



## 100 Focused Attention Practices for the New Year!

By Dr. Lori Desautels

These practices are created to prime and prepare our brains and bodies to hold a state of relaxed alertness. Focused Attention Practices calm and/ or energize the nervous system. They incorporate breath, movement, rhythm, visualization, music, and imagination which is sometimes challenging when we feel locked in a survival brain and body state. Many of these practices energize and help all of us to focus and pay attention to the present moment. Other practices calm the brain and body when we are feeling rough and dysregulated. These FoAP are as much for adults as they are for children and youth. There are a few that attend to younger ages, but feel free to modify and enhance them based on the ages of your student population. As a parent or caregiver, these practices can be implemented in our homes along with school settings.

As we prepare to problem solve, create, pay attention, and generate strong working memory and emotional regulation, through our executive function skills, we need to have a strong oxygenated glucose blood flow to the cortex, and these practices assist in this undertaking. They are to be implemented at the beginning of our days, throughout the day, and anytime we need closure and a reset. They are built into our procedures, routines, and transitions. Our hope is that the students will begin to lead and direct these once they notice how these practices calm their own bodies and clear their mind. Focused Attention Practices are a critical part of operationalizing Social and Emotional Learning.

### KEY

**C- Calming**      **E- Energizing**

*Some can be both and will have both letters*

1. **Nostril Breathing- C-** With your thumb, close your left nostril and breathe in through your right for four seconds. Hold for four seconds and place your first finger on your right nostril and breathe out for 6 seconds. Now breathe in for four counts in your left nostril, hold for four and then breathe out for six counts in your right nostril. Repeat alternating nostrils three times and notice the sensations in your brain and body. (Closing our eyes is always an option)

2. **So What- C-** When we are feeling mildly irritated or anxious, this FoAP can help calm us and reframe the experience that is bothersome. As we breathe in, we say (in our heads) “so” and as we breathe out for a longer exhale, we say to ourselves, “what.” We do this a few times, imagining if this worry or frustration will matter a week from now, a month from now, or a year from now. This is a great one to do with smaller worries or irritations. (Closing our eyes is always an option.)

3. **Golden Cord- C-** In this FoAP, we imagine a golden cord with a glittering ball attached. This cord connects our chest to our bellies. As we take a deep breath in, we see the glittering ball move up along the golden cord into our chests and as we exhale, we see the glittering ball move back down the cord into our bellies. You can imagine this movement as fast or slow as you would like. Try this for one minute as you focus on your breath and the vision of the glittering movement.

4. **Lifeline Tracing- C-** As we breathe deeply, we trace the lifelines on our right hand with our left finger matching our breath to the movements. After 30 seconds, we switch hands, and with deep inhales and exhales, we trace the other lifelines on our hands matching the movement to our breath.

5. **Breath of Fire or Dragon Breath- E-** This is an energizing or sympathetic nervous system breath that helps create attention and energy in our nervous system before we begin an assignment, performance, or activity that requires concentration and some added energy. For 20 seconds, stick out your tongue and pant like a dog. Try to do this quickly as you see your belly moving only. Stop and take two long deep breaths. Repeat the breath of fire with your mouth closed for 10 seconds and then sit quietly for a minute and notice any sensations in your body or brain. What do you notice? Can you feel the energy in specific spots?

6. **Box Breathing- C-** In this FoAP, we draw an imaginary box in the air with our finger as we breathe for four counts on our inhales and exhales as we create the shape. This is a calming breath and can be repeated a few times.

7. **Energize- E-** In this breath exercise, think of a performer preparing for an event. We take a long deep breath in and then exhale quickly and fast. We see athletes using this breath to prime their brains and bodies before a competitive event. It is important to start with 5 or 10 breaths and then build up to 30 but this takes time. This is a powerful breath we can use to energize our brains and bodies when we are feeling tired, unfocused, and sluggish.

8. **Hand Massage-C-** For one minute, with hand sanitizer or lotion, we begin to give ourselves a hand massage as we intentionally breathe in and out paying attention to our breath and the sensations in our hands and wrists. Begin the massage at the wrists and move up our hands to our fingertips on both hands.

9. **Container Hold- C-** In this FoAP, we begin by placing our right hand under our left armpit and our left hand on our right shoulder. As we breathe in, we give ourselves a little squeeze and as we breathe out, we slowly release that squeeze. We do this three times slowly and then switch sides. This is an excellent practice to help us feel grounded and steady when we are feeling anxious and unsettled. We can do this for a minute or two or until we begin to feel a bit calmer in our nervous system.

10. **Head to Belly- C-** In this FoAP, we place our right hand on our forehead and our left hand on our chest. In this position take three to four deep breaths and as you inhale provide a little pressure to your head and chest. Following three deep breaths, move your hand from your forehead to your belly keeping your other hand on your chest. Repeat this a few more times! This practice helps to settle the nervous system and also grounds us in our space.

