

# Co-Regulation: Practices from the Field

• AEN Cohort 7 •

# Co-Regulation: Practices from the Field

What is this?

The following resource is a compilation of strategies created by graduate students in Butler University's Applied Educational Neuroscience Certification, cohort 7.

What do we mean by co-regulation?

Co-regulation is one of the four pillars of Applied Educational Neuroscience (AEN). In her new book, *Intentional Neuroplasticity*, Dr. Lori Desautels describes co-regulation as “our biological imperative to share our emotional availability in a safe, trusted, and nested space” (p. 110). Our presence with another can be used to share calm or dysregulation. We often send cues of safety or threat nonverbally (e.g., tone, prosody, body language) but with intentionality we can harness this power to share our calm through regulatory practices.

How can you use this resource?

Each page in the following resource features a strategy created by a cohort 7 graduate student. Use these strategies as 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 includes materials (if needed) and directions. Additionally, each strategy may include notes on things to keep in mind and possible adaptations or accommodations. Hyperlinks included in the following pages will take you to additional resources and materials.

The following resource is organized by categories of regulation practices, though many may naturally fall into more than one. The categories in this resource include **relational connection**, **breathwork**, **movement**, **sensations**, and **rhythm**.

Happy Co-Regulating! - Cohort 7, Dr. Lori Desautels, and Courtney Boyle

# Table of Contents

## Relational Connection

Positive Postcards	7
Warm Fuzzies	8
Proactive Social Stories	10
Joining In	11
Using the Palm of Your Hand to Focus on What You Can Control	12
Collective Care Events	13
Tell Me Something New	14
4 Square Reflection	15
What I Like About You	16
Welcome to Our Classroom	17
Sharing My Calm	18

## Breathwork

Mountain Breathing	20
Sequinimal Breaths	21
SunBEAM Salutation	22
Breathing and Connecting with Our Sensations of Touch	24
Spring Time Deep Breathing Exercise	26
Body Scan	27
Guided Meditation - Installing a Resource	28
Share My Calm	31
Daily Calm	32
Square Breathing	33
Energy Sharing	34

## Table of Contents *continued*

Sharing the Silence - Audible Breaths	35
My Safe Place - A Guided Visualization	36
<i>Movement</i>	
Rhythmic Catch and Return	39
Grounding in Nature	40
Still as a Rock	41
Moments in Motion	42
Slow-mo Races	43
Shake 10	44
Take a Walk	45
The Mindful Walk	46
Dance Party	47
<i>Sensations</i>	
Sensing	49
A Moment to Paws	50
Grounding Yourself Through Hand Massages	51
The Teacher's Corner	52
Web of Regulation	53
Calm Palm	54
Calming Bottle	55
Regulation Task Boxes	57
Be a Thermostat, Not a Thermometer	59
Story Hand	60
Self-Soothing with Your Senses	62
	4

## Table of Contents *continued*

Ice Water Practice	63
Sunny Disposition	64
Rhythm	
Stress Release Drawing	66
Co-Regulation in the Virtual Environment	67
Partners in Creativity with Watercolors	69
Coloring for Co-Regulation	71
Make it Even	72
Team Pause	74
Scribble Picture/ Stained Glass Creation	76
Doodle Your Heart Out	77
Double Down Scribble Circles	78

# Relational Connection



Photo by [Helena Lopes/Unsplash](#)

The following strategies are based in establishing authentic relationships and secure attachments. These practices allow each other to feel seen, heard, and valued.

# Positive Postcards

by Jessica Amarant

## Materials:

- Postcards, sticky notes, index cards - anything you can write a note on!

## Directions:

When your students (or you!) need a pick-me-up, write an encouraging note to a student or students. Choose a student who you feel could particularly use a moment of connection or make it a goal to write to a different set of students each week. This is a great way to build connections and develop felt safety in the student/teacher relationship.

## Notes:

- Your “postcards” do not have to be fancy! It can be as simple as a sticky note, or even an email!
- Send a postcard home to the family if you feel that would be more impactful for your population!

# Warm Fuzzies

by Anna Claire Bradbury

## Materials:

- Colored or blank half lined paper and half blank, (a blank sheet of paper would work as well)
- Markers
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Staples (for the teacher)

## Directions:

My second grade teacher Mrs. Burke introduced me to this practice and I have carried it with me ever since. Each week, the teacher will randomly select one student (by the end of the year, each student will be selected). All the other students in the classroom will take a sheet of paper and write down what they appreciate or think is special about the selected student. They may also draw or trace any images that make them think about the student. Students can work on their page as part of their bell-work or an end of class activity. At the end of the week, students will have the opportunity to honor and recognize the selected student by sharing their writing and images to the whole class. All students can share or just a few. This practice is best used in the middle to late part of the school year because it will give students enough time to get to know each other. The teacher will then collect all the papers and turn them into a booklet for the student and of course, the teacher will get to add a page too! This practice helps students create a connection with one another and shows them that even if you are not close with that particular person, there is still something you can appreciate or notice about them.

## Notes:

- While we all hope and believe students will complete activities with good intentions, teachers will need to be mindful and attentive to student's work before allowing them to share or submit their work. For the first warm fuzzie, students will also benefit from seeing a teacher example about how to express positive thoughts and appreciation towards other people, especially if the selected for the week is not someone they are close with.
- While this activity is suited for most age groups, there might be a time constraint with selecting one student per week. To speed up the process, but still have the same results, have each student in the room sit in a circle and write their name in the center of a blank



## Warm Fuzzies (continued)

---

sheet of paper. Have the students pass their paper to the person on their left and that student will write down what they appreciate or think is special about the student who has their name on the paper. Allow students 45 seconds to write, then pass the papers around to the left until the paper returns to the original person. Have music playing during this activity. Depending on some classes, you might need to collect the papers, check them, then return them to their original people.

# Proactive Social Stories

by Lisa Gundaker

## Materials:

- A prewritten social story focused on an area of need for a given student.

## Directions:

I greet my students as they come into the classroom each day. During 'bell work', I sit alongside the student I am supporting and read the social story to the student. We read it each day and after a bit, we read it together, then the child will read it to me. It begins each day with a proactive, specific reminder, and action(s) for the student. It supports the beginnings of self-regulation.

## Notes:

- In my experience, social stories work best when read every day. Depending on the grade level, a student might choose to color the pictures, choose between a few social stories, or co-write one with a trusted adult.

# Joining In

by Jessica Reamon

## Materials:

- Your calm presence

## Directions:

The practice of Joining In is done when a student is beginning to exhibit signs of distress. To give context, I work specifically with autistic students (and many with complex needs), and each student's signals look so different. Some of my students might start rocking which is a signal to me they are experiencing anxiety (important: rocking may not be a sign of anxiety for every student – you must know that student's signals!). When they start rocking, I start rocking with them. If they start jumping, I'll jump with them. If they are spinning, I spin with them. This creates a sense of safety and acceptance; it nonverbally tells them "I am here with you, and you are exactly as you should be right in this moment."

## Notes:

- It's important to know your students, and especially for this practice. Do not use it if you know it could be a trigger for them and potentially dysregulating. I have only used this with autistic students. It must be done with a regulated adult.

# Using the Palm of Your Hand to Focus on What You Can Control

by Gloria Sherman

## Materials:

- Plain sheet of paper
- Colored pencils or regular pencil/ colored pens or single color

## Directions:

- With your dominate hand, trace an outline of your non-dominate hand.
- In the palm of your hand list/draw the things you can control.
- On the outside of the outline of your hand list/draw things you have no control over. An example might be the weather, how someone treats you, etc.

## Notes:

- I use this with someone who is feeling overwhelmed by all of the sensory input and perceived expectations. It provides a visual reminder of what we can control and helps steady our brain so we can manage our day-to-day activities. Each day we have a certain amount of energy to efficiently manage our body-brain balance. When we use our energy focusing on things we cannot control, we then take away the energy we could be using on things we can control.
- This can be used with early elementary age children with more adult guidance. For example, offering choices about what you may or may not be able to control.
- I've used this with middle school students for many years. It provides them with the knowledge of where to spend their energy.
- I've found it most effective when working with parents and their interactions with their children. It has been helpful for them to see what they previously viewed as defiance as maybe their child not knowing how to prioritize and organize their thoughts and actions.

# Collective Care Events

by Katie Thornton

## Materials:

- Depends on the activity you select!

## Directions:

Staff Collective Care Events to support and promote co-regulation to support for staff. Set one event a month on your staff calendar before school starts. Promote the event one month ahead of time with promotional flyers. Set events for right after school.

## Here are suggested events:

- Gardening
- 5K
- Bring Your Puppy to work
- Happy Hour
- Crafting
- Cookie Decorating
- Trivia
- Hiking
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Goat Yoga
- Wellness Coach
- Cooking or Dinner Swap
- Concert or Music Performance
- Drum Circle
- Comedy

## Notes:

- Keep in mind cost, time, and location. It is great if you can use the end of the day school time.
- You are able to adapt and adjust the activity for any group. The goal and intention is to mindfully put calm nervous systems together to bring a sense of community and regulation. We need each other and connection more than ever!

