

Montessori and Special Needs

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A Peaceful Classroom: Self-Regulation

Example Lessons

For Toddler and Early Childhood Classroom- Belly Breathing- Whole group or Small group

Bring the group to the circle area. “Today we are going to play a game. It’s called the Balloon Belly game. To play this game we need our nostrils (point to the holes in your nose). We need our lips (slightly part your lips to make a gentle pucker and point to your lips). And we need our belly (point to your belly right below your ribs).

“Put your hands on your belly like this.” Demonstrate placing one hand on your belly and covering it with your other hand.

“Now watch me make my belly like a big balloon.” Take a very deep, slow exaggerated breath in through your nostrils. Push your belly out as far as you can and look at it. Whisper, “now I’m going to let all of the air out of my balloon belly. Watch.” With an exaggerated pucker of your lips, slowly blow out while contracting your belly to make it as flat as possible. Look at it again.

“Your turn to play. Put your hands on your belly. Breathe in with your nostrils and let your balloon belly fill all the way up. Breathe, breathe, breathe. Look, your belly is big!” “Blow all that air out with you lips. Look! Your belly is flat again.”

Invite individual, or 2-3 children, show their balloon belly. Get the children this opportunity until they are just beginning to get restless. Finish with the whole group doing the exercise one more time. Then say, “Sometimes when my body is feeling is feeling jumpy, I like to play the balloon belly game all by myself. And you know what? After I play, my body feels calm again. When your body feels jumpy, you could play the balloon belly game and see if your body feels calm again.”

End the group with your regular transition.

Note: with a slight word change and a bit faster pace, you could introduce this game to lower, and maybe even upper, elementary students.

Lower and Upper Elementary Classrooms- Partner Isometrics- Whole group or Small Group

Bring the group to the circle area. “Today I’m going to show you Partner Isometrics. These are exercises you can do with a friend, or maybe even two friends. I really like to do this kind of

exercise even by myself when I'm feeling jumpy, or having trouble concentrating, or just need a break from my work."

"Isos means equal and metria means measuring. Isometric exercise uses equal press, pull, or hold to strengthen your muscles, but it also can calm your mind."

"Turn to face the person you are sitting next to. Put your arms straight out like this." Put your arms straight out in front of you, bending your wrists so your palms are facing out. "Now touch your palms with your partner's palms. Without moving your arms or your wrists, begin to push slowly against your partners palms. Remember isos means equal. You are trying to use an equal pressure." You may need to demonstrate with another adult or a student- a student who may have some special needs or is disturbed by touch could be a good choice.

"Count to 10 and bring your arms down. Gently shake your arms. How do they feel?" Give students the opportunity to describe how their arms, and bodies are feeling. If they are still interested, let them practice this another few times.

End by saying, "any time you feel like you need a break, or your attention is wandering, or you are feeling jumpy. You can do this alone or invite a friend to do it with you."

Extensions: Likely for a different day- review the meaning of isometric and how isometric exercises can be used to self-regulate. The students will need to spread out a bit to do Leg Isometrics.

"Turn to the person sitting next to you. Slightly bend you knees and touch your feet to your partners feet." (If your student wear shoes, they need to remove them and just place to the side near their body). "Very slowly, see if you and your partner can begin to straighten your legs while pushing on each other's feet. You can put your hands on the floor behind your back if you need to." (You may need to demonstrate as above). "Count to ten and let your feet come apart. Gently shake your legs."

End as above.

Extension: Combine the palms and the feet

Instead of one partner, invite 3 children to sit in a curved triangle. Straighten arms to the side, place left palm against palm of friend on the left and repeat with the friend on the right. Push with equal pressure between all three students. Students ca experiment doing this with their feet.

Note: Several yoga poses provide isometric input. Downward Facing Dog, the Plank are two examples. Provide one place in your classroom, like the Quiet Place perhaps, where students can use a yoga mat and practice these poses. The poses should be taught to the whole or small groups before introducing into the classroom. The work cycle would end with the student wiping the mat with a wipe or a sponge.