11. **Eye Yoga-C-** Keeping your head still, take your right hand with your first finger and move your finger back and forth from side to side and only move your eyes. Try not to move your head as you follow your finger. After you have tried this a few times, do this with a partner and have them watch you follow your finger to see if you can still your head. You can also move your finger up and down and in different positions but only follow with your eyes.

12. **Old Favorite- C-**Breathe in your favorite color as the color swirls up into your head and down into your body filling up all the spaces in your body you can imagine. Hold your breath for four counts and then slowly exhale releasing a worry, some irritation, or anxiety in a color that you do not like. Try this a few times and share with others how this feels!

13. **Fist Pumping- E-** Stretch arms out to each side (shoulder height) and elbows straight opening and closing our fists with an energizing breath of

fire. We begin for 30 seconds and then take a long slow deep breath and begin again for 30-60 seconds. This exercise brings an oxygen flow to the brain as the fingers act like a remote control for the brain waking us up with this repetition. We begin to focus on the movement and breath. Flip our hands over and open and close the fist again for another minute. This strengthens the nervous system.

14. **Crossing Movements- E-** Make a fist with the thumb inside and straighten the arms out to a 60-degree angle. Inhale with straight arms and cross in front of our forehead on the exhale. Inhale with straight arms at a 60-degree angle and cross behind our head. Continue with this powerful breath as this exercise releases calcium deposits in the shoulders and increases an improved blood flow to the brain.

15. **Rocking Our Breath and Body-E-** Sitting with legs straight out in front, spine straight, with arms stretched out in front of us. Keep the arms parallel to the legs. On the inhale we are straight, and on the exhale, we lean forward keeping the arms parallel and at shoulder height. Moving forward and then returning upright, we match our breath to these movements. This exercise strengthens kidney function and helps to strengthen the nervous system. We do this for one minute.

16. **Twisting and Swirling- E-** Sitting with legs stretched out, place each hand (your open palm) on your temple and inhale as you twist left and exhale as you twist right. Keep the spine vertical and straight with firm pressure on each side of the temples of your head right above our ears. Elbows are out as you twist. This exercise balances the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems with the breath and twisting motions.

17. **Punch and Grab- E-** Standing with our feet about three feet apart, we make a fist with our hands. One arm at a time, we reach in front of us opening our fist on the inhale and closing it, and drawing it back to our body on the exhale. We move back and forth with a powerful inhale and exhale opening and closing our fists alternating arms as we can pretend to grab what we need on the strong inhale opening our fists and grabbing as we pull our arms back to our bodies. This is much like a boxing movement with one arm at a time at any speed that feels comfortable to you! The faster you move, the more energy you create.

18. **Finger Tapping and Breathing and Rhythmic Breathing- E-** With both hands at the same time, begin with your thumb and first finger and tap fingers from the first finger to pinky as you tap all four fingers, you take a long

inhale and as you tap back to the thumb and first finger, take a long exhale. Repeat the tapping and breathing for one minute.

19. **Vagus Nerve FoAP- E-** With fingers touching our shoulders and elbows lifted high, at shoulder length twist left with an inhale and right with an exhale and a powerful breath for one minute.

20. **Shrugging- E-** Shrugging shoulders up and down with a fast breath keeping our neck loose, followed by 5 rotations of the neck in each direction. Improves circulation and the toning of the vagus nerve.

21. **Wrist Rotation- E-** With arms stretched out in front of us and hands making a fist, (thumb tucked inside our palms) slowly rotate wrists for one minute and then switch the rotation in the opposite direction for another minute. This exercise with slow deep breaths can release the emotions we are holding in our chest.

22. **Push It Away- E-** Clasp hands at chest level and on the inhale, then keeping hands clasped, we push them out in front of us opening our palms but still clasping our fingers, as our arms straighten with our palms facing out. On the inhale, bring your hands back towards your chest keeping the hands clasped! Do this quickly with a powerful breath for one minute!

23. **Camel Ride- C-** On our knees, Inhale and arch our back, and then as we slowly exhale, we curl our spines forward with hands resting gently on our legs. This exercise is focusing on movement and deep breaths!

24. **Cobra Snake and hiss like a snake! C-** Lay on your bellies and lift your chest only with your hands by your side ...take a deep breath in and slowly begin to let the air out slowly and hiss like a snake through your teeth!

25. **Butterfly- C- and E-** press both feet together and sit with a straight spine placing your hands on your feet and begin to move your knees up and down and fly with your butterfly wings! After one minute of flying with your knees moving up and down, take a deep breath in holding the knees up, and slowly bring them down on a long exhale!

26. **Fly Away- C and E-** Fly like the most beautiful bird and flap your wings as you move your arms up and down fanning the air with your beautiful wings and deep breath! Begin with your fingertips on the ground, and then with straight arms lift them up so the back of your hands touch on the inhale and on the exhale drop them to the ground. Repeat this movement with your powerful breath for one minute.

