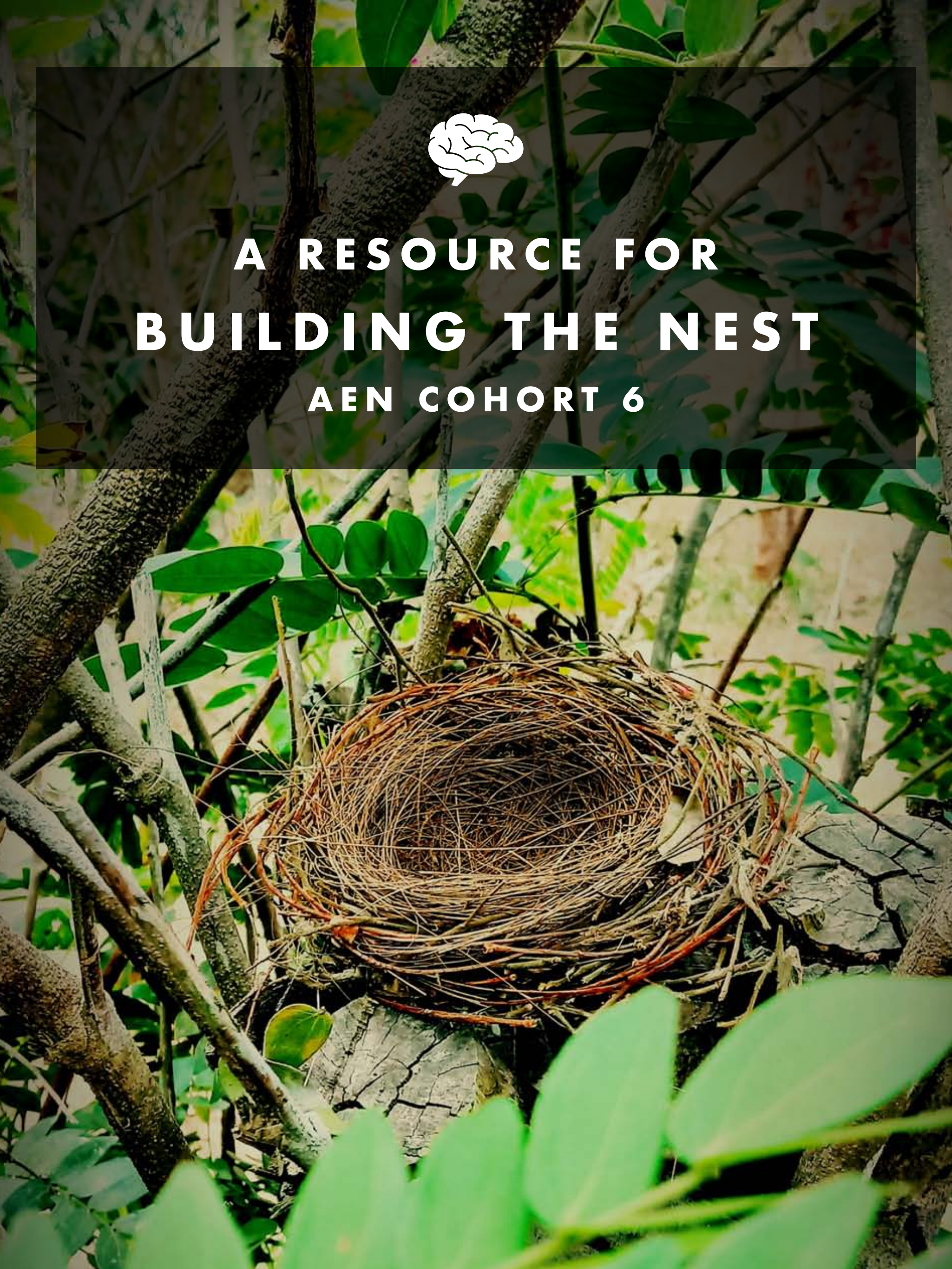




**A RESOURCE FOR
BUILDING THE NEST
AEN COHORT 6**





BUILDING THE NEST

What is this?

The following resource is a compilation of strategies, lessons, and ideas created by graduate students in Butler University's Applied Educational Neuroscience Certification, cohort 6.

These brilliant contributions were the product of a multi-week online discussion of the following prompt:

Develop a 10 minute morning or afternoon brain-aligned gathering/meeting to create the "nest." Consider creating or using a pre-existing Focused Attention Practice, video clip, thought-provoking questions, and/or anything that feels relevant to your role and responsibilities. This could be designed for staff, students, clients, family members, etc.

What do we mean by the nest?

The *nest* is key concept from Dr. Desautels' Discipline Ladder, published in her book *Connections Over Compliance*. The following excerpt describes the *nest* in relation to education:

Set the Temperature and Build the Nest - When a bird constructs a nest, it builds a structure or place for laying eggs and sheltering its young. When we prepare a nest for our students, we are planning, constructing and cultivating an environment that meets the bio-social and emotional needs of our students! Nests are created by many materials that hold it together for strength and endurance.

Note that *nests* can be found anywhere - at home, in the workplace, community, church, etc. All humans have brains and nervous systems so the idea of creating a safe and connected nest for all to flourish is applicable every where you find a human.

How can you use this resource?

Each page in the following resource is a submission from a cohort 6 graduate student. These are meant to be launching points meaning you can implement these ideas as is or make adjustments based on your context and needs. Each idea is accompanied by the original creator and contextual information such as the intended audience and setting. Strategies are organized by audience (e.g., children and teens, adults) but keep in mind that you can put your own spin on it and make it work for you. Hyperlinks included in the following pages will take you to additional resources and materials.

Enjoy! - Cohort 6, Dr. Lori Desautels, and Courtney Boyle M.S.

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BUILDING THE NEST



FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

(Clients, patients, your own
children, etc.)

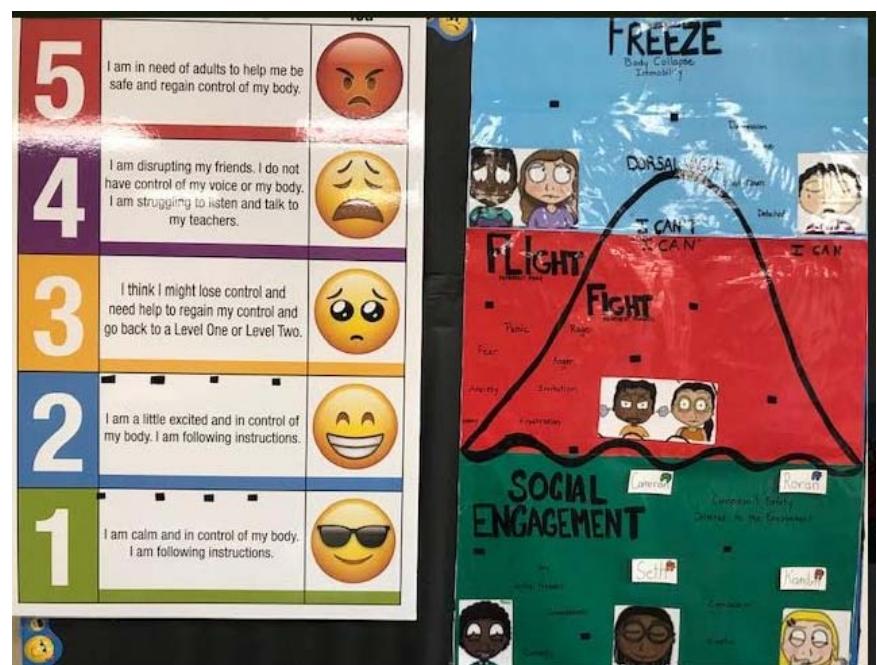
MINDFUL MOMENT MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS

by Judy Gill

I have already started creating my nest in our classroom and sharing it with our school. I do this by way of morning announcements which include a brief 2-3 minute mini lesson on a topic relevant to our nervous system. Myself as well as other staff members participate in the sharing of mindful moment morning announcements. I usually write the scripts to be read over the intercom and send out the videos or any other relevant information to our staff. (See MM Announcement below for an example of the morning script.)

Our Resiliency Team uses the "[First Three Weeks in a Brain Aligned Classroom](#)" by Dr. Lori as our scope and sequence for rolling it out. We have actually taken it and stretched it out for 15 weeks, so we can fit it into our morning routines. We unfortunately, don't have closed circuit television capabilities in our schools but going forward for next year I plan to create google slides for all the staff with short video clips embedded and staff can project them on their smart boards. Our morning procedure also includes a focused attention practice that the whole school does together.

Once the mindful moment announcements are finished, I continue on with my students in our classroom and we have a morning check in time. Students and staff gather at the front of the room and check in by either using the PVT chart or the five point scale. Because I'm a self contained SEL classroom it is corporation policy that we use "The Incredible 5 Point Scale" to help manage our discipline. It is part of our school approved classroom management plan. But, I have actually taken the Polyvagal Theory Chart and placed it next to the 5 Point Scale and given students the option. This allows me to talk about the two charts and point out how they work together or how they might not fit the students needs at that time.



For example, I had a student check in using the five point scale and he placed himself at Level 1 on the five point scale (Calm body, happy and ready to learn). I asked him if he felt the PVT chart was a better description since he was full of energy and becoming a little agitated but would quickly calm back down. He was literally spinning on the floor in front of me. He agreed he was a little excited, but he was excited because he wanted to learn and others were distracting him. So he placed his card on the blended state area of the chart. That gave us an opportunity to talk about how most of us live in this blended state and it's ok, because you can still learn in this blended state it's just a little bit harder. We ended up creating a movement area for him. One of

the 5 Point Scales shortcomings is that it is too concrete for some students, however it is certainly helpful for my students with ASD, who don't always recognize their changing brain states or sensations.

After our morning check in, we gather at the calendar center. This is where I start to see some of my students begin to get antsy because they are on the floor and expected to stay in their space on their dot. So we always start with a quick brain interval to help them refocus and we talk about active listening. We also have a calming area with weighted blankets and other calming fidgets as well as rules for how to use it. We have another check in time right after lunch/recess. The students always look forward to this time.... because they are coming off of a break. I never thought about doing a check out at the end of the day, until it was mentioned at our last session. I look forward to implementing this in my classroom. I was actually thinking about talking to administration and seeing if we could make it a PM mindful moment announcement time like we do in the morning. Stay tuned... I'll let you know what's decided. By the way, thank you for this discussion post. I've been wanting to share how I am intentionally creating "nesting moments" in my classroom but there never seems to be enough time. This was the perfect opportunity.

Mindful Moment Morning Announcement- Thursday January 27th

"Good Morning Little Tigers! This is Mrs. Gill on this Thankful Thursday and this 27th Day of January. "

"I have some helpers with me today from Ms. Tepovich's 2nd grade class: They are:" (Students say their names)

"Everyone please stand, attention- we are still and quiet, salute- right hand over your heart" First say the pledge and then the character pledge.

"Thank you, you may return to class. "

Mindful Moment information combined with Core Practice:

"For our time together today, I want you to watch this short video clip about our brains, see if you can make the same model of your brains as you see in this video. Teachers please play video now: " <https://youtu.be/lRmnVmELMn8> (hand brain model for kids)

"Alright little tigers, I hope you enjoyed that video, let's say we pretend that we are flipping our lid and practice some mindful breathing to go along with this. Place your hand model out in front of you and when you flip your lid just like she did in the video you are going to inhale then as you exhale you are going to close your lid. We are going to do this three times...ready flip your lid inhale 1 2 3 4 now exhale and close 4 3 2 1. Flip and inhale 1 2 3 4 and close exhale 4 3 2 1. One last time...flip inhale 1 2 3 4 and close exhale 4 3 2 1."

"Great job little tigers and great hand models of our brains. Speaking of our brains can your PFC access your hippocampus to help you remember what our brain word of the week is? "

Word of the Week:

"If you guessed primitive you are correct! Now here's some fun facts about the word primitive. Did you know that it comes from a Latin word that means "first or earliest of its kind." This goes right along with what we have been learning about our brains, because the primitive area of our brains is the first area to develop. People have been using this word for about 1500 years. "

Birthdays:

"Time for our birthday celebrations. We get to celebrate Jocie Knust in Mrs. Holzmeyers class and Kyli Marvel in Mrs. Culbertsons class."

Bingo Number:

"Alright little tigers, this is the time of our last BINGO number call. After I call this number we will be done with our bingo challenges. Please be sure to listen carefully.....Drumroll please..... the number is O 72, O 72 "

"This is Mrs. Gill saying- I am thankful for all of you on this Thursday and thankful for your amazing brains! "

RESTORATIVE CIRCLE

by Devan Dewees

With our goal being to build community in our classrooms and incorporate restorative practices, we attempt to start each morning in a circle within the class. The circle includes the students, classroom teacher, assistants, and myself and/or another therapist in the program. We utilize a talking piece and pull our chairs to the front of the classroom and sit in a physical circle (although it took some time to build our tolerance to this!) The outline of the circle is below:

1. Engine checks-- We utilize the ALERT program which was introduced to us by our OT. We ask students to take a moment to check in with themselves and use the visuals below for clues from their body. Then they are asked if their body feels fast, slow, just right, or not ready.
2. Strategy practice. Based on what the students' body is telling them, they are encouraged to pick a strategy to practice during the next 1-2

Body Sensation Word Wall					
Fast		Just Right		Slow	
Shaky	Clenched	Still	Open	Unsteady	Curled up
Flushed	Sweaty palms	Comfortable	Steady	Empty	Numb
Racing heart	Fidgety	Steady heart	Still	Slow heart	Queasy
Tight Jaw	Loud/fast voice	Jaw set	Steady Voice	Body aches	Quiet/slow voice
Feeling hot	Fast voice	Comfortable	Smooth voice	Cold	Slow voice
Jumpy	Tight muscles	Quiet	Tall	Slumped	Curled up
Foot-tapping	Fast breathing	Relaxed	Steady breathing	Heavy	Lump in throat
Tense		Soft	In control	Slouched	Tired
Out of control					

minutes. Adults are modeling verbally and physically during this time as well (“My engine is feeling slow so I’m going to stand up and do some squats or I’m feeling fast so I’m going to do rainbow stretches and take deep breaths”). An interactive strategy room is presented, and if students wish they may spin the wheel to select an additional strategy to engage in (visual screenshots below)

3. Circle then continues with a 'question of the day' which comes from a package of restorative circle prompts that I bought from TPT :) Each group of questions focuses on one main theme (identifying feelings, expressing and regulating feelings, responsibilities, my own actions, choices and consequences, conflict resolution, apologies and forgiveness, perspective taking and empathy)-- Something I am now realizing is that I should make a group of brain related questions to add to the group!

4. Lastly, the circle finishes with reviewing

Body Sensation Word Wall					
Fast		Just Right		Slow	
Shaky	Clenched	Still	Open	Unsteady	Curled up
Flushed	Sweaty palms	Comfortable	Steady	Empty	Numb
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Out of control					

This is an interactive spinner from wordwall.net



This is a google slide so each of the pictures is interactive and links to a strategy to practice



classroom expectations and members have an opportunity to share anything else that they may wish to share with the classroom community.

JINXY & LUCKY

by Sarah Guest

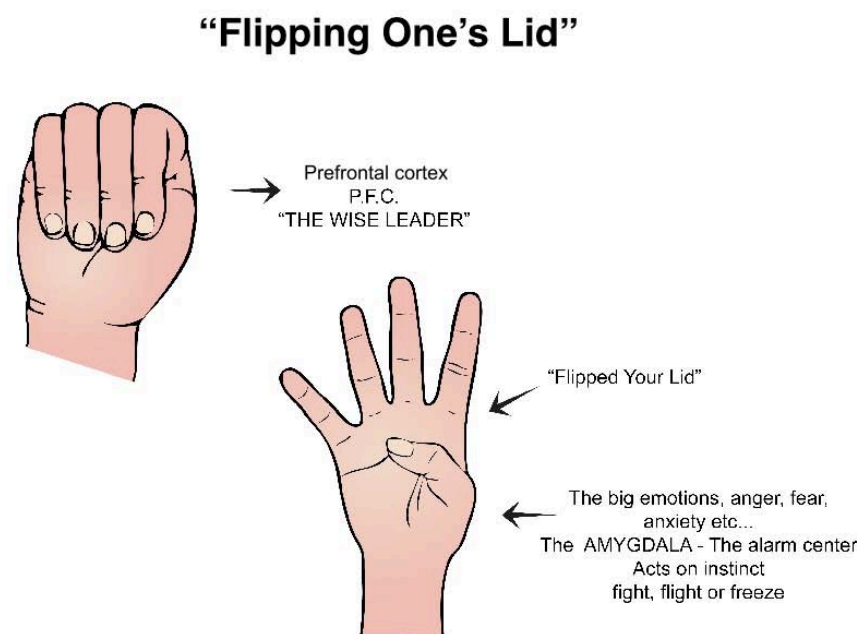
[Jinxy and Lucky: A Story of 2 Nervous Systems](#)

In less than four minutes, this delightful little story about two mismatched characters beautifully demonstrates many big concepts of AEN for students such as:

- Triune brain
- Brain and body states
 - Cortex: thinking, curiosity and problem-solving
 - Midbrain: emotional/fight or flight
 - Brainstem: sensations/shutdown
- Neuroception: how our nervous system works to keep us safe from perceived threat based on past experience,
- Sharing our calm to co-regulate another, how co-regulation helps us move into the cortex to self-regulate



I have used this animation with a grade 3 classroom asking them to think like Neuroscientists after some pre-teaching using Dr. Dan Siegel's hand model of the brain to demonstrate 'lid flipping'.

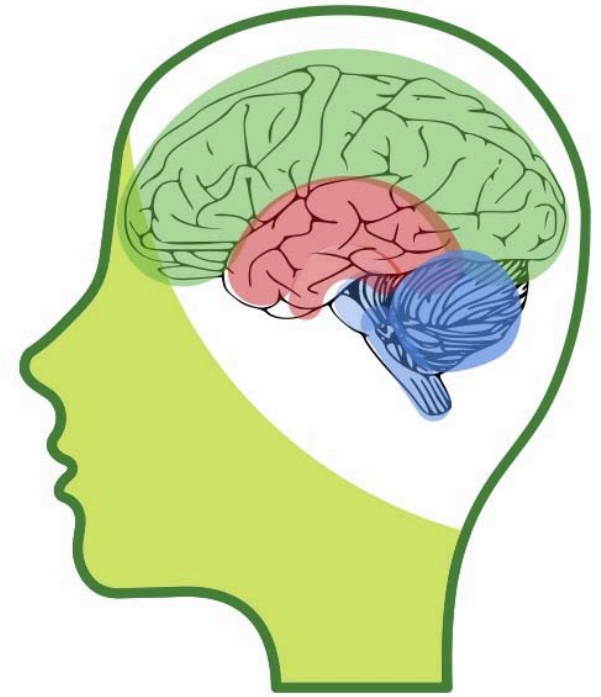


Credit: Daniel Siegel, V.D. is the creator of this metaphor and expression “Flipped Lid”. Copyright © 2014 www.sharonSelby.com

Sharon Selby © 2015 www.SharonSelby.com

The first time we watched as neuroscientists I challenged them to notice what part of the brain each character was in at the beginning, middle and end. It was important for them to be able to identify the

different brain/body states but also significant to see how much the states fluctuated, including being in a blended state. We also noted how a trusting relationship and sticking together (without any words, just body language/facial expressions/proximity) helped Jinxy get his lid back on. We also discussed how flipping our lid in an emergency can help us survive...all emotions and sensations have a purpose and are meant to be noticed but also how quickly...90 seconds...they can change if we let them.



The next time we watched, I invited them to look for evidence related to how Lucky and Jinxy felt about the world based on their previous experiences (neuroception). We noted big ideas like Jinxy did not feel safe in the world because he was wearing a helmet and avoided other people, looked sad or lonely, looked like he had been injured, he was always on alert looking for threats. On the other hand we noted how Lucky felt safe in her world because she smiled and made eye contact, was curious and seemed to be looking for adventure and challenge (sort of like how we want to be at school learning new things), even when things got challenging she wasn't afraid to lean in and connect with Jinxy, her connection and acceptance of Jinxy helped him move into his 'upstairs brain' and in the end it was her co-regulation that helped Jinxy solve the umbrella problem and help them land safely, she shared her hope and trust in the world so he could use his accident-prone life (also important experience) to save them both.

Both viewings naturally led to personal connections for the students. They wanted to share how someone had helped them get their lid back on, how they flipped their lid for different reasons or what brain and body state they were experiencing at that very moment.

Possible activities to follow to reinforce understanding:

- This could be done as a partner talk activity or a written/drawing activity - Think of a time you felt like Lucky (when you are in your cortex, safe and secure and ready to be brave or curious). Think of a time you felt like Jinxy (when you are in your midbrain or brainstem, fearful or worried something is about to go wrong)
- Read out possible scenarios that create stress at home or school, have students show with their bodies (stand over here if...stand over there if...make an X with your arms if you are blended) if this makes them feel like a 'Lucky' a 'Jinxy' or a blend of both. Example scenarios such as *when I have homework but am not sure how to complete it, when I get into a fight with a friend, when I go to a place (city, restaurant, location) that I have never been before, when I fall trying a new activity, when I accidentally break something that doesn't belong to me, when I feel sick to my stomach, when I am invited to sleepover at a friends house, etc.*
- I have used this video for years as an example of friendship and compassion but found it to be a powerful and engaging example of understanding and respecting how each Nervous System is

unique based on our life experiences and the safe relationships that help us find joy, health and resilience.