# Tell Me Something New

by Sam Wilhoite

## Materials:

- Create your own list of questions for an entire year OR buy “Head Rush”, which is a deck of cards with questions for social skills and/or therapy. Can be found on Amazon.

## Directions:

This practice is having a question of the day. Examples include: “What is your biggest fear?”, “What has been your favorite vacation?”, “What cheers you up when you are sad?”, etc. You do this first thing in the morning or the first time you are interacting with a student. As a speech-language pathologist I use this to kick off my sessions with both individual and group sessions.

## Notes:

- Keep in mind that this is a time to listen to your student(s). Give them time to process and come up with an answer. Answer first if they are having a hard time, or use examples! They might be shy about answering at first, but they will surprise you with their answers after awhile. Then make sure that you answer the question as well. Even if they don’t seem interested in your answers, it shows the student(s) that you want to be open with them about yourself.
- The great thing about this activity is that it truly fits a wide range of populations! All you might need to do is change the wording of the question or provide more examples.  
Adjustments: wording, cueing.

# 4 Square Reflection

by Ben Meisner

## Materials:

- Paper
- Pen

## Directions:

This practice is designed to increase mindfulness and gratitude while co-regulating with a trusted adult or peers. It is best used at the start of the day or at the end of the day anticipating the next.

Fold your paper into 4 squares, labelling each square: 1) celebrations, 2) challenges, 3) priorities and 4) brain dump.

Bookended by 3 cleansing breaths, take 3-5 minutes to compartmentalize some thoughts to ease the mind and create focus.

## Notes:

- Things to keep in mind...I always advise my students to share what's top of mind – academic or not-- and to be cognizant of their personal boundaries as we will discuss these in a conference together. I never want them to feel forced to share with me.
- The “brain dump” section can be adjusted to match any sort of feedback or reflective aspect.

# What I Like About You

by Emily Stewart, M. Ed

## Materials:

- Pen, pencil, or something to write with
- Paper

## Directions:

Educator states that they would like to let the student know 3 things they really like about them, asks if this is okay.

If student agrees, teacher writes down three things they really like about student.

After student reads them, teacher asks if it's okay for teacher to explain what they meant by each thing they wrote down.

If student agrees, teacher explains why they wrote down those 3 things. Teacher asks student if they knew that's how teacher saw them, or how others might see them? Discussion happens. Teacher reminds student that they are always there for student, and if they start to feel dysregulated in class, to remember these 3 things they wrote down and know that teacher is on their side and that they are always available to talk.

## Notes:

- The idea is to have student truly understand that the teacher loves the child, thinks positively of them, and reminds them of this fact. This is a trust building exercise. Student may not have previously known the teacher was a trusted, caring adult that could be counted on before – but now they would know. This could be called back upon when child is feeling dysregulated to remember how teacher is on their side (Teacher + Child vs. The Problem).
- This can work with any population. For adults, of course the language could be adjusted to match a work situation.



# Welcome to Our Classroom

by Sara Spitz

## Materials:

- List of welcoming options- examples: fist bump, hug, high five, pinky hug, butterfly, cellphone, snake, bunny hop
- Visuals of welcoming choices (optional)
- Welcoming apron (optional)

## Directions:

At the beginning of the day or period stand at the door to the classroom. As each child enters the room, say, "Hello, I am so glad to see you today. How would you like to be welcomed?" Allow students to choose which welcome they would like and then perform it with the child with a smile, calm tone of voice, and eye contact.



## Notes:

- There are endless ways to say hello and encourage children to pick what is most comfortable for them. They may even come up with new ideas that you can incorporate.
- Some children may not like to touch so make sure you have welcomes that allow for differing contact levels. You can assign a student to be the person that welcomes other students at the door if they are able to co-regulate. Students can also use the welcome procedure to welcome visitors to the class including



# Sharing My Calm

by Jennifer Sheets

## Directions:

I would do this anytime a student or even adult is escalated. It is not fancy. I would just sit in the same room or near the person that is escalated. I try not to talk or do any big movements. Slowly over time I will try to engage the person in a conversation. I always start off talking about myself or how I feel.

# Breathwork



Photo by [Max van den Oetelaar/Unsplash](#)

The following strategies utilize breath to calm the nervous system. Breathing is the only autonomic function we can consciously control. Through intentional breathing we calm other autonomic functions such as heart rate and blood pressure to dampen the stress response.

# Mountain Breathing

by Christa Crabill

## Materials:

- Your hands and your breath
- The book, *Breathing is My Superpower* by Alicia Ortega - This book is helpful in introducing 5 finger breathing, but not necessary to teach this practice.

## Directions:

This works for individuals, groups, or a whole classroom setting.

Hold out one hand like you are ready to give a high five (or stretch out one hand on your desk or leg). Then take the index finger of your other hand and trace the fingers of the opposite, stretched out hand, breathing in slowly as you move up each finger and breathe out slowly as you go down each finger. As I instruct this breathing practice, I ask students to pretend/ visualize their index finger as a car and the other hand is a big mountain range. They must drive up and down the mountains slowly in order to go around the mountains safely. Continue tracing each finger until you have gone up and down all five fingers.

## Notes:

- Keep in mind students' dexterity and ability level along with individual comfort level with this practice.
- With older students this can be introduced as Five Finger Breathing, encouraging a deep inhale as they trace up the finger, and exhale as they trace down the finger.
- Another option would be to draw an outstretched hand on paper by tracing it, and then using this model to go up and down each finger breathing in and out.
- Have a handout prepared with a picture of a hand for students to practice tracing up and down each finger.

# Sequinimal Breaths

by Maddie Higgins

## Materials:

- Sequin animal or pillow; something you can hold that gives a similar sensory input—the material can move back and forth.

## Directions:

In my classroom, I have a "sequinimal"—a plush toy with sequins—that some of my students like to play with when they're regulated. When they need some help catching their breath or slowing their ANS down, I sit next to them and hold the animal, breathing in as I rub the sequins one way, and breathing out as I rub the sequins the other way. I breathe loud so they can hear it over the commotion, and I do it until they're ready to join me. Then, I ask if they want to hold the animal and I keep going with them.

# SUNBEAM Salutation

by Teri Lawler

## Materials:

- None required, but helpful if you have a chair that can be positioned toward the warmth of the sun. However, without a chair, standing in the sunshine achieves the same positive benefits.

## Directions:

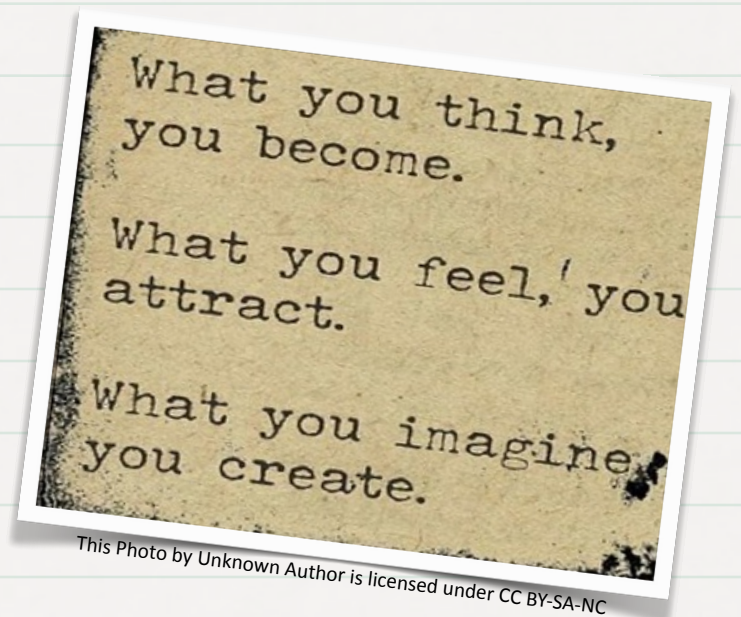
BEAM stands for Balancing with Emotion, Attachment, and Movement.

Begin by identifying any tension that you are holding in your mind and body. Pay special attention to where in your body you are holding the stress. Examine what thoughts come to mind in connection with your body sensations. Identify the emotion word that best describes how you are feeling. As you hold that word in your mind, orient your face and heart to the sun. Inhale deeply for a count of 4 as if ingesting the sunshine. Exhale this phrase, "I am traveling light and light dispels darkness so I must let my light shine! I don't need

\_\_\_\_\_ (say the emotion word that best described how you are feeling). I have \_\_\_\_\_ (identify a replacement feeling)."

Repeat, replacing the tense of the verbs upon exhale. "I am traveling light and light dispels darkness so I will let my light shine! I don't need \_\_\_\_\_ (say the emotion word that best described how you are feeling). I have \_\_\_\_\_ (identify an attachment that reminds you of the replacement feeling)." Lastly, repeat the pattern, replacing the tense of the verbs. "I am traveling light and light dispels darkness so I let my light shine! I don't need

\_\_\_\_\_ (say the emotion word that best described how you are feeling). I have \_\_\_\_\_ (name a physical movement that reminds you of the replacement feeling)."