27. **Balancing- C- and E-** Using the balancing birds or a stir stick, as we breathe deeply, we balance the beak of the birds on our fingers. Inhaling and exhaling, we balance moving our arms up in the air, behind our backs, and in other ways that challenge us to continue balancing the object on our fingertips.

28. **Grounding Tree Pose- C-**With one foot firmly planted on the ground, we slowly take our opposite leg and move it up the side of our planted leg and foot, taking deep breaths as we balance. We then lift our arms slowly waving them back and forth in a V shape above our heads as the wind blows through our branches. Changing positions, we move our trees as a tornado passes through. Changing our trees as a gentle rainstorm passes through. What other movements and changes can you create with the weather?

29. **Ice Cube Melt-C and E -** With a small ice cube, place it on our tongues, and for one -minute sense the ice melting in our mouths. Do not chew the ice. As we move the melting cube around in our mouths, we continue to breathe deeply through our noses. What are the sensations you have experienced? How many breaths did it take for the ice cube to melt? We can do this FoAP with frozen grapes and juice-flavored ice.

30. **Body Percussion- E-** In this FoAP, we increase blood flow and circulation as we make fists and firmly drum on our arms and legs, back and front, to a specific beat or collectively as a group! We can drum to music, or we can create our own chant as we drum. This stimulates blood flow in our bodies.

31. **Clapping- E-** Standing or sitting and with straight arms, out to the side we begin a pattern of straight-arm clapping. We begin clapping in front, behind our backs, above our heads, and repeat taking powerful inhales and exhales with each arm movement. This is a series that causes us to remember each movement.

32. **Blossoming Flower-C-** With our fingertips touching together from each hand, we begin opening our thumbs, with a deep inhale and then exhale as we continue to breathe, adding our first finger then second finger, and third, and when we come to the pinky, our hands pull apart and we take the biggest breath as our flowers bloom. As we open each pair of fingers, we can also state an affirmative sentence such as “I am peaceful” “I am strong”, “I am ready”, “I am getting there.”

33. **Turtle Moves- C-** Very slowly with long deep breaths, pull your head out of your shell in your very own turtle-like way! As you pull your head out of your shell, breathe in and then as you tuck your head back in, exhale long and

slow. How do you hide your turtle head? How do you pull the turtle out of its shell? Each movement can look unique!

34. **Warm Up- C-** Place a hand warmer in your palms and as you pop it open and hold it to warm it up, take long slow breaths in and out as you move the hand warmer around in your palm, between your fingers noticing how the warmth feels in your hands.

35. **Movement-E-** This one is for younger children. Direct students to stand and, as they inhale, lift an arm or leg and wiggle it, exhaling it back to its original position. For younger grades beginning these focused-attention practices, it is good to include an inhale and exhale with any type of movement. As we continue to raise an arm or leg or change position, we inhale and then slowly bring the arm or leg back down with a longer exhale.

36. **The Deep-Dive Breath-C-** Have students inhale for four counts, hold for four, and exhale for four counts. You can increase the holding of your breath by a few seconds once the students find the rhythm of the exercise. With each breath, you pretend to dive deeper into a pool of water.

37. **Sound-C-** The use of sound is immensely powerful for engaging a calm response. In the three classrooms where I teach, we use rain sticks, bells, chimes, and music. There are many websites that provide music for focus, relaxation, and visualization. Here is one of my favorites.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_gtzGSNcCI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_gtzGSNcCI)

38. **Rise and Fall-C-** As we breathe in and out through our noses, we can lie on the floor and place an object on our stomachs, enhancing our focus by watching the rising and falling of our bellies.

39. **Hum-C and E-** There are many ways you can incorporate humming as a break or begin class. Lead students in Simon Says or Name That Tune or have them move their arms and legs to someone's humming. This activity releases stress and blockages in the brain stem.

40. **Sighing- C-** With a huge deep breath, let out the largest sigh you can! This is not a scream or shout but the swirling sound your voice creates when you let all the vocal energy go! Sighing can lead to yawning, and giant yawns are calming to the nervous system. Maybe we try three sighs in a row!

41. **Deep Breathing and Scrunching C and E** - Have students scrunch their toes and cross their legs at the ankles. Then they should cross the left arm over the right arm, clasp their hands together, and—keeping their hands clasped—bring them toward their chest. Have them hold that pose for 30

seconds as they take five deep breaths, and then have them take another 30 seconds to uncurl their toes, uncross their legs, extend and unclasp their hands, and uncross their arms while taking another five deep breaths. How did that feel? This contraction and release can strengthen our nervous system and prepares us for the day!

**42. Feeling Phrases C and E-** To begin the day, have students share through a picture or description how their bodies feel. Some example phrases: cold/warm/hot; twitchy/butterflies/soft/stuck; sharp/dull/itchy; shaky/trembly/tingly; jittery/weak; empty/full; relaxed/calm/peaceful; flowing/spreading; strong/tight/tense; dizzy/fuzzy/blurry; numb/prickly/jumpy/tearful/goosebumpy.