MAP OF GOOD MEMORIES

by Kimberly Harding

I am so lucky that I get to teach weekly in classes. This is a lesson I used this week. It is a bit more than 10 minutes but is one of my favorites. I can't wait to share what the children create and how it goes. I have attached the lesson plan, just in case it would help anyone out too.

Lesson Title: Map of Good Memories	
Subject: Neuroscience/ SEL/ PBIS	
<i>Identify Common Core Standards/ Key Standard (1a)</i>	While there is no common core standard for SEL instruction, Kentucky recognizes the need for SEL and defines it as learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.
<i>Identify student outcomes What will students learn?</i>	Students will be working on self awareness and one way to help regulate or self manage.
Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a mix of different types (factual and procedural knowledge, conceptual understanding, thinking & reasoning skills, collaborative & communication skills) • Aligned to KCAS • Important to grade level and subject • Reflect several types of learning • Are measurable • Are differentiated by groups of students or individuals • Is informed by previous assessment data (1c, 1f) 	<p>The 2nd grade class I am working with will learn and practice a self management activity known as anchoring. An anchor is defined as, something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that grounds you in yourself – your mind and your body • you can hold on to when you feel overwhelmed • that makes you feel calmer, more at ease, and more sure of yourself <p>They will practice this by first visualizing their favorite place. What do they hear, see, taste, feel, and smell? They will then get to discuss it with their partner.</p> <p>They will then create a drawing with their 3 favorite anchors.</p>
<i>What key terms are essential to this content (academic vocabulary)? (1a)</i>	Anchor - We will discuss what an anchor is
<i>What materials and resources (and their sources) will be used during the lesson?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of materials used • Lesson extended beyond textbook • Materials aligned with learning needs • Use of websites or blogs (1d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The book <i>Map Of Good Memories</i> by Fran Nuno • Large drawing paper • Crayons • Pencils • Markers
<i>What prerequisite knowledge is required of students? (1a)</i>	The brain works to calm the body.
<i>How does this lesson fit with the overall unit plan and/or goals for the year? (1a, 1e)</i>	As a Neuro Educator, I deliver lessons to stakeholders as a TIER ONE framework connected to the 4 pillars of applied educational neuroscience: educator brain state, attachment, regulation, and teaching neuroanatomy. The lesson fits with the SEL/Neuroscience lessons and goals for the year covering regulation and teaching neuroanatomy.
<i>What strategies will be used to check for understanding and assess students during the lesson? (1a, 1c)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair Share • Discussion • Finished art (Map of Anchors)
<i>What pedagogical approaches will be used during the lesson? (1a)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constructivist, where the learners are the makers of meaning and knowledge. 2. Collaborative, where learning can be created by members actively interact by sharing experiences and take on asymmetry roles.
<i>How does the lesson connect with other subject areas? (1c)</i>	This lesson connects with other subjects as this activity will help the students regulate and prime their brains to use their prefrontal cortex so that they may be prepared to learn. In short, this allows Maslow to be addressed so that Bloom can be tackled.

Identify how the lesson will differentiate instruction to provide support for all students. (1b)	The lesson will be differentiated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using children's literature for entrance into the lesson• Using art to answer the question, words if wanted	
How will students be grouped and what are the reasons for the groups? (1b, 1e)	Students will be grouped by their Covid seating placement and then by their desk placement.	
How will the needs of students requiring additional support or enrichment be met (including ECE, ELL, and G/T)? (1b)	Individual Instruction, as well as follow up lessons and practice with teacher	
How will the lesson integrate student interests and cultural backgrounds? (1b)	The book was chosen to address the large number of refugees in our community, as the story is about a child having to leave her country due to war looking for safety. The lesson also integrates children’s interest as they are sharing places that bring them joy and happiness.	
Describe lesson coherent sequence of activities (with time allocations) Instructional Sequence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shows how outcomes, activities, materials, methods, and groupings work together• Progresses from simple to complex• Describes how lesson launches• Describes method for presenting material• Includes questions posed of students• Describes how and when teacher will model content, concepts or skills• Describes opportunities for guided practice, group work, and individual practice• Describes opportunities for reflection and closure (1e)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Start with a Focus Attention Practice-Flower Blossom.2. Lesson Opening-Review when we are upset, sad, or nervous. What does it feel like? Ask then what can we do?3. Read the book, A Map of Good Memories4. Questioning-What did Zoe do to help remember and to calm her?5. Questioning-So if you were to go to your favorite place in the world right now, where would you go? Close your eyes...what do you hear, feel, smell, taste, and see?6. Turn to a partner and share.7. Model-Show the class my favorite place drawn on the paper.8. Ask them to go back to their desk, ask for them to get out pencils and crayons, have the paper passer pass out paper. Model for them how to fold paper in 3 parts.9. Have them draw their favorite place in the middle.10. Practice anchoring with that place with the students. Discuss with students how thru the week I need them to finish by drawing 2 more places that they can use.11. When finished, allow time to draw 2 more places on either side to use for anchoring.12. Collect when finished to review.	Allocated time: 5 minutes Allocated time: Allocated time: 5 minutes Allocated time: 10 minutes Allocated time:5 minutes Allocated time:5 minutes Allocated time: 10 minutes Allocated time: 5 minutes
Identify levels of cognitive demand that activities place on students. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remembering• Understanding• Applying• Analyzing• Evaluating• Creating (1e)	Remember-breathing and favorite places (including 5 sensory) Understand-how to use the process of anchoring Apply-using anchoring with visualization Create-picture of good memory “places”	
Identify how the lesson allows for student choice. (1e)	The lesson allows student choice in which they can choose their places to use for anchoring and choose what brings them joy to anchor.	
Identify formative and summative assessments (directly aligned with learning outcomes). (1f)	Formative assessment is the finished product of the art. Summative assessment is do they use this in their brain aligned practice.	
Identify opportunities for students to design and use assessments to measure their own learning. (1f)	Students could continue using this technique drawing new places and/or hang them in their room to practice using anchoring.	
DOMAIN 4 EVIDENCE: Lesson Reflection: What worked during lesson (cite examples)? What did not work during lesson (cite examples)? What improvements will be made when lesson is revisited? How might you better meet the needs of individuals and groups of individuals? (4a)		

GETTING TO KNOW OURSELVES

by Kiah Penfield

I created this to build relationships, share perspectives, develop empathy, and begin hard conversations in my homeroom. (We meet about three hours total each month, in one-hour increments). It really helped to start with more low-stakes questions, before bringing up potentially difficult topics. It also helped that there were only two options, which makes this a lot more low-stakes. And students didn't have to leave their initials, just make a mark to represent themselves (so they could remain anonymous). This activity ended up going longer than I intended, but most of the students stayed after to finish the activity, so I suppose it went well.

Note: This was developed for the beginning of the 2021-2022 SY.

[Getting to Know Ourselves.pptx](#)



GETTING TO KNOW OURSELVES

Mrs. Penfield's 12th grade homeroom

MORNING NERVOUS SYSTEM MENU

by Jenny Barkac

Arriving at school, adults and students can enter the classroom in a dysregulated state. The nervous system requires specific things to become regulated so that teaching and learning can take place. Without this intentional process, the body is forced into an environment that may unintentionally prolong that dysregulation.

Creating opportunities for regulation upon entering the classroom will allow for the brain/body state to receive just what it needs to become regulated again. Choosing an activity upon entering the room that will give the nervous system what it needs for regulation will increase engagement and stamina for the academic content that follows this time frame.

Investing in this activity can lead to student nervous system self-awareness while honoring what each student may need before starting the academic part of the day.











This activity was created to work with the Conscious Discipline framework.

Directions: As students enter the classroom each morning they will choose which brain/body state matches how they feel using the brain state check-in tool. This tool is a representation of lessons that have been taught over time. They will then choose the “Menu Options” for the specific brain state to help with the regulation process. This morning activity can be done for as little as 5-10 minutes but it is done intentionally to meet each individual nervous system. Each brain state station will need to be explicitly taught and modified as needed.

At the conclusion of this activity teachers may choose to have a 5-minute reflection time or brain journaling time where students have the opportunity to share which activity they chose and how it was helpful to them. This will help to bring awareness about what may help each state to regulate as well as normalizing that not all students come in to school ready to learn.... yet.

Student Brain State Check in

Right now...

 <p>Executive State</p>	<p>I am ready to learn and can help others (I can do it!)</p>	<p>I need help</p> 	 <p>I got this!</p>
 <p>Emotional State</p>	<p>I am working to manage Emotions (I am safe, keep breathing, I can handle this)</p>	<p>I need help</p> 	 <p>We got this!</p>
 <p>Survival State</p>	<p>I am feeling strong emotions and need some time (Take 3 deep breaths)</p> 	<p>I need help</p> 	 <p>I'm Safe</p>

Brain State Menu Options

Survival State Menu options

(The language of the brain stem is sensations)

- Breathing

- Brain hand massage using lotion
- Coloring/drawing
- Rhythm choices such as drumming
- Noise canceling headphones
- Listening to music headphones
- Tapping choices
- Art creation station
- Yoga stretches

Emotional State Menu options

(The language of the limbic system is feelings)

- Feeling buddies activity
- Writing we care center and kindness letters
- Journaling
- Check in activity with a friend
- Post it worries

Executive State Menu options

(The language of the cortex is words)

- Ready to learn activities
- Writing a story and illustrations for it
- Create a commitment for the day
- Do your classroom job for the day
- Choose a center to work on
- Group activity
- Listen to the need of a friend (listening to understand)

Visual images of each activity along with directions for the activity will be near each “brain state stations”.

Created by Dr. Jenny Barkac, inspired by the teachings of Dr. Becky Bailey

GROUNDING PHOTOS

by Ashley Starkey

I used this activity with my middle school students. I gave each of them a number then asked them to go to the following Google Document (which was linked to my Canvas page, for my students).

Google Document: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1mVcSWHqWyJA-BuNnF-xFTOMDw79pl8ebpmRHx6F_gdo/copy

Once they were on the Google Document they were to take about 5 minutes (more time was given if they needed it) to write down a many things they noticed in the photo that their number corresponded to. My students needed permission to not worry about spelling, but to just write what they saw. At the end of the five minutes we discussed how they felt about the assignment, but we did not share out their noticings.

BUILDING THE NEST FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

by Victoria Cornell

Setting: Resource class (like a study hall time with their resource teacher), High School Students

Classroom set up: bottles of water, apples, cuties, and bananas available for students as well as hard candy and other various snacks. Comfy chairs in the corner of the classroom by the windows. Students can sit at their tables or in comfy chairs.

1. Stand at the door and greet each student by name as they enter the room
2. Each student checks in by completing a Google Form with the following information: [Check In](#)
3. Teacher and/or MHT will respond to students' check-in. Every student will have a touchpoint, but responses will be based on the students' stated needs.
4. Yoga - for self-care or may choose an alternate activity such as walking around the "block" upstairs - <https://youtu.be/VpW33Celubg>

SENSATIONS

by Chrissy Dagostino

1. Begin with triangle breathing exercise

(A visual for breathing work really helps some students who get squirmy with the level of inhibition that simply sitting still and breathing creates.). Mention to students that the visual can be calming to some while distracting to others- encourage them to listen to their bodies and close eyes if it feels more grounding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9Q8D6n-3qw>

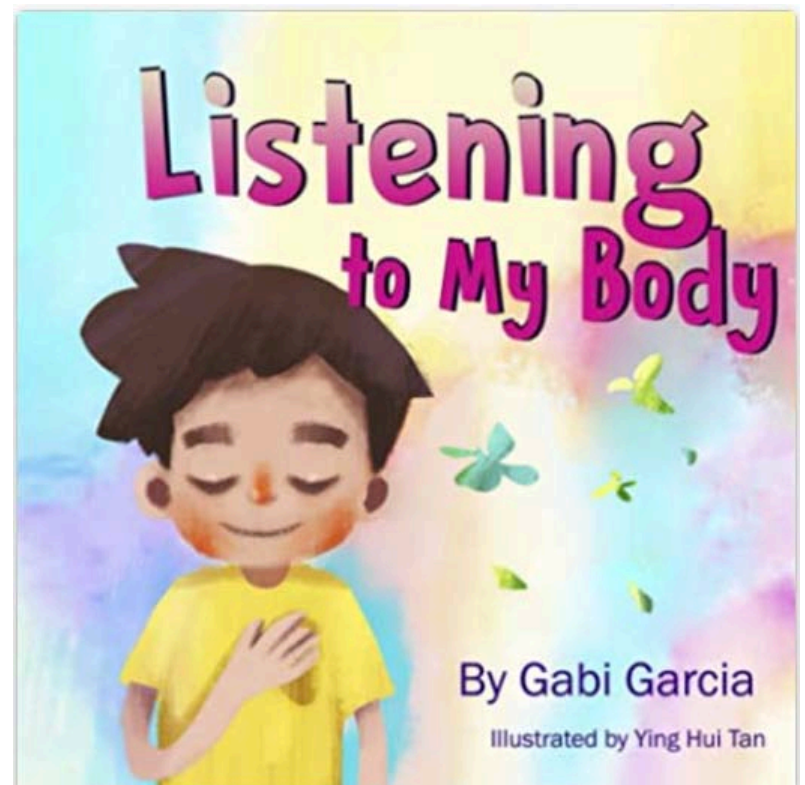
2. Read "Listening to my Body" by Gabi Garcia

About the book:

Help your child build on their capacity to engage more mindfully, self-regulate, and develop emotional resilience.

Listening to my Body is an engaging and interactive book that guides children through the practice of naming their feelings and the physical sensations that accompany them. Learning to tune into their bodies and do this, is a foundation for self-regulation.

From wiggly and squirmy to rested and still, Listening to My Body helps children develop a sensations vocabulary so that they can express what they are experiencing. It includes kid-friendly activities woven throughout the book to reinforce the teachings.



3. Play 'Name the sensation' game:

Read scenarios to the children (short relatable stories that highlight common emotional experiences of young children).

As children listen and imagine/embody the sensations in each story, ask them to volunteer to share a) the feeling they experienced hearing the story/scenario, and b) the sensation that accompanied it.

Discuss whether the sensations we feel when imagining scenarios are the same as when we are in the scenario ourselves. Why?

Consider how our powerful capacity to embody sensations when simply imagining something (for example, feeling relaxed when we imagine lying on the beach listening to waves) might be a tool for calming our nervous system when we are facing stress.

4. Possible follow-up activity

Create a sensation wall for students to share the sensations they pair with different emotions and notice what is shared and where they differ from one another.

BELLY BREATHE EXERCISE

by Kristin Peterson

This is an exercise I came up with based off a children's book. ([PDF](#))



DIGITAL NERVOUS SYSTEM FIRST AID STATION

by Hannah Cushing

I am teaching online this year - 8th, 10th, and 12th grade. It has been a challenge to create a nest in a digital space, and while I've tried a few different practices for check-ins, FoAPs, and touchpoints, I don't feel like I have built a consistent routine that I'm happy with.

So I'm using this as an opportunity, to build something that could be used as a check in and a digital nervous system first aid station, but it is very much a work in progress.

Check-in form - When I use it, I have the spreadsheet open so that I can see the responses as they come in to help me understand what individuals and the group needs. It has helped me to respond to group needs but also encourage individuals to take care of their own needs as they need to. It also gives me a glimpse into what may be affecting them at home - visiting relatives, caring for pets, etc.

[Check-in GoogleForm](#)

Nervous System First Aid Station - Since my students recently gave me a very hard time about not seeing Encanto, my nervous system first aid station is Encanto themed. The Nervous System First Aid Station - has a variety of links embedded - pictures bordered with blue are also links to documents. I think I can continue to add to this. It would also be easy to make a copy and change this thematically to something that interests your students.

[Digital Nervous System First Aid Station](#)



DRAWING FEELINGS

by Amy Thomas

Everyday, we have the Daily 6 we do in morning. The students tell the class how they are feeling based on a feelings chart we have in our class.

It has been mentioned that often kids will not take this seriously or just say something that is not thoughtful. This is not the case in my classroom. I am able to gauge where many of my students are at the beginning of the day based on what they say, they are extremely open (livid, mellow, joyful, confused, etc.) as am I. Apart of the daily 6 is also giving students time to share with the class as well as practice restorative practices in different scenarios.

For the most part the nest is built, but because fo the push of pacing and curriculum I have not been able to explore the nervous system as I have wanted to support the students' understanding. I have a class of students who love drawing and doodling this year. We have discussed art being therapeutic, but I also want to show them that art can be a window into their nervous system. I am going to use the Drawing Emotion strategy form *Connections over Compliance* (p, 186) rather than going around the room and labeling our feelings I am going to have the students draw feelings. Each will have a small booklet that is their feelings book. This book can be added to as often as they would like. If they notice a new feeling within their body and they are able to associate it to a feeling/emotion, they can add it.

On the first day we will all draw what happiness looks like to them. I will discuss where in my body I feel happiness (my cheeks, my heart, my mouth) If they would like to share they may. I will have them describe where happiness is located within their body. The second day the students will repeat the procedures for sadness, the third day for anger, and the fourth day an emotion of their choosing. We will then use their drawings to represent their feelings. Before we start our Daily 6, we will close our eyes and feel in our bodies whether we are feeling happiness, sadness, anger, or the other feeling. Then we will share our feelings OR we as a class will decide a new way to say/ represent our feelings the beginning of our day.



EMOTIONS & SENSATIONS POSTERS

by Charity Coppola

Context: I currently teach 10th-12th grade students specialized career courses that focus on child development and early childhood education so many of my classroom practices attempt to blend strategies that are relevant and appropriate for older students with the modeling of strategies that are a good fit for our littlest learners.

Welcome: Every student is greeted at the door by name, and sometimes with a fist bump or hug depending on individual preferences. I use this as an opportunity to make sure every student has a touchpoint every day.

Initial Check-In: We always begin our class period with a check-in. I have found that using visuals like the ones below have the greatest likelihood of getting my students to actually engage in discussion. We use Jam board and students have the option to post anonymously about which picture they relate to the most as well as the “why” behind their choice. While anonymous submissions are an option, I have noticed that as the year has progressed, students are increasingly choosing to share out loud with me and their peers. It is so interesting to see how individual students interpret the visuals and their meanings!

Focused Attention Practice: The “Give Me Yours, and I’ll Give You Mine” focused attention practice has become a staple in our classroom meetings. Students visually document something that is stuck on their mind or that they feel is impacting them mentally. They fold up their pieces of paper, exchange with a classmate and that pair shares a moment of deep breathing together. Sometimes students ask to share what they wrote or drew with the class or with me, but often they just appreciate the ability to express it in a non-verbal way. I always ask students to reflect on how the experience has impacted them. A common theme in their responses is that being able to put something on a piece of paper instead of just internalizing the worry puts them in a better mental space to learn. We used to do this once a week, but now they request to do it daily and I love that it is such a meaningful outlet for them.

On a scale of Baby Yoda, how are you feeling today?



On the Chihuahua scale how you feeling today?

icunny.co



Activity: In addition to our daily classroom meeting routine, I wanted to share a simple activity that really excited me because it was so successful with my high school students who can be a tough crowd sometimes. While my students are older, many of them have not been taught much about emotional awareness or regulation during their younger years, so I try to find ways to use our Early Childhood Education focus to create opportunities to fill in gaps. This took longer than ten minutes, but could definitely be modified into a less time consuming experience.

In one of our classes, we read aloud the book *In My Heart: A Book of Feelings*. I asked my students to pay close attention to the variety of feelings experienced throughout the book and the sensations associated with each of those feelings. For example, anger is associated with the feeling of being hot and wanting to explode. The girl in the book describes calm as feeling lazy, slow, and quiet. Sadness is described as feeling heavy like an elephant. She describes feeling scared by talking about how fast her heart beats and experiencing cold chills.

When the book was finished the class engaged in a discussion about how the sensations that they associate with each emotion described are similar or different than what was mentioned in the story. It was so powerful to listen to this group of students talking about how they individually experience these emotions- happy, sad, calm, mad, shy, proud, hurt, broken, hopeful, silly.

Then students had the option to work as small groups on posters or individually. They chose four of the emotions from the book and on posters or sheets of paper depending on if they chose to work in a group setting or by themselves, they illustrated things in their own lives that led them to experience those emotions. Their final products were so insightful for me as their teacher. I expected students to choose the, for lack of a better term, “easier” emotions to work with, but many of my kids chose things hurt, broken, and anxious, and were so intentional in identifying the parts of their lives that incite those emotions in them. Some students even asked to share and explain their visuals to the whole group. It was such a meaningful class session, and I am excited to build on it.

FOCUSED ATTENTION PRACTICES WE LOVE

by Rob Beltz

I've been wanting to take our (my class) focused attention practices to a new level. In the past, I have introduced FoAPs one at a time to students and we have engaged in said practices together. This has proven to be meaningful co-regulation. Over time, students have begun requesting that we do certain ones; clearly, every student has his or her favorites. In listening to these requests, I recognize that some students want energizing practices, while others want calming ones.

