

PURPOSEFUL PRACTICES

Purposeful practices are intentional activities that provide preemptive emotional regulation opportunities. Students and staff often show up at school under the influence of stress and trauma as a result of prior experience or perceived threat. Too often, occurrences at school can trigger the effects of stress and trauma in students and staff. Many times, those who are experiencing those effects go unidentified. Purposeful practices help students regulate and prepare to manage behavior and perform academically. By infusing these practices into normal routines and rituals, faculty and staff allow students the opportunity to overcome the effects of stress and trauma for the moment at hand.

The following is a list of purposeful practices that can prove helpful in preventing and minimizing the effects of stress and trauma. Some of these activities can be done in a corporate setting while others may be more effective with individuals. They should be adapted for relevance and age-level appropriateness.

4 categories →

Internal/Awareness Activities	Physical/Awareness Activities	Auditory/Expressive Activities	Sensory/Tactile Activities
<p>Meditation, Reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide students through positive reflection <p>Visualize, Predict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to visualize overcoming obstacles or mastery of task Visualize a safe or happy place or safe person to be with Visualize identifying distractions and setting them aside <p>Name "What" vs "How"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to focus on either "what" or "how" they are feeling <p>Focus on the Now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to focus on what their bodies are experiencing in the moment Ask students to focus on their current surroundings and the events of the now <p>Reading Self-Scripts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can spend time reading and imagining self-scripts that have been previously written <p>Imaginative Walks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a scene or route while students visualize the experience (woods, beach, etc) 	<p>Reaching/Stretching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaching for height, floor, and across the body Bending at waist (in all directions) Stretching fingers and hands (with or without resistance of an object) <p>Rhythm/Rhyming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hum songs together "Air guitar" or tap different instruments in a band or orchestra while hearing the song Listen to instrumental music (focus and follow one instrument) Create a storm by clapping hands on thighs in wave fashion <p>Intentional Breathing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timed breathing (in 4, out 4, or any variation) Breathe in with guided imagery of air in, lungs expand, air out, lungs shrink, etc. Slowly trace hand while breathing (in on up moves, out on down moves) <p>Name "What" vs "How"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to focus on either "what" or "how" they are feeling and ask them to share videos 	<p>Music, Sounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to instrumental music (focus and follow one instrument) Listen to nature sounds <p>Doodle the Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read a story full of imagery while students doodle what comes to mind Doodle time to clear the brain – draw the things cluttering the brain <p>Art Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing, painting Poetry, rhyming exercises Shaping and molding with clay or other material Origami – folding paper into shapes Music creation <p>I Feel Cards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can write statements of, "I feel..." on cards The above can be coupled with statements of "so I should..." or "I can help myself by..." Variations of this can be used with phrases such as, "Right now my responsibility is..." or "To be successful I must..." 	<p>Animal Therapy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to animals that can be petted or cared for (caution to allergies) <p>Sensory Bins/Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make items available for individuals (stress balls, spinners, soft items) Provide each person an item and talk through them (Describe the item, how does it make you feel? etc.) Provide a corner where students can go – (include sensory items, textures, headphones, weighted blankets, etc.) <p>Textures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to feel and describe the texture of an object (may try with eyes closed but eyes closed should always be optional) <p>Tapping Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize EFT tapping exercises as found online Tap messages by code (Morse Code or any group-defined code) Tap in building sequence <p>Origami</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Folding paper into decorative items