Sensations are different from emotions in that they describe the way the body feels physically. Children who struggle with speaking can point to places on their bodies that hold a sensation. Sensory awareness promotes cognitive growth and self-awareness. When students can begin to identify their sensations, they begin to tap into where the negative feelings and images are. This focused-attention practice can be implemented several times a day after different experiences. Questions to ask as part of this practice:

- What are you sensing? As the teacher, begin by sharing and modeling your own sensations.
- Where is this in your body?
- What might be the reason for these butterflies?
- Can you draw what fuzzy, tingly, tight, etc. looks like?

**43. Breathing-C-** Have students inhale deeply, lifting both arms in the air over their heads and holding their breath for four seconds. As they exhale, have them slowly place their hands on the back of their neck and massage their neck. They can repeat these three or four times until they feel more relaxed.

**44. Tracing a Hand-C-** Have students take a marker, crayon, or pen and trace their nondominant hand without lifting the pen as many times as they can until they begin to feel calmer. They should focus on their breathing and the continuous movement of the pen or pencil during this activity.

**45. Swimming in the clouds C and E** - Have students lay on their bellies and move their arms and legs, breathing in and out five times; on the sixth breath, they should slowly relax their arms while still kicking their legs. On the seventh breath, they should stop kicking and lay still, imagining that the



clouds are pulling them up into the sky. Tell them to imagine they're weightless and drifting or floating to their favorite place. They can imagine the colors and sounds as they breathe deeply for a minute.

46. **Focusing on balance-C and E-** Ask students to stand on one foot, holding the other foot off the ground and keeping their balance. With each breath, they should try to lift their opposite leg and foot higher. Have them pay attention to how high they can lift each foot. Switch sides and see if there is more balance on one side than the other.

47. **Not chewing gum-E-** Give each student a piece of gum and have them hold it in their mouth for one minute without chewing, just feeling the sensation. Ask what they noticed as they tasted the gum but did not chew. After one minute, we can chew together and share sensations and feelings.

48. **Visualization-C-** Feeling safe, peaceful, and connected with others can generate positive emotions and ease in critical thinking and problem-solving. In our focused attention practices, we quiet the brain with safe place visualizations. The students sit quietly, closing their eyes as we verbally walk them into their favorite imaginative place. We then direct them to envision the sights, sounds, colors and feel of their own safe place. They can invite anyone they choose to be with them, or they can rest and enjoy this space on their own. This has been the favorite focused attention exercise of the students who practice this skill.

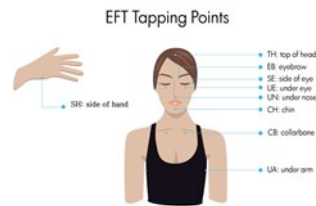
49. **Sound-C and E-** For two minutes, have students close their eyes and listen to all the sounds around them. Once they have identified a sound, they capture it in their own way, such as envisioning a box around it or placing an imaginary X on it. Students then share and compare the sounds that they heard and captured.

50. **Sound Focusing-C-** As we listen to a bell, chimes, or a lingering sound, focus on the sound, until you cannot hear it anymore and then raise your hand when the sound disappears.

51. **Crinkling Paper-C and E-** With a sheet of scrap paper begin to crinkle it slowly one breath at a time. As you crinkle, inhale, and exhale crinkling the paper into a small ball. Now as you unfold the paper, take a pen and trace the lines you have created in the crinkles for 30 seconds! When the time is up, look at your lines and design. What do you see? What did you create?

52. **Tapping or EFT-C** - This is a very powerful focused attention practice that is backed by research and uses meridian points on our skin that have an abundance of nerve receptors. Tapping and taking deep breaths activate

these nerve endings on these meridian points traveling to limbic structures in the brain that can calm the fight/ flight responses. See resources...



**53. Hand Exercises-C-** With a small ball, marble, or rolled-up clay or playdough, we roll the ball between our palms and along our fingers as we take deep breaths for one minute. It is important to roll the ball up to the fingertips and back down along our palms. We can even substitute a pen or pencil to roll between our hands. This movement inside our hands stimulates the receptors in our fingers and this activation travels to our brains.

**54. Cotton Ball Breathing C and E-** With a cotton ball, we place this on our palm where our wrist meets our hands. With gentle breaths, we try to blow the cotton ball to the tips of our fingers without blowing it off! This is not COVID-19 friendly but can be a practice we can do outside, or students can do this at home!

**55. Palm Rub-E-** In this FoAP, we begin to slowly rub our palms together increasing the speed for one minute. We continue to breathe with gradual and then a rapid movement for one minute and at the end, we release our palms and raise our arms in a V shape above our heads taking three long deep breaths. What sensations do you experience? How do you feel?