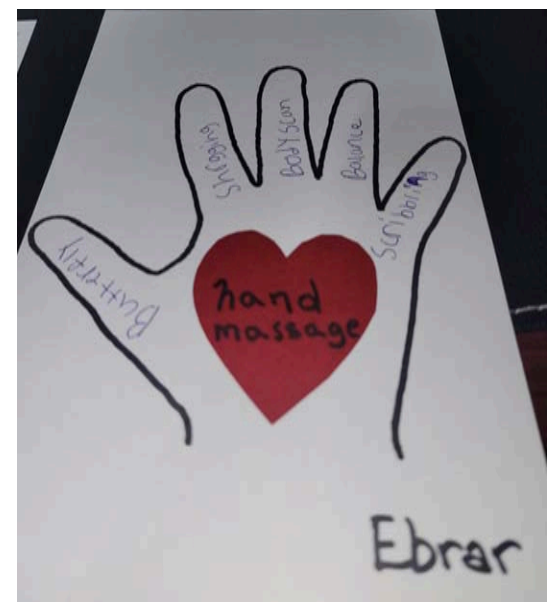
In thinking about the universal needs of my students, it has occurred by designating myself as the person who determines which FoAP we are using, I am taking away an opportunity for my students to have autonomy. We are at a point now where we understand our nervous systems and recognize what we need.



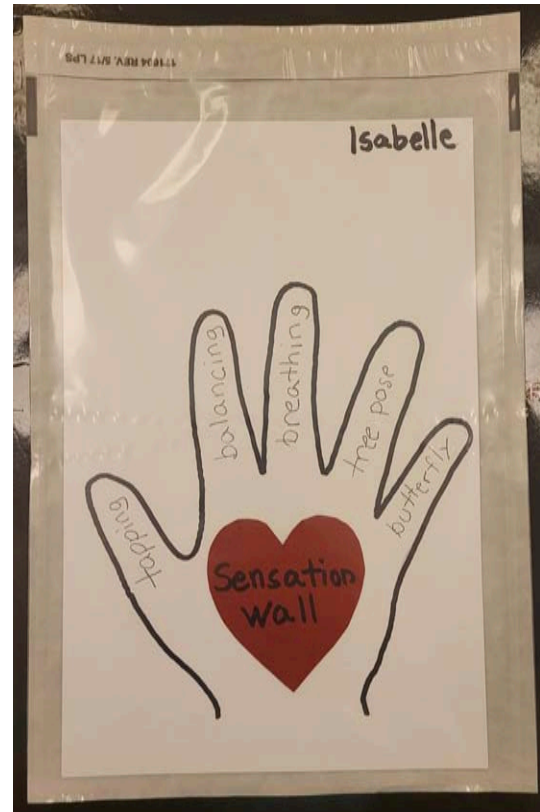
For my ten minute meeting, I sat with my kids and discussed these points. Together, we made a list of our favorite focused attention practices. I then had students choose from the list six FoAPs that they found useful, or that they wanted to practice more. Next, I had students trace their hands (which is a FoAP in and of itself) on a 5.5" x 8.5" piece of cardstock, and cut out a small red heart. On the heart I had them write their favorite FoAP. On each finger of their hand I had them write one of the other five FoAPs that they chose. Students glued the heart to the center of their hand.

Finally, students were able to put their completed "Choose your FoAP" project into an adhesive plastic sleeve (a special big thanks to the UPS Store for donating these label sleeves). These can easily be adhered to a student's desk, notebook, or folder. This will have the benefit of allowing students the autonomy to choose the focused attention practice that they feel they need, and also to have them visible and accessible when the students need to calm or activate their nervous systems.

One goal that this project meets is moving from co-regulation to self-



regulation. For students who may need extra support, allowing other students to regulate themselves independently frees the teacher to co-regulate with individual students a bit easier.



A WELCOMING CHECK-IN

by Amber McKinney

Daily, when students walk into the room, the first thing they do is check in on the board. They utilize a magnet that they made at the beginning of the year, to place themselves on the polyvagal chart. Also, I have a slide up each day with a different activity. Some days, it is a QR code that students scan with their phone that connects to a check in form. Using the google form, students answer questions about how they are doing--I change the questions each time. Sometimes, there is a question similar to "what have you done to take care of yourself this week?" or it could be "What is your biggest struggle related to school right now." I message students back privately to address their info they share. On days that we do not complete a form, I put a silly question on the board--such as, would you rather eat hamburgers or tacos for the rest of your life. We have a short, silly discussion to get us going.

In this school year, where social skills are lacking tremendously, my biggest goal has been to get them to talk with each other!

MINDFUL SNACK




by Alysha Stucker

I am a school counselor in a Pk-8th grade building. It's HUGE. We have over 1100 students and 120+ staff. We are short a counselor (we are supposed to have 3), which makes days even more hectic. Two challenges we face in the counseling office are students coming down for breaks and snacks, and not in coordination with each other. In principle, I am VERY supportive of these two things, but some of our teachers do not have good boundaries around the use of the counseling office. Anytime a student asks, they just send them, without an understanding of need and a plan for how to meet the need. I am new to the building, and because of its size, it is like turning the Titanic to make changes in how the system works.

I found this mindful snack image online, and thought this would be a great tool to implement in the counseling office. It would address students' need to take a break and get a snack. Additionally, I was thinking that if students had to actually do this activity, it might weed out who is misusing the counseling office to just come play, or avoid a task, and which one's actually need what they are coming down for. ([PDF](#))

Mindful Snack

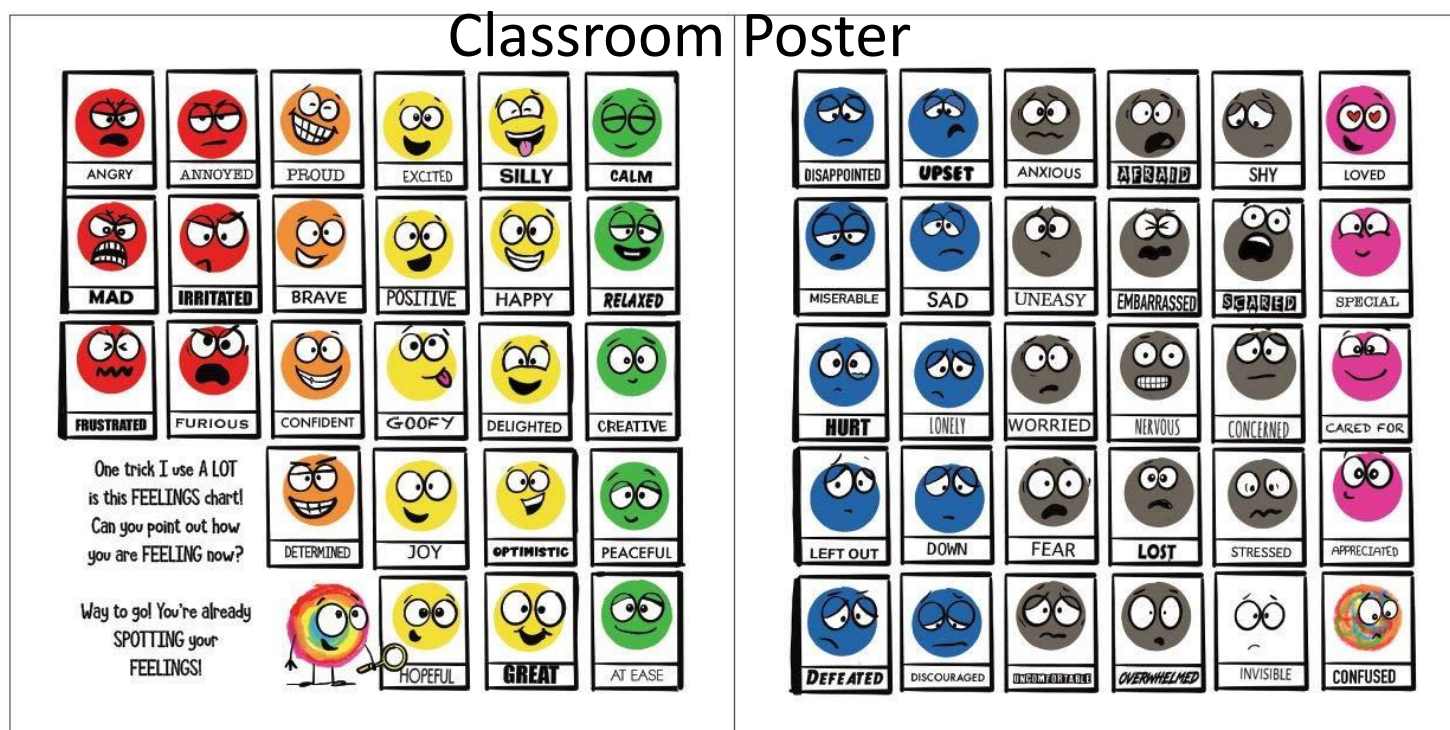
Choose a snack. As you eat, notice how the snack tastes, feels, smells, looks, and sounds. Circle at least one word from each category.

 Taste	 Texture	 Smell	 Appearance	 Sound
sweet	brittle	aromatic	stringy	crunchy
zesty	crisp	floral	heavy	fizzy
sour	lumpy	perfumed	flat	squeaky
bland	sticky	rotten	fizzy	sloppy
strong	rubbery	musty	crystalline	sloshy
spicy	chewy	fragrant	cuboid	quiet
cool	tacky	pungent	dull	loud
warm	soft	bland	firm	slurpy
sharp	fluffy	tart	flaky	noisy
rancid	smooth	strong	crisp	bubbly
citrus	chalky	weak	fluffy	popping
tainted	tender	spicy	hard	crackly
bitter	firm	savoury	sticky	sizzling
hot	dry	citrusy	dry	mushy
rich	hard	mild	crumbly	wet
tart	grainy	artificial	lumpy	drippy
mild	gritty	fruity	smooth	crisp
weak	bubbly	tangy	mushy	gluggy
umami	waxy		fragile	
tangy	flaky		messy	
acidic	crumbly			
savoury	mushy			

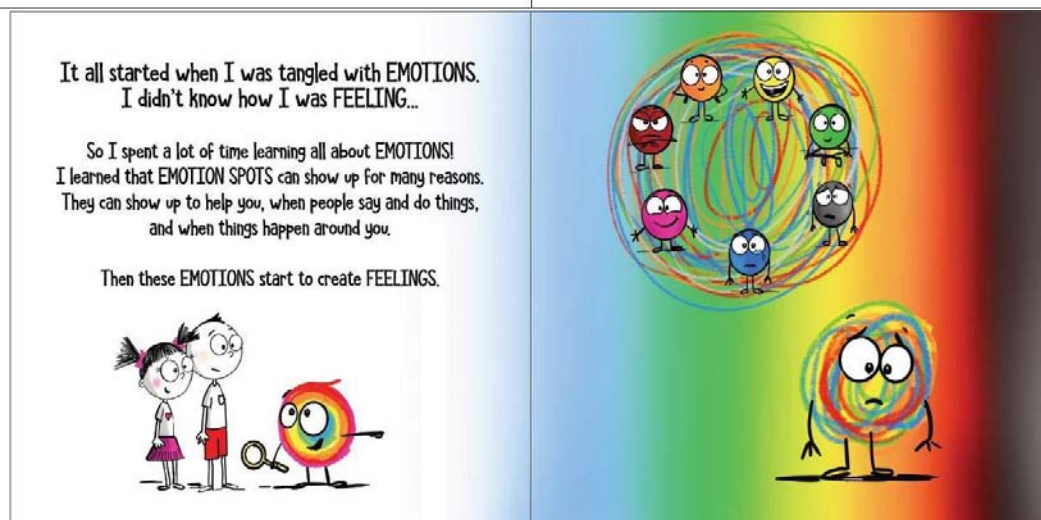
A SPOT OF FEELINGS

by Angela Meyer

I teach in a first-grade classroom. Creating a nurturing and supportive environment is at the base of what we do in our classroom. We use various tools and attention practices in our space. We tend to complete practices in 4-6 minutes since the kiddos tend to have shorter attention spans. 😊 We use a resource called “A Spot of Feelings.” This resource product provides books, plush figures, posters, and social/emotional lessons based in a primary classroom. We start each our morning meeting with checking in with our “how am I feeling” poster. This poster includes happy, confident, peaceful, angry, sad, anxious, loved and scribble. Scribble is an indication that emotions are jumbled, and the individual is not sure how they are feeling. *All these emotions were previously taught with a kid friendly read aloud and activity. Once we determine the climate of the classroom, we brainstorm positive ways we might return to “calm.” Students often request deep belly breathing, a stretch break, laying on the floor with the lights off taking relaxing breaths or drawing a picture. Students are given options and tools to best support what they need in that moment. ([PDF](#))



Description of Scribble.

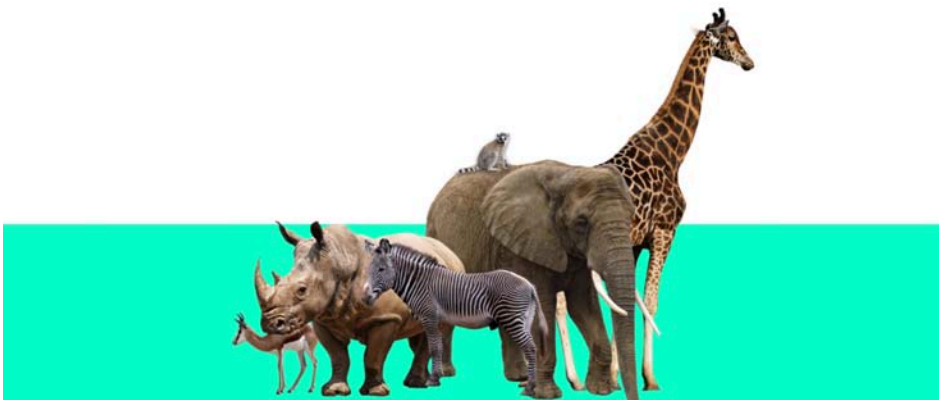


ANIMAL REGULATION CARDS

by Gina Zanella-Sample

This FoAP is for elementary school students and incorporates the Tapping technique. In Dr. Lori's book, "Connections Over Compliance", she has some "animal" cards that incorporate tapping and rhythmic sensations with facts about animals. In my experience, kids LOVE learning about themselves and animals, so I decided to put the two together. I have used this activity with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders. I first teach them about their brainstem - what the brainstem is responsible for and what it craves. I then tell them that in order to think and use the cortex area of our brain, we must engage our brain stem. I then tell them we are going to do an activity to wake our brainstem up. After we run through the [slides](#) that I have created, I ask them if they know any additional animal movements and they share great examples. I end by telling them that the activities we just did can be done anywhere and at any time when we feel that we need to wake our brains and bodies up.

ANIMAL REGULATION CARDS



MONKEYS

- Take a cue from this gorilla and tap the top of your head gently with your fingertips....
 - ...now above your eyebrows
 - ...now on your temples
 - ...now under your nose
 - ...now on your chin
 - ...now under your arms
 - ...now on your hand



DOGS

- Can you shake off your stress and worries like a dog?
- Can you do a downward dog stretch?



ZONES OF REGULATION MORNING MEETING

by Sarah Johnson

When I started in my current position, I incorporated a Morning Meeting into our daily agenda. The time allotted, including the SEL lesson, was about 30-45 minutes, depending on how students presented. Each day followed (more or less) the following routine:

Checking in - How are you, how / did you sleep, how was breakfast?

Self-Assessment - What zone (from Zones of Regulation) are you in? (We had a reference on the wall, and kids had their own personal colored cards they could show if they did not feel like talking)

- If a student indicated they were mildly dysregulated (blue, yellow zone), I would ask them to finish the morning meeting and then we could check in if they needed to use additional coping skills.
- If a student indicated they were significantly dysregulated (red zone), or feeling they were in multiple zones at once (learned the hard way that was a bad indicator) students were able to follow our red zone procedures and choose a coping skill to try to reset, then check back in in five minutes. Student-created list was posted for each zone.



Chronic Calm - hospital provided a daily script (one for each day of the week, repeats weekly) that they requested we read. Each day was a different guided breathing or visualization exercise.

Follow up on any needs identified during the self-assessment (e.g., Do you still feel like you're in the yellow zone? Do you need to take a few minutes to use a coping skill before we begin?) *I had one student (3rd grade) who consistently needed to just draw out his current state / emotions for ~ 10 minutes every day throughout the morning meeting time. I ended up giving him an accommodation to have paper / pencil at his desk because he would use the opportunity to communicate his needs each morning, and throughout the day as needed!

Additional Ideas: IPS has an SEL initiative for teachers to incorporate 3 signature practices: Welcome ritual; Engaging instruction; Optimistic closure

As a team, the teachers at NDI agreed to focus on increasing our procedures around optimistic closure this year (the other practices are pretty well in place across our site). I think this aligns well with the idea

of creating a nest - we are bookending our class with relationship-building components. I decided to try for two birds with one stone, so to speak.

At the end of class, we do a 'check out' that includes reviewing our goal / tracking sheets and celebrating our success. At the same time, I can make sure that the tracking is complete for progress monitoring purposes. But we use this opportunity for 'specific praise' - mostly noticing what the students have been working towards, and recognizing their effort and success. And, students can pick which stamp marker they get to use! Which is a surprisingly effective teacher tool. (Right now, this is adjusted slightly - my newest student has such significant challenges, it is more meaningful to stamp the sheet right away when he performs his goal. So every time he works for 15 minutes, he gets a stamp right then. At the end of the day, then, we take a tally of his success stamps!)

SEL Lesson from Second Steps, Zones of Regulation, or the Educator's Neuroscience Toolkit

SHARED DRAWING

by Kim Richards

Shared drawing (5-10 minutes)

Client Sessions with children – Expressive Arts Therapy (in school)

To begin sessions, I often engage in shared drawing with students. This is where one person takes a turn mark making on the page, indicates they are finished and then the other person makes a mark on the page. It continues until the child determines that the image is complete. It is an amazing way to connect, see into their world and share some giggles and laughs when our mark making becomes interactive. The child has choice in their medium (ex. watercolors, markers, oil pastels, crayons) and if they chat or not during this time. It a good low-risk activity that creates a great back and forth rhythm and co-regulation.

I wonder how this would work in a classroom setting – if it could build community and safety if done (often and over time) as a class image or smartboard creation, eventually leading to shared drawing in partners, once it was understood that the activity was process over product (which isn't generally what students encounter in our education system).

Here is a sample (shared with permission). This student always requested that we both 'sign' our initials on the piece when finished.



A 10 minute Felt-Safety Activity

Shared Drawing

What is it?

This is where one person takes a turn mark making on the page, indicates they are finished and then the other person makes a mark on the page. It continues until the child determines that the image is complete.

Choice

The student/client has choice in their medium (ex. watercolors, markers, oil pastels, crayons) and if they chat or not during this time.

Why?

It a good low-risk activity that creates a great back and forth rhythm and co-regulation. Engages student/client in a safe manner. Builds connection, community, collaboration and expressive creativity.

Extensions

- Full class shared drawing - virtual or in class (whiteboard or paper)
- Leading to partner shared drawing -virtual or in class
- Save drawings to use for another activity or to reflect back on with community



GRATITUDE, SINGING, & BUILDING THE NEST

by JJ Epperson

Since my students are the "why" behind my teaching, I created a video opener for them. I'm pretty sure Monday mornings will be a good time share my video because everyone is tired from the weekend and grumpy they have to be at school. Also, no one ever says "thank you" to students. It really can be a struggle to get out of bed and come to school day in and day out. Plus, to be faced with my energy and almost-always-cheery vibe can be downright overwhelming to some!

In my search for a video I could use in class on Valentine's day, I came across a You-Tube video of a man getting on a metro train, thanking all the passengers for getting up that day and heading to work, and inviting them to sing along with him. I thought to myself, I can do that! I also thought that if I did it as a video I could 1) reuse it over and over, 2) share it, 3) provide quiet music and lyrics for those who would like to join in, and 4) make it a stable ritual that didn't change. It's calming music and I used bright, cheery, happy images so I could intentionally place positivity into their minds.

This video is 4 minutes long because my class periods are only 42 minutes each. Based on the desire to chunk my teaching while also making my admin happy about delivering content, I feel this was a good compromise.

<https://www.loom.com/share/bd8378242fa645fa94f161b862054978>

Next Steps - Invite students to suggest songs for videos.

Since I'm a Spanish teacher, they want a song in Spanish. They chose *Nuestra Canción* by Monsieur Perriné (it's a Tik Tok - famous song). Here's a link to the song: <https://youtu.be/ahtMpUhoj9s>

Here is the new video I made to go along with the song students chose!

