



ROCK-A-BYE: MINDFUL BREATHING FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

*"Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment, I know this is a wonderful moment."*

— Thich Nhat Hahn

OVERVIEW

A script for educators that helps young students calm themselves by focusing on their breathing

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily, for at least one week or longer (Mindful breathing can ultimately become part of a class's daily routine.)
- At the start of a school day, to close a class, in a classroom meeting, or a student's one-on-one meeting with a school mental health professional
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- 15 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK-Lower Elementary

MATERIALS

- One stuffed animal per student

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice focusing and redirecting their attention to their breath

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Try this [Mindful Breathing](#) practice before leading students in this practice. Check in with yourself before doing the practice and again afterwards. Do you notice a change in how you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity, from Susan Kaiser Greenland's [Mindful Games](#), is a brief, simplified adaptation of both [Mindful Breathing](#) and the [Body Scan](#) meditation for older children and adults.

- Tell students:
 - *Lie on your back with your legs flat on the floor and your arms by your sides. If you like, you can close your eyes. Now I'm going to place a stuffed animal on your belly. [Place a stuffed animal on each student's belly. You might have students play with their stuffed animals ahead of time or engage with them in some way so that students don't get distracted by the novelty of a stuffed animal.]*
 - *Feel the back of your head touching the floor. Now feel your shoulders, upper back, arms, hands, lower back, legs, and feet. You can pat the stuffed animal on your tummy and notice what that feels like, too.*
 - *Now notice what it feels like to breathe in and out, moving the animal up and down with your breathing. How does your body feel? Is your mind busy? [Wait about one to three minutes before moving to the next instruction.]*
 - *If it's hard to keep your mind on your breathing, silently say the word "up" every time the animal moves up and silently say the word "down" every time the animal moves down.*
 - *Let's check how our bodies feel now. Feel the back of your head touching the floor; now feel your shoulders against the floor; feel your upper back, arms, hands, lower back, legs, and feet.*
 - *When you are ready, open your eyes and sit up slowly to finish. Take a breath and notice how you feel. Do you feel difference than you felt before?*

CLOSURE

- Invite students to describe the experience of mindful breathing.
- Ask them what they noticed about their ability to focus on their breath.

- Assure them that the mind is easily distracted—a key to mindful breathing is to continue redirecting your attention to the breath as your mind wanders.
- Ask students why they might want to try this activity again in the future.

EXTENSIONS

- Consider using this practice in conjunction with mindfulness activities, including a [body scan practice](#) and [loving-kindness meditation](#).

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Were they calmer and more focused?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

While research on the effects of mindfulness on children is still in the early stages, a [2016 review of 12 studies](#) suggests some promising outcomes for young children relative to attention, self-regulation, and motor skills. A [2014 meta-analysis](#) that focuses on 24 studies of K-12 students showed demonstrated changes in students' attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem and self-concept, and well-being.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“Mindful breathing” is a simple process—it involves observing the breath and redirecting attention to the breath when the mind wanders.

This activity is helpful because it can give children an anchor for their attention--their breath--a place to focus when they might feel carried away by emotions. Students who practice mindful breathing regularly may feel less anxiety, more focus, and a greater sense of calm in the classroom.

SOURCE

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