



SHAKE IT OFF

"The mind should be allowed some relaxation, that it may return to its work all the better for the rest."

—Seneca

OVERVIEW

Students notice what it feels like inside their bodies when they are shaking or tensing body parts, resting their bodies, and transitioning between these states.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily or weekly
- At the start of a school day, at the beginning or end of class, before doing a sitting practice or a loving-kindness practice
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, restlessness, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- <15 minutes

LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- A rattle, a key chain, a recorded song, or some other sound to signal stops and starts during this activity

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice relaxing, tightening, and shaking body parts
- Observe changes in body states

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Try a shortened version of Shaking It Off.
- Tighten your muscles during an in-breath and release them during an out-breath. (Repeat several times.)
- Stand up and “shake out” your muscles from head to toe. Pause, rest. Then do it again.
- What did you notice in yourself as you engaged in this practice?
- What would happen if you practiced this several times a week? When would you benefit this practice most during your day?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- Be particularly conscious that you are setting up a learning environment in which students will not bump into each other or hurt themselves during this practice.
- Find a big enough space for students to stand up and extend their arms in a circle without touching anyone or anything.
- A rattle may work well to begin and end the shaking time. You can use a shaker, a key chain, or extended sound such as a recorded song to signal when the movement should start and stop.
- Depending on the age of your students, you may introduce this practice as a “game” (for younger students) and/or as an activity with a purpose: to help your students relax and “reboot” their nervous systems (for older students).
- Special Note: For more information about how to facilitate “Shake It Off,” please watch the following [video by Daniel Rechtschaffen](#), the creator of this practice.

THE PRACTICE

- Begin by having students tighten up their bodies with each inhale and release with a big sigh on the exhale.

- Have them tighten their fists, faces, and bodies as they inhale and then, as they breathe out, relax everything so that they are as loose as a noodle.
- Let them try tightening and relaxing for about 10 breaths.
- Then ask them to feel 10 breaths without tightening but while staying totally relaxed. Ask them how this felt.
- Once they can tighten and relax, we can graduate to shaking.
- Have students stand up and start to shake their feet. Then have them shake their legs, up through the hips, the belly and chest, the arms, the head and neck, until their whole bodies are shaking. It can be nice to shake a rattle while they are moving.
- At various moments, call “freeze,” or simply ask students to stop moving when the rattle stops.
- During these moments of pause, ask the group to notice what is happening in their bodies.
- Then call “shake” or begin rattling, and everybody will shake.
- Invite students to notice what it feels like inside their bodies when they are shaking, in stillness, and transitioning between states.
- If the class is up for it, you can add blithering. This is when we let our tongues wag and make nonsense sounds. We can blither and shake our bodies at the same time. After a few alternating sessions of shaking and being still, ask the students what they noticed.

CLOSURE

Ask students to reflect on this practice by choosing one or more of the following activities or questions for discussion:

- Draw one side of your paper in chaos and the other side of your paper calm and relaxed.
- Write about some moments in your life when you regularly feel stressed and some moments in your life when you feel calm.
- Ask students to discuss the following:
 - What was the difference between feeling tense and feeling relaxed?
 - What was it like to shift between shaking and being still?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Where might you try it again? When might it be most well-received?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Mindfulness of body sensations is a foundational skill developed in [Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction](#) courses for adults and many adapted mindfulness programs for youth, and this particular practice guides students to notice different body states (e.g., tensing, relaxing, shaking). A [review](#) of 24 mindfulness studies with K-12 students demonstrated changes in students’ attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem, and self-concept.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

To support students in feeling comfortable and relaxed in the classroom, we can help their nervous systems find a state of rest. When students experience dysregulation--or emotional upset--we can use practices like these to help them relax and regulate. Teaching students this practice may reduce their stress, bolster their personal well-being, and improve their [attention and executive functions](#) (e.g., self-control, planning, decision-making, etc.) as well as their [school functioning](#).

SOURCE

Adapted from [The Mindful Education Workbook](#), by [Daniel Rechtschaffen](#), Published by Norton.