<https://www.loom.com/share/19c808c7a5924094baf6a89ace50df28>

PLAY-DOH CO-REGULATION

by Aynur Damirgi

This year, in my role as a K-6 ESL teacher, I had several kindergartners and first graders who came in with no school experience, and a few we know come carrying traumatic experiences. My time with these students tends to be short (around 20-25 minute sessions), but it's also often a one-on-one or small group lesson. I decided to structure my time into a more preschool like experience for these students with a mix of organic and structured opportunities for language learning. One of the activities I've incorporated into our time is the choice of play dough or coloring for 3-5 minutes at the end. Other than providing materials (such as cookie cutters and crayons), I don't come in with a plan. This time has quickly become a favorite for myself and my students as we create or color side-by-side and show one another what we've done. With the play-dough (which has been a favorite), I've found it has turned into a repetitive activity with students creating the same thing over and over again each day. Sometimes I'll create something new or show them how to do something different and we venture out if they want as I point out the shapes and colors or specifically ask for a particular shape or color. As I started this at the start of the year, I hadn't even considered how this experience is both co-regulating and rhythmic, but I've recognized that as students have begun requesting this activity. Recently, one student even made sure he got out my favorite color and the star cookie cutter that I tend to use. In essence, it's the simple, ritualistic and repetitive experiences that we might overlook as a "waste of time" in the education world that actually are so valuable in creating felt safety and neural pathways of connection.

MY FOCUSED ATTENTION PRACTICE

by Jenn Haak

Explanation I would like to learn more about the Focused Attention Practices that some of our third graders have created on their own. I want to create a visual of some kind to share their creative and effective FoAPs. It could be meaningful to have the third graders lead FoAPs for the K-1st graders too. I'm thinking of creating a flyer or hallway design highlighting their creative new practices (also trying to add more AEN into our hallways to support regulation between classes!).

I gathered the student-created focused attention practices and placed them into these slides. I'll be printing, laminating, and attaching them to a ring so students can have a Focused Attention Flipbook created by their classmates! I'm going to incorporate creating FoAPs into my next lesson with this class next week, so I'll have even more to add at that point!

[Student Focused Attention Practices \(ppt\)](#)

Revised edition after teaching a lesson in a third grade class where each student could design their own FoAP! My plan is to shrink them so they are four per page, print and laminate them, and then hand copies to the students so they can trade them with each other! Their creativity and heart for caring for their brains, bodies, and each other is truly beautiful.

[My Focused Attention Practice \(PDF\)](#)

CONNECTING QUESTIONS

by Ann Yetman

Since I float around to different classes during the day at the local high school, within each class there are different students with different needs. Although my main assistance is given to the students on I.E.P.'s and 504s, I try to connect with an entire class. The way I interact with students is the same across the board, and many teachers I see do the same:

1. I say hello to as many as I can before class starts and ask how they are doing.
2. I treat students the way I want to be treated – I use manners – please and thank you when I speak to them.
3. I try my very best to make them laugh and smile.
4. I make sure they know I will always help them, no matter what the circumstance, and if I can't I will find someone who can.
5. I get to know them – their interests, etc.
6. If a student is involved in an extracurricular activity, I will do my very best to show up and watch them (being an empty nester, it is easier for me to do that).

If I was teaching a high school, resource class (students with moderate disabilities), with a total of 8 students, this is what I envision for a 10-minute brain aligned activity to create a safe environment:

Background music is a must!

<https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/neuroscience-says-listening-to-this-one-song-reduces-anxiety-by-up-to-65-percent.html>

The Activity:

Random questions would be put in a container. A student picks a question, and I read it aloud. I then pass a beach ball to a student to answer. The student can answer or pass. Once done, the student passes (or rolls) the ball to another student (or me) to answer. Once everyone has had a chance to answer, the floor opens up for additional comments to foster discussion. The steps are repeated with each question.

Some questions include:

1. What is one thing you are really good at outside of school?
2. What is something you have done that you are really proud of?
3. You are stranded on an island. What three things would you take?
4. What is your biggest pet peeve?
5. Are you a morning person or a night person?
6. Who is the person you respect the most and why?
7. How would your best friend describe you to someone you have never met?

8. If you lost your sense of smell but could only pick 3 things that you would still be able to smell, what 3 smells would you pick?
9. If you were President, what new law would you make?
10. If you were the weather, how would you describe yourself?
11. What is your favorite fast food restaurant?
12. What superpower would you choose and why?

The activity creates a safe, nonjudgemental environment for everyone to know more about one another and have fun at the same time.

MAKING A POLYVAGAL NEST

by Ron Branca

10 Minute Morning or Afternoon Exercise

The following Polyvagal exercise(s) were inspired by the “befriending” exercises found in Deb Dana’s book titled *Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection: 50 Client Centered Practices*. Ms. Dana is a social worker who uses Polyvagal Theory in her work with -step waly trauma clients. Since the exercise was originally suggested to therapy work with adults, I have modified Ms. Dana’s suggestions to make them more developmentally appropriate for school aged children and to keep them within the bounds of what would generally be considered Tier 1 practices.

Target Group: Late Elementary school aged children. Grades: 3 to 5.

Setting: Classroom prior to first period of day. Prior to start of meeting/gathering place a simple drawing of step ladder on white board. Bottom third of the ladder is colored red. The middle third colored yellow, top third colored green.

Time limits: 3 separate phases on 3 different days, 10 minutes each session.

Purpose: These 3 quick exercises are a multi-step way to help students safely begin to create connections to their frequently changing autonomic vagal states (dorsal, sympathetic, ventral) through the utilization of simple art, and verbal labeling and affective vocabulary development. Students can create variations at home and share different autonomic behavioral or feeling expressions in counseling sessions if needed. The trajectory of the feeling states being recalled is to go from highly externally structured (counselor presented worksheet with sample vagal states) to being more personally generated feelings by the student.

Goal(s) of Exercise is to” build the nest” and promote safety and personal awareness of the three primary polyvagal states. For older students this could also coincide with a discussion of Neuroception.

Week 1: (Session 1). Have students copy picture of ladder from white board. Have them color in the three sections (red, yellow, green). Mention stop light metaphor, Next to bottom third (red color) have them print words “dorsal vagal”. In the middle section (yellow) print words “sympathetic vagal”, and at top three rungs of ladder (green section) print words” ventral vagal”. For older students this would be a good time to bring up a short discussion of neuroception but for younger students this can and probably should be omitted at this point. Very brief discussion ensues about how feeling states can and do often change and how we can go up and down the steps on a ladder. If ladder metaphor is too abstract discuss how the colors on a stop light change.

Week 2: (session 2) Using the alphabet, give students a pre-printed list of feeling words for each vagal state and at end of day have them circle the feelings they can recall from their day, and what was going on at the time (“triggers”) that might have led to the circled feelings. Also have them note which state had the most feeling words circled. (Jayne Pyecha suggested that I add to the list of pre-printed vagal state examples words from the work of Byron Katie. This would give the younger students even more feeling vocabulary words to choose from., Connie Thompson also suggested that I consider using the “emotion words” Brené Brown has identified in *Atlas of the Heart*).

Week 3: (session 3), Have students write their name vertically down the side of a piece of paper and have them put down (self- generate) a vagal state or states that go along with the corresponding letter in their first name. This should be a very personalized list of feelings.

Note: The above 3 sessions could be supplemented by including a very short (only one paragraph) follow up exercise which would be a way for older students to add narrative to the above exercises.

Steps: Students are to use 5 steps to write their personal autonomic short story. Spending no more than a minute on each step.

- My autonomic state is (was).....
- My system is (was) responding to.....
- At the time- my body wanted me to.....
- My brain makes up the story that.....
- When I review my short story I notice that.....

If needed, the counselor could offer possible examples before having the students respond to the prompts.

YOGA & TRE

by Rose Mogus

So my idea is to combine yoga and some of the Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE) movements with deep breathing exercises in a structured setting. I would prefer to do these at the beginning or end of the school day. I think the end of the school day would be more helpful, however, if schools were willing I think both would be even more beneficial.

I think using TRE would be something to do after getting parent permission because it could trigger some individuals. However, I think it would be so beneficial to have students start to understand their bodies at a young age. I really want to educate individuals about their bodies and the way stress and trauma are held in the body. With that being said, I have not begun my TRE classes yet but am pursuing the certificate so I will have that hopefully within the next year. I also think it is important to use the FoAPs everyday, just to ground the students, I think with students I would use this first thing in the morning, and then as needed during the day and it could even be used individually for students as needed. At the beginning of a school year or when beginning to implement the yoga exercises and breathing into the classroom it would be important to teach the basic postures that you would be using as well as norms for when it is the stretching and breathing time, for example we will be respectful of others and during this time we will keep the noise level down to focus on our task. I also think you could do a mini lesson on simple anatomy, teaching the students about the muscles, and how our bodies try to protect us so we need to take care of them and help them relax, depending on the grade level you could be more in depth about this. After norms were developed, the mini lesson is taught and students understand the exercises you could really implement these daily.

Mini Lesson Ideas:

- Good Postures to Teach: You could use youtube video as well as invest in a poster with some of the basic positions to use. Then children could reference the poster if they needed some time to stretch on their own.
- Teaching students about the psoas muscles.
- Teaching about having health muscles.
- Teaching the benefits of stretching.
- Teaching the benefits of deep breathing and how to correctly deep breathe.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2j7S8dy8j0>

Kids:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=ho9uttOZdOQ>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeVh3NVfa0k>

Teens:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kJgTouHHeE>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kgZnJqzNaU>

Norms:

- You could do this as a lesson after teaching the mini lesson about the body and have students talk about what they think would have them relax and concentrate at this time.

Journaling:

- Something I also thought about adding was a journaling activity after the daily stretches. For younger students you could allow them to draw pictures about how their bodies feel after stretching or their autonomic state for older students you could have them write about their experiences with the stretched and again about their autonomic states.

Setting up the space:

- In the classroom I would designate a corner of the room to a safe relaxing place. I would have yoga mats or a softer floor material here, maybe some of those foam mats. I would have a poster of simple beginning yoga poses for reference. I would also have noise canceling headphones and a comfy place to sit if needed. This space would be for students who need a moment. They could do stretches or breathing or both in this space.

MINDFULNESS MINI LESSONS

by Lara Oberman

I developed some short lessons on mindfulness to model in a kindergarten classroom. I used picture books and strategies taken/borrowed from our class resources! There are four lessons, each about 15 minutes.

Day 1

1. Read a book to explain how mindfulness can help our bodies calm after doing something energetic: [The Lemonade Hurricane](#)
2. Focused Attention Practice (This FoAP will be centered on the practice of breathing, however, not all people find breathing relaxing. Be sure to always give students the option of opting out of the exercise. It would be helpful to have a different option, such as coloring, available for those who are not comfortable breathing):
 - a. Teach students how to properly breathe: *Place one hand close to your nose (don't touch your nose!) and the other hand on your belly. As you breathe in through your nose, feel your belly get bigger, blowing up like a balloon. Then, let you breath out of your mouth slowly and feel it on your hand.*
 1. Watch me!
 2. You try!
 3. What did you notice?
3. Try the Deep Dive Breath
 - a. Inhale for 4, hold breath for 4, exhale for 4

Day 2

1. Review book and mindfulness
2. Practice taking a deep breath
3. FoAP
 - a. Movement - *Stand tall, as you inhale, lift your arm, then exhale your arm back down. Repeat with your other arm and both legs.*
 - b. 6 second breathing - *Take a deep, 6 second inhale while reaching your arms overhead. Exhale while counting backwards from 6 and slowly bringing your arms back down.*
 - c. Rise and Fall - *Lay on the floor and place an object on your belly (a marker, pencil, etc.). As you breathe in, watch the marker rise. As you breathe out, see the marker go back down.*

Day 3

1. Read a book to explain how mindfulness can also help calm our thoughts and help us focus: [Puppy Mind](#)
2. Practice taking a deep breath

3. FoAP

- a. Visualization - *Sit up tall in your seats, with your feet on the floor. If you are comfortable, close your eyes. If not, just put your head down. Imagine your favorite place to be (or a place you would like to go). What do you see? What colors? Smell? Who is with you? What do you hear?*
- b. Color breathing - *Breathe in your favorite color. Breathe out a color you don't like. Imagine the colors swirling and alive with each inhale. I am inhaling a bright yellow that fills me with joy, I am exhaling a smoky gray that makes me sad.*

Day 4

1. Show brain video
2. Practice taking a deep breath
3. FoAP
 - a. Introduce [Animal Regulation Cards](#)

Ongoing - hang up [visuals](#) of different practices and have students choose after each recess or out of class transition

A TANGIBLE NEST

by Jane Pyecha

So I took the nest pretty literally! We lost some very special people last year and it was especially difficult for my 10 year old daughter as it also triggered other losses in her life. She wants a pet more than life itself but we cannot have one right now. I believe a pet would be therapeutic for her and so have gotten creative with other options.

We are going to start a parent and me volunteer program at the Humane Society next month which she super excited about. I want her to have something at home that she can use when she's feeling like she needs it so I created a literal nest for her. Most every thing in her nest has special meaning to her:

- The giant dog is Duke who she cuddles with and loves on.
- Princess the cat is from <https://joyforall.com/> created as a therapy tool for Alzheimer's and dementia patients. It purrs (with voice and vibration, meows and moves when you pet it).
- The small dog looks just like Hannah who we had to leave behind when we moved to Indianapolis.
- The white shawl and the purple throw my mother made.
- The pink fringed blanket is weighted.
- And, the blue plush is what she chose from the vigil for her friend



She usually chooses one or two things to cuddle/sit with quietly. There are also adult coloring books, her journal and art desk for her to use if she wants, as well as other toys she has. Sometimes when we are both feeling sad we cuddle here or in my bed together.

Some other FoAPs we do together is our nightly ritual of song, kiss, cuddle joke. We make up a song to sing to each other and get jokes each from the internet to share while we cuddle up. We finish out with a kiss and then off to bed.

BREATHING OUT LOVE & FORGIVENESS

by Christine Hernandez

To create "the nest" I've worked with 2nd and 3rd grade classes and help them develop an understanding of their feelings and chart the mood of the class. We first started with Focused Attention Practice calming breaths. Students think of someone in class that was helpful and breathes out love or good vibes to them focusing on their favorite color when they breath out. They continue to do this for someone in class that might have bothered them during the day, again breathing out forgiveness and good vibes while focusing on their favorite color. As kids come into class they choose if they are in a high/low mood and a positive/negative mood. When they chart the mood, we discuss why they are upset or what made them happy and then move into what we need to do to be in a learning mood. We share out ideas and then end the 10 minutes with deep breathing exercises and being ready to learn.



MORNING MEETINGS

by Shelli Cargill

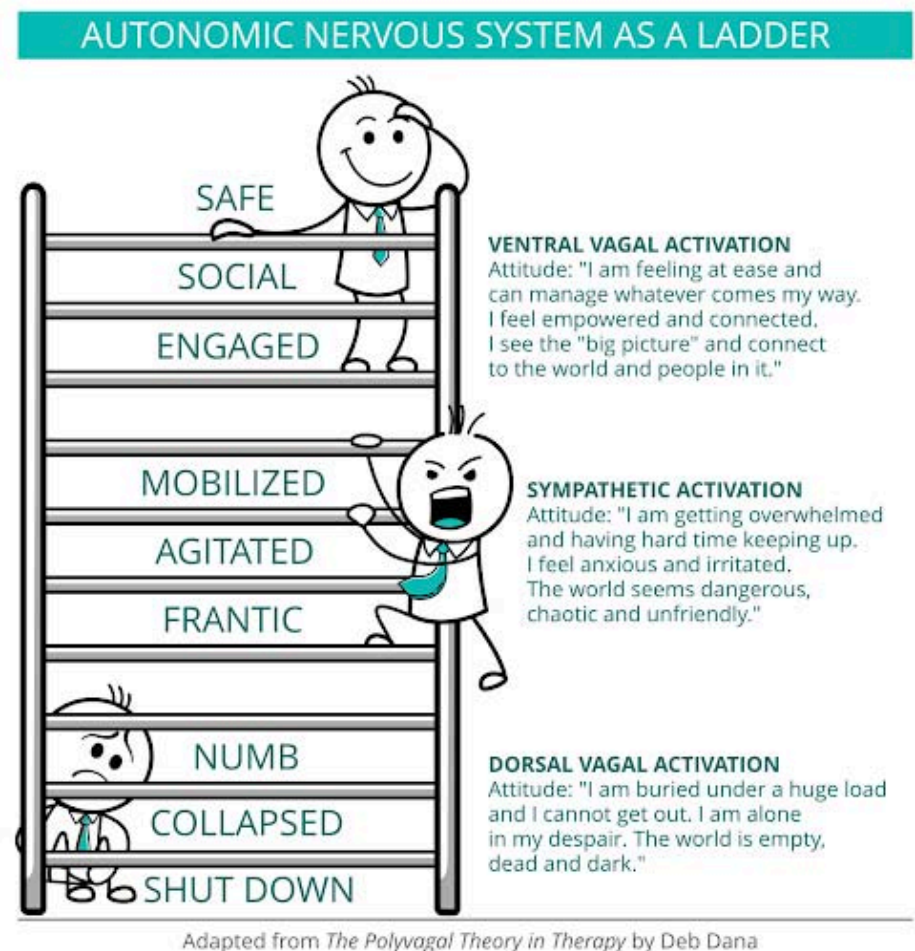
My idea for Developing a 10 minute morning or afternoon brain-aligned gathering/meeting to create the “Nest” for students in an elementary classroom begins with:

1. **Set the setting** - Soft music playing every day as the students enter the room. Here is the link to the images/music that are playing on the screen as they enter. I like to set the tone to the day as relaxing and calm. Depending on the day I may play some music with more energy or exciting images.

[Beautiful Relaxing Music • Peaceful Piano Music & Guitar Music | Sunny Mornings by Peder B. Helland](#)

2. **Check In** - As the students come into the room to go to the carpet, I have them take their magnet(already prepared with their name/picture on it) and have them check in with how they are feeling on the polyvagal ladder template (on a poster on the board). In some cases I can have the students put their magnet on backwards - without their name showing - if they don't feel like sharing with the group the state they are in.

3. **FoAP** - Next, as they join the carpet (or their desks) depending on their age level, I begin a Focused Attention Practice with the students. This is one of my favorites from Dr. Lori's list of practices: Visualize colors while focusing on the breath. Inhale a deep green, and exhale a smoky gray. Have students imagine the colors as swirling and alive with each inhale. If a student is de-escalating from an angry moment, the color red is a great color to exhale.



4. **Affirmations** - Affirmations for the day... I will do my best today...I can solve problems.. I can learn things...I am important....I can do hard things, etc...
5. **Question/Discussion** I ask the group a question from this list: [QUESTION LIST](#). Anyone who wants to can share during this time.

6. **Nervous System Helper** - Then each student chooses a nervous system helper idea they can use for the day to help them through any sympathetic or dorsal events they have (breathing exercises, asking for help/break, co regulating with a friend, talk to a teacher, breathing with a teacher or friend).
7. **Whole Group Deep Breath** - Three deep breaths as a group and then chant (Hey Hey Hey-)Point to yourself and say “I am going to have an awesome day)
8. **Check out** - During this closing piece of the morning meeting, anyone I notice on our chart who has indicated they have come in in sympathetic/dorsal- I set reminders for myself (and other staff) to increase the touchpoints for that student that day. If they are feeling better throughout the day I have them change their place on the PV ladder.

HUNT THE GOOD STUFF

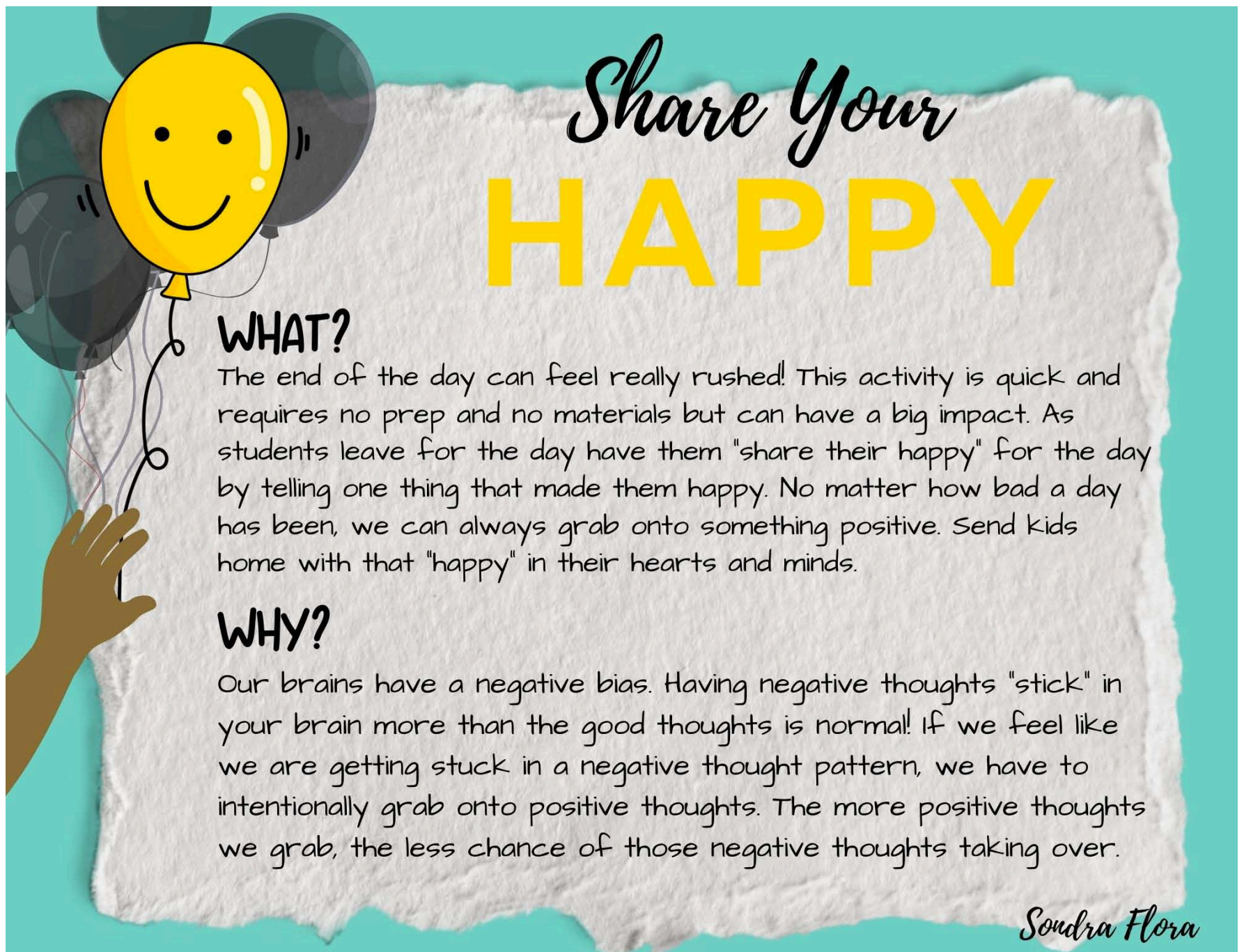
by Corey Odle

I am the coordinator of an out of school time program for middle schoolers. I used to be the girls' teacher and now am just not in the classroom much and hate the loss of connection with the kids, especially my old students. My staff have started a daily after school meeting with the youth where we review the daily/weekly schedule and do a daily riddle. To maintain connection with my students I've started joining the daily meeting and my daughter is one of the students in my program. We have done a daily thing since she was little "hunt the good stuff" to tell each other good things about our day thus far. The other kids and staff started joining this practice and it is now a part of our daily after school meetings. We even talked about how our brains are wired for the negative (and why) and how important it is to seek out the positives in our lives.

