

Flexing Focus Muscles With Sound

Build your students' attention span with these fun, easy exercises

Objective

Students will learn key SEL skills in self-awareness and self-management

Time

Time 40 minutes (steps 1-2 and 3-5 can be broken into two 20-minute lessons)

Materials

- Rubber band
- pencil
- stapler

Instructions

1 Tell students there's something they are expected to *do* at school that they do not *learn* in school. Ask them to guess what that could be. The answer: Focus. In order to learn all the amazing lessons that they are taught in the classroom, they must first know how to pay attention and focus. Explain that focusing is a skill and like any skill, you must practice it to master it. In fact, every time you focus on something, you're strengthening the connections in your brain that will make it easier for you to focus the next time.

2 Tell students they will close their eyes and you will make a mystery sound for them. You should make the sound three times then tell them to open their eyes. (You can make mystery sounds of your choosing, or use objects to create sound, such as a rubber band or stapler.) Have them guess what the sounds were and reveal the mystery. Now, ask students to close their eyes and listen closely to the normal, every day sounds in the room and the building around them. They aren't listening for mystery sounds, but rather sounds that we rarely stop to notice. Once students have identified three distinct sounds, they should put both hands on top of their desks. When all students are ready, ask them to open their eyes and raise their hands to share what sounds they heard.

3 Explain to students that they can flex their "focus muscles" by finding one thing to focus on and spending time focusing on it. Tell them, lucky for us, there's something we keep with

us at all times that is perfect for this practice – our breath! Explain that you're going to set a one-minute timer so they can pay attention to their breath. It might sound easy to do, but this can be challenging. Explain that even if you start out by paying attention to your breath, you might find yourself thinking about something else by the time the minute is up. Don't be surprised if this happens, just remind yourself to bring your focus back to your breath.

4 Tell students to sit tall in their chairs and close their eyes. Ask them to rest their hands on their knees, relax, and start to notice their breath moving in and out. They should notice if their breath is deep or shallow, choppy or steady. Notice if the air they breathe feels hot or cold and what it feels like moving through their bodies. Every time students inhale, ask them to think to themselves "in." Each time they exhale, ask them to think "out." Allow 1-3 minutes.

5 Afterward, discuss this exercise with students. Did they find it hard or easy? Where did their minds wander off to? Were their thoughts about what they were going to do after school, something that happened a long time ago, or something in the future that hasn't even happened yet? How long did their mind wander before they realized it and reigned it back in? Doing this short exercise with your students daily will help them flex their focus muscles and grow their ability to focus for longer periods of time. For all students, the more they practice, the more they prepare their minds to learn!

