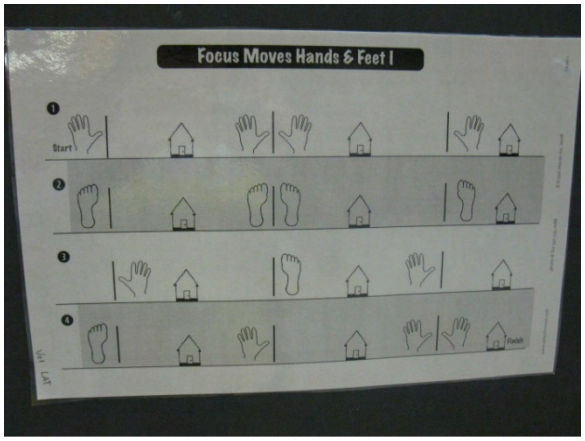
-Gives body a different type of feedback to muscles and joints and increases resistance slightly (heavy work)

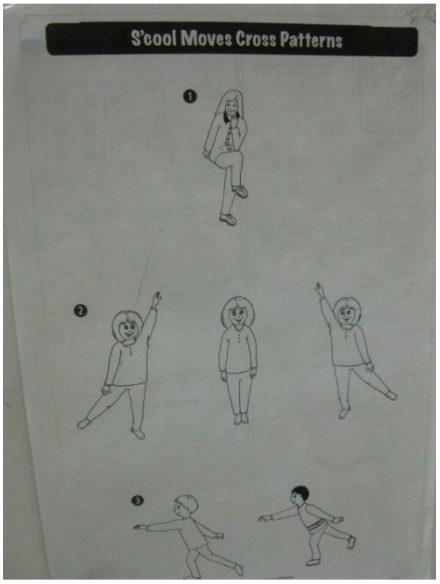
Focus Moves

-Levels 1 and 2

-Purpose to enhance focus, attention directionality, eye movements, use of both sides of the body in coordinated manner, rhythm and timing (motor planning).

- These skills all required for learning.





-Teach 1 poster at a time
- Add in new ones as children master
- Once mastered can alternate posters and/or move to the next level
- Encourage good rhythm and timing during tasks (not stopping and starting, hesitating)
- May do them following heavy work tasks before going back to class or as a quick hallway break before or after challenging subjects or times of day when a movement break is needed.
- See “resources” on page. For details on S’cool moves program.

Body Moves

Commando Crawl

- Student crawls/slithers on ground using Arms to help

Crab Walk

- use hands/feet to crawl backwards and forwards

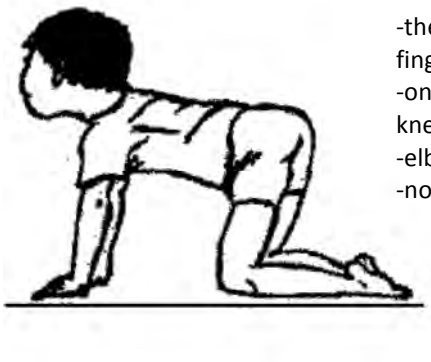
Cross Crawls

- bring knee up and touch it with opposite elbow
- switch sides and repeat pattern
- try to keep a straight back

Fragile Egg

-cross arms on chest
- bend knees in towards chest
- tuck neck towards chest
- hold positions for a few seconds (5-30) or rocking

Rocking Puppy



-the rocking puppy is important for all muscles including the head, neck shoulders, hand, fingers and hips. It can help "quiet" your body because it is rhythmical.
-on hands and knees; ensure arms and hands are under the students shoulders and knees are under hips with toes flat against the floor.
-elbows are slightly bend; do not let the arms "lock"
-now rock slowly, forward and backwards

Yoga positions

- Experiment with various yoga positions
- encourage slow breathing
- hold positions (5-30 seconds)

Superman position

- Arms straight out in front like "superman"
- lift arms, legs, and head at same time
- Hold 5-30 seconds
- ensure that legs remain straight

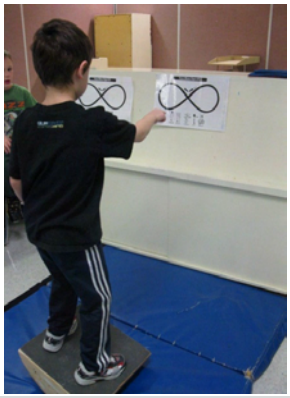
Recess (Heavy Work)

- encourage students to climb, swing, etc. at recess
-Recess is very important – even to the point of considering it a subject! Teach it! Give children ideas of how to move and what to do!
-recess should never be taken away as a consequence of poor behavior.

Balance Board

Maintaining stationary balance

- ensure mats are around for safety
- provide support as needed



Doing activities

- have students do an activity while on balance board
- Such as catch, zoomball, focus moves poster, throwing beanbag to target,
- Or concepts being learned in class (number/letter identification)
- For additional challenge, students may wear weights while on board

Trampoline

Jumping

With Claps

Marching

Bounce with Weighted Ball

- increases alertness levels
- can be used as part of an obstacle course

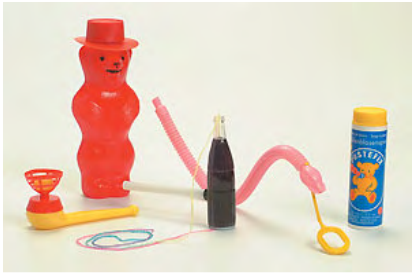
Breathing

- Long, deep breathing is difficult for kids to learn, they tend to use shallow breaths with their shoulders elevating. We want their stomach to move out – indicating diaphragmatic (belly) breathing.
- try having them place a hand on their stomach so they can "feel" it moving in/out
-Rhythm Breathing: counting in to 3, hold for 3, breath out for 3 as slow as you can
-Square Breathing: have child "draw" a square in the air while they are breathing (may also trace a square on paper). Slowly draw while you breathe in on the one side, then out across the top, then in down the side then out across the bottom, etc.

Use of feathers

- have students hold small feathers in their hand
- encourage them to blow lightly, but to not let the feather fall out of their hand
- This encourages students to control their breathing
- They can gradually build up their control by Blowing the feather more or less.

Oral Motor Tools



- straws, cotton balls, blowing bubbles, blow toys and whistles all help children learn how to control deep breathing and visual skills such as convergence, divergence and visual fixations.

Resources

The following programs and resources may be of interest to you, as you implement body breaks into your school.

- S'cool Moves for Learning: Enhance Learning Through Self Regulation Activities, Debra Em Wilson, Margot C. Heiniger-White

- Tool Chest, Diana Henry

- "How Does Your Engine Run?": A Leader's Guide to The Alert Program for Self-Regulation, Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger

- Zone In, Cris Rowan

- Response to Intervention (strategies for the classroom)

- The Sensory Connection Self-Regulation Workbook: Learning to Use Sensory Activities to Manage Stress, Anxiety and Emotional Crisis ,Karen Moore

- Behavior Solutions for the Inclusive Classroom, Beth Aune, Beth Burt and Peter Gennaro

Appendix