SHARE YOUR HAPPY

by Sondra Flora

I feel like I have a lot of things in place for the nest at the beginning of the day and after recess. I struggle more at dismissal because we are always so rushed. Our kids have specials at the end of the day so we pack up to go to specials and then when I pick them up, we combine with the other 2nd grade class and our walkers come with me and the car riders go with the other teacher and our two busers go on their own. I need something really simple that doesn't require any materials or specific plans because I will likely forget them and then we won't have a solid routine built. I was reading another post and there was a line on it that said "share your happy." At the end of the day, as they walk into specials, I can have students share their happy for the day. We have really focused a lot on negative brain bias because I notice so many kids getting stuck in negative thoughts. We have read books and practiced being intentional with catching positive thoughts to put in our mind. So as students are sharing their happy for the day, no matter how bad the day was, we can find something happy to remember before we leave.



Share Your HAPPY

WHAT?

The end of the day can feel really rushed! This activity is quick and requires no prep and no materials but can have a big impact. As students leave for the day have them "share their happy" for the day by telling one thing that made them happy. No matter how bad a day has been, we can always grab onto something positive. Send kids home with that "happy" in their hearts and minds.

WHY?

Our brains have a negative bias. Having negative thoughts "stick" in your brain more than the good thoughts is normal! If we feel like we are getting stuck in a negative thought pattern, we have to intentionally grab onto positive thoughts. The more positive thoughts we grab, the less chance of those negative thoughts taking over.

Sondra Flora

BACK-TO-BACK DRAWINGS & NEURONERD NIGHT

by Trish Giese

I had a collection of ideas, but I wanted to be able to focus on a practice that has been successfully implemented into my classroom every week. The students love it and now my whole team is using it for an authentic brain break after recess.

Last semester we discussed art therapy and had the pleasure of a guest speaker, Juliet King. She talked to us about Art Therapy. This brain-aligned gathering combines the benefits of art therapy. When I did some research on art therapy, I learned that numerous benefits of art therapy have been identified, such as the following:

- changes in brain patterns reflecting a calm, focused state of attention
- more developed gray matter areas in the brain
- development of neural pathways in your brain that enable you to create and focus on making art
- reduced cognitive avoidance in which you become less aware of what you are thinking and doing when experiencing psychological distress
- increased emotional awareness
- increased sense of control and ability to express inner thoughts
- ability to communicate abstract feelings
- improve attention span
- increase self-esteem
- expressing emotions
- and IT'S FUN!

As we have learned from Dr. Lori, "A focused-attention practice is a brain exercise for quieting the thousands of thoughts that distract and frustrate us each day. When the mind is quiet and focused, we're able to be present with a specific sound, sight, or taste. Research repeatedly shows that quieting our minds ignites our parasympathetic nervous system, reducing heart rate and blood pressure while enhancing our coping strategies to effectively handle the day-to-day challenges that keep coming. Our thinking improves and our emotions begin to regulate so that we can approach an experience with variable options." Art therapy does just that and more!

To help contextualize this creation for my first-grade class, I would do this after our lunch/recess break. Generally, after recess, our students come in dysregulated and need some time to calm down and get their brains ready for an afternoon of learning. I try to incorporate this practice once a week. Students always work with a different partner to build relationships between students.

This practice is called "**Back-to-Back Drawings**".

Items needed: Clipboard/paper/pencil/object/shape/piece of simple abstract art

Time frame: 10-15 minutes (this might take a little longer in the beginning)

- Students will be grouped into pairs.
- They will sit with their backs turned from each other.
- One person will be partner A and the other will be partner B.
- Give one person an image, such as a shape or a collection of shapes. You can also gather examples of simple abstract art from your art teacher for students to use.
- Partner A will be instructed not to show the image or shape they received to their partner. Partner B will be instructed not to peek at their partner's image.
- Partner A will have the drawing/shape and describe it to their partner who cannot see the image. Partner B will try to recreate the image to the best of their ability.
- You will set a timer of 3 minutes or whatever you feel is an appropriate time. The timer eliminates students from becoming off task.
- Then the partners will switch places and repeat with a new image.
- When the pairs are finished, they will compare images.
- *If students are describing a shape, they cannot say the name of the shape to the other partner.

Debriefing questions:

- What did you learn when you described the image?
- What was hard about that activity?
- What did you learn while drawing?
- What are some lessons that you learned from this activity that might be used in the future?
- How did that make you feel?
- Was this something you would like to do again?

My class starts math right after this practice so it ties in nicely if we are using shapes. I hope you give this a try! (It also results in some healthy laughter when the creations are shared and compared.) :)

*Update/Edit to this lesson ... (thanks Jenn for the idea!!)

I love the idea of hosting a "Parent Night". This post-covid parent night (it might occur in a year or two ...) could start with a student led Focused Attention Practice. After that, the students could present and teach their parents about the brain stem, the amygdala, and the prefrontal cortex. Then we could finish with the "Back to Back" art activity; parent and child! I am thinking a little mindful yoga would be great too! There are so many great options to think about once the schools allow parents back in to the schools. I also believe that this would strengthen my community of students and enhance our cozy, loving nest! :)

[NeuroNerd Night flyer](#)

RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT

by Amber Burwell

My Focused Attention Practice is the use of Rhythmic Movements. These movements were introduced to me from my OTs and we have had some really positive feedback and data from the classes that are incorporating it. I have done these with kindergarteners all the way to 8th graders. These movements are PATTERNED, RHYTHMIC, and REPETITIVE activities that can help regulate students.

Click the link below to see me modeling them.

[Rhythmic Movement video](#)

LUNCH BUNCH

by Danielle Reynolds

Grade Levels: 5 and 6

I see my students intermittently throughout the day in 30-minute blocks based upon IEP service hours. The majority of my students also participate in weekly lunch bunches, which are one of my favorite times to connect with kids. Each lunch bunch consists of three parts: a check-in, game of snowman/spaceman (an alternative to “hangman”, but the rules are the same), and an additional game (e.g. “Would You Rather?”, “Zoom-in Game”, “Silly Stories”/”Mad Libs”, “Which one doesn’t belong?”). During the game of snowman/spaceman, instead of trying to solve one word or a short phrase, students take turns guessing letters to solve a question. Once a student solves the question, they pick a peer and ask them the question. Once that student shares, they select another peer. This continues until all students have shared.

Through check-ins, the types of questions asked during the snowman/spaceman game, and a predictable routine (with a little bit of novelty), I hope that this could be considered “creating the nest”.

Here is an example of the check-ins that I have created/adapted and used: [Check-ins](#)

The question for snowman/spaceman can be tailored to fit student needs. I plan to incorporate some of the guiding meeting questions that Dr. Lori shared during last class as well, but here are a list of questions for some general ideas:

- <https://learn-grow-blossom.com/105-morning-meeting-sharing-ideas/>
- <https://www.centervention.com/morning-meeting-questions/>

Examples of some games that you may not be quite as familiar with just as an FYI: (I made the first 4 and the last one is a link I found online. I like these two games due to the level of conversation, language building, perspective taking, inferencing skills, and focus that they generate for students. My colleague has used the first 4 games with her 2nd-4th grade lunch bunch group as well.)

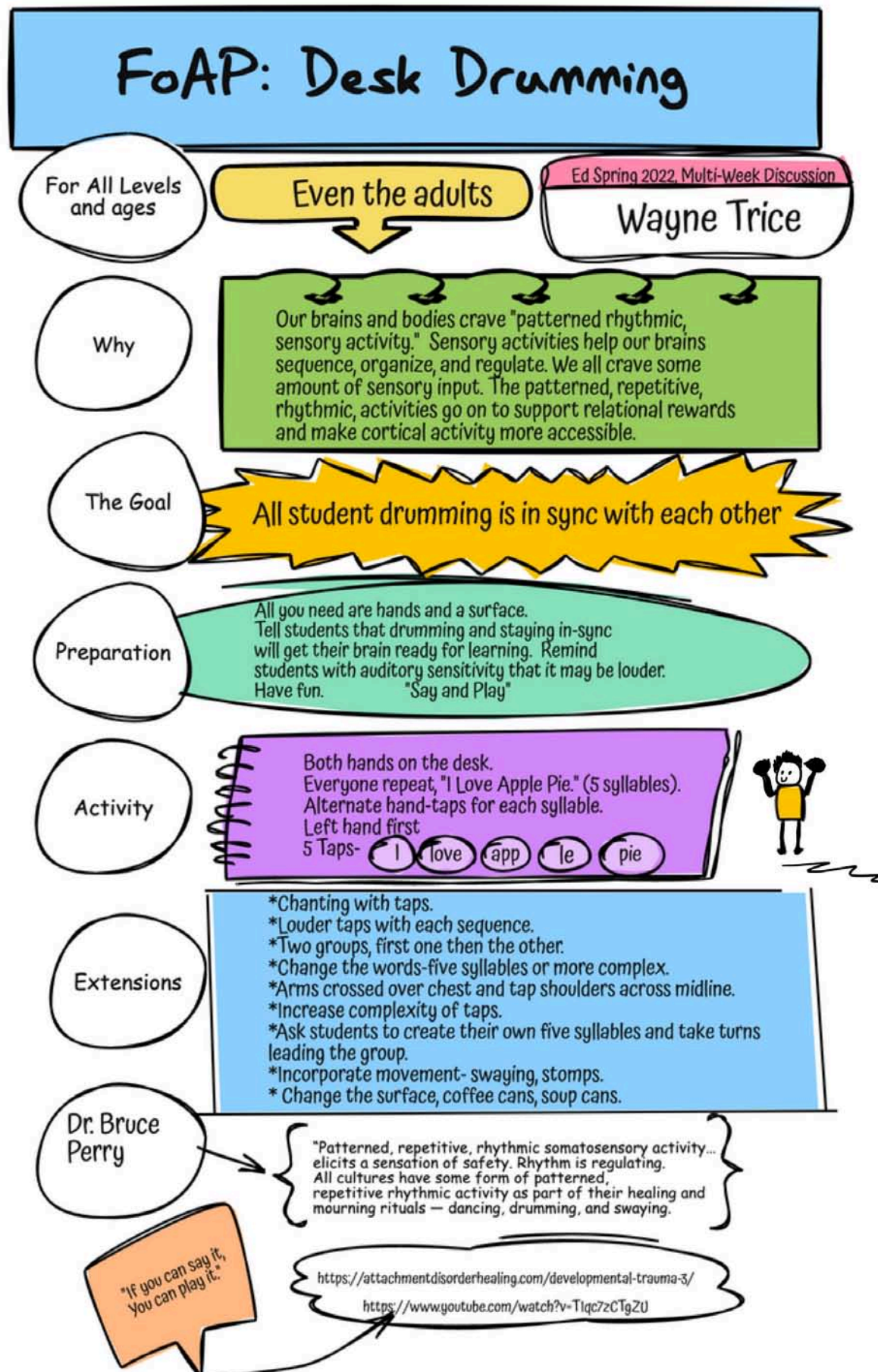
- [Zoom Game 1](#)
- [Zoom-in Game 2](#)
- [Zoom-in Game 3](#)
- [Which One Doesn't Belong \(1\)?](#)
- [Which One Doesn't Belong \(2\)?](#)

DESK DRUMMING

by Wayne Trice

The FoAP I settled on was a sensory activity utilizing patterned, rhythmic movement. Disclaimer, I've not done this with a class. But, I find myself drumming briefly at my desk as a transition between activities almost a natural signal to my brain to switch gears.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIqc7zCTgZU>



WELCOME RITUAL FOR THE NEST

by Michele Berning

We have an alternative classroom in my middle school and I am hoping to embed a ritual in the room. Students are in the classroom for part or all of the day based on their needs - typically kids who struggle with dysregulation and have a high level of trauma. I am envisioning an opening ritual at the beginning of the day where students start with a breathing practice, initially teacher led and then moving to student led, followed by an opportunity to share one positive from the day before and one hope for the current day. I would like to have a mid-day check in and an end of day check in where we come back together, practice a grounding activity and then share one positive from the day. Our hope is to help students start to change their focus while practicing regulatory strategies on a daily basis.

I have put my ideas into a powerpoint to share that I would like to give to the teacher as a sample of how to implement.

[For the Nest.pptx](#)



BREAKFAST GROUP

by Kelly Cox

When thinking of a "nest" and Safe Space in school, I immediately thought of having breakfast with my students. Last year, I had several students who needed time to regulate in the morning. We would do this by eating breakfast together. While this may seem simple, it was really effective in preparing dysregulated students for their day.

Potential Agenda:

1. Emotion Check-in
2. Share one thing they are happy or sad about
3. Focused-Attention Practice
4. Goal for the Day
5. Something they are grateful for

CLOSING ACTIVITY

by Johni Tomlin

A Closing Activity

I would use this with a small group counseling session with 3-5 elementary aged students in grades 1st-5th.

Begin the closing of the session with a “ball toss”. Students throw a ball to each other and the student who catches the ball says something he/she/they learned, liked or didn’t like about the session. Continue until everyone gets a turn. Then, end the session with a Mindful Moments JusTme video such as <https://vimeo.com/227542821>

COUNSELING THE NEST

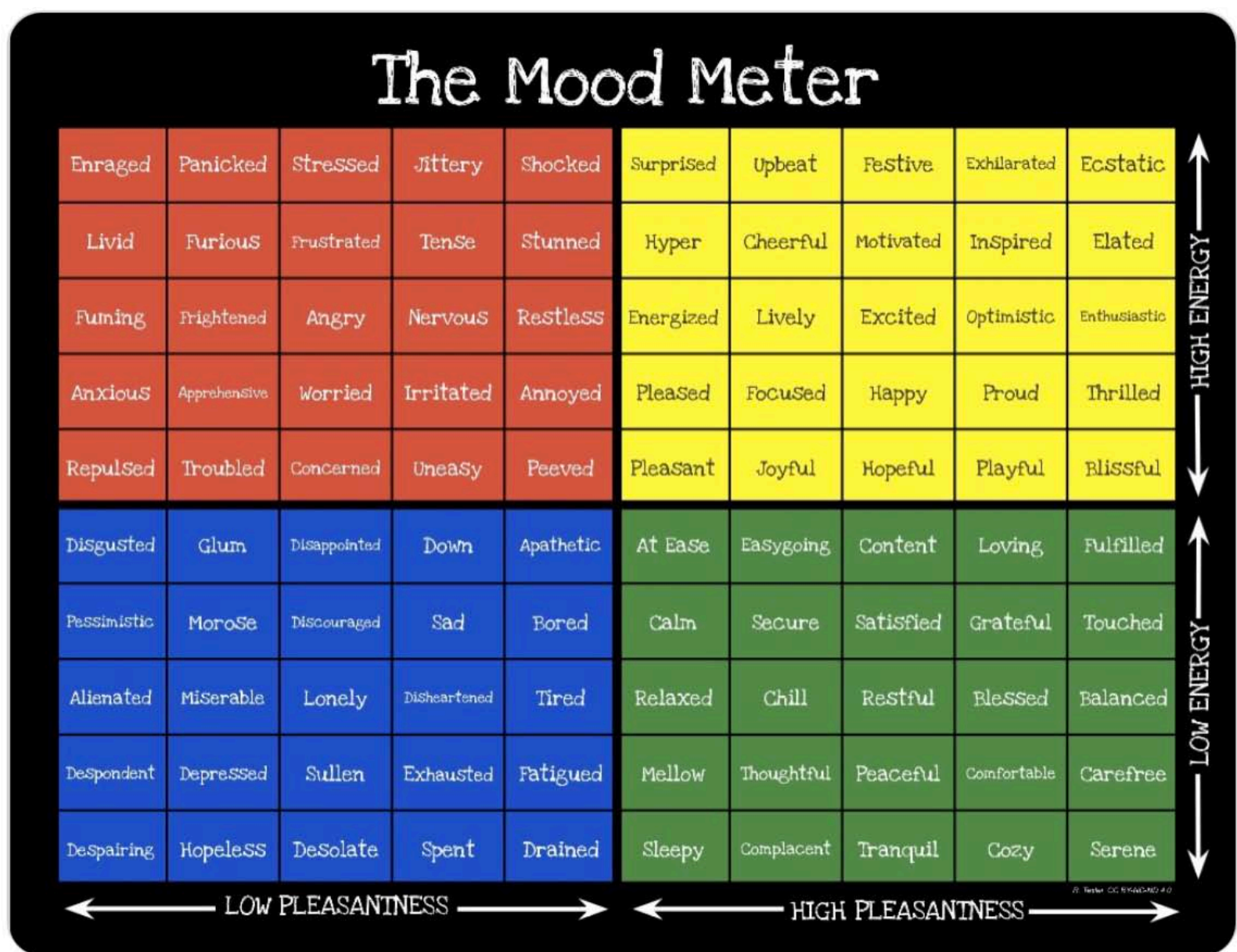
by Sam Grimes-Scott

What: Group counseling session;

Who: 5 middle school students with a need in building coping skills

When: Time we meet varies but I would use this as an early morning activity or possibly if we were meeting at the last period of the day when students were low energy

1. Personal Mood Check In: Mood Meter



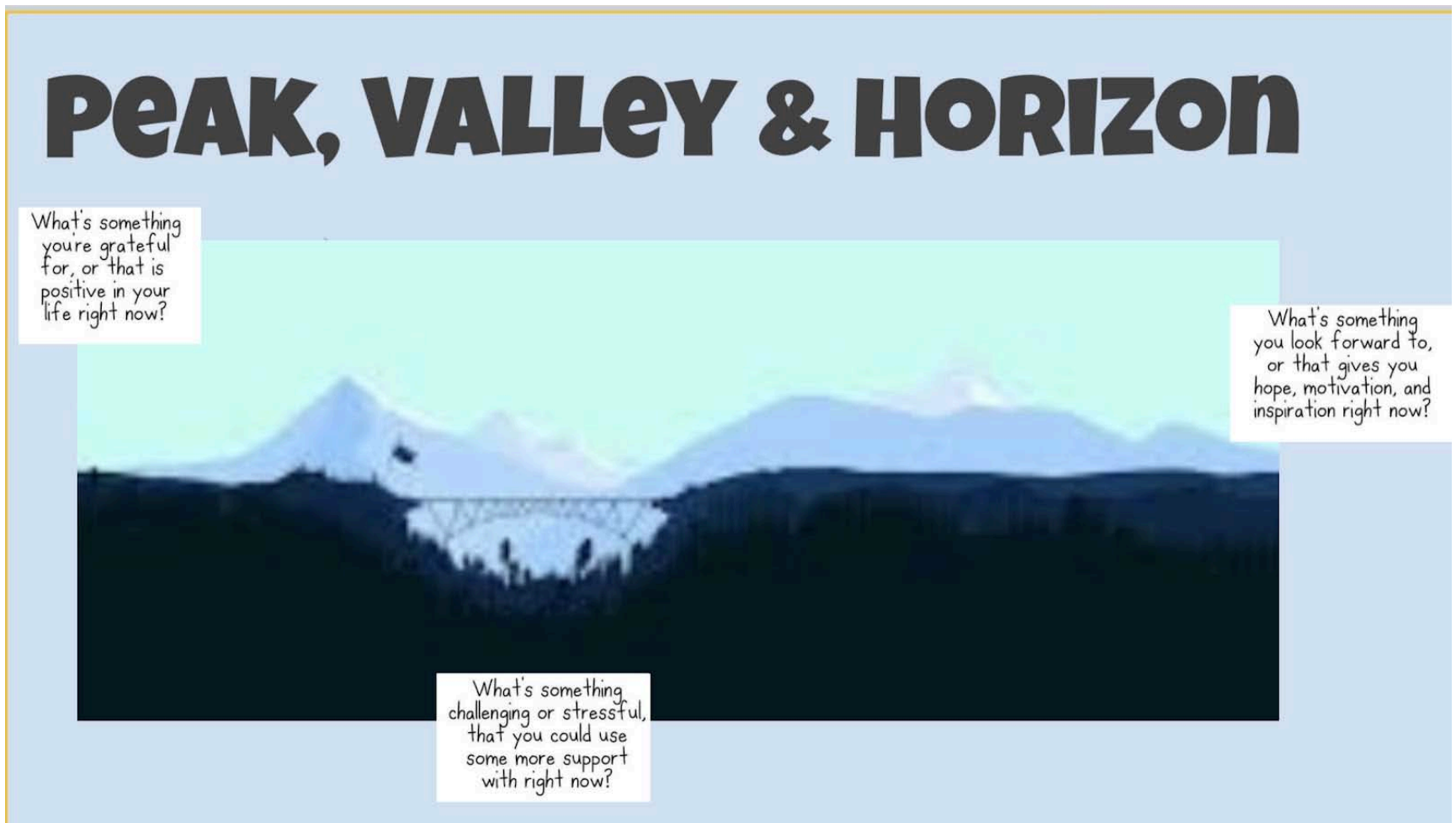
2. Focus Attention Practice: Invisible Pictures: Students will get the chance to guess the pictures that I “draw” with my fingers. EX: House, Heart, Rainbow

3. Community Building Check In: Peak, Valley, Horizon

a. Questions to participants:

1. REGULATE: What calming or regulating strategies did you find helpful this week?
What made you feel secure during the week? Insecure? Comfort/Discomfort?