# SunBEAM Salutation (continued)

## Notes:

- This practice is an act of resistance for me. As a brown person who grew up in the south, sunbathing was not something that I enjoyed or appreciated. I spent much of my summer playtime in search of shade and avoiding anything that would make me perspire and revert my straightened hair to its natural, tightly coiled curled pattern.
- Similarly, the SunBEAM Salutation is resisting the automatic negative thoughts and maladaptive, behavior patterns that have defended me so I can embrace new, more adaptive ways of being and self-soothing. It is an opportunity to embrace my mantra of “traveling light” – not carrying the heavy burdens of negativity in any form – and allowing the warmth of the oft avoided sun to penetrate so deeply that it gives me chills, illuminating and drawing the light from within me. Light dispels darkness. I choose to lead with love. Thus, dark moods, thoughts, and emotions cannot exist in the presence of this SunBEAM Salutation. I no longer need to defend and separate, I can tear down walls and build bridges of deeper connection with myself and those around me.

# Breathing and Connecting with Our Sensations of Touch

by Margot R. Munger

## Materials:

- Background music if that is something you and the kids you're supporting find that to be calming (I generally play traditional Chinese flute music, which I find very relaxing).
- Some sort of tool for sensation – I use a variety of things depending on the child from kinetic sand to soft beach sand to a weighted blanket that contains liquid to push around, to a collection of fabric swatches with different textures to cool river stones.

## Directions:

Instructions... We sit together and I let the child know I would like to take some deep breathes together and then use the sensation of touch to help us connect to our breathe and our bodies. I'll model sitting tall, rooting my feet in the ground and talk through taking a breathe in through my nose, out through my mouth, modeling and also narrating what I am doing to make it easy for the student to join me.

After we have taken several deep breathes together, I'll invite them to feel or play with the substance we are using for our touch sensation (often kinetic sand or soft beach sand in a tray). We'll keep breathing and also explore touching and I'll invite the child to close their eyes while we do this if that feels comfortable. I try to give about a minute of quiet once we've gotten into the rhythm of the breathing and then ask the child how they're feeling, what they are noticing, how touching the sand or other object is connecting with them. For a student who was escalated when we began I'll ask them to notice how they are feeling now compared to how they felt when they arrived.

When a child comes to be in a deregulated state, this is one activity I might do with them. It is also something that I regularly do with students who I have scheduled, proactive times to be with throughout the day.



# Breathing and Connecting with Our Sensations of Touch

(continued)

Notes:

- I think the key in co-regulation is letting the child direct where the activity goes and allow them to get what they need from it. So this might become a more breath focused time, or it could become more playful, or evolve into talking out a problem together. When I am co-regulating with a child I try to let go of my adult agendas, expectations and timelines and be fully present. My presence is the gift to the child to help them be present and learning to be present in a world that often pushes back against being in the moment.

# Spring Time Deep Breathing Exercise

by Gina Wagenblast

## Materials:

- You could give student(s) an artificial flower and a bubble wand.

## Directions:

This deep breathing exercise can be used any time in the classroom. It can be for a whole group, small group or one-on-one. The purpose is mainly to reset and return to a better learning environment after excitement, an unknown drill, conflicts spilling over after recess, etc.

I direct students to remind taking in the scent of a spring flower and then holding the breath. After about 5 seconds, they are reminded to bring their bubble wand to their mouth and blow out...entirely...blowing all the bubbles out of the wand completely.



## Notes:

- Students can just visualize as they are more comfortable using this exercise. Props in the beginning are helpful to set the stage and bring the exercise to “life”. This can be for any age group because most have background knowledge/experience with these two simple ideas (smelling a flower and blowing out through a bubble



# Body Scan

by Meera Balaji and Balaji Somasundaram

Learning Support Coordinators and Specialist Educators in Autism and Dyslexia  
Masters in Educational Psychology  
Masters in Specialist Teaching  
New Zealand

## Directions:

This is a fantastic activity that students can “take home” with them. It can be particularly useful to do a body scan to help relax before sleep.

## Here's how it works:

1. Students lay on the floor, with their eyes closed if they are comfortable (or they may prefer to look at the ceiling).
2. Encourage students to pay attention to their feet for 5 or 10 seconds.
3. Move on to their toes, then ankles, then calves and knees. Continue body part by body part until you reach the head.
4. Question how each part of the body feels to bring students' awareness to their body in the moment.
5. If there is tightness or stress, imagine breathing the stress out of that part of the body with each exhale.

## Notes:

- This activity can be done with the kids/students in a room with some mats or even a clean floor.
- Here are some questions to ask during the body scan activity:
  - How does this body part feel?
  - Is it cold or warm?
  - Does it feel tight or relaxed?
  - Is all or part of that body part touching the floor?
  - Or clothing?
  - What does that feel like?
- This activity can be done with all age groups/both indoor and outdoor settings. The body scan activity is an effective way to begin Mindfulness meditation practice. This supports students to tune in their body and feel reconnected to their physical self by noticing any sensations they are feeling without any judgement.

# Guided Meditation - Installing a Resource

by Jodi Corbett

## Directions:

Guided imagery takes us to our favorite places and uses our five senses to recall positive feelings, such as awe, wonder, joy, thankfulness, and contentment and bring us into our calm mind.

## READ SCRIPT:

This time is for you. During this exercise you will take an imaginary walk on your favorite beach. Make yourself comfortable. You may want to sit cross-legged or flat on your back with your hand on your belly. If you are sitting cross-legged, pretend a string is attached to the crown of your head and straightens your spine, one vertebrae at a time. You can rest your hands on your knees.



Let's begin to relax your body. Scan your whole body for any tense muscles. Bring your attention to this tense area and slowly breathe into this spot. As you exhale, think about how grateful you are for this part of your body. Imagine the tension melting away with each breath in and out. Take a few deep breaths. With each breath, you breathe IN calm and breathe OUT anxiety. Feel your body sinking more and more into deep calm.

Let's begin your guided mediation walking on the beach. Imagine you are walking on a warm and bright summer afternoon. You are on your favorite beach by yourself. The path leading to the ocean is surrounded by wild golden rod and plums of dune grass. Everything along the path smells of sea and sun. Inhale the spicy and sweet of the dune grass as it brushes against your hand.

Monarch butterflies are flapping their wings along the dunes, and you can see the orange and black wings filling yellow goldenrod like bouquets. You can feel the afternoon sunshine on the crown of your head and one the tops of your shoulders. A salty breeze is gently caressing your face. You've left your school day behind as you walk in the late afternoon sun. The late

## Guided Meditation - Installing a Resource (continued)

afternoon sun is casting a beautiful shimmer of diamonds on the waves, curling into a soft crash of white foam on the sandbars where dolphins swim. Instead of dolphins near the sandbar, there is a loan surfer wearing a black wetsuit starting to stand on his board as he catches the top of newly formed long roller.

The vast and endless blue bird of sky is decorated with a few floating white clouds disappearing on the horizon where you can see a rainbow-colored Hobie sail. Seagulls are sitting near the shoreline, with a few flying overhead. Their caws laughing with the murmur of waves. The pipers are running with their little legs to and fro to the tide going in and out. Feel the sensations of warm sun on the crown of your head.

You are barefoot and walking near the low tide line. The sand massages your bare feet. The water is cool on your ankles. The sound of the waves washes against the shore as a shush, shush, shush. You feel peace. Calm. Yet, alive --here, at the beach. You keep walking along the shoreline. You bend down and pick up a welk shell. It's broken on the underside. You trace your finger along the rough edges of the broken shell and turn it over where it is smooth and still shiny with orange-pink colors. You bend down to pick up a piece of blue sea glass, worn smooth by the ocean. The blue glass is a rare find and you close your fingers around it as you keep it in the soft part of the palm of your hand.

You pause. Inhale the closeness of the ocean. Look out to the horizon and then return your gaze to the sand. It invites you. You sit down in the warm white sand and gaze out at the ocean, sun on your shoulder. You take time to breathe in the rhythmic and cyclical motion of the waves rolling into shore. You belong here, to this moment – in this place by the sea. This whole gorgeous coast, with its sand dunes, sandy beaches, piles of seaweed, broken and whole shells, seagulls, and sand pipers – all belongs to you. You feel so peaceful. Free. Alive in your body and calm in your mind. You are part of the shoreline, making up a whole around you. You can see the whole picture and it is your story, your memory, your feelings, your time. Time slows down to a halt. Your mind begins to drift, being carried away by this feeling of peace and gratitude.

You write out each letter of your name and notice the sound that it makes as you scratch it though the sand. You stand up, look at your whole name written in the sand. Sunlight fills your name, leaving shadows on in the deeper places where you used more pressure. Your name is more light than dark recognizing they both give your name a wonderful shape in the sand.

## Guided Meditation - Installing a Resource (continued)

You say goodbye to this moment, rise into the waning afternoon light, grateful for the time to be alone with nature and yourself. You walk back past the surfer floating on a wave and through the soft sand. The monarchs' wings are still murmuring on the golden rod. The dune grass tassels are aglow on the edges, like fingertips stretching gently to the sky. You feel calm, good – grateful.