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<p>Rich Storytelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell a story loaded with adjectives and adverbs while students hear and visualize the events Can ask students to visualize the appearance of some of the characters <p>Inventories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can mentally take inventory of strengths, blessings, opportunities, etc. The teacher can read a list of emotions or feelings while students listen for those that they are feeling (focus on the positive) <p>Sounds of Silence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to enjoy quiet (with headphones if desired) Can be coupled with descriptions of thought during silence Can ask to track number of breaths during a certain time frame <p>Color My World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While hearing sentences filled with imagery, ask students to identify the colors they visualize <p>Loop Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to watch looping video of an aquarium (or a real aquarium), fireplace, or ocean waves <p>Body Scan...and Relax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can mentally scan each part of the body (head, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, legs, feet) and mentally intentionally relax each Students can identify thoughts/distractions and intentionally remove 	<p>Cross the Middle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice mild yoga moves Touch the opposite heel Hand-Knee Cross (like 20's dance move) <p>Mini-Dance Moves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach sections of a line dance that are later to be assembled for full dance (i.e. Cupid Shuffle) Allow students to teach certain (pre-approved) dance moves (moon walk, etc.) <p>Laughter Is Medicine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joke of the Day followed by discussion Bad joke marathon Clean comedy Laugh and stop laughing on cue exercises <p>Walking/Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can walk through a specified area with an adult guide. The area should be designed to encounter vivid and uplifting messages Outdoor gardens, butterfly gardens, and woods are good areas for this type activity Calisthenics: jumping jacks, running in place, sit-ups, etc. (care as to not highlight those who cannot perform well) <p>Face Massage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to massage their faces (i.e. Massage the temples in a circle, massage forehead from center to the sides, cheeks in a downward direction) Student can make silly faces by blowing out cheeks/eyes and giving big cheesy smiles 	<p>Name What vs How</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to focus on either "what" or "how" they are feeling Can ask the relationship between the two <p>Feel the Chime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sound a chime and ask students to hear it as long as possible until it fades away. Chime can be used as a marker/notification or ritual <p>State Our Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class or group can develop a statement to be recited as a ritual at the beginning of class or at designated points during the class <p>Someday...So Today...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students should complete the statement, "Someday, I want..." and then complete the statement, "So today, I will..." Exercise can become a ritual as a reminder of life goals or purpose statement <p>When I...I Will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a reinforcement to social emotional skills, students should complete the statements such as "When I feel angry, I will..." or "When I am insulted, I will..." <p>Thought Journals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to journal thoughts as they come to mind. This can be done in general or related to subject matter, events Variations can allow for post-categorization of thoughts 	<p>Hand Massage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Massage areas of hand for stress relief (palm=wholistic well-being; thumb=worry; index finger=fear; middle finger=anger; ring finger=sadness; pinky=self-esteem) <p>Mood Lighting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be used as a time for the entire classroom or for a sensory corner or room <p>Taste Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chewing gum or tasting candy and describing the sensations experienced <p>Hand Trace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trace the outline of one hand with each finger of the opposite hand Variations can include counting dips, rises, etc. <p>Roof of the Mouth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to tickle the roof of their mouth with their tongue and describe how and what they feel <p>Refreshment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a break and drink some cool water A variation is to ask students to trace the sensation of the cool water on their body as it is consumed and makes its way into the belly <p>Hand Abacus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to show numbers using their fingers. Fingers on the right hand indicate tens; those on the left hand indicate ones (the hands are backward from what the student would see because they should be showing others)