2. RELATE: What kind of support do you need from group members today? When thinking about your challenge or stress, who do you trust to help support you? When thinking about something you're looking forward to, what people will you share it with? Will you keep it for yourself?
3. REASON: Reflect on your self-talk this week—what was helpful/healthy? Unhelpful/unhealthy? What could be different for you in the coming weeks? Do you anticipate any struggles this week? How can we use group time to plan for these?



4. Wrap up: We can use the time to set goals for the week; give a shout out to someone else in group (or oneself); any final comments or observations.

GROUNDING MINDFUL MORNINGS


by Priscila Weber

Some of the activities I have done with students and used as part of our Advisory periods is focused on Grounding. This is used as a transition to get students focused and calm as we work on community-building and sharing. Students use the 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding method and they start seated in a circle, at their desks, or another comfortable spot. Students are directed to take slow, focused breaths while noticing 5 things they see, 4 things they feel, 3 things they hear, 2 things they smell, and 1 thing they taste. Alphabet Grounding is a variation of this in which students are given an alphabet sheet and they find things based on their senses for each letter of the alphabet. After being introduced to this, we use it as a springboard for sharing moments of gratitude and to be mindful rather than mind"full".

Sharing


5

Slowly take five deep breaths.




4

List four things you can see or notice around you.




3

List three things you are grateful for.




2

Say two positive self-talk statements to yourself.



1


Name one thing you are looking forward to today.



Una Mañana Consciente


5

Lentamente toma cinco respiraciones profundas.




4

Haz una lista de cuatro cosas que puedes ver o notar a tu alrededor.




3

Haz una lista de tres cosas por las que estás agradecido/a.




2


Digase dos declaraciones positivas de dialogo interno.



1

Menciona una cosa que esperas hoy.





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MINDFUL MONDAYS

by Alanna Smallwood

Something that I incorporated this year, in the middle school, is Mindful Mondays. I chose Mondays because I have found that students are most dysregulated after a weekend of either fun/excitement or stress/sadness. Either way beginning their Monday mornings with a little focus attention practice helps to bring some of them to a peaceful place and ready to start the school week.

In the beginning of the first 5-8 minutes of Health/Gym class, I would lead with a breath and body scan, followed by a mindfulness reading or yoga poses. Then I would end with another breath. The kids seem to like it and look forward to it. I only wish they could have this everyday!!

BUILDING THE NEST



FOR ADULTS

(Staff, parents, clients, etc.)

RIVER REFLECTION

by Cynthia Argo

This is a focused attention practice for adults or children. The purpose of this reflection is to teach students and staff to become better observers of their surrounding environment and nervous system responses before reacting to disruptions or challenges. It is inspired by a blog post written by Cindy Yantis. The reflection has been slightly altered from one I often use with students.

First consider this passage:

Life is Like a River: It ebbs and flows, sometimes rushing and other times meandering around obstacles and detours, or through branches that shift its course. While we may have purpose and intention about our life's desired destination, like boulders, deep holes, and waterfalls along the course of a river, there are elements in our lives that we cannot control. With presence of mind and body, we can better navigate the disruptions, inhabitants, speed, and organic flow of the river. We can find more peace in the changing current of our lives, and a more relaxed ease in the journey.

Reflection: Today we are going to do a river reflection, where you will visualize how your river flows today. How it flows today may be different than tomorrow, but it continues on, no matter the obstacles. After you find a comfortable position, we will begin by closing our eyes and taking a deep breath into your lungs. Then very slowly, I want you to release the breath. Let's take one more deep breath, and then slowly release it. Now I would like you to continue to breathe at your own pace, while imagining that you are walking along the bank of a river. Think about what it looks like. Is it a big river or a small one? What is the color of the water? How is your flowing; Is it slow or swift? What is in your river....rocks, pollution, beautiful plants or animals? If you can reach down and touch the water, what is the temperature of the water? What is next to the river? Is it protected by trees? Is it rocky or marshy? Now, I want you to focus on what the air around you feels like. Is the air warm or cool? Is it still or windy? What are the sensations you feel in your body as you stand beside the river? What feelings are you experiencing? Is there anyone there with you, or are you by yourself? Stand where you are and take in the scene around you. Try to notice everything you can. Don't try to change it, just accept what it is. When you are ready, turn and walk away from the river and back into the room. Listen to the sounds in the classroom. Feel your body sitting in the chair. When you are ready, take one more deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

Processing the Exercise: Students or staff can draw or share what they visualized during the exercise and how their river is similar or different from their current life.

Possible questions:

- What was in your river? How did it flow?
- Was it a peaceful or tumultuous?
- What feelings did you experience?

- Did you feel safe?
- If you did not feel safe, could you see a safe place to go, or was there someone or something about the environment that helped you feel protected?

VAGUS NERVE HACKS

by Anna Boikov

Creating a nest for our own nervous system is just as (if not more) important as creating a nest for those around us. Sometimes my teacher friends and I would love to get our yoga mats out in the middle of the school day and go into extended child's pose for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, it's pretty tricky to provide yourself with a decent yoga routine while in the classroom or in a staff meeting.

I came across these Youtube clips while creating a presentation for my team on Polyvagal Theory. These 'vagus nerve hacks' can be done with your students, in meetings, on playground duty or wherever you are on the planet. They are inconspicuous (unlike pulling out your yoga mat) and (after my presentation) according to my team, quite effective.

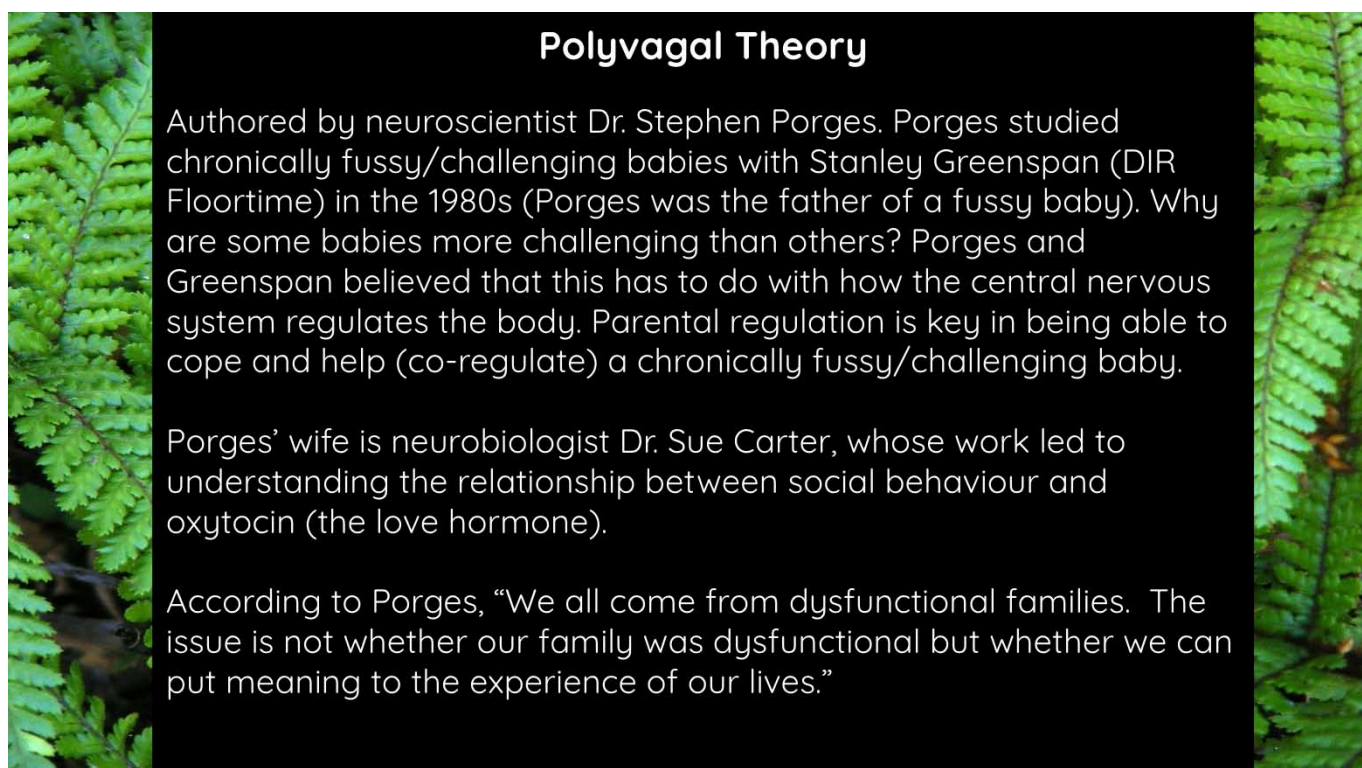
Vagus Nerve Hacks

- Hand Reflexology: <https://youtu.be/GpHgKRVOdVs>
- Vagus Nerve Massage: <https://youtu.be/9uZ1rnKF5DU>

This is the presentation I created for my team.

- [Polyvagal Theory STOS -1.pptx](#)

We had a look at this over 2 meetings because people wanted to stop and talk about the slides, videos and vagus nerve hacks. An outcome that I wasn't anticipating was that although we talked about Polyvagal Theory being only a theory, my team agrees that this is a theory that supports and promotes the work we do at our school. Feeling grateful.

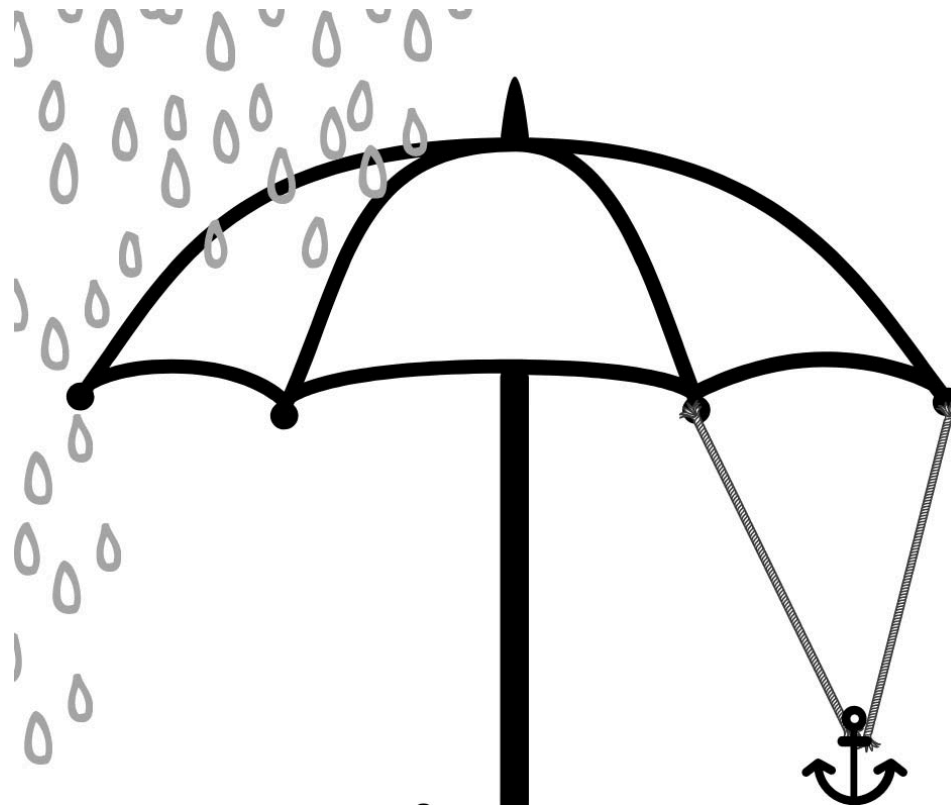


UMBRELLAS & ANCHORS

by Laura Brazil

As a school building leader, the core group of people that I am teaching and responding to is our faculty and staff. So this exercise would be meant for them. We've done some neuroanatomy with our staff, and the idea of regulation and reset is familiar to them. They've seen the polyvagal chart, but I want them to explore that more and think about it for themselves, not just for students. I re-listened to the Deb Dana interview, and her metaphor of an umbrella has been stuck in my head ever since. I love it!

So I would begin my giving my staff this visual:



Then we would talk through Dana's labels for each, including:

- The umbrella as the ventral vagal - sunny skies - showing curiosity
- Under the umbrella - the sympathetic (stormy) - fight or flight and the dorsal (foggy) - shut down
- The rain is what happens - good, bad, and in between
- The anchors are what help keep the umbrella from flipping inside out in tough winds.
- When the umbrella is working, we have many areas of storminess or foginess (blended state) but our ventral vagal is making decisions about them and is still running the show!
- If the umbrella flips, sympathetic or dorsal may take over!
- So developing anchors and spending time with them when we are struggling can help keep the umbrella working and protecting us!

After each of these, I would pause and invite staff to think about how the metaphor applies to their own lives, and how they were functioning today.

EDUCATOR BRAIN AND BODY STATE

by Christina McKeever

Our Resilience Team created this brief (15 min) presentation for our staff during one of your staff meetings. The goal was to start the conversation about what adults need to feel safe and connected. It has served as the anchor for our work this year, a tool for reflection and reminders that we all need different supports. Each staff member was given a paper/pencil copy of the survey - and about 5 minutes to complete it. The reflections also helped to start the conversation that felt safety is personal - not all students want the same tools or touches. The power was in the conversations about regulatory resources and supports - several "ahas" as adults reflected on what they need and how to find out what their students need.

[Educator Brain and Body State Presentation](#)

Educator brain and body states

—
Check in time!

MUSIC MONDAYS

by Heather Saul

I love using music to help improve my mood; it's easy to do and works incredibly fast. A while back there was a show on NPR that discussed how listening to just a few minutes of classical music each day can improve mental health, lower stress levels, and decrease cortisol levels in the body. I've found a way to incorporate just a few minutes of classical music into my workday morning routine and love it.

Since we are still semi-virtual at Cape Assist, I am proposing virtual "Music Mondays" to start the workweek off right. I will email staff a small selection of a classical piece to enjoy before barreling into the work week. The email will have a link to the audio recording and information on the composer. In the body of the email, I will embed a "screen shot" of a classic piece of art. There is something so calming about being in an art museum and looking at works of art while classical music plays in the background. I want to create this same feeling/ sense for staff at Cape Assist.

To incorporate some of the feedback I received, I will email staff to see what music helps them get into a positive/ focused mood. I will also suggest that we try this for a full week, ask staff for feedback (did it work... what did you like... what could be changed) and then utilize on a more frequent basis. I also like the idea of "assigning" this to a different staff member each week.

THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

by Anne Martin

As a Principal, creating a culture of collaboration amongst my staff is critical. The relationships the adults have in a building has a significant impact on our students' well-being. If a staff is divided and cliquy, students will intuit that and their felt sense of safety will be compromised. Staff members, however, all come with a lifetime of experiences, opinions, and practices, and often the philosophy that some staff have is directly in conflict with beliefs held by others. This poses a particularly daunting task for an administrator, who must weave all these different strands into the tapestry of the school. The good news is, we know all humans have a drive for connection and want to be seen, heard, and understood. I therefore start each staff meeting with an activity that allows for this.

At the first staff meeting of the year, I begin by showing the video [One Caring Adult](#) (Trigger Warning: suicide attempt, sexual violence). In the video, the speaker uses a jar of marbles to show how many weeks we have to influence a child from birth to age 18; when a baby is born, we have 936 weeks, and by the time they are 16, we only have 104 weeks left. I remind staff that we have 40 weeks with our students each school year. I then hand out 3 index cards to each staff member and ask them to write 3 ideas down (one on each card) of how they will be the difference for their students this year. Finally, I have staff form 'inside outside circles' (the group forms two circle of equal numbers of people; those in the outside circle are facing the inner circle; those in the inner circle are facing outwards, so everyone is partnered up). The person from the outer circle then shows her cards to the partner on the inner circle; the inner person chooses one and the outer person talks about why they wrote what they did. The partners then switch and the inner person shows her cards, the outer person chooses one, and the inner person speaks to it. I then have the outer ring move three steps to the left and repeat the process. This can be done 2-4 times.

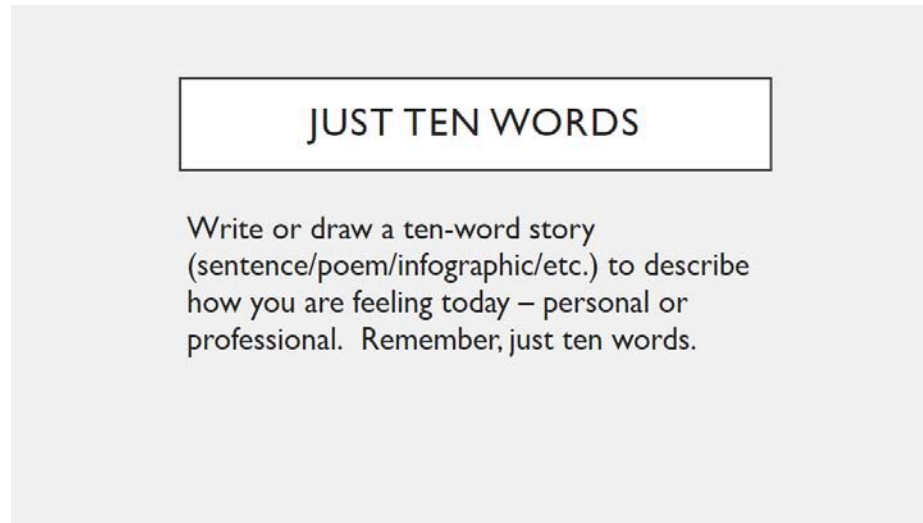
The benefit of this kind of activity is that it is highly inclusive, reflects a person's best values, and allows for different perspectives to be heard. As well, the randomness of the partnering breaks up cliques.

To conclude, I collect the cards and post them in the staff room so people have the opportunity to read how their colleagues plan to be the difference.

JUST TEN WORDS

by Mike Groher

I began a staff meeting last week with the following slide;



I felt that this was an activity that would allow staff an opportunity to 'get in touch' with how they were presently feeling. After 10-minutes, we went around our circle to complete a 'whip-share'. Staff were invited to share one word, their ten word creation, or pass. Some elected to share a number of words between one and ten and some shared very creative and descriptive poems with exactly ten words. Staff shared that they enjoyed the activity overall and, specifically, appreciated the insight or glimpse into how their colleagues were feeling. I appreciated staff's ability to present feelings other than 'tired' or 'overwhelmed'. To me, the feelings or writings that were shared felt 'real' and well thought through.

Something I personally enjoy doing is reading or listening to something - not necessarily related to school, kids, etc. - and creating a metaphoric connection between what I am reading or listening to and my profession or activity with staff/students. With that said, I also find moments to encourage others (staff) to do the same with provided material. When attempting an activity such as this, I often provide a framework for processing. The following image is a 'go-to' for me and follows an ORID Framework;

Objective: Facts, Data, Senses

- What comments, ideas, or words caught your attention? Why?

Reflective: Reactions, Heart, Feelings

- How has the reading affected you?
- How did you react to (responded to) your selected reading?
- How have you felt while reading?

Interpretive: So What?

- What has been your key insight or most meaningful aspect of your selected reading?
- What have you learned from your selected reading?
- How does this relate to any theories, models, and/or other familiar concepts?

Decision: Now What?

- How, if at all, has this reading changed your thinking?
- What is the significance of this reading to your professional work?
- What will you do differently as a result of this reading selection?
- What will it take to help you apply what you have learned?