Now slowly open your eyes and come back to the gym. Notice the sounds around you. You can hear rustling on the gym floor. Notice people near you without seeing them. If you are not sitting up, slowly roll over to one side and use your arms to pull yourself into a seated position. Slowly move both arms over your head and clasp them together. Now, take your pointer fingers, touching each other, like this, and point them to the sky with your arms close to your ears. Stretch just a little deeper by pointing a little further toward the sky. Lean to the left side, hold. Lean to the right side, hold. Breathe. Slowly bring your arms down into your lap. Open your eyes and look at each other. You did this together. Your calm remains. Whenever you feel anxious or worrisome, remember that you can imagine your favorite place by using your five senses. We all have places that help us feel alive, safe, and calm.

### Notes:

- Wear comfy clothes.
- Those with hearing impairments would need adjustments.
- I have read a shorter version of this guided meditation to middle school students. I have read the full version to teachers.

# Share My Calm

by LaMonica Henson

## Directions:

When a student is entirely dysregulated, I have been using this share my calm technique. First, I get eye level with the student (I may get on my knees or sit next to this student). Then I ask to take their hand and place it on my heart. I say “Feel my heartbeat – Can you make yours match mine? We close our eyes together and I breathe slowly, carefully, deliberately so that I can model a calm demeanor through my heartbeat and breathing. I will monitor how they are matching mine by asking if I may place my hand over their heart? If yes, then I can say wow yours is really fast right now! Let's take deep breaths together to help that slow down. Would you like to count with me? Then we can count our breaths out loud together. I will keep asking have you matched mine yet? NO it still feels a little fast lets keep breathing...

# Daily Calm

by Hillary Pyle

## Materials:

- Phone or tablet
- Calming app
- Quiet space

## Directions:

Every morning I take the first couple of minutes when I get to work to close the door and dim the lights. I go to my Calming app and chose a meditation practice for that day. This has helped me in getting relaxed for the day. I am able to clear my mind of outside school thinking and get ready for the day ahead.

## Notes:

- I have found that the meditation times can be too long for some or also the time of day is important. There are times when I might not have time in the morning and chose to do this in the evening before bed. I don't find that 10min is too long to meditate, but my daughter has a very different opinion.



# Square Breathing

by Natalie Schneider

## Directions:

### How?

1. Visualize a square- You will be tracing your imaginary square with your finger in the air.
2. Inhale slowly for four slow counts- trace one side of an imaginary square with your finger.
3. Hold your air for four slow counts- picture the corner of one side of the square.
4. Exhale slowly for four slow counts- trace the imaginary second side of the square with your finger.
5. Hold your empty lungs for four slow counts- picture corner two of the square.
6. Repeat until you make a full square.

### Where?

- Anywhere

### Why?

- Use this practice when you are dysregulated/anxious and need to calm/slow down

# Energy Sharing

by Erin Sughrue

## Directions:

Sit next to each other in whatever way is comfortable for both people, on the floor or in chairs. Put your hand on the back of the person that is dysregulated and share your positive energy while you both breathe deeply and try to match your breathing with each other. Positive energy pushed in and negative energy pulled out through the hand on the back.

## Notes:

- Ensure the person understands the strategy ahead of time and is okay with a touch on the back.

# Sharing the Silence - Audible Breaths

by Elaine Fogleman

## Directions:

When students are upset, many times the last thing they want is to be told to “breathe.” Instead, the adult can share the silence and model breaths. The adult will sit or stand in a calm manner, looking down or in the distance, avoiding eye-contact. The adult will stay silent for about a minute, and then begin taking their own deep breaths. These breaths should not be exaggerated but should be audible. The adult continues to take slow deep breaths in, and slow smooth breaths out. After a few minutes, the student may begin to join with their own breaths. As the adult observes the student relaxing as they remain silent and breathing, the adult may invite the student to join in a few breaths.

**When:** When a student is upset and needs a calm, safe space to regulate.

**Where:** Any quiet spot, preferably out of sight of others.

**Why:** Sharing the silence allows students a safe place with adult support to calm down, without having to listen and follow more steps on *ways to calm down*. The student’s brain is given a peaceful moment to calm and regulate. This shared space also encourages felt-safety for the student and can help create a trusting relationship between adult and student.

## Notes:

- Give it the time each student needs. As you breathe and share the silence, read the student’s body language to determine how long to wait.

# My Safe Place - A Guided Visualization

by Karen

## Directions:

This is a guided visualization exercise, it is recommended to turn off (or down) any lights or unnecessary sounds. As you read this use a calm, slow, and melodic voice.

*Sitting comfortably with eyes closed (if that feels good to you), take 3 deep breaths, kind of warming up your visualization. Pay closer attention to your exhale, making sure it's a little longer. (pause briefly)*

*So I would love for you to imagine yourself walking down this beautiful wooden staircase and just picture it and feel the steps beneath your feet as you walk down these stairs, and you can feel your hand glide down the smooth, hard, old, polished wooden banister.*

*And as you intentionally walk, you come to a closed door and it too is wooden and very heavy with a crystal glass doorknob.*

*As you look at this door, taking a couple of deep breaths, you slowly open the door feeling its weight, and you enter into this beautiful space where you have the sounds and the smells and the visuals that you love.*

*You might enter with soft carpeting, you might enter with an all glass room, you might smell the scent of spring. But I want you for a couple of minutes to go into this beautiful safe space and I want you to imagine the sounds that you hear, the sights that you see, the colors, the textures that you feel. Walking around this space or sitting in this space experience this for the next minute or two as you notice the sounds, and as you look around this beautiful space and feeling all the textures and smelling the smells that you love, maybe you've even invited the people that you care about into this space. (pause for 1-2 minutes)*

*As you notice the sounds, and as you look around this beautiful space and feeling all the textures and smelling the smells that you love, maybe you've even invited the people that you care about into this space.*

## My Safe Place - A Guided Visualization (continued)

*As you notice, all the details in this room know that this is a place that you can return to anytime you need to. It is your safe space it's a place where you can let go and breathe deeply and experience that peacefulness that alludes us so often during every day.*

*Take a few deep breaths as you take one more look around your space. (pause briefly) And slowly open that door feeling the solid doorknob in your hand and the weight of the door as you pull it open, and as you slowly and intentionally come back up those stairs you feel the cool, smooth banister beneath your hand. (pause briefly)*

*And with two final breaths, may you feel gratitude, may you feel peacefulness, and may return to this safe place as many times as you need to. When you're ready, you can just slowly return to this space.*

### Notes:

- This practice is helpful to relax, calm, and create a safe feeling. This is something that has helped me gain perspective and decrease anxious moments. I have listened to this through the recording of class. A calm, soothing voice is needed when reading this passage. It is helpful when there is time and can be relaxing to do in the evenings. This also helps with breathing- to slow down and re-calibrate.
- The ability to have a recording would be helpful. I would suggest a small group would be most beneficial for younger students. It is important you can create an area where lights can be dimmed and it is quiet.

# Movement



Photo by [Hugues de BUYER-MIMEURE/Unsplash](#)

The following strategies utilize movement to calm the nervous system.

# Rhythmic Catch and Return

by Amy Christison

## Materials:

- A ball that bounces or rolls and is easy to catch

## Directions:

If a child is dysregulated and not in a state to talk, take the child to a safe space and sit or stand a distance apart that feels safe to the child. Begin rolling or bouncing the ball to the child. Most often the child will return the ball in the same manner it was sent. Try to create and keep a rhythm with the bouncing or rolling. Periodically check the brain state of the child. When the cortex appears to be back online, allow the child the option to talk.

## Notes:

- The nonverbal rhythmic connection seems to work with many levels of dysregulation.
- This has been used successfully with K-5 students, but is likely to be just as effective with older students.

# Grounding in Nature

by Margret Davis

## Materials:

- Garden tools

## Directions:

With my background in farming and school gardening, I love using nature and school garden environments for authentic grounding practices. Walking with my students through the school garden, looking at what they have planted, watching native bees hatching or building nests, or just listening to sounds while sitting beside my student on a bench, are co-regulating practices I use. My students like to linger in this familiar place they helped create. Being in the garden helps them focus and distracts them from negative feelings. My district has nature classrooms in the woods, a perfect place for grounding and “healthy detachment”.

I also make use of the arts. Students who love painting will get distracted and feel centered while drawing.

## Notes:

- This practice works for all ages and developmental levels.



# Still as a Rock

by Sarah Dorsey

## Materials:

- Music (playlist, YouTube, etc.)

## Directions:

A fun, co-regulation activity that we've built into our daily schedule in the classroom is really just a fun game that we love to play. It's called "Still as a Rock" and is a freeze game of sorts.

I try to implement breaks into our day when I notice an energy shift in the classroom, be it as a whole group or maybe just a couple of students who are dysregulated or edgy or in need of regulation but unable to achieve it independently. "Still as a Rock" is a great way to do just that!

