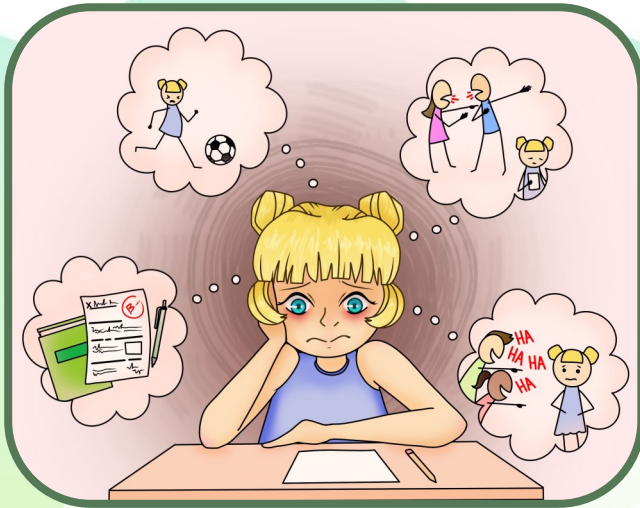


Anxiety Reduction Techniques



Not One More:
A Mission to Eliminate
Youth Suicide

Overview

Life, and especially school nowadays is riddled with situations that trigger stress and anxiety. There are so many requirements for so many different classes, clubs, and other aspects of life that everything seems unmanageable. As a result, stress, panic attacks, and the inability to cope with them are unfortunately very common.

But simple activities such as walking, tapping, and breathing have been shown to reduce the effects of stress. These exercises are incredibly short, easy to learn, and can be done anywhere. The skills explained in this pamphlet will inform students and teachers how to understand stressful environments, and how to respond when they feel overwhelmed

Objectives

- Equip students with simple habits they can use when they experience stress or anxiety in and outside of school
- Deepen the class's ability to help one another calm down in stressful times

Venue:

- Classroom Activities

Estimated Cost:

- \$-0-

Activities:

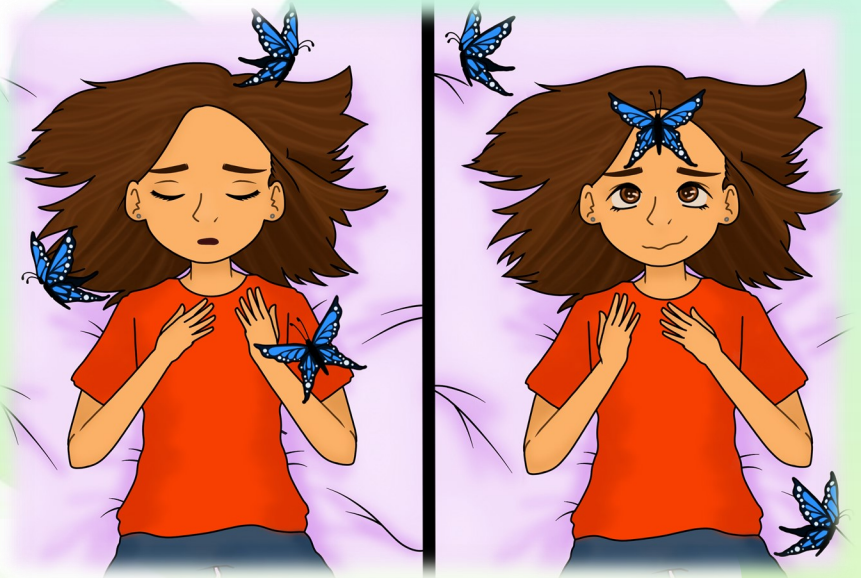
- Butterfly Hugs
- Using the Wise Mind
- Anxiety Reducing Breathing
- Taking a Walk

"I promise nothing is as chaotic as it seems. Nothing is worth diminishing your health. Nothing is worth poisoning yourself into stress, anxiety, and fear."

- Steve Maraboli



Butterfly Hugs



What Is It?

Butterfly Hugs is a technique that is done by placing both hands crossed over the center of the chest. Then, each hand alternates tapping the chest. The taps continue until one is calmed.

Why It Is Effective!

Butterfly Hugs are categorized as bilateral movements. This simply means that the pattern of movements is done in a “right, left, right, left” progression. Bilateral movements are one of the bases of EMDR therapy. This therapy helps process trauma, and has been shown to assist in mental disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Often when people experience trauma, they are unable to properly understand the event, as their brain is more concerned about survival than comprehension. Therefore, the memory is disconnected and acts as a trigger. When processing trauma, the focus put on performing the movement allows for a bit of distance between oneself and the trauma. Furthermore, the comforting notion of a hug or the security of a walk is helpful in disconnecting oneself from revisiting traumatic scenes. Another thing that EMDR therapy does is that it processes trauma in the same way the brain processes events. It goes through the same sequence, and essentially shifts traumatic events from triggers to memories.

Allowing any thoughts to come while performing bilateral movements helps understand the full scope of their circumstances. This can help students put their situation into perspective and realize that they may be allotting more weight to a it than is rational.

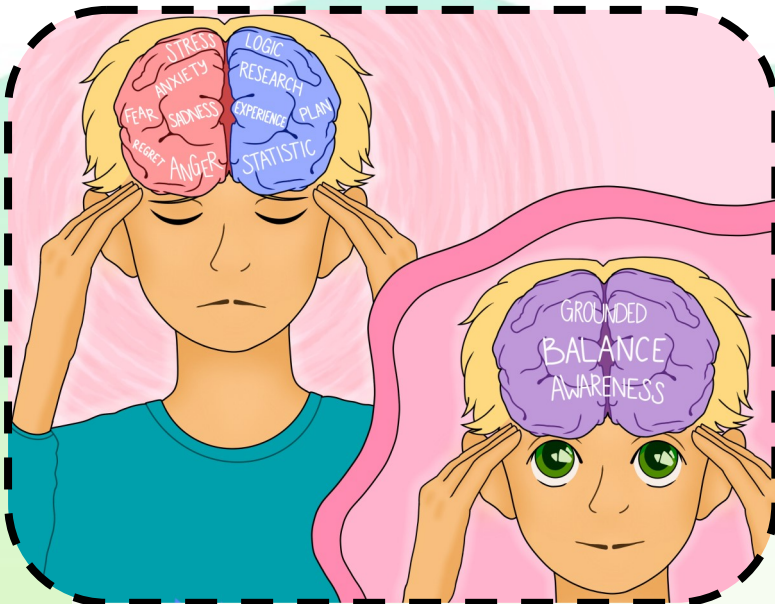
Take Action

- Teach the class how to do Butterfly Hugs and why they are effective. Normalize the use of butterfly hugs in and out of the classroom if a student gets stressed.
- Facilitate discussion of Alternative Activities that follow bilateral movement.
- Ensure safety during the activity.



Alternative Activities

Another bilateral movement that is more inconspicuous than