The purpose of the Framework is to allow for thought processing to take place while directing the thought - in the end - to a 'now what' perspective. If you would like to take a stab at this, here are two songs that I have recently encountered that would work perfectly (in my opinion) with school staff as we collectively work to relate to the needs (present and future) of our students;

- [Surface Pressure from Encanto](#)
- [Anywhere Away from Here by Rag'n'Bone and P!nk](#)

Anyway, I'm not certain these are 'typical' Focused Attention Practices, but they are designed to focus staff attention/thinking at the onset of a meeting/presentation - providing quiet reflection and collaborative processing.

MINDFUL MINUTE

by Mindy Byham

I often find myself at a bit of a loss on how to creatively transform an idea that would work wonderfully in the brick and mortar school world to the virtual setting – I have seen many great ideas come out of discussions and posts in this class, and there are times when I simply can't figure out how to "translate" those into a virtual exercise!

That said, my school has an existing "Lunch and Learn" option for parents – this is a quick, 10-15 minute opportunity at lunch time for parents to learn something about virtual schooling – it can be anything, and many different people contribute to these sessions. Using that established structure/routine as a model, and at the same time, I can offer a Mindful Minute (I'm open to better names for this!) for faculty to address educator brain and body state. I haven't implemented this yet so it's theoretical at the moment, but what I envision this somewhat like the following:

Check in – How are you doing?

- What was your morning like – stressful, calm, productive, chaotic?
- I will offer a visual of the Nervous System Tracker to help quantify and/or pinpoint this, and that could also be used to do tracking if anyone chooses to use it that way

Mindful Minute –

- Introduce a Focused Attention Practice – I really like the options from the Tapping Solution with Nick Ortner so I plan to use those ready-made videos, with an occasional scribbling task or breathing exercise so it's not always the same. This part will take about 5 minutes, give or take.

Check out – How are you feeling now?

- Was that helpful? Would something else be better?
- Optional: note where you are on the nervous system tracker and whether it is different than at the beginning

The idea is twofold: 1) that the faculty go into their afternoon classes and tasks more regulated themselves & ready for whatever the kids bring/to be equipped to co-regulate as their own brain state is calm, and 2) to be sneakily teaching them not only some simple practices but also the vocabulary and awareness of regulation and brain body states without it being a formal PD.

Noted – I have been writing a monthly newsletter that contains little snippets of AEN information and vocabulary and I'm introducing these concepts in that way; I had thought I might use that newsletter to inform about these sessions and provide the link. Also important is that I already have established weekly office hours when teachers or other faculty can come to discuss students, plan, problem-solve, or simply vent so I intend to schedule my time and these sessions in such a way that if a specific co-worker needs to

stay and have more time to regulate or wants to know more about what we're doing, I can make that happen without having to change any appointments or obligations.

Additional ideas: I've been thinking about ways to improve this nest-building idea since first designing it, and I think that simply expanding my "audience" beyond staff alone might be the way to go! It is very "doable" for me to take about 15 minutes a few times per week to address different groups in slightly different ways. With that in mind, I would like to do this on a weekly basis with 3 groups of people: faculty, parents (or Learning Coaches), and students - since I work with elementary students, this would be kids from Kindergarten to grade 4. As noted, this would be totally optional and would take place during the time period when lunch is scheduled, so that anyone who wants to join wouldn't have a conflict with any class. Because of the way our classroom software is set up, I could also record these mini sessions so that if any of the parties involved wanted to review, repeat, or simply to watch at a different time, they could do so. Finally, in addition to having a link in my monthly newsletter, I can also provide that in my email signature, to spread the information more widely and hopefully be able to reach more people!

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE MINDFULNESS

by Kristen Ryder

I'm creating a video for trauma therapists based on my trauma-informed yoga training from Justice Resource Institute's Center of Trauma & Embodiment (<https://jri.org/services/behavioral-health-and-trauma/center-for-trauma-and-embodiment>). I've been a yoga and mindfulness instructor since 2014; however, TCTSY through JRI is a treatment modality for complex trauma. When I'm teaching TCTSY, I am very clear about the type of class that is offered, as it is not a "typical" yoga class, like vinyasa or ashtanga, or yin. It is founded on three Theoretical Underpinnings: Trauma Theory, Attachment Theory, and Neuroscience, and TCTSY Core Principles that are used in each class offering: Interoception, Invitational Language, Choice-Making, Non-Coercion, Present-Moment Experience, and Shared Authentic Experience.

TCTSY constantly refers back to this quote from Dr. Judith Herman, author of Trauma and Recovery:

"No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest" ~Judith Herman, M.D.

TCTSY, or Trauma-Centered, Trauma-Sensitive Yoga, is an empirically validated, clinical intervention for complex trauma or chronic, treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This modality has been researched by the National Institutes of Health as well as JRI's Trauma Center founder and medical director, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (<https://www.traumasensitivelyoga.com/>). While the center has since closed, researchers at JRI and throughout the community continue to evaluate TCTSY's efficacy with different populations impacted by trauma, namely combat veterans with PTSD and sexual abuse survivors.

My target audience is our community trauma therapists at our regional Children's Advocacy Center's Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviewing program, to help stave off secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. This video is meant to be part of a five-part series for therapists to choose from based on their need in that moment. One video will be a mindfulness practice that is trauma-informed but not TCTSY. I'll share one movement practice (TCTSY) and the mindfulness practice. All videos will be roughly ten minutes.

The foundation of TCTSY and how it supports brain-aligned AEN work: both honor shared experience (co-regulation) and interoception. As you view the two videos (forthcoming this week! just wanted to get my post up), see if you can notice moments of choice-making, moments of offering control back to the client, moments of agency, moments of sensation (or not), and moments of shared presence.

Here is 1 of 2 short videos, offering trauma-sensitive mindfulness for direct service workers in roles that support trauma survivors (that includes all of us!). The plan is to make this into a short series, so direct service workers can choose from a small bank of 8-10 minute practices based on what they need in that moment; maybe in-between clients, classes, or tasks.

While I carry TCTSY language and non-coercion into my mindfulness offerings, TCTSY does not offer mindfulness as part of their training or modality; it has not been part of their research. I welcome your feedback and noticings; this might feel different from a typical practice, and it's all good.

[AEN Mindfulness video](#)

C-CUBED MEETINGS

by Paige Wescott

To develop an administrative "Nest," with our team, we meet up each morning for Coregulate-Connect & Create (C-Cubed) based on Dr. Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model of Regulate-Relate-Reason. If staff members are not able to make the brief (10-minute), meeting, 30 minutes before classes begin in our library, they just need to text us in our GroupMe. We're no longer using radios (due to increased anxiety in halls and classes with high numbers of escalations), so we all keep our cell phones close to us. We use "tap in/tap out" as well, so we can communicate "in-the-present-moment" as much as possible. Once a week we adjust our NEST to be a Zoom staff meeting or a Teams call, with multiple voices welcoming, sharing a positive intervention, brain-boost, or focused-attention practice (FoAP) each week.

An example of one of our C3 meetings recently is the following:

We connect as we come in; soft low-fi music is playing to calm and soft lighting meets us.

I stand with staff for a brief stretch and 4 deep breaths (4 seconds in -from the nose- 4-second hold, and 6 seconds exhale), then begin with a reminder (we've already trained on this) of our reasons for self-regulating ourselves before we begin our day with our own family, our staff, and our students and families. I start with this quick, but loaded TikTok:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@neuraleducation/video/7010824035747630342>

After one or two team members share a take-away, we go into a quick meditation.

The current feelings of unrest within each of us, during this Russian/Ukraine conflict, are made worse as we realize none of us here can simply go to the border of Ukraine and solve this conflict alone. But we can clear our own battles, our own unforgiveness, and our own offenses we've embraced within us, and invite a regulated calm to reign in our nervous system and our limbic system. In this way, we are better able to teach, connect, and coregulate with students, staff, and families from our cortex, and help others to share our calm contagion.

As we begin to meditate, I invite all to bring out any physical reminders for their upcoming journey within. Some of us have a coat (a meditative shawl), a soft kushie, or a choice of position that prepares us to go deeper and still feel safe. We remind each other, frequently, that we must make sure we go to this place of safety, first, and we work to provide the same for our teams, students, and families, at any opportunity. Often, we are all STUCK in our physical nervous system, and not be able to get to a place of calm or safety.

I invite a right hand on the heart and a left hand on the stomach; we take nice, big, deep, nose breaths and we practice expanding our lungs so our bellies are pushed out. Encouraging them to use the diaphragm muscle between their bellies and their lungs to breathe in and let it exhale. The first goal of

our meditating is to calm our nervous system down, and diaphragmatic breathing will do that. It will send the message up to the Vagus Nerve (part of the diaphragm nervation) and when the diaphragm is the breathing muscle, we are instantly telling our brain that we are SAFE; that we are OKAY. Verbal cues are helpful here, too; "I am safe; I am here, now. It is my intention to be willing and ready to release and clear inner conflicts, tension, hurts, stress, and distractions that I am carrying in order to become my BEST SELF, today, for myself, my family, my students, and my teams. I am allowing my intellect and ego to move away from me right now. I am allowing all of the distractions outside of me, to be completely irrelevant right now. As I go within, all is well. We continue to inhale and release (4, 4, 6).

We allow our bodies to settle in and our breaths to be natural. We let it go. We actively release our conflicts, tensions, and anxieties; we name them to tame them and we allow them to be released with the breath out - to dissipate into the air and disappear.

We send our feet and toes love and gratitude for all they do. We remind them to relax and we surround them with a warm, golden light of love and gratitude. We move up the warm, golden light up our lower legs, relaxing our muscles and allowing them to feel heavy. We allow the heaviness to be so heavy, that they seem to almost disappear. We allow the warm, golden light to travel up to our thighs and we take a very deep breath through our pelvis; releasing tension in our hips and pelvis. We release the tension in our lower abdomen, and we allow the warm, golden light of love and appreciation to travel up our bodies - to circle around our lower back. With each breath and release, a little more conflict and/or anxiety washes into the warm, golden light. Frustration, hurt, pent-up emotions are washed away into this warm, golden light, as it spirals around our mid-backs, our chests, our necks, and heads. Our hands on our heart and abdomen are centered within the warm, golden light, as it perfectly envelops and surrounds our entire body. The warm, golden light of love and gratitude spirals around us, within us, and actively washes away tensions, discord, and stress.

Now we relax our entire body, including the jaw, our throat, and our neck, where we often carry so much tension. We allow the facial muscles to droop, the sinuses, and the bridge of the nose to relax. We allow the forehead, between the eyes, to relax. We allow it all to melt away and be swirled out by the warm, golden light that fully surrounds us. We allow the top of our heads to receive all of that warm, golden light.

We breathe in the warm, golden love and gratitude. We say, "I am now ready to release all of the conflict, offense, hurt, and distraction, as I breathe in the strength, power, and resilience within the warm, golden light of love, and gratitude. We release whatever is left, that weighs on us or remains in conflict within us, into the warm, golden light. We release others and ourselves from the judgments we have carried in our hearts, thoughts, and nervous systems. We release our hurts, our scars, and all those who have hurt us into the warm, golden light. We accept ourselves in our weaknesses and flaws and know that as we move out of this meditation, we will be embracing our Best Selves; more whole, more aware, more attentive, and more accepting and ready for all that awaits us! We know that we are here to release conflict, and we can return here, whenever we wish and that we are safe here. We are here now, ready to meet all in our world, as our Best Selves.

We take in two final breaths, as we move back into our shared presence.

We assess, briefly, how we feel, think, and how we can do this, anytime - for ourselves, with our students, with our own families, and with staff.

We leave empowered and refreshed, memorizing this feeling of love, gratitude, and safety. The more time we spend in this feeling state, the more we will be at peace with the external world of our students and staff, as well.

We leave with thanks for each other and with the purpose to co-regulate and move forward with amazing teaching and learning; knowing that we are STUDENTS of our STUDENTS and that we will be learning today, too, as we are taught or SCHOOLED by our students - even as we teach and share our calm, regulated, contagion!

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

by Tracey Wise

One of the things I like to do with staff as an "opening" is a mental health check-in. I use a poster with different symbols correlated to their feelings. I give everyone a sticky and ask them to place it where they are feeling that day. It is a great way to remind staff to check in on each other.

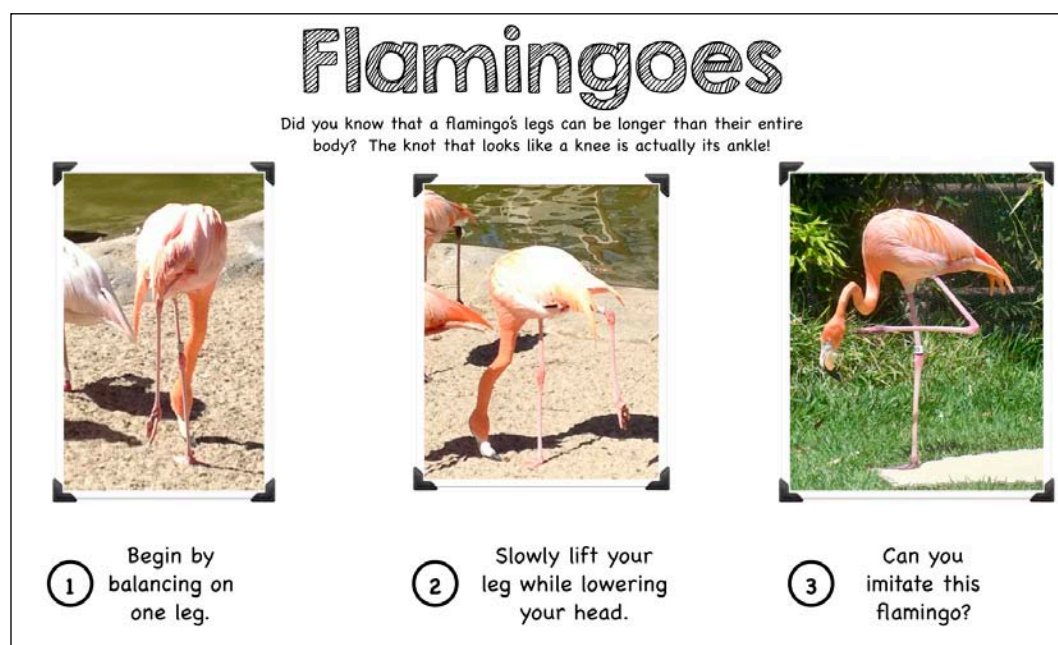
INTRO TO EDUCATOR BRAIN & BODY STATE

by Amy Egly

This is my Fifteen Minutes; I actually used this last week, reflected and tweaked my presentation to staff. I introduced AEN, and focused on Pillar One. I included FoAP that I use as well as Brain intervals/Breaks. I over-thought this entire thing, hoping that just ONE staff member wanted to learn more. I had numerous staff asking soooo many questions. I feel like this is a great starting point here.

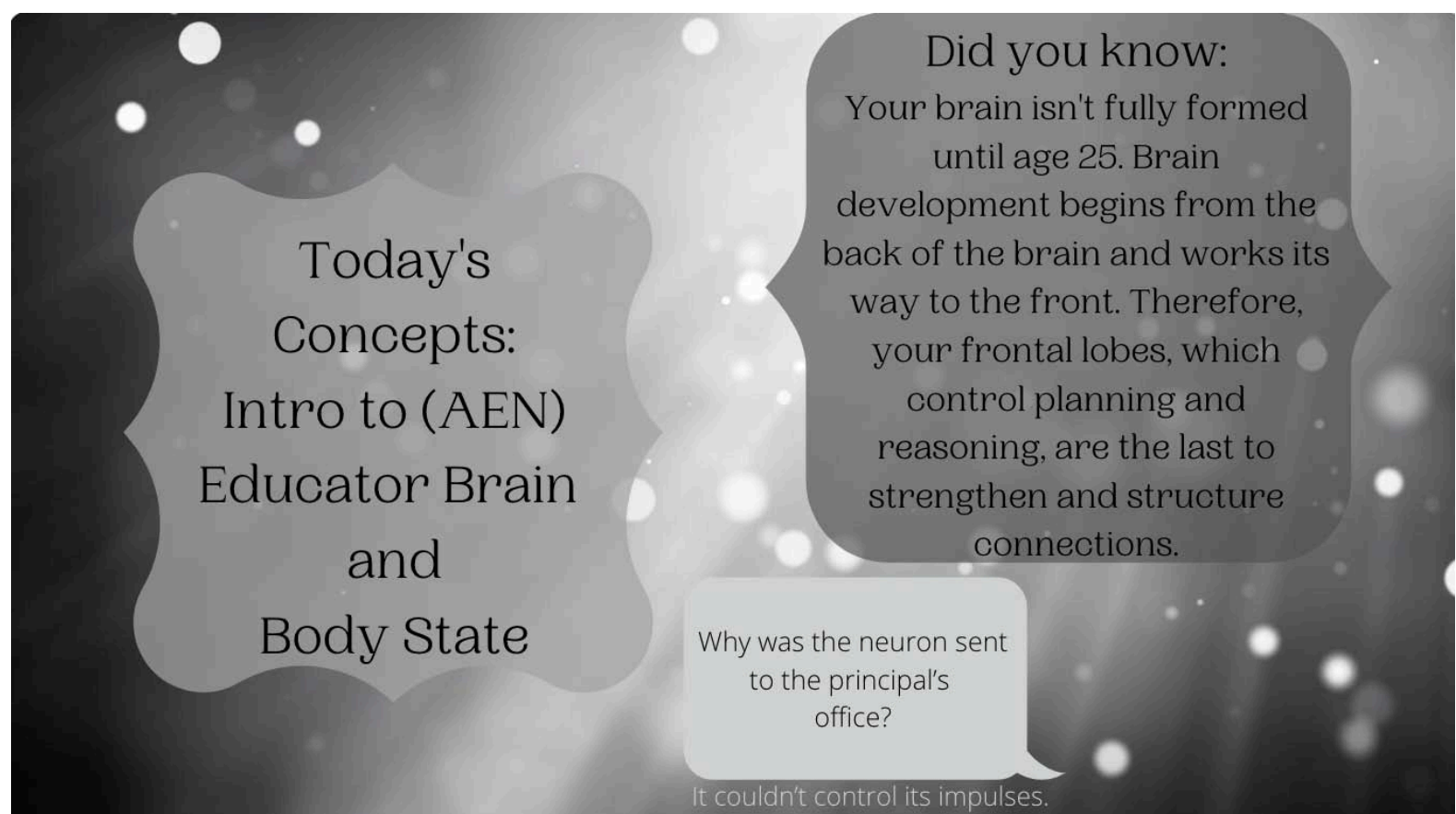
I did Tension for my FoAP-It's a student favorite. Tense muscles from toes to fingers tips while breathing in for a count of 4. As we exhale we start to release from fingertips down to toes. We do this 3x.

Brain Interval came from Deck of Cards, the Flamingo



Brain Break-I do this at the end of class, it's usually a lateral thinking puzzle. My students LOVE them.

Here is the [presentation](#).



I LIKE TO MOVE IT, MOVE IT!

by Natalie Elliot Handy

FoAP Title: I like to move it, move it!

Target Group: Administrators/staff

Location: Meeting

Time: Any...but especially after lunch when the carbs are kicking in!

Takeaways: Be a Thermostat, Not a Thermometer: Emotional Contagion is real; Bring about body awareness!

Background:

Ever since starting this journey, I became determined to educate our staff, and human service professionals, about Applied Educational Neuroscience and the positive impact incorporating the framework can have on our client outcomes. To start, I developed and have been offering the training: "A Child's Behavior Starts with You: Understanding Why Behavior Management is Really about the Adults". This training hits on the Brain, ANS, Trauma, ACES, Attachment/Authenticity (love me some Gabor Mate), introduces AEN, identifies barriers to Connection and offers brain-aligned strategies that focus on the brain stem, limbic and cortex. To date, I've had the privilege of training almost 500 human service professionals, parents and foster parents....and counting. As you can imagine, I'm super excited.

The next step is to work this into our daily meetings, routines, policies and procedure and this assignment came at the perfect time! Since not everyone has fully tasted the Cool-Aid, I decided to give them a little taste! My plan is to slowly incorporate a FoAP into our weekly Director's meeting. Get the buy-in!

The Practice Run:

This week, I logged on (it's virtual of course) before everyone and started playing an upbeat song - Justin Timberlake: "Can't Stop the Feeling"! (inspired by Courtney of course) It's the kind of song that makes you want to move/baby dance, sing, smile and laugh. So of course, that's what I was doing as folks logged on. The result... as you expected. People don't notice at first but then... smiles, a little laughing, head nodding, shoulders moving, mouths moving from saying the words to yourself. Instead of the normal silence, people are head nodding, singing, dancing... "Getting Right with their ANS!". It was great compared to the normal feel of "not another meeting...I'm so tired, no one is really talking because their working through lunch" attitudes.

And then what happened?:

Once everyone was on and fully jammed for 60 seconds, I turned down the music and told everyone how much I appreciated them, their time, and the work they are doing to help our clients live their healthiest lives (our mission). I followed up with stating that I hoped each of them enjoyed the music and reminded them that the brain LOVES rhythm and movement! Listening to music was a quick and easy regulating practice, one that can easily be incorporated to beginning of meetings, both this one as well as their own.