For "Still as a Rock", we play soothing music (or maybe something upbeat like Kids Bop depending on student preferences and mood!) and walk around the room, breathing deep and practicing giving good personal space, and when the music pauses, we all collectively freeze (sometimes giving our muscles a good squeeze as well!) before releasing and moving again. Sometimes we play this as a competition, other times it's just a collaborative time to move. The giggles and stop/start of movement I think is what tends to balance us all out. My paras and myself often play as well!

These are activities that our students can look forward to and anticipate. They're predictable because we have certain times of days where we always build them into our schedule, but they're also spontaneous in that we also pull them out when we need them or a specific student needs them.

# Moments in Motion

by Amber Hartsough

## Materials:

- Rocking chair or trampoline

## Directions:

I have a rocking chair and two trampolines in my classroom. Several students use my room as a place to co-regulate and take a break. The students gravitate to the rocking chair and to the trampolines. The use of the items depends on the student and their needs, but motion and movement, helps the students either calm down or gain the energy they need. Students who are escalated with emotion tend to gravitate to the rocking chair. Students who are full of energy gravitate to the trampolines and a student that usually sleeps uses the trampoline to rest and after a few minutes he wakes up on his own, jumps, and rejoins our group. I use these times when the students are rocking or jumping to calmly add in conversation. Students will open up or calm down. The key is that I remain close, give them the needed space, and then slowly and calmly begin conversation. After a few minutes the students are ready to return to class or back to our work.

## Notes:

- For younger students, with proper permission from parents and the school, the children could be rocked in the chair to co-regulate. Currently, my students are older and rock themselves and I remain close by. Adding a second rocking chair would be a great option as well so that the teacher can rock along-side the student who is rocking.

# Slow-mo Races

by Briana Sarr-Kerman

## Materials:

- Just you and a student!

## Directions:

One of my favorite co-regulation activities to do with students is slow-mo races. I use this most often when we have students who tend to run or quickly dart away, and it helps to slow them down as well as to help build rapport and to focus on their body. I challenge them to a slow-mo race in the hallway, in which we “race” in slow motion- so basically doing slow lunges down the hall. I model it for them, and give instruction and verbal feedback during the activity if they enjoy that type of input; otherwise, I just do the activity next to them. It gives additional sensory input (most of them end up stomping while doing the lunge), and usually they end up giggling while we “race”, which helps to distract their mind from the dysregulation and refocus on something different. We also talk about their physical feelings during the activity- their heart rate, breathing, etc. to help them connect.

## Notes:

- I do not recommend doing this down a long hallway unless you want to feel like you just did leg day at the gym. 😊
- Slow-mo races can be adapted for differing levels of physical ability, location, etc. They can also be done in smaller settings, using crouching/waddling, crawling, etc. I have also used different tools for tactile input during the activity as well (legos, fuzzy dice, putty, etc.) for students who need extra input.

# Shake 10

by Allison Wier

## Directions:

Students shake each of their limbs individually for 10 seconds (verbally counting to 10 as they do it) and then shake their whole body for 10 seconds.

## Notes:

- Since this activity is energizing, I usually follow it with some “steadying” movements like good morning stretch, touching their toes, and a few yoga poses that they know.
- I always tell students that it is a choice and they only have to do what feels good to their body!

# Take a Walk

by Melanie Ackland

## Directions:

When I am called into a classroom because a student is “refusing” or “shut down” I often quietly kneel down next to them and ask if they would like to take a walk. I ensure that they will not have to talk or discuss anything with me until they are ready. This provides the student with the assurance of safety they might need to regulate.

## Notes:

- Depending on the student, a walk may be all they need. Other students may benefit from our motor lab (movement) with specific activities. While other students may prefer to sit quietly in my calming corner with fidgets or visual calming.

# The Mindful Walk

by Jennifer Weinstein

## Directions:

1. Before starting this practice, the educator must check in with their own body/brain state to see if they have a steady nervous system to share. If not, the educator must implement a strategy to get themselves reconnected with their body.
2. The student is told by the educator that they will be sharing a "mindful walk" together.
3. Before embarking on the walk, the student and educator will breathe together (the student can choose their favorite breathing exercise or the educator can model one themselves).
4. The walk can occur outside or indoors.
5. The student and educator take turns (as they walk slowly together) naming out loud what they can see, hear, smell and feel.
6. In between each sensory statement, the educator and student stop and take a mindful breath together.
7. After the walk is completed, the student and educator can take a minute to reflect how that was for each of them (what was helpful, how their nervous system is feeling at the moment).
8. Before separating from the student, the educator will use a nonverbal signal to indicate connection (a heart sign, a peace sign, etc). Throughout the day and moving forward the educator can use that nonverbal signal to indicate connection with that student.

## Notes:

- Younger students might need a visual step by step guide before the walk starts. This might also look like a social story that can be reviewed with the student before starting.

# Dance Party

by Angie Nichols

## Materials:

- Your favorite shared song

## Directions:

A dance party can happen anywhere at any time you need it. The key is to choose a song that all parties can sign and or dance along to. Movement is a great way to process emotions, move stress hormones and connect on a level that is playful and joy filled. You can take this up a level in the co-regulation by trying to copy each other's dance, make up a dance together or sing the chorus at the same time. Take to heart the idea of "dance like no one is watching" and be silly. HAVE FUN!

## Notes:

- This activity can be modified by the volume of your song, the choice of song and even how much of the song you listen to. Depending on the level of co-regulation that is needed you could even just listen to the song and make eye contact when you hear the parts that you might otherwise be singing at the top of your lungs.

# Sensations



The following strategies utilize physical sensations and touch to calm the nervous system.



# Sensing

Ashley Anderson

## Materials:

- Brown paper lunch bags
- Items you can identify through your senses (i.e., hard candy, lotion on a cotton pad, piece of play doh, textured fidget toys, etc.)

## Directions:

When recognizing early signs of dysregulation, and to help ground a student (or staff member), gather your items and place each in a separate brown lunch bag or any type of bag you cannot see through. Have the student or staff member close their eyes, put their hand in the bag and use their senses to describe and guess what the item is.

# A Moment to Paws

by Katrina Barhydt

## Materials:

- A classroom pet (preferably a mammal) or school facility therapy dog available to help teach both self-regulation and practice co-regulation.

## Directions:

Animals (mammals mainly) have very obvious and distinct cues when they are relaxed, happy, and feel safe. Our individual nervous systems notice those cues and actively causing an animal to become more visibly relaxed and happy will facilitate a co-regulation state between the student and the animal. Petting a cat or dog has powerful healing possibilities and provides our nervous system with the stimulation it needs to become regulated.

## Notes:

- It is important to note allergies or fears of a specific animal when practicing this form of co-regulation.
- A weighted stuffed animal could help with the sensation of a pet that can mimic cuddling, petting and the feeling of being grounded and safe. You could also consider a non-mammal (turtle) or smaller mammal (hamster), if that is more accessible.



# Grounding Yourself Through Hand Massage

by Sunny Edwards

## Materials:

- You can use a lotion if you would like, if you have a scented lotion that you find relaxing it is a great addition to this practice.

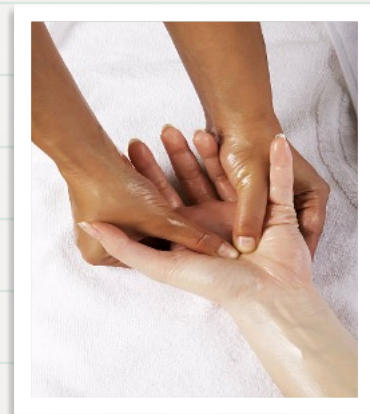
## Directions:

We will be massaging and stretching our hands, or the hands of someone you are working with. Using a light to firm pressure, you want to start by using your thumb in the palm of your opposite hand. You can make large and small circles moving in a clockwise motion. You can then move from the palm up the hand and rub in-between each finger. You will massage each finger and gently pull on each finger giving each individual finger a good stretch. Then return to the palm and massaging in circles. Massage the top of the hands gliding in-between each finger and the tops of the hands. You can massage each finger separately and stretch each finger. Switch hands and massage the other hand using the same methods. While you are massaging follow your bodies lead, or the individual you are working on. Breathing deep, rolling your neck and shoulders, trying to find balance in your body.



## Notes:

- Always ask for permission before you begin working on someone else. They need to be comfortable with this process before you begin, and if they become uncomfortable and ask you to do so, respect their wishes.
- You can teach your students to massage their own hands, or assist a peer with this technique as well.



# The Teacher's Corner

by Mary Pat Kochenash, OTR

## Materials:

- To implement this practice, you need a designated place and favored items!

## Directions:

In the beginning of the school year, teachers should pick a “spot” in the classroom that is their spot. This will be The Teacher’s Corner; its purpose is twofold – as an anchor spot for the teacher and as a spot where the teacher can demonstrate his/her regulatory style/skill set. After placing favored items in this spot, the teacher will introduce it to the class. The teacher will explain its purpose, show the items to the class and throughout the day, demonstrate its use. After about a month, he/she can invite someone in the class to add an item that they find anchoring to The Teacher’s Corner. The teacher can decide whether to continue to add student items and make it into a classroom Corner or keep it as his/her own. By demonstrating to the class how he/she manages their own nervous system, they are modeling a form of co-regulation – preparing themselves to be present and ready to connect and teach.

