

Reset for Calm and Settled

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Introduction

This routine should be led and modeled by the teacher. Watching an adult follow the routine will help to activate the students' mirror neuron network to assist in bringing about the feeling of calm (provided that the teacher is actually achieving a calm state). We don't command or direct students to follow the calm routine. We become calm ourselves while using the routine, in our voice tone and volume, in the pace of our speech, in our posture and facial expression, in the words we choose, in our calm and predictable movements.

Achieving a calm and settled state, interrupting and quieting the stress response, is a health intervention, but it is also the most significant thing we can do to ready children for learning. A high level of stress substantially impairs the learning process, the ability of students to focus and listen, to hold things in mind and work with them, to process information and make connections; and it impairs their ability to store and remember information. Calming the stress response is an essential step in becoming ready to learn.

Children are not typically taught to recognize and manage stress, so it is up to the school to teach this, because stress management is so critical to cognitive development and academic achievement. Establish the culture in the classroom that prioritizes stress management, that values the ability to reset to a calm and settled state throughout the day. For this culture to be established, it is essential that teachers model the successful management of their own stress and their own ability to maintain a calm and focused state in the classroom (see information on educator resilience at <https://kevinplummerphd.com/>).

Use this routine proactively, as a normal activity of the day, just as you would require students to periodically keep their area neat or wash their hands before snack and lunch and after using the bathroom. You can build this routine into the major transitions of the day (e.g., from lunch/recess to the classroom, from free time back to academic time, from an extended academic task into another academic task, from centers to the next thing on the schedule, etc.).

Use this routine reactively, when the class becomes rambunctious, or when the stress level has crept up, or when things have been moving a bit too fast or things have become too chaotic and need to be reset.

Create the conditions in the classroom conducive to achieving a calm and settled state with this routine. Perhaps you turn off some of the lights and the things that make noise. Close the doors and windows to limit the outside noise. Ensure that students, when seated at their desks, are in a comfortable spot free of distractions.

Make the elements of the routine your own. There is a lot in the routine that you may feel you don't need. Reduce it to the steps that work for you and your class. Add to it if you want (some people incorporate yoga, stretching, progressive muscle relaxation or other movement).

The skills needed for this routine will need to be taught and practiced ahead of time, in order for this routine to become fluid and efficient (i.e., completed in a brief period of time and capable of reliably bringing about a conditioned settled response). Students will need to be taught the breathing techniques and it might be helpful, in the instances of relaxing the body, to teach the students how to do progressive muscle relaxation. During the calm and settled routine you will see that students are

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expected to use their thinking and breathing to relax the body, but this is sometimes easier if they have already learned increased body awareness using progressive muscle relaxation.

The Calm and Settled Visual at the end of this article is not part of the Calm and Settled Routine. It is just there as a reference, as a way to help teachers to help students recognize if they are calm and settled in their day or if they need to get more calm and settled. It can also be used as a way to redirect students to settle. Point out one or more of the indicators on the visual and indicate to students that you noticed they were having trouble with it (e.g., "I noticed that you were having trouble staying patient and ignoring what was going on in the background and that your words were not polite. Let's check the routine and have you work harder on getting more settled as we finish this math."). If the student is unable to respond favorably to the redirection (and the support from the visual about achieving a more calm and settled state), you can give the student an individualized prescribed restorative break activity (see <https://kevinplummerphd.com/restorative-breaks/>).

Calm and Settled Routine

Return to your desk and let your hands, your feet, your legs, and the rest of your body take a rest and become still. Rest your hands on your desk, on your legs, or by your side, and rest your feet flat on the floor.



Let your voice take a rest and become quiet, so you can notice the smallest sound, and let your breathing slow down and relax until it feels easy and normal.

Listen to soothing music and let your thoughts take a rest as you focus on the soothing scenes on the Smart Board or another classroom screen.

As you focus on the music and focus on the scenes, take a deep cleansing breath. Breathe in through your nose as you count to three in your head and then slowly exhale through your mouth as you tap your leg or desk softly with your hand to a count of five or six.



As you exhale, feel your body soften and relax. Do this three times. Take your time, no rush, everything else will wait as you sit in your space of calm and settled. With each breath, notice where you feel it in your body, your throat or your chest or maybe your stomach area.

Close your eyes if you're comfortable with that and feel the weight of your body pressing down on the seat of the chair and your back as it leans into the back of the chair.

Now let your breathing return to a normal flow, whatever feels comfortable, just let your breath move naturally. Follow the movement, notice your chest rising with each inhale and lowering with each exhale.

Notice your stomach. If it feels tight, take a breath and let your stomach soften when you exhale.

Notice your feet and your legs, let them soften with your next breath.

Notice your hands and arms, are they tense or tight? Let them soften with your next breath.



Notice your shoulders, let them soften.

Notice the muscles in your face and your jaw, relax them, let them soften.

Continue breathing normally, in a relaxed way, noticing and following the breath through your body, counting each breath if you want, then starting over when you reach five.

You're in your settled space. There's nothing you have to worry about right now, nothing else you have to do. Just enjoy this wonderful opportunity to feel at peace.

Now open your eyes but remain still at first. Look around, take in what you see, what you hear, while remaining settled and still. Feel the quiet calm and the focus that you have.

Now go ahead with the rest of your day now, feeling more settled and focused and knowing you can return to calm and settled anytime you need to.



You Know You're Calm and Settled When . . .

you know you're calm and settled when



your body is settled and still

you feel patient, you are able to wait

your breathing is easy and smooth

you feel peaceful, content

you feel happy, relaxed

your clothing feels comfortable

your words are polite



your extra sounds are turned off



your voice is an inside voice

It's easy to ignore background activity

it's easy to listen. . your ears can listen while your brain thinks about the other person's words

you can easily pay attention. . your brain can think about what the teacher is showing and make a connection

it's easy to focus on and complete your work



you like working together with others

you feel like smiling