What's Next???

Continue to incorporate music at the beginning of each meeting I participate in and offer a fun fact related to one of the four pillars of AEN with the goal of others leading their meetings in the same manner.

AEN BULLETINS

by Laura Erber

“Mindful Mondays” for the educators in my building to make them more aware of self-care, awareness, and nest building.

AEN Bulletin 1:

Good Morning Everyone!

I chose, as one of my course assignments in AEN (Applied Educational Neuroscience) , to share a weekly bulletin or "care package" if you will, of helpful concepts, quotes, videos, etc., that help us learn together the "brain aligned" concepts we discussed a few weeks ago. This includes taking care of the educator's and adult brain as well! As I stated in the AEN workshop, educators are probably the single most important influence on a student's personal, emotional, and educational well being and growth next to their parents. I have included two video links that promote relational learning and teaching. Please watch them when you get time. One is 7 min and the other 20 minutes but I think they bring home the point and the importance of relationships in education. All people need to feel safe before they can enter into more complex learning and higher order thinking.

I know this information is helping me personally as well as in my professional life here at school. It is my hope that it helps all of us take better care of ourselves and the ones we serve so diligently!!

Have a great week!

Your feedback is appreciated!

"We can change social conditions to create environments in which children and adults can feel safe and where they can thrive." Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, "The Body Keeps the Score"

https://youtu.be/TpsK_fY2BpQ

<https://youtu.be/LNuxy7FxEVk>

APPRECIATIONS

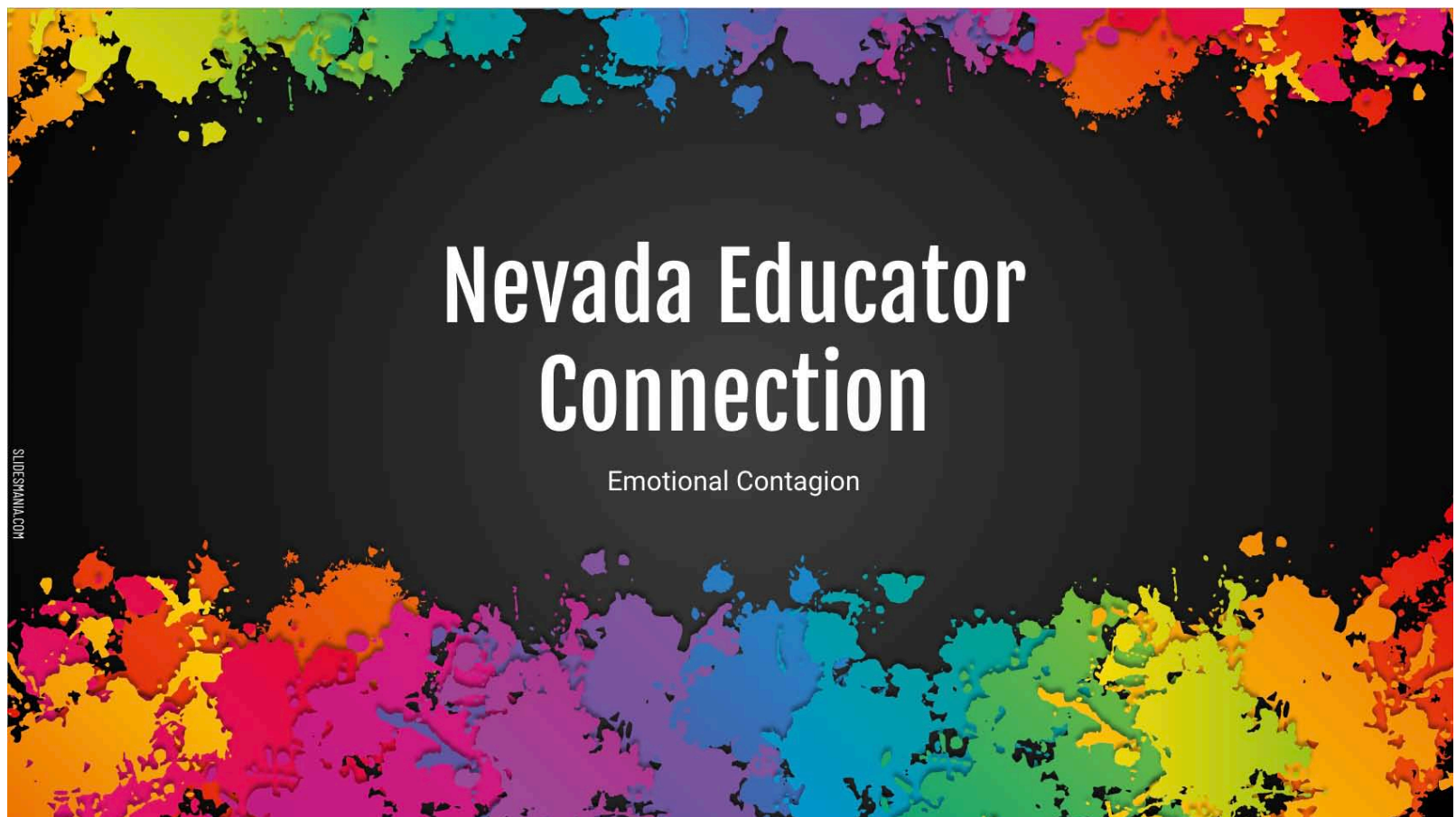
by Katy Sahm

I am a therapist working primarily with adults and young adults. I have set an intention to do a FoAP at the beginning of every session or some kind of breathing/relaxation. I ask check in questions such as 'how did that feel today?' 'what felt helpful?' 'what did not?' 'how do you feel this helped regulate your nervous system to prepare for this session?' and finally, 'how could you use this in your daily life to help you regulate during highly stressful times or anxiety etc.?' Then we continue to our session; at the end we end with a FoAP if needed to calm the nervous system before wrapping up. We also end with 'appreciations'--'what is something I appreciated about you during this session and what is something you appreciated about me during this session?' GREAT way to wrap up and have a 'soft' ending, especially after intense sessions. Nice to do with families or couples as well. They have to say appreciations for one another and I say one for all of them as well. I also have an affirmation jar and some affirmation cards and I always tell people before they pick that whatever they pick was meant for them. Gives a lot of hope. I also intend on (and have been) adding one brain-based fact during each session to help them understand their nervous systems and that their brains are working FOR them! This has been amazing and transformative for folks. No longer are they shameful but beginning to see and believe they are actually brave and courageous and have acquired many strengths through their distress. The last thing I have been trying to do is ask patients when they come back for the next session what they noticed or are more aware of about their nervous systems, and what breathing or coping or FoAP have helped them since our last visit. It has been amazing!

EDUCATOR CONNECTION: EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

by Connie Thomson

I am developing a professional learning experience around regulation and attachment for K - 12 teachers in my region using all of the fabulous information and resources from our courses. While I will probably use the [presentation](#) as a lead into learning about emotional contagion, it could stand alone in its current form for the purpose of building the nest in other professional learning contexts. I could also see this being applied in the classroom as a gathering practice. I have included notes in the presentation to give you the gist.



EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

by Lora Wilson

I am planning to teach my front office staff about emotional contagion. Last week we had an issue with our heat. When we returned to school last Monday we had been out of the building for five days (due to snow-apocalypse). The building was EXTREMELY cold. We assumed the cold building was due to not having people in it and heat turned on for five days. This was not the case...one of our boilers had died over the time away. (We did not have this information from our maintenance department) As "luck" would have it, our situation made us "famous" over night on Facebook. By Wednesday morning, parents were calling in and taking their kids out of school, threats were made to contact TV stations. (Now mind you, we had one boiler still working and some heat in the building, not enough to bring the building up to a normal temperature, though). Needless to say, I was frustrated, the front office staff was frustrated and this came across to parents on the phone. Parents contacted central office in disgust about the "attitude and sass" they received when they call the building. Not a good situation.

While the direct audience will be only two people, I believe my mini presentation about emotional contagion can render a "catching" affect on many people! (pun intended)

[Emotional Contagion.pptx](#)



COALITION NEST BUILDING

by Kim Erichsen

The Lower Township Healthy Youth Coalition's general coalition meeting is held each month and as we discussed in class it would be beneficial for the meeting to begin with a brain aligned practice to begin to build the "nest" among our members. The practice will have to be limited to about five minutes because the meeting's agenda is usually packed and sticking to an ending time is already challenging. The beginning practices should be basic and more universal in nature. The members are culturally diverse, come from all sectors of the community, and have varying degrees of knowledge on the topic of resiliency. Also, the coalition is also trying to build membership, so we don't want members to feel uncomfortable, or to want to skip the practices to get to the agenda. We want the practices to be a meaningful piece of the meeting. Topics to begin with could be explaining and practicing FoAPs, tracking our nervous system on the polyvagal chart, and explaining the 90 Second Rule by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor.

The questions that Sam shared in the discussion post were ones I was hoping to incorporate down the road. The members could begin answering the questions to themselves or journaling their answers. When the members felt more comfortable, they could share their responses with the rest of the group.

Here the questions that Sam included in her nesting idea.

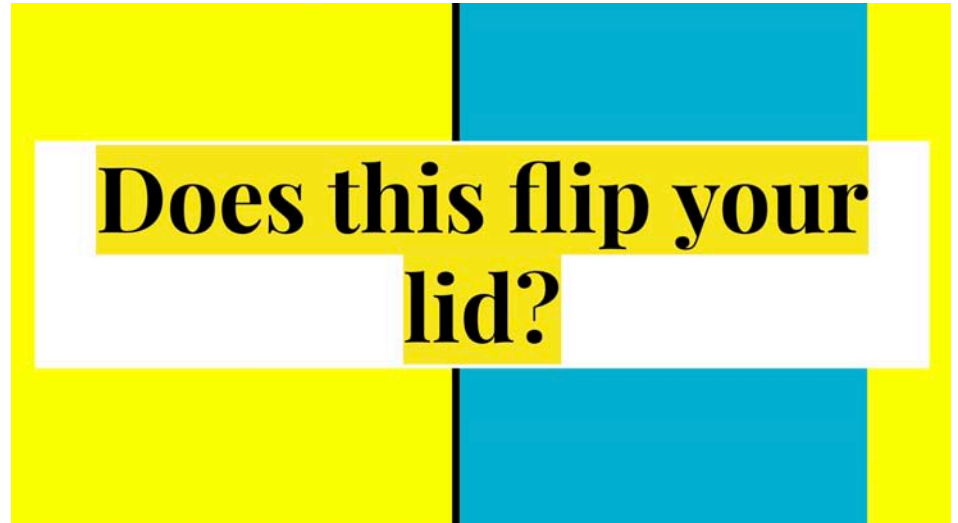
1. REGULATE: What calming or regulating strategies did you find helpful this week? What made you feel secure during the week? Insecure? Comfort/Discomfort?
2. RELATE: What kind of support do you need from group members today? When thinking about your challenge or stress, who do you trust to help support you? When thinking about something you're looking forward to, what people will you share it with? Will you keep it for yourself?
3. REASON: Reflect on your self-talk this week—what was helpful/healthy? Unhelpful/unhealthy? What could be different for you in the coming weeks? Do you anticipate any struggles this week? How can we use group time to plan for these?

If the coalition is going to move forward on advocating the message of resiliency the members should also have a firm understanding themselves. Starting each monthly meeting with a short practice will begin to build that foundation and the coalition's "nest".

DOES THIS FLIP YOUR LID?

by Carla Bunner

I am a school therapist in an elementary school. I designed this [powerpoint](#) to be part of a group therapy lesson to help teach the kids about what 'flips their lids'. This activity is done after many weeks of learning about all parts of the brain and what they are responsible for in how we process and regulate emotions. Additionally, work around the concepts of fight/flight/freeze have been well established as have where we may feel these various stress responses in our bodies. The focus of this activity is to begin bringing awareness to things that may or may not flip our lids.



With this awareness students can start understanding ahead of time what sorts of things activate their systems, so that they can make plans to handle those before they happen. The example I always give is that I am very activated in anger when I am cold. Now that I know that about myself, I can make as many accommodations as I need to to try to manage that before it happens, and before my lid is flipped.

Additionally, I believe this activity 'creates the nest' by normalizing and validating routine day to day things that flip our lids. It allows our students to be less judgmental about themselves as 'bad' or 'angry' and allows them to understand oh, this is something my system doesn't like. This creates a sense of safety.

When I do the activity, I almost set it up as a 'would you rather' meaning if this is something that DOES flip your lid you stand here, and if it is something that DOESN'T flip your lid you go stand over there. This allows movement in restless elementary school kids. It is also a great visual way to get kids to see the similarities they have with others, including the teaching staff, about what sorts of things flip lids in all humans. Normalizing reduces shame and opens us up to feel safer.

Once the students are on their respective sides of the room after answering if it does or doesn't flip their lid, I will invite anyone to share about how they know this flips their lids? Does this put them into fight/flight/freeze (collapse) and what tells them that? Where in their body do they experience those feelings and what does it feel like.

OVERCOMING EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

by Melanie Davis

My staff is tough and the moments I get to share with them at PD is often rushed. While I know some appreciate the efforts and information shared over the past school year, I am far from reaching a level of "buy-in" with how important the AEN work is for staff and students.

My nest continues to be built upon creating a safe space in my office for everyone in the building, including cafeteria workers, custodians, teacher, students and administrators. I found the visual from *innerdrive.co.uk* shared with us earlier absolutely on point and have tweaked it a bit to explain and offer ideas for helping those who enter my "nest" with cognitive overload and emotional regulation. As we have discussed in class, the educator nervous system is at the base of our ladder and I feel my job is to create a culture of awareness at the base. The visual can be a tool to help with this awareness. ([PDF](#))



PALM LINE TRACING

by Cori Newland

I just love the term, building a nest. It's so fitting thinking about the warm, inviting spaces we try to create for our young children in the early childhood world. I work with a lot of program leaders of child care programs and we are consistently addressing the emotional climate in classrooms. I have worked with leaders on providing this space for their staff and staff providing this space for their children. My favorite thing to help teachers implement are these moments to create the nest. When I step into a room, I can feel if the nest has been started or not. We are working on greeting children warmly when they walk in, creating individual hello's for individual attention. We are working on getting down at their level and just being with the children. I often have them reflect: How often do you have moments with each child throughout the day? Who do you connect with well and easily? Who do you struggling connecting with?

Then we focus on building touchpoints, "I love you rituals" as Conscious Discipline calls them, and noticing the children that need it most, which are often the ones they are struggling to connect with.

A very successful and responsive FoAP that the teachers and children end up loving is Palm line tracing. My own children love it and we use it when needing to calm or refocus energy.

Palm Line tracing is simple and effective for young and old!

Slowly trace the lines on your palm. Feel your fingertips graze each line, all the while taking intentional breaths. Keep your mind focused on how the touch feels to your fingertip along with your palm itself. Relax your shoulders and work your way toward the horizontal lines on your fingers. When you're finished, move to your other palm.

Audience: Young children (toddler through PreK)

Setting: Start with large group or small group time, moving to individual moments

- I like to start by first showing the children and teacher the steps above on my own hand and talk through the feeling and sensations not only my hands feel but my body. Once modeled for both children and teacher, the teacher then takes the lead.
- Then ask, "Do you want to trace the lines on my hand?" Or "Do you want me to trace the lines on your hand?" Now, young children often love this closeness and ask for a turn many times in a row but of course we always respect those that do not want to be touched. We start to ask questions like, "How does that feel different?" And the children really focus in on the feelings and sensations. I have done this with toddlers and even though their verbal skills are still developing and we might be doing a lot of talking, it is amazing to watch how it builds the sense of connection and safety between teacher and children.

- As the children become more and more familiar with the activity, they are asked to trace each other's lines on their hand and it brings in more peer interactions. It also becomes a connection the teacher can refer to when children need that extra moment of touch or focus.

I do use this with my own children like I mentioned before. My son, 6 years old, often asks for me to trace the lines on his hands when he needs help calming but also does it on his own hand when he needs help refocusing. I catch him, when he is working in his room, he will be fidgety, then stop and trace the line on his palms and get back to work refocused.

I am hoping the video worked of my son, Oliver, doing some palm line tracing. He was a little camera shy but did well.

RESPONSE-ABILITY-CENTER PROTOCOL

by Laura Smith

As the MTSS Coordinator in my district, I have to wisely navigate the fidelity and implementation of systems established and adopted in our district. As a consultant to this engineering process, I am grateful to contribute my adaptive approach by providing evidence based options and alternatives to objective aligned programs and practices in our district. Currently I am working along side my principal and paraeducator in creating a well functioning Tier 2 behavior intervention space (we call "The Response-Ability-Center").

This led me to apply a communication protocol between teacher, student and staff to support students self-awareness as well as develop co-regulation practices. With this, I am sharing the draft protocol and practice in creating a community through clear communication of supports and strategies. I believe having this clear and consistent practice supports both students and staff develop the language, reflection and application of sensory and emotional regulation.

Here is the working document link to this procedure: [Response-Ability-Center Procedure and Protocol](#)

Again, as I support system development, I want to ensure that clarity, consistency (as well as adaptability) is integrated into the procedures and practices

USE YOUR STRENGTHS

by Melissa Woods

This activity is called “Use Your Strengths” and was created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) found in the *Greater Good Toolkit: Science-Based Practices for a Meaningful Life*. This activity can be used with adults or students of any age although modifications will need to be made based on the audience’s age and abilities. I have adapted this activity to be completed in a 10 minute time frame.

Research suggests that thinking about personal strengths can increase happiness and reduce depression. Humans have a tendency to give more importance to negative experiences or to focus on weaknesses and limitations. This exercise asks participants to identify one personal strength and consider how that strength could be used in a different way. Recognizing and exercising strengths allows neural pathways to develop that will ultimately better equip the participant to access their strengths.

1. Take a moment and think about a personal strength (i.e. creativity, perseverance, kindness, modesty, or curiosity). Consider times you currently access this strength and when it is most likely to shine through.
2. Jot your strength down on paper and write down when you are most likely to access this strength.
3. Consider how this strength could be used in a different way (i.e. if your strength is curiosity, how can you use your curiosity to try something new).
4. Write down how you plan to use your strength in a new way.
5. Share your plan with a friend, colleague, or loved one.
6. Reflect with your partner on how you feel after identifying your strength and what it will feel like to carry out your plan to use your strength in a new way.

Putting strengths to use can help enhance them and using strengths in new and different ways can reveal how useful strengths can be in a range of contexts.

If I were to revise this activity for elementary students, students needing visual supports, or students needing help understanding differences in relationships (i.e. romantic vs family vs friends), I would spread the activity over a few days. I would start with students creating collages of things they enjoy or are good at. In a follow up session, I would read the book called [Everybody Has Something](#) by Margaret Domnick. We would then talk about the things that the students might need help with and what they are good at. I would add visuals of things my students typically need help with and things that they are good at to support students in participation. We could then proceed with the original strength's activity by the Greater Good Science Center. The next session we would work on identifying ways to advocate getting help and identifying people that can and will help us when we are needing help.

BUILDING THE NEST FOR STAFF

by Caleb Offord

I was procrastinating this post for several days while trying to think up a meeting/practice to use with students, when it hit me (aka my wife suggested) that we need to set the staff nest first! I'm a special education teacher working with several paraprofessionals, so setting their nest is a natural starting point. I may do something similar to this with my paras at some point.

The purpose of this exercise is to support staff in (a) feeling comfortable advocating for their own neurophysiological needs and (b) developing some strategies to support their own self-awareness and wellness (and not necessarily just at work!). Note: this exercise would pre-require some basic knowledge of brain states (e.g. Polyvagal chart) and recognizing our own brain/body state.

Step 1 - Validate their role. - Each of the staff in the classroom is a critical component of the classroom climate. Each one of them is indispensable and brings unique qualities and skills to our team, and the relationships they build with kids are the most important part of what we do. I would want to start a validation of the work they do, but also just recognize that we as adults aren't robots, and we also have needs, stress, struggles, and challenges. An opening script could go something like this:

"We are going to engage in something of a self-reflective practice that I hope you'll all find helpful. While applying this practice in the long-term will make for an excellent modeling opportunity for students, I really want you all to take this practice and use it for you. As we develop these, I want you each to really make it your own, and something that will actually be helpful for you. While I think this is something that will make us all better at our jobs, I don't want us to do it just to be more effective at their jobs. I want us to enjoy our work, and feel supported in it, and not feel that we just have to lower our head and power through when we are stressed, frustrated, angry, overwhelmed, etc."

Step 2 -Amygdala reset demo - I think it would be great to demonstrate an example or a few examples (depending on time) of amygdala reset rooms used with students or staff, to help the staff visualize what the process we're about to explore can look like.

Step 3 - Staff reflect on their own resiliency tools - at this point, ask staff to reflect for a few minutes about some strategies that may help them when they feel themselves moving in sympathetic (fight or flight) or dorsal vagal states. Provide a menu of some possible strategies (FoAPs, reflections, sensory strategies, etc) staff might find helpful for re-centering when feeling stressed or overwhelmed. This reflection process may extend beyond this meeting, and would probably continue to extend throughout the school year, but encourage staff to try some different strategies and build their own personalized amygdala reset that they can use throughout the year when they need it!