## Notes:

- When using this practice, it is helpful to keep The Teacher’s Corner active and dynamic. It should be used regularly, with discussion of the how and why of its use. The teacher can use it to co-regulate with students or to be their anchor and place of felt safety.
- This tool can be adapted in a myriad of ways. It can be small or large, simple or intricate, sensorial or cerebral. It is as individual as the person who designs it and the students who contribute to it.

# Web of Regulation

by Morgan Moore

## Materials:

- Paper
- Crayons, markers, pencil, and/or something to draw with

## Directions:

Use a piece of paper to write your name in the middle and connect the different senses off of your name like a web (touch, sight, smell, taste, hear, vestibular, proprioception, and interoception). Then off those senses, write five ways you can regulate yourself using that sense to create a toolkit for yourself to pull from as needed.

## Notes:

- You can add or take away which would be appropriate for the class. You can also add connection as one of the points to expand the tool kit.
- If some connect and can be used, you can connect that in your web!

# Calm Palm

by Breanna Peterson

## Materials:

- Just your hands! 😊

## Directions:

- Let's take a moment to trace the lines on the palm of our hands (for younger students, ask "where are your palms" & most likely get lots of high-fives 😊).
- We will use our pointer finger on our other hand to trace all these lines on our palm.
- While tracing, notice how it feels inside and outside of your body.
- Let's take about a minute.
- While tracing, breathe in slowly through your nose and then let it out your nose.
- *You may play calming music during this time, or just have quiet.*
- After about a minute (based on engagement/age), switch hands.
- After you're finished, ask questions like: How did that feel? What did you notice? Did you notice anything inside your body? Did you notice anything outside your body? *Some responses you may get:* tingly, tickles, warm, soft, calm, "good," etc. (when students say good, I always ask what that means/tell me more?)



## Notes:

- This practice can be used to help teach body sensations; it can also be used to help calm the body, accompanied with slow deep breaths in/out of the nose. It can be used in whole group, small group or individually. It's possible the adult could also trace the lines on the individual's hands, if both were comfortable with that touch.
- Verbiage may need to be modified across age groups, but can be used Kinder – 12<sup>th</sup> (and older!). An adult can trace the lines for the student, if they're unable to trace, and are comfortable with that touch.

# Calming Bottles

by Meera Balaji and Balaji Somasundaram

Learning Support Coordinators and Specialist Educators in Autism and Dyslexia  
Masters in Educational Psychology  
Masters in Specialist Teaching  
New Zealand

## Materials:

- Plastic Bottle - Smart Water bottles work best
- Super Glue
- Glitter Glue
- Filler - this can be glitter, pom poms, letters, beads, sequins, etc.
- Glass Jar or Large Drinking Glass
- Hot Water

## Directions:

1. Clean the plastic bottle by removing any adhesive labels and glue.
2. Fill a bowl with what “filler” you want to use for your sensory bottle.
3. Fill a glass jar with hot water and add your glitter glue. Aim for 1/3 glitter glue to 4/5 water. Let the hot water melt the glitter glue.
4. Once the mixture is cool enough, pour mixture into the plastic bottle.
5. Add the “filler” (this could be more glitter, pom poms, etc.). The more you add, the nicer it looks.
6. Shake it up and see if it falls too fast. If so, add clear glue directly to the bottle. If it falls too slow, add more water.
7. Once it is desired consistency, unscrew top and use super glue to fasten the top permanently. Allow it to dry before allowing children to play with it.
8. Place the sensory calming bottle in an area of the classroom where children can go to be calm and settle down. This area should be established with soft items like pillows, stuffed animals, rug, etc.



## Calming Bottles (continued)

---

### Notes:

- Fill a cozy area with pillows, soft objects, “feelings poster,” and a few of these calming bottles for children to look at the bottle and soothe themselves.
- This activity can be done with all age grounds/inside classroom settings. Sensory bottles are a great way to help children slow down and relax when they are feeling overwhelmed or unable to manage their emotions. Watching the materials in the bottle slowly fall back to the bottom after vigorous shaking can help calm breathing, thus helping the children self-regulate emotionally.
- When we notice a child starting to dysregulate, we can say “I see that you're frustrated about (issue for example maths problem or waiting for a turn). Let's take a break and shake up this calming bottle. Just take some time to breathe while you watch the glitter fall, which might help you with your feelings.”



# Regulation Task Boxes

by Kristin Chesterman

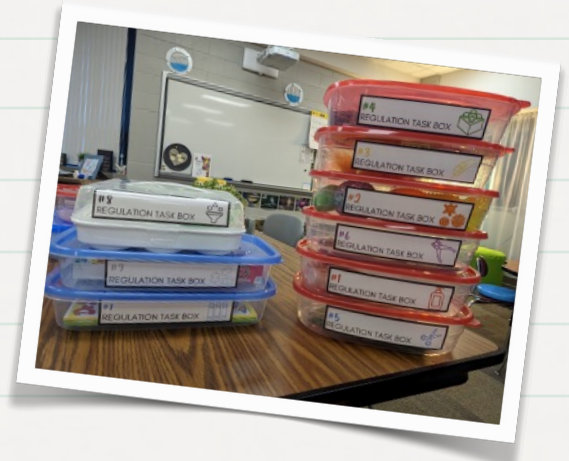
## Materials:

- Storage containers (various sizes)
- Timer
- Suggestions: beads, pom pom balls, muffin tin, puzzles, feathers, straws, coloring pages, crayons/markers/colored pencils, headphones, lotion, hole punch, paper, scissors, Legos, stretch bands
- Data collection sheet (optional)

## Directions:

Regulation task boxes contain structured, patterned, repetitive activities to help the nervous system become more regulated (drawn from the work of Dr. Bruce Perry and his 6 R's). Scholars are not able to take in more learning information without listening to their nervous system and providing an activity to regulate the system. This is not an opportunity for “avoiding work”; it is managing the sensations of the body in order to be able to access the reasoning part of the brain and return to learning. Ideally these task boxes could be utilized intentionally throughout the day as a preventative measure, but they could also be used during times of dysregulation.

Each task box is a container/box that contains all of the materials needed by the scholar to soothe their nervous system. The possibilities are endless, and the size and amount of the materials will determine the kind and number of containers you will need. However, it is important to provide items that provide the most optimum brain calming which, according to Dr. Perry,



# Regulation Task Boxes (continued)

include activities that are relational (offered by a safe adult), relevant (developmentally matched to the scholar and their emotional age), repetitive (patterned), rewarding (pleasurable), rhythmic, and respectful (of child, family, culture).

Below are some possibilities (and all found at the dollar store!):

- Sorting items (beads, buttons, pom poms, pattern blocks) into cupcake liners, muffin tin, cupcake carrier, ice cube trays...any divided container
- Coloring or sensation word drawing
- Headphones to listen to calming music with rhythmic beats (60-80 beats/minutes)
- Feather breathing with straws and feathers
- 12-24 piece puzzles
- Sensory objects
- Lotion for hand massages (can be done without lotion)
- Active calming tools (exercises, stretch bands, Minds in Motion movements)
- Hole punching
- Paper cutting (into strips or on lined paper)
- Legos



Notes:

- [Link to labels seen in pictures](#)
- While this strategy was geared toward use in the school setting, it could easily be used in many settings outside of school, including home. The activities could still be the same, but some items may be tweaked according to emotional age, such as the picture of the puzzle, the size of the sorting beads, or the type of coloring pages.



# Be a Thermostat, Not a Thermometer

by Heather Hunley

## Materials:

- You just need a willingness to check-in with yourself. 😊

## Directions:

“Be a Thermostat, not a Thermometer” is a great mantra. It reminds us that our emotions are contagious (hello mirror neurons!) Our personal approach influences every space we enter and every nervous system we encounter. It’s imperative that we take steps to regulate our own ‘climate.’

1. Determine your ideal temperature – what describes your bodily sensations, your energy level, your feelings, and your mood when you are feeling your best for the task at hand?
2. When stepping into a situation, a room, a space – pause and check in with your own nervous system.
3. Install any resources you have available to maintain your own ideal temperature. (i.e. breathing, cold water, bringing to mind your safe place, laughter, etc.)
4. Remember QTIP – quit taking it personally! (It’s usually not really about you – but about the other person’s nervous system.)
5. Respond to challenging behaviors using co-regulation practices.

## Notes:

- Just as extreme temperatures can be unpleasant and difficult to inhabit – we need to check our own weather before we go into our classrooms, homes, and offices.

# Story Hand

by Sarah Hurley

## Directions:

First establish willingness, you can say "I would like to tell you a story, are you willing to listen?" or "Would you like to hear a story?"

Sit or stand close to or across from each other, if your partner is a child and you are both comfortable with lap sitting, that is how the original ritual was written.

You can use your own hand as you go through the story, or if your partner is willing you can touch their thumb and fingers as you tell it.

Now, hold up your hand and touch, massage or gently rub your thumb and say "The story has a main character" and describe the main character - giving the character the physical features, characteristics and maybe even the name of your partner.