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<p>Aromatherapy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce scents to help classroom mood and productivity (always announce – maybe conduct experiment via discussion) Some scents: Lemon = calming and clarifying Lavender = calming and tension relieving Jasmine = calming and uplifting Rosemary = memory and fatigue Cinnamon = mental fatigue and focus Peppermint = energy and concentration <p>Thought Catalog</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A teacher can guide students through thoughts about a particular topic or in general (i.e. What do you think of your ability in this area? Visually put negative thoughts in a bin to be discarded. What are the positive thoughts?) <p>Daily Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to establish three goals for today <p>Heartbeat Count</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to place hands over heart and focus on the beat of the heart. They can count the number for a specific time frame (i.e. 30 seconds) A variation would be to jump up and down for a few minutes and repeat the exercise <p>Inspire Me</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show or read stories of inspirational people or accomplishment 	<p>Blow on a Pinwheel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to control the air they exhale to make the pinwheel go slow, then fast, then slow <p>Push Against a Wall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to try to push a wall over for 10 seconds, 3 times. When they stop and they relax, feel-good hormones flood the body <p>Tapping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to self-tap on knees (left/right) to think of good or positive things Continue this process while performing intentional breathing (count in/out) Continue this process while doing something fun <p>Hallway Hopscotch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using either a tile floor or pre-defined squares, prescribe a course for students to walk (not necessarily hop) Course can be as simple as walk in a diagonal pattern or can be more complex such as 4 straight, 6 to the right, 10 backward, etc. <p>Let It Out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask student to inhale slowly while tightening the muscles of the body and thinking of the stressors they currently face Next ask them to slowly exhale, relaxing the muscles and visualizing the stressors leaving the body Repeat several times Variation can include naming specific areas of stressors 	<p>Let It Go</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute pre-printed coloring sheets showing balloons. Ask students to color the balloons as desired and then identify things which are holding them back. They should write those things on the balloons and visualize letting them go <p>Stress Is Coming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to write or draw the stresses they anticipate for the day or week. Next ask them to write or draw how they can respond to that stress without allowing it to control them <p>Repeat a Mantra</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a mantra that you and your student can use to help them calm down. “I am calm” or “I am relaxed” work well, but feel free to get creative and make it something personal to you and your student <p>Another’s Shoes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to write what they imagine are the feelings of another person This can be done in response to pictures (can be something as simple as a picture of hands or shoes or a face) or a short story Care should be taken to use positive examples to avoid triggers <p>Name That Tune</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play a few notes from a popular song (preferably on an instrument or through music player) Ask students to write a guess of the song 	<p>The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instruct student to sit comfortably, close their eyes and take a couple of deep breaths in through their nose (count to 3), out through their mouth (to the count of 3). Tell them to open their eyes and look around. Name out loud: 5 – things they can see (within the room and out of the window) 4 – things they can feel (the silkiness of their skin, the texture of the material on their chair, their hair, etc.) 3 – things they can hear (traffic noise or birds outside, things in the room) 2 – things they can smell 1 – thing they can taste (it might be a good idea to provide some items for this; when they taste whatever it is that they have chosen, they should take a small bite and let it swirl around their mouth for a couple of seconds, really savoring the flavor) Take a deep breath to end <p>Name the Item</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep a bag or pillow-case filled with items of different textures Ask students to reach in the bag and feel one item. Can they guess what it is? A variation is to have students write their descriptions and see if they can gather with others who had the same object

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<p>Calming Jar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill a jar with water, add glitter, and seal to create a “snow globe” type item • Ask students to shake it and watch it as it settles. Variations can include counting to time the settling effect or counting breaths while the glitter settles <p>Nap Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take short 5-15 minutes to “nap” • Students may not sleep but can rest • Classical or soft music or nature sounds can be helpful <p>Emotion Chart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For one week, ask students to record emotions for 3 times of the day (the current time, afternoon, evening) • At the end of the week ask students to reflect on how those emotions impact them, and what they might do to improve those effects <p>Throwback Thursday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a ritual, teachers can describe a good memory in our nation’s or the school’s past (i.e. Armistice Day, moon landing, etc) • The teacher may also show humorous pictures of past fashion or play past hit tunes that are different from current styles • Students may also reflect on a positive time they can remember. They can be guided into the experience with questions about sights, sounds, and scents 	<p>Relaxing Wave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to sit still and relax muscles progressively by tightening for 5 seconds and then relaxing • Progress through: Eyebrows (forehead), Jaws, Neck, Shoulders, Wrist and Hands, Back, Thighs, Ankles and Feet, Toes • Repeat slowly 3 times <p>Spider’s Web</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While sitting in a circle, ask students to toss a ball of yarn to another person in the circle while acknowledging a positive characteristic of the person. Each person must receive the yarn before it can repeat. Develop a web • Can be used to reinforce concepts like support, dependence, teamwork, etc. <p>Ho, Ho, Ho...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either a teacher or student can lead the group in fake laughter by loudly repeating the laughing phrases, “Ho, ho, ho, ha, ha, hee, hee, hee” • Keep this up for several minutes until laughter becomes real <p>Dance Freeze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play music asking students to move to the beat with dance moves • When the music is stopped, students should freeze until the music begins again • As a variation, students can sing along with songs and continue when the music stops 	<p>I Appreciate...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to either state or write answers in response to cues from the leader • Cues can be related to privileges, people, acts of kindness, opportunities, or just listing blessings in general • Variations can include another step, “Because I appreciate it, I will...” <p>Coloring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide pre-printed sheets and crayons or colored pencils and allow students time to color • Soft music in the background can be helpful as well <p>Collage-Tile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to draw black line simple images (designs, landscapes, animals, etc.) • Provide small colored pieces of paper (small squares of construction paper) that can be pasted to color the picture in tile like fashion <p>Break It Down Into 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List daily class objectives on a board and then ask students to break them down into 3 steps or areas of focus <p>Two Hand Draw</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a pencil, pen, or crayon in each hand, ask students to draw or write identically with both hands simultaneously • Students can also write or draw with their dominant hand then trace with the other 	<p>Play Dough</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to create objects or just roll or feel play dough <p>Custom High Fives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to create their own physical greeting to use with a friend or with the teacher • Throughout the class period, provide opportunity for the student to reengage with the custom greeting, even if from a distance <p>Rice/Sand/Coffee Bins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to dip hands into tupperware containers that are filled with items. Containers should be filled with items that have a distinct texture – one for rice, one for corn, one for sand, and another with coffee beans. Any others are welcome • Students can run the items through their hands and sift through their fingers to release stress • Variations can include the description of those textures <p>Japanese Stress Balls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can roll Japanese stress balls (preferably those that chime as they roll) on temples or in their hands • In lieu of Japanese stress balls, golf balls, ping pong balls, or others can be used in similar fashion <p>Bubble Wrap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to pop bubble wrap at designated times