**56. Sparkler Breath-C and E-** In this FoAP, we pretend we have a sparkler in each of our hands. As we deeply inhale, we raise our arms up in the air with our pretend sparklers and wave our sparklers around as we hold our breath for three or four seconds and then on the exhale, we lower our pretend sparklers into an imaginary bucket of water very slowly as we exhale through our mouths making a “sizzle or snake sound” through our teeth! This is a long-extended exhale. As we lower our sparklers into the bucket of water, we begin to crouch down as our sparklers hit the water.

**57. Touch Your Fingers-C-** In this FoAP, as we inhale slowly, we bring our arms with our first finger pointed directly above our heads trying to touch each fingertip. As we exhale for a long breath, we lower our arms. We might try thumb to thumb or pinky finger to pinky finger. Trying this practice a few times and looking straight ahead will help us be more focused and attentive.

58. **Shake it up! - E-** In this FoAP, we begin shaking our bodies one part at a time. We begin with our wrists and then arms and then legs and even our heads as we breathe in and out with every move. This FoAP strengthens the nervous system and circulation of blood flow.

59. **The Ride-E-** As we stand with our feet apart, we raise our arms like goalposts on a football field, and very slowly, we move from side to side. With every breath, we move a little faster and we can even try and close our eyes feeling the movement, rhythm, and the air around us! This FoAP energizes the nervous system!

60. **Driving the Car -E -** Standing with our feet three feet apart, we stretch our arms out in front of us with elbows locked, as we make a fist with our thumbs inside our fists. We begin to drive this fast car as we turn our head and upper body from side to side beginning slowly and speeding up as we inhale and exhale from side to side. It is as if we are moving the steering wheel of our fast car with us from side to side.

61. **Sliding Palms-C-** In this FoAP, we bring our hands together with our palms touching, at eye level. With a deep inhale, we slide one hand down with our fingertips stopping in the center of our opposite hand's palm. On the exhale, we curl our fingers around the hand that just slid down our opposite hand. We move back and forth sliding our palms and, on the exhale, grasping our fingers. We repeat this 10 times inhaling and exhaling.

62. **Brain/ Sensory Bath -C and E -** Gather a group of three or four children into an area of the room with a large beach towel, a bath-time luffa, a tube of lotion, and plenty of smiles and curiosity. Students can choose to take their own luffa and press it on their arms and legs pretending to scrub and clean, or they can choose an adult to give them the sensory bath. Model this activity as you begin by pretending to step into a warm, sudsy tub. Have everyone sit down together and sing in rhythm, "We're taking a brain bath, a brain bath, a brain bath, we're taking a brain bath to help us feel\_\_\_\_\_!" Have students choose different words to fill in a sensation or feeling (happy, bubbly, fresh, clean, peaceful, etc.). Once everyone has patted the luffa up and down their arms and legs and on top of their heads, pretend to carefully step out of the tub. One at a time, wrap up each child tightly in the oversized beach towel while swaying and rocking back and forth, continuing to sing. This time singing about drying off and feeling ready for the day. Students can then select a drop of hand lotion to massage on their hands, leaving the area with three deep breaths as they enter their day of learning.

63. **Drawing to the Flute-C and E** - As we listen to the sounds of a flute or any instrument, we begin to draw images and breathe deeply to the sounds, rhythms, and anything we hear in the music.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7H\\_9D8Co7U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7H_9D8Co7U)

64. **Power Pose-C and E** - Choose a power pose that feels good to you. You could stand, sit, or create a core pose, and in that pose, for 30 seconds, take deep breaths frozen in this stance. As 64. **Power Pose-** As you stand in this pose, think of the strengths and powers you have that help you move through each day! You can create a warrior, core or sitting/standing pose and as you breathe in deeply, freeze your body in this pose. As you breathe deeply, listen to the powerful drums that are reminding you of your “power.” Share with one another after the practice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LznxZDX7fo4>

65. **Breathe like a flower C and E** ...Breathe like a bear ...Breathe like a lion...breathe like a... make it up! Talk about all the fun ways an object, an animal, or a character you know breathes! You could even create Tik-Tok videos to share these breathing practices.

66. **Tracing a hand-C-** Have students take a marker, crayon, or pen and trace their nondominant hand on a sheet of paper without lifting the pen as many times as they can until they begin to feel calmer. They should focus on their breathing during this activity.

67. **Swimming in the deep end – C and E-** Have students lay on their bellies and move their arms and legs, breathing in and out five times; on the sixth breath, they should slowly relax their arms while still kicking their legs. On the seventh breath, they should stop kicking and lay still, imagining that the water is pulling them down or the clouds are pulling them up into the sky. Tell them to imagine they’re weightless and drifting or floating to their favorite place. They can imagine the colors and sounds as they breathe deeply for a minute. We can then share our experiences.

