# **Chapter 9: Activities**

## **Comprehensive School Health**

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# 1. Sound in Space

***Learning Goals***

Students will begin to develop body and mind awareness by focusing on a sound (i.e., through mindful listening).

***Equipment and Materials***

* Bell, chime, or triangle instrument: Try a few options ahead of time. Ideally, use something that gives a lingering sound after you strike (or start) it so that students can listen to the sound as it fades. We really like the Woodstock Chime, which provides high quality and can be purchased readily online for about $15.
* Rocks: We usually use rocks found at a discount store. We use ones that are small and fairly uniform and write students’ names on them. You can also plan an activity to find suitable rocks outside or have students each bring one in from their house or neighbourhood.

***Setup***

Ideally, use a space large enough for students to sit comfortably in a circle with their legs crossed. If that is not possible, students can sit wherever space allows; the floor or carpet is preferable to a chair.

***Instructions***

1. Invite students to sit in a circle, then use the following prompts to work through the activity.

**Getting ready:** “Let’s get ready to be mindful by sitting in a comfortable position in crisscross applesauce and zipping ourselves up tall and strong.”

**Mindful breathing:** “As we breathe, let’s be mindful of how our belly goes out when we breathe in, making room for the air we breathe inside our belly. When we breathe out, our belly goes back to normal. Let’s put our hands on our bellies to feel our breath.”

**Listening to the bell:** “Now we are going to mindfully listen to the sound of this bell as we breathe. You are going to close your eyes (or look at your focus rock) and listen to the sound of the bell. When the sound softens into silence, I want you to raise your finger. No one needs to see this—it’s just for you to keep track of the sound. Ready? Remember to listen to the sound until it’s completely gone and raise a finger when it stops. We’ll do this three times.

1. Ring the bell.
2. After you have completed the activity three times, discuss the following questions:

* What was that like for you?
* What did you notice about the sound you heard?
* What did you notice about your breathing?
* What thoughts did you notice your mind thinking about?
* How did you bring your thoughts back to the bell and to your breath when you got distracted?

***Variations and Differentiation***

* Depending on the age or readiness of the group, you may want to ring the bell either fewer or more times.
* It is often be helpful to share personal experiences when introducing this activity to students. For example, how do you bring your own mind back to the bell when you get distracted? Younger students will need more concrete examples (e.g., “When I start to think about something else, I try to listen to the sound again”); older students can discuss the question at a more abstract level (e.g., “When I get distracted, I allow those thoughts to sit and wait, and I move my focus back to the tone”).
* Focus rocks can be helpful for students who are uncomfortable with closing their eyes, as well as students who struggle to keep their mind focused. They can simply look at the rock during the activity. This approach works best if the rock is placed about 0.3 meter in front of the student and if your instructions specify that the rock cannot be touched or moved during the activity.

***Assessment Look-Fors***

* Notice students’ differing levels of readiness to sit and focus through the activity; based on what you observe, tailor the activity in future instances.
* Notice the language used and the points raised during the discussion. What vocabulary or concepts might need to be introduced or reviewed?

***Safety***

Students may raise difficult experiences or issues in discussion. Therefore, it can be helpful to have a school counselor or resource teacher take part in the circle and to maintain open communication with parents.

# 2. Focus on Breathing

***Learning Goals***

Students will begin to develop body and mind awareness by focusing on their breathing.

***Equipment and Materials***

* Bell, chime, or triangle instrument: Try a few options ahead of time. Ideally, use something that gives a lingering sound after you strike (or start) it so that students can listen to the sound as it fades. We really like the Woodstock Chime, which provides high quality and can be purchased readily online for about $15.
* This activity is written for young children. We find that for this group, it can be helpful for students to have a small stuffed animal to place on their stomach. These objects can be brought from home, or you can purchase them inexpensively at a local discount store. Alternatively, you can also plan an activity to fill small plastic or cloth bags with rice or beans—students love to help!

***Setup***

Students need enough space to lie on their backs without touching furniture or other students.

***Instructions***

1. Invite students to find a space in which to lie on their backs, then use the following prompt.

“Now we’re going to get ready to be mindful. Make sure that you’re lying on your mat in a comfortable position with your arms at your sides. In a minute, I’m going to ring a bell. I want you to listen very carefully to the sound until it softens into silence. It can help to close your eyes.”

1. Ring the bell, then use the following prompts.

“Now I just want you to pay attention to your breathing. Don’t try to change it or make it faster or slower; just notice it when it goes in and when it goes out. You can close your eyes if you want to. Try not to think about anything else—just your breathing.

“We’re going to walk around and put a small stuffed animal on your tummy. You don’t need to touch it; just let it sit there for now. When you’re breathing normally, you can think about your stuffie moving up and down as your breath goes in and out.

“Notice when you stop paying attention to your breath and start daydreaming or thinking about something else, like recess. Just bring your attention back to your breath and the movement of your stuffie. If you want, you can think ‘in’ and ‘out’ in your head if that helps you to focus on your breath.

“When I ring the bell again, bring your awareness slowly to the classroom and open your eyes.”

1. After one minute, ring the bell and then gather students into a circle.
2. After you have completed the activity and students are ready in the circle, discuss the following questions:
   * What was that like for you?
   * What did you feel in your body?
   * What did you notice about your breathing?

***Variations and Differentiation***

* The language of this activity is suitable for young children (ages 4 through 6 or so). For older students, you can have them sit cross-legged rather than lying down or give them a choice; you can also alter the level of the discussion.
* It is often helpful to share personal experiences when introducing the activity to students. For example, what helps you focus on your own breath? Do you count? Do you repeat a certain word?

***Assessment Look-Fors***

* Notice students’ differing levels of readiness to be still and focus through the activity.
* Tailor the activity in the future based on what you observe.

***Safety***

Students may raise difficult experiences or issues in discussion. Therefore, it can be helpful to have a school counselor or resource teacher take part in the circles and to maintain open communication with parents.