

PRACTICES TO DO WITH CHILDREN

Balloon Breath (2 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

Synching body movement, even small movement, with our breathing helps us slow down, focus, and return to the present moment. In this practice we use deep breathing and movement together to settle our mind. When we are in the presence of children, it can be helpful (and fun!) to model and engage them in the practice.

Sitting or standing, place both hands on top of your head.

As you breathe in, slowly and deeply, raise your hands above your head, matching the movement to your breath, like you are blowing up a balloon. When you get to the top of your inhale breath, your arms should resemble a big, round balloon on top of your head.

As you exhale, slowly bring your hands toward your head, again, matching the movement to your breath. Continue with this breath and arm movement 2-4 more times.

Then, for a final breath, as you exhale, forcefully blow the air out through pressed lips, making a silly sound like a horse.

Starfish Breathing (3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

Synching body movement, even small movement, with our breathing helps us slow down, focus, and return to the present moment. In this practice we use the sensations of breathing and touch to settle our mind. When we are in the presence of children, it can be helpful (and fun!) to model and engage them in the practice.

Choose a hand to be your starfish, and extend this hand, palm out with fingers spread widely – like a starfish.

Use the pointer finger from your other hand, to trace the starfish in sync with your breath. Start at your thumb, and as you breathe in deeply, trace up your thumb to the top. Do this carefully, so your movement matches your inhale.

Now, with your out breath, trace down the inside of your thumb. Again, move slowly paying attention to keeping the breath and movement together.

Continue breathing up and down each finger, paying careful attention to match your movement with your breath. As you breathe and trace, notice the sensations of movement in your body – your chest and belly moving in and out and your finger moving up and down.

When you come to the base of your wrist below your little finger, rest for a moment. Check in with yourself. Notice how you are feeling without analyzing or judging.

Then continue the practice switching hands.

Calming Glitter Bottle (1-5 minutes)

When we shake up a glitter bottle, the water becomes cloudy with all the colorful and sparkly contents swirling around quickly. This can resemble how our mind and emotions feel when we are worrying, angry or stressed.

Watching the water inside the bottle become calm and clear as all the little bits of glitter fall slowly and gently to the bottom, helps us find calm. When we sit quietly and just watch the settling, we give ourselves time and space to regain a sense of control and ease. Watching the glitter engages our senses and brings us into the present moment. This works with children and adults.

Seeing how the water becomes clear, when all the contents are resting quietly, also reflects our ability to see more clearly when we are in this calm and emotionally regulated state.

Make your own calming glitter bottle:

- Find a bottle or jar - rigid plastic or glass works best as lighter, thinner plastic may warp with the introduction of warm water.
- Fill the jar $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ full with glue (Elmer's Clear School Glue or similar, or you can use pre-mixed glitter glue). The more glue, the slower the objects will settle after shaking.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of glitter and other small objects if you like – a small funnel is very helpful for this step.
- Fill the bottle the rest of the way with very warm water
- Add food coloring (optional)
- Glue cap on bottle. Let the bottle rest to allow sealing glue to fully harden or the bottle may leak. You could use hot glue for a stronger seal.
- You can also mix the ingredients in a bowl before transferring the mixture into the bottle.

Five Senses Exercise (2-3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

One effective way to shift habitual thinking patterns, is to get out of our heads and more in touch with the present-moment experience of our bodies. We can do this by engaging our senses. This brief practice can be done any time we want to refocus on the present or when we are having a stressful moment and need to re-center ourselves quickly.

- Notice five things that you can see. Look around you, notice and name five things that you can see.
- Notice four things that you can feel. Tune in to your sense of touch, notice and describe the texture of four things you can touch.
- Notice three things you can hear. Listen carefully, notice and name three sounds you hear in your environment.
- Notice two things you can smell. Notice and name two smells you recognize.
- Notice one thing you can taste. Focus and name one thing that you can taste right now. You can take a sip or bite of something, or just notice the current taste in your mouth.

Pleasure Gazing (5-10 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This exercise helps you engage your sense of sight in an intentional way to foster calm, co-regulation and present moment awareness. If you are in a setting working with infants and toddlers, bringing your full attention to your interaction with a child, paying close attention to them as well as your internal responses is a way to share mindfulness. As you tune in to the interaction and your internal responses, it is important to bring a sense of open curiosity, not analysis or judgment.

Start by taking a few deep breaths and notice how your body feels. You can use long, slow exhales, or even an audible sigh to help you ease any tension.

Now, orient yourself toward baby with kindness and curiosity. You might ask their permission to initiate this interaction, noticing if they give cues that they are interested in engagement.

Start by using your sense of sight. Gaze onto baby--what do you see? Offer them a gentle smile. Look closely at the features of their face. What are all the different colors you see in their eyes? What is the exact shape of their smile? Look at their fingers and toes, taking time to notice small things you haven't noticed before. Go slowly, feature by feature. Notice what features you delight in and the warm connected feelings that may arise through this visual interaction.

Once complete, take a few deep breaths in and out and notice how you are feeling now.