68. **Steamroller-** This strategy is helpful for children who do not like to be touched directly yet need some deep pressure to calm an activated nervous system. The children lie on their tummies with their arms spread wide, and we roll a large exercise ball up their bodies from their feet to their heads while we sing about a steamroller. Then we roll it side to side down one arm and then the other. This is calming and rhythmic, and the children love to sing while we implement this strategy.

69. **Burrito-E-** Combining rhythm and gentle but firm pressure like the steamroller, the burrito is helpful for body awareness. Children lie down on a

blanket, and we slowly roll them up so that the blanket is wound around them, providing nice pressure. When they're ready, we unroll with a little speed as the children pretend to roll down a hill.

**70, Peaceful brushing-C-** This has been one of the children's favorite calming and regulating strategies that we recently began implementing. We sit in a circle as I model peaceful brushing, circling my face and ears with a makeup brush—we have a variety of these brushes. I then brush my arms, hands, and palms. Next, I brush areas of the children's faces, necks, arms, and hands. Many of them do not want me to stop. Some of the children brush their own peaceful spots. This light touch is stimulating in a gentle way—it's a very effective strategy before naptime and during transitions, as well as when students first arrive at school or end the day.

**71. Trauma- and Tension-releasing exercises- C-** In these exercises, we squeeze different muscle groups and then release and shake them out. We begin by scrunching our faces tight and then releasing those muscles. We make fists with our hands and then slowly release, shaking them out. We repeat this contraction and release with our shoulders, legs, and arms, and then scrunch down in a pretend bear cave to get as small as we can before releasing all our muscle groups and growing big and tall once again.

Trauma and Tension Releasing Exercises (TRE) are intended to release pent-up stress and anxiety in the body. These exercises stimulate the body's innate tremor mechanism and target the psoas muscles, which are our fight-flight muscles in the pelvic region. Children's nervous systems are still developing, and these exercises are gentle enough to produce a bit of contraction and then release, allowing the child or adolescent to feel the sensations in their bodies.

Fast = Charge. Fast movements activate the nervous system, producing possibly pent up energy.

Slow = Recovery. Lower, more intentional movements slow down our nervous system, activating a parasympathetic response.

### Contracting and Stretching

1. We crunch and release our toes 5 times; then we rotate our ankles.

2. Standing, we rise up on our toes 5-10 times and then release. Recovery is sitting down and shaking out the calves.
3. We work our quads and hamstrings with a chair pose. We squat 5-10 times and then stretch by pulling our leg behind us.
4. We can place a ball between our legs, squeeze it tight, and then release to produce a charge and release.

72. **Tongue Talking-E-** Loosely place your tongue on the roof of your mouth and begin to speak without moving your tongue from this position. Create a class chant to say together. Since this can be an awkward exercise, the teacher should be prepared to go first, modeling the activity and breaking the ice!

73. **Waking Up the Bowl-C-** Patterned, repetitive activity that works with our body's rhythms and senses is calming to a child's nervous system. The Tibetan singing bowl is a part of our morning circle time—students listen to the sound the bowl creates, and we collectively try to match that sound with humming, chanting or creating our own sounds to match the bowl. We begin by taking a long inhale and on the exhale, we create a similar sound to the bowl or musical instrument we are using.

We follow this with three deep breaths and then take turns playing the bowl, matching the sound, and increasing our breaths to five or six long inhaled and exhaled. Sometimes we play the bowl and students close their eyes and listen to the tone until they can't hear it any longer. When this happens, they raise their hands in the air.

Some children may be sensitive to these sounds, so it's important to pay close attention to each child's response and adjust this activity as needed.

74. **Walk the lines-C and E-** Movement and breath calm the nervous system. We have created an adjustable labyrinth of colorful lines, shapes, and mazes with various types of footwork and animal walks that the children follow—walking, hopping, crawling, or skipping as indicated. We model the crab walk along the purple line, for example, and then the students follow. The students love to lead this exercise and often design patterns of movement that we mimic.

This regulation strategy gives us a deep look into students' balance and gross and fine motor skills. We're also able to see their levels of frustration and how they respond to mistakes by redirecting their movements.

**75. Bilateral Scribbling-E** - This promotes emotional regulation and exercises sensory and motor systems needed for cognition. With a large sheet of paper and two markers—one in each hand—students will follow your directives. Have them make random marks up and down, then horizontally. Next, have them make large arcs across the page, followed by large circles, first fast and then slowly. Finally, have them make dots all over the page.

As they look at their drawings, ask them:

- Is there anything about this scribbling that resembles you or any part of you?
- Is there anything about this scribbling that is nothing like you?
- Are there any pictures or designs you see in this scribbling?
- What word comes to mind as you look at your scribbling? Would that word describe something about you or someone you know?

**76. Animal Symbols-E**- Have students view pictures or figures of animals and then choose an animal that they're most connected to, either positively or negatively—a totem, in Linda Chapman's terminology. After they choose, ask the following questions and have students write out, draw, or verbally share their responses.