Touch, massage or gently rub your forefinger and say "This story takes place in ..." and describe a setting (here you can describe your actual setting or get creative, if you are narrating through a specific problem or scenario use the real setting).

Touch, massage or gently rub your middle finger and describe a key event (describe something innocuous that happened earlier, before the activating situation, problem or event) - beginning

Touch, massage or gently rub your ring finger and describe what happened to activate your partner or led to the situation or problem - middle. Check in with your partner to ask "is that what happened?" Allow for correction if necessary and check that you understand. Ask, "how did that make your body feel?" or "what did that feel like?" (sensations) or "how did that make you feel?" (emotions). Repeat back to your partner "so, you felt ... because ..., is that right?" No judgement just understanding.

Touch, massage or gently rub your pinky finger and ask your partner to help you end the story.

At this point you can ask "what can we do?" "how can I help you?" "what do you need?" "what are you willing to try?"

Or, your partner might be feeling listened to and validated and need no further action to be taken.

# Story Hand (continued)

## Notes:

- This is my "take" on one of Dr. Becky Bailey's I Love You rituals, I started using it about 15 years ago and it is "the same but different" each time. The ritual can be done during a escalated period - but since you might want to have physical contact, it will only be effective if the other person is willing.
- My language changes pretty much every year as I have been trained in different deescalation techniques (I think this version has some SAMA training in there).

# Self-Soothing with Your Senses

by Nikki Nichols, MSW, LSW, CTP

## Materials:

- The beauty in this is you only need yourself!!!

## Directions:

So this is practice that I use regularly with client's other adults and youth in the Mental Health and Substance Misuse field. The youth or adult I am working with can use this practice when they feel they need to be grounded or become present and not distracted by overwhelming thoughts. The youth or adult will use their 5 senses to de-escalate. The client would use each sense to regain the present mindset naming 5 things they can see, 4 things they can hear, 3 things they can feel, 2 things they can smell, and 1 thing they can taste. This practice can be used anywhere, by anyone who feels the need to feel grounded and to de-escalate.

## Notes:

- Understand the physical abilities of the person/people you are working with-this practice uses our senses; sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch to deescalate. Also know whether or not uses one's senses can become triggering- focusing on certain smells, or physical touch can escalate someone who have had traumatic experiences. Alternative practices may be needed – including creating a self-soothe box of objects that feel safe and comforting to the person.
- Alternative practices may be needed for those who may have physical impairments (ex: hearing impairment, limited sight) or those who are triggered when connected to certain senses ( ex: someone assaulted and cannot think about the feelings of touch) – including creating a self-soothe box of objects that feel safe and comforting to the person. The box can be decorated by the person, then items such as fidgets, comforting blankets/fabric, stones or crystals, pictures etc.
- If using the alternative practice with the self-soothe box old shoe boxes or old mason jars can be used to decorate and hold the items for self-soothing.

# Ice Water Practice

by Liora Shwartz

## Materials:

- A glass of ice water
- Straw (optional)

## Directions:

Take a big sip of ice water. Notice how far down your throat you can feel the cold sensation as you take a few deep breaths. Notice when it dissipates. Repeat a few times, experimenting with taking a larger gulp, smaller, swallowing quickly or slowly. See if the cold sensation spreads further down or stops closer to your mouth. Make sure to do some deep breathing in through your nose while you are spending a moment noticing.

## Notes:

- This practice helps by noticing physical sensations (getting you into your body) and slowing down for a mindful moment.

# Sunny Disposition

by Pamela Westvold Justus

## Materials:

- Small glass spray bottle
- Distilled water
- 1-2 drops essential oil of choice
- Creative label that makes children smile

## Directions:

You can actually call it whatever you like...the more magical the better. I put distilled water and just enough essential oil to be able to smell but nothing to overpower because there is a lot of asthma in my school. I first had a chance to use it when a class came in from recess and by my office very out of sorts. I asked if I could show them a magical transformation. They were interested. I showed them how I spray my magical spray and their job is to walk through with much panache and arrive on the other side transformed! Then I demonstrate in a very dramatic way. I would say it has a 98% success rate. Some will only be moved when their spirit moves them which means they might be willing to give it a go a bit later on but not with everyone.



# Rhythm



Photo by [Lee Pigott/Unsplash](#)

The following strategies utilize rhythm to calm the nervous system. These practices might focus on the rhythm of music, art, or patterns.

# Stress Release Drawing

by Nicole Calabro

## Materials:

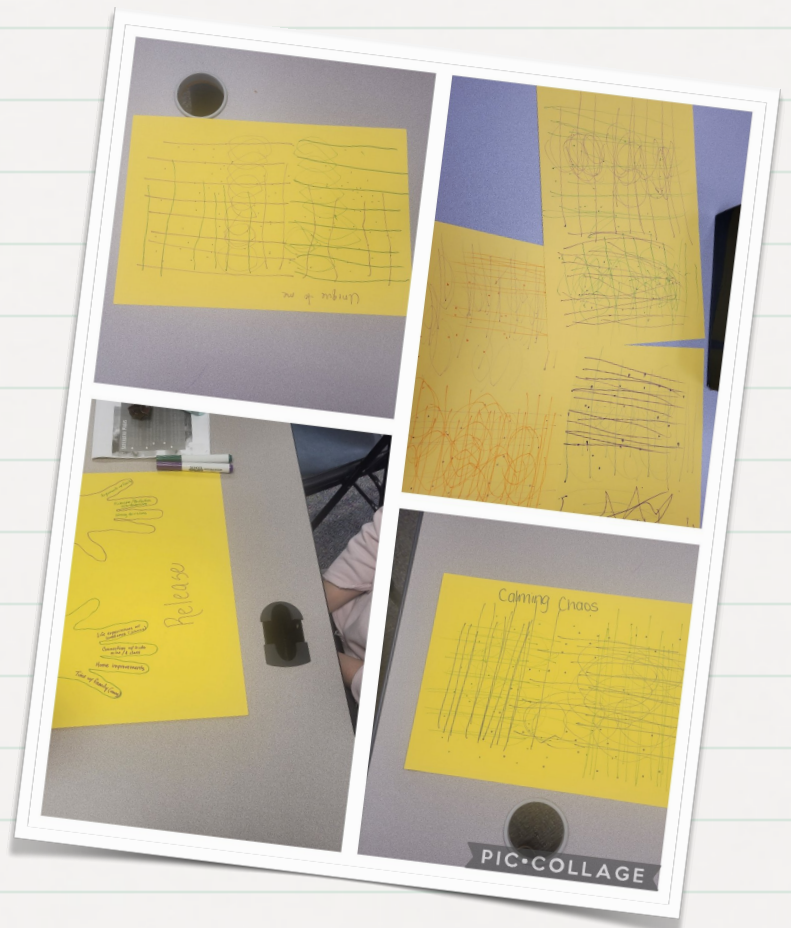
- Paper (white or construction)
- Markers

## Directions:

Place a piece of paper in front of you. You need two different colors (pens, markers, colored pencils, crayons) Draw vertical lines at the same time for 10-15 seconds. Draw horizontal lines at the same time for 10-15 seconds. Draw arcs (they can crossover the lines) 10-15 sec. Draw circles or dots for 10-15 seconds. Place your artwork in front of you. Sit in a comfortable position. Inhale (hold your breathe for 3 seconds) then exhale. Inhale (hold your breathe for 3 seconds) then exhale. Inhale (hold your breathe for 3 seconds) then exhale- like a balloon loosing all of it's air. Examine your art work- What do you notice? If this was going into an art show, what would you call it?

## Notes:

- The children definitely feel better about themselves and keep asking to do this again because they like the way they feel when they participate in this activity.



# Co-Regulation in the Virtual Environment

by Kendall Carr

## Materials:

- Age-appropriate playlist
- Ability to share sound through a virtual platform (ex., Zoom)

## Directions:

This co-regulatory practice can be used in small groups, whole groups, or individual sessions. I have used it successfully with students in grades K-6 with a lot of success.

Before using this strategy, be sure to have it as part of your routine so that it is embedded in your expectations and students understand what to do while the music plays.

The purpose of this co-regulatory strategy is to get students regulated before class. They come to class with all different experiences, and you will never know exactly what happens before class since they are at home and not with you.

**Step 1:** Before starting your session, choose a song from your playlist based on the stressors and experiences that your student(s) have recently experienced. You may want a calming song, or you might want an energizing song.

**Step 2:** Start the song and then allow the student(s) to enter your virtual classroom.

**Step 3:** Play music for 3-5 minutes. If the purpose is to energize – model a dance party! Get up and let your student(s) see you dance to the music. If the purpose is to calm – model a calm body. Allow your student(s) to see you close your eyes, rub your hands, roll your shoulder, roll your head, etc. NEVER require students to have their webcam on, but ALWAYS have yours on.

**Step 4:** After the 3-5 minutes is up, open discussion with your student(s) on how their body feels. Focus on the sensations they feel in their body. You can then use this discussion to lead into your lesson for the day.