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<p>Imagery Texture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity is like an imaginative walk. The teacher describes a walk either through a park, woods, hallway, house, and uses descriptive language regarding some of the items encountered (colors and appearance – avoid textures) Students are encouraged to think about the items and remember the textures they imagine of certain items <p>I Am Meditation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher reads a list of positive words or phrases (i.e. “I am strong, I am powerful, I am dependable, I am capable, I am in control of my behaviors, etc.”) while students repeat the words or phrases to themselves. <p>Body Pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher leads the students through a progressive pledge of using the body for good. While the teacher makes leading statements, the students are to think of examples of things that will fit into the categories mentioned. For example: I pledge my brain to focus on things beneficial to me and others I pledge my mouth to speaking words that build up and help others I will use my hands to help others and accomplish good deeds I pledge my feet to go places that are peaceful 	<p>Tickle Talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Either in unison or in pairs, students should speak nursery rhymes while trying to hold their tongue to the roof of their mouth <p>Mirror</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity can be done with one leader, in pairs, or in small groups Students should mimic the physical actions of the leader. Speed of movements can increase as the activity continues. Avoid competition as in Simon Says <p>Balloon Tap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each student will need a balloon and should tap it upward on cue to keep the balloon in the air. When stopping, the balloon should not be grabbed but allowed to float softly into open hands Variations can include tapping with different fingers in progression or using opposite hands, etc. A good variation would be to use music as the indicator of when to start and stop the tapping <p>Clapping Clones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity can be done with one leader, in pairs, or in small groups The leader should clap hands in a rhythm or numerical sequence The next person adds a sequence or rhythm Students are to mimic the patterns of those preceding them 	<p>One Hit Wonders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher can share and play songs that were “one hit wonders” This can serve as a good reminder that all efforts are not always successful <p>Transition Tunes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During classroom or lesson transitions, teachers can use a phone and speaker to play feel good songs (or 30 second segments of a song) Getting song suggestions from students beforehand is helpful and allows the use of a student’s song on birthdays or as appropriate <p>Relaxation Apps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are a number of relaxation apps available for smartphones. Most provide activities that can be done as an individual, but some can be adapted for groups. Those listed below are free, but do have in-app upgrade options Calm Relax Melodies Happify Headspace Breathe2Relax PAUSE The Mindfulness App Pacifica Rootd Stop, Breathe, and Think Colorfy Nature Sounds Relax and Sleep 10% Happier: Meditation Brain.fm: Music for the Brain 	<p>Nature Box</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect items from nature and create mini samples of different environments in Tupperware containers Allow students to feel and smell the different containers to determine which is the most relaxing to them <p>Cold, Warm, Yucky</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare buckets of water at warm and cold temperatures. A third bucket can contain a mixture of corn starch and water to create goo Allow students to dip their hands into the different buckets and describe the sensations they experience <p>Feather Duster</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity can be done with one leader, in pairs, or in small groups. Using a feather duster (or similar item), either pass through the class while dusting the forehead, shoulders, and hands of students or allow them to dust their face with the duster <p>Scented Soaps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make scented soaps with relaxing or calming scents (lemon, lavender, rosemary, cinnamon, peppermint, jasmine) for students to use when washing hands <p>Puzzle Pieces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix up the pieces of 3 large piece jigsaw puzzles Allow students to sort the pieces by puzzle Also allow to solve puzzles if time allows