- What is it about this animal that you like or dislike?
- How is this animal like you in any way? How is this animal nothing like you?
- What are the two best qualities about this animal? What are the two worst qualities?
- What would the home of this animal look like?
- Who is in this animal's family, and do they get along with one another?
- If you could give this animal magic power, what would it be?

This exercise promotes connection and emotional regulation in a safe environment.

**77. Frog Breaths-E**- Standing up with our heels touching and our toes pointed out, we squat down with our fingertips touching the floor. As we stand and then squat, our inhale happens when we stand, and we exhale

when we squat! Our goal is to try for 20! This exercise energizes us and strengthens the nervous system.

**78. Balancing the plate-E-** With a light object such as a paper plate, cup, or even a book, we begin to balance this object on our heads with a variety of poses. We can begin walking, balancing on one leg, squatting down, or bending forward as we steady our heads! What other poses can you create?

**79. Pretzel Breath-C and E-** With every deep breath in, we begin to curl one arm, leg, and our bodies into the shape of a pretzel. We extend our exhale before we begin to bend and curl the next part of our bodies. As we curl and bend into the shape of the pretzel, we are continually breathing and extending our exhale. Once we are in the shape of the pretzel, we begin to release and undo our shapes with each breath!

**80. Visualization-C-** My Special Place- This is one of the students' favorites! In this FoAP, we begin with three deep breaths as we visualize our special place. The visualization begins: "If you are comfortable, close your eyes and imagine walking down a beautiful wooden staircase. At the bottom of this staircase, is a large wooden door. As you open the door, you enter a beautiful room with all the smells, sights, and sounds you love! What do you see? What colors, furniture, and decorations are in this room? What sounds do you hear? Is this room indoors or outdoors? Are some of your favorite people or animals in this space? What foods have been prepared for you? You move around the room and find all that helps you to feel peaceful and calm. Take a minute and enjoy this space knowing you can come back here anytime you wish!" After the students have explored this place, we guide them up the staircase and back into the classroom. The students can listen to music as we explore this place, and they are welcome to share their experiences following this focused attention practice.

**81. Rock and Roll Along the Spine-E** -For one minute, we roll back and forth along our spines breathing rhythmically with the back-and-forth motion. This FoAP energizes our bodies and brains and brings movement and rhythm into our day.

**82. Present Moment Walk-C and E-** In this FoAP, we begin a quiet walk with a pad of paper and a pen. As we walk through our school, indoors and/or outdoors, we notice the sights and sounds around us. We pay attention to our senses and what those senses are picking up. Halfway into our walk, we stop and take a few moments to write down or draw what we have seen, heard, and felt. As we continue our walk, we add to the list and once we are back in the classroom, we can share our noticing. What did you notice? Have you



ever noticed that before in this school? What did we hear? What did we smell? Was there anything familiar to you that you remembered? What was new to you? How did these sensations make you feel? Did they bring up memories? Please write or draw your noticings.

**83. Mind Maps-C and E-** Fear Path, Joy path, Anger Path-Who is on your path? What is on your path? How can you switch paths? Here is an example of a mind map! In this FoAP, we begin to identify and draw our paths of emotions and sensations. What does your fear path look like? Who is on it? What experiences are on this path? Do you travel it often or once in a while? Who is on your joy path? What experiences are on this path? What people do you meet on your joy path? What about your sadness path? Is it traveled more often? What about an anger path? Who is on this path? What experiences? Do you have a peaceful path? What experiences and people are on this peaceful path? We have a choice of paths but sometimes the path we travel most often is the one that we automatically travel without thinking through the other paths. When we have intentional neuroplasticity, we begin to shift our thoughts and feelings so we can travel the paths that feel more soothing or comforting but this takes time and practice! As we create our mind maps and feeling pathways, breathe deeply and notice what feels good to your body and brain! You are in control of where you want to go, even though it doesn't feel like this on many days!



**84. Dedicate This One-C and E-** In this FoAP, we create an image or write down a few words that we want to share with someone we appreciate! As we think of this person, we breathe deeply for one minute sharing our love, hope, and any words of comfort to this person. We dedicate our FoAP to another.

**85. Give Me Yours, and I'll Give you mine-C and E-**In this FoAP, we write down or draw a worry or concern we have and as we fold up the paper, we hand it to a friend. As we share our worries together, we breathe together for one-minute breathing in strength and love and breathing out this strength and love and power to our friend. It is a choice if we share these with one another and as a class, we will need to set guidelines and agreements for everyone!

**86. Vision Quest-C and E-** In this FoAP, we begin to focus on one specific object in our room or within the setting where we are. With following our

focused attention for 30 seconds, we begin to broaden our gaze and create a gentler more open vision of our setting which can directly impact our parasympathetic nervous system. When we broaden and gentle our vision, our heart rate lowers, respiration lowers, and blood pressure lowers!