# Co-Regulation in the Virtual Environment (continued)

## Notes:

- It can be fun to create a Google Form and let the student(s) submit song requests. This can provide a lot of insight as to how the student(s) feel about themselves and what they are experiencing in their lives.
- Have playlists ready to choose from. I like to pull songs from recent movies geared towards children. Be sure to listen to or read the lyrics before playing the song for students.
- Give a class job – assign a Student DJ each week! Make sure that they run their song choice by you before class.

# Partners in Creativity with Watercolors

by Danielle Konigsbacher McKinney

## Materials:

- Watercolor Set
- Paintbrush(s)
- Water in a jar or bowl
- Watercolor paper

## Directions:

This activity can be done 1:1 with a student or in a small group. It can be done silently or as you are having a conversation with a student. Sit with the student(s) and paint with watercolors together. When done, share your paintings with each other. You can simply freely paint by painting whatever you and the student want to paint. It might be a sunrise, rainbow, flowers, sports ball or animal. You can also combine watercolor painting with a focused attention practice. See the options below.

1. Paint sensations or emotions—How can you use brush strokes to represent different sensations or emotions that you are feeling?
2. Color Breathing—Utilize paint colors to represent your breath. Paint your breath swirling and/or moving as it enters and exits your body. Maybe you are breathing in blue for calm and breathing out red for anger. Try painting different size breaths.
3. Bilateral painting—Free paint with both hands at the same time. Just move your hands in ways that feel good.
4. Nature Walk—Start by going outside for a walk. Choose one of the following options:
  - a. As you are walking, look for things that can be used as stamps for watercolors. For example, you can paint the back of a leaf with watercolor and then stamp the leaf on the paper. How many textures can you create with objects found in nature?
  - b. As you are walking, look for an item or items with colors that you are attracted to. When you get back inside, use trial and error to attempt to mix watercolors to create the same color as the object.

# Partners in Creativity with Watercolors (continued)

## Notes:

- If a student doesn't feel that he/she is artistic, you can choose a watercolor tutorial on YouTube to follow. You can use a tutorial on beginner watercolor brushstrokes or a step-by-step painting tutorial for beginners.

# Coloring for Co-Regulation

by Krista Shipley

## Materials:

- A variety of coloring items. (crayons, colored pencils, markers, pens, etc.)
- Assorted coloring pages. I keep a variety of styles on hand, depending on student preference. (cartoon characters, mandalas, landscapes, etc.)

## Directions:

When we need to co-regulate with our students, staff and student chooses a coloring page. This can be done anytime our students need to take a moment to relax and reflect. Coloring is a rhythmic, repetitive activity to calm our nervous system and bring us back to baseline. We can use this time to talk to our students when/if they are ready. What does that child need in that moment? How can I help you?

## Notes:

- This practice can be adapted to different age levels and populations by choosing different coloring pages/subjects. Older students may like mandalas or 'adult' coloring pages with more fine detail.

# Make it Even

by Maddie Stenhjem

## Directions:

Instructions... Pick a number between 1 and 5. Lay your hand flat on a surface, on your leg, or on your chest. Starting with your pinky, start at 1 and tap as you count up to the number you chose. Once you reach the number you chose, you will be on a finger that isn't your pinky or your thumb. When you move to tap the next finger, start back and 1 and count up to the number you chose. As you tap through your fingers, when you get to your thumb, go back to your pinky so you are continually tapping in the order "pinky, ring, middle, pointer, thumb, pinky, ring, middle, pointer, thumb." Continue counting until you reach our number when you tap your thumb.

Try this with only one hand, then once you understand the concept, work your way in from your pinky on both hands simultaneously. If you need an additional bilateral options, cross arms across chest or legs and complete the exercise.

Example: I chose the number three

Starting with my pinky, I say/think the number "1" as I tap my pinky, I say/think the number "2" as I tap my ring finger, I say/think the number "3" as I tap my middle finger, then back to "1" as I tap my pointer finger, "2" when I tap my thumb, "3" when I'm back to my pinky. Continue until the number you chose ends on your thumb.

1 pinky

2 ring

3 middle

1 pointer

2 thumb

3 pinky

1 ring

2 middle

3 pointer

1 thumb

2 pinky

3 ring

1 middle

2 pointer

3 ring

DONE



## Make it Even (continued)

Use this practice when feeling moments of heightened anxiety or need to feel closure after a stressful moment.

### Notes:

- Feel free to edit to make changes so this explanation makes more sense. I read it a few times and it makes sense to me, but it is also something I do all the time. Explaining it feels wordy!
- This can be used in a whole class setting, or individually when a person needs to regulate. It is a quiet exercise that can be customized as needed. The smaller the number, the faster the exercise. The larger the number, the longer it will take to get back to the chosen number on the thumb. More advanced options include using both hands at the same time, or crossing arms and doing both at the same time. An additional option is to choose a number between 2 and 10 and count across all ten fingers.

# Team Pause

by Michelle Vieau-Miltz

## Materials:

- iPad, computer, phone, etc.
- A screen to share

## Directions:

### Preteach:

- How a pause can positively affect the central nervous system (CNS).
- How a stimulus affects the CNS.
- Mirror neurons and emotional contagion.
- The processes and protocol for calling and implementing a team pause.

With the learners, develop a playlist of music that has a soothing and steadying effect on the CNS. It is recommended that the music be age appropriate, lyrically have positive messaging and themes, and melodically be soothing. To create ownership in this playlist, have students submit proposals for the playlist and then use a scientific process to experiment with each song (after screening for appropriateness yourself). After each use, reflect as a team about the effectiveness. If effective, it is added to the playlist. An additional tip is to include a video of the song with lyrics shown. You can make these as a team too. Kids of all ages love to create theses. The visual of the video and lyrics creates a more steadying effect than just the audio alone. It also gives them something to focus on rather than each other or their own anxiety.

### Suggested process for implementation:

- Anyone (staff or students) can initiate a team pause through a predetermined signal or request process. These requests are always honored by the team.
- A song from the predetermined playlist is randomly chosen (random is important!)
- It is played in audio and visual forms. During the song, students can watch quietly or put head down, close eyes, etc. Students do not sing along.
- After the song is over there is a brief team reflection about the effects on the individual and team's CNS and energy, etc.

Previous tasks are resumed. Note that sometimes it is repeated with the same or a different random song.

## Team Pause (continued)

### Notes:

- I used this strategy with many different sizes and ages of groups. It was one of the most highly effective ones I used to refocus, steady and soothe our shared nervous systems. Students loved it, felt ownership in it, did not abuse it (after the initial novelty wore off), and respected each other's needs during it. For the investment of very little time, we gained so much attention, calm, and unity.
- Accommodate for age, ability, and screen for appropriate themes including those that respect the cultures and beliefs of others.

# Scribble Picture/ Stained Glass Creation

by Pamela Westvold Justus

## Materials:

- Scrap of paper
- Black marker and crayons (Really any combination preferred works...I like the contrast of black Sharpie and crayons)

## Directions:

You just scribble with a black marker, pen, and pencil - whatever. Then you begin coloring in tiny sections in all different colors or with a color scheme - whatever is preferred. This can be done with a class or small group or one on one. I think there is much power in an adult and child working on one together. Even with a class, I could offer to color together and circulate with anyone who would like that. It's very soothing.

# Doodle Your Heart Out

by Reagan John

## Materials:

- A piece of paper
- A pencil (coloring utensils are suggested but not necessary)

## Directions:

This is something that I have done for years now, without even realizing that it is my own way of having a focused attention practice for myself. In pretty much every notebook for class I've ever had I would always dedicate the last few pages to this. When I would start to feel nervous, overwhelmed, or even shut down I would flip to the back of my notebook and doodle. I would start by making random lines across the page to create different shapes. In those shapes I would doodle patterns, or fill in with color, or write notes to myself. I still find myself doing this with paper or sticky notes on my desk.

## Notes:

- For younger ages maybe having a pre-designed template with shapes to color in or with older kids using it as a journaling technique.

# Double Down Scribble Circles

by Kat Toebes

## Materials:

- A large piece of paper
- Tape
- 2 colors (markers, crayons or colored pencils)  
OR
- Concrete
- Side walk chalk in 2 colors

## Directions:

Close your eyes and focus on the thought that you are stressed about. Grab one of each color in each hand and at the same time, start in the middle with your hands together. Move your drawing implements toward you and then out and then both up (away from you) and over and together and then down and around and around in unison. You will draw large scribble circles while thinking about the stressful thing. Go around and around again faster and faster if that feels right.

When you are done, look at the drawing and see if you feel the stressful thing having resolved itself somewhat.

## Notes:

- You can also do this alternating hands, creating more of an infinity motion where one hand doesn't start until the first hand tags it. I think it incorporates some of the ideas of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). It activates both sides of the brain. You can also scribble instead of going in circles.
- This works well with children. For younger children you may need sturdy paper, well taped down. If someone was differently abled, say they didn't have use of their hands, they could actually picture the scribbling in their mind and still get a good benefit from it.
- <https://thepowerofyourotherhand.blogspot.com/2020/01/bilateral-drawing-balancing-and.html>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/arts-and-health/201509/bilateral-drawing-self-regulation-trauma-reparation>