**87. Meet Awareness! E--** Just like in the movie Inside Out, we have another “gift” of feelings that can be one of our superpowers. “Awareness” occurs when we pay attention to the present moment. For example, “I am aware of my hands, wiggling my toes, my eyes opened and looking around, how my clothes and shoes feel, and anything else around me! With a focus on “awareness”, we can relieve our minds of the past and worries of the future. “In this moment, I am safe and feel my body and brain working for me.” This scene can also help us to focus on the sights and sounds of nature if it is too difficult to find something close to us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHACKCNDMW8>

**88. Climbing the Mountain-C and E** - This FoAP can be done seated or taking a walk. We begin by imagining a mountain in front of us or we can watch this video of a variety of mountains from around the world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYH5aoHHLrA> We begin by discussing how mountains can mean much more than what we see or physically climb. We can feel mountains of challenges or a problem we experience can be a mountain we need to climb to experience the solution on the other side. Questions: What mountain have you climbed recently? Was it difficult? What did you find on the other side of the mountain? Sometimes life brings us many mountains and to reach the solutions, answers, peacefulness, or calmness, we have to climb that mountain to experience the answers or remedies. In this FoAP, we can use our breath and/or movement to imagine our mountains of challenge and discuss how we can reach the other side. How can we use each other to help us climb? Who is your hiking stick? Do you have enough water? Are you warm and comfortable as you climb the mountain? There are so many variations you could create for this Focused Attention Practice.

**89. Night Sky-C-** In this FoAP, we focus our vision on the nighttime stars. As we breathe deeply, we observe shapes, light, and the number of stars for a couple of minutes. At the end of this FAP, we can share our observations and how it felt to sit back and watch the twinkling stars.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFcDcZu4dR8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTzULG9z5Zk>

90. **Box and the Boat-C and E-** In this FoAP, we can write a worry or something that is troubling us on a piece of paper or even imagine this. We then place our worries into an imaginary or real wooden box and then we place the box into a boat that sails away. As we imagine this scene, we breathe in peacefulness and breathe out our worries. We can do this for a couple of minutes as we breathe deeply with the lifting away of sadness, worry, or an anxious time. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cySBHyKZDsM>

91. **Finger and Palm-C-** In this practice raise your arms to shoulder height and place your palms together with your wrists touching. Spread your fingers wide, and as you breathe in, open your palms so your fingertips are touching. As you exhale bring your palms together again and repeat 10 times. This exercise activates the receptors in your fingertips which strengthens our focus and attention.

92. **Backwards Palms C and E** - In this FoAP, we place our palms toward us with our pinky fingers touching and spreading our fingers. Our elbows are bent, and we have them shoulder height. As we take two warm-up breaths, we begin with our thumbs on the right hand and one by one we curl our fingers down in one long inhale. Then we exhale slowly beginning with the thumbs on the left hand, raising each finger with a long exhale. We repeat this exercise 5 to 10 times.

93. **Horse Lips-C and E** - Loosen your lips and blow... allow the air to wriggle your lips and do these with a large inhale and even bigger exhale. We can laugh, too, as we calm the brain stem areas where the stress response begins! How long can you keep your lips vibrating? Count the seconds with each other!

94. **Regulating with Your Partner-C and E-** Choose a partner. Without talking, find a rhythm in your own breathing with your partner. Change it up!

95. **Feeling Your Breath-C-** Place your fingers just an inch or two in front of your mouth. As you breathe in through your nose, inhale a shallow breath and feel the air, then exhale through your mouth. Now breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth as you blow up your belly with a deep diaphragm breath. Feel how much warmer this air is against your fingers.

96. **Body Scan-C-** Have students sit with their legs straight out and begin wiggling their toes and ankles, shaking knees and thighs, rotating shoulders, arms, and finally their heads, keeping all body parts moving at the same time.

Then reverse the process and stop moving heads, arms, shoulders, and on down. This sequence also promotes working memory.

97. **Finger Raises-C-** Inhale and lift the forefinger of your left hand, then lower this finger as you exhale. Go through these breathing movements raising and lowering each finger on both hands. You can use other parts of your body to match the inhale and exhale with 10 deep breaths, always exhaling a bit longer than the inhale.

98. **Drawing Your Breath-C and E-** Take a moment and notice how you breathe. Do you notice a rhythm? A pattern? A pace? Try to draw your breathing.

99. **Guess the Sound- E-** Play a sound (running water, animal sounds, construction, etc.) and have students guess the sound and three ways they have used it or seen it!! Write our responses in the chat, whiteboard or on paper.

100. **Reveal-C and E-** Bring an object to zoom or in the classroom that is covered with a towel or cloth. Hold the covered object with just a small part being revealed in front of the students and with every deep breath they take, you begin to peel back a piece of the cloth, revealing a bit more of the object! After a few deep breaths, they should now see a part of it and can begin guessing in the chat box! How is this object related to our content or SEL? Students will love the anticipation and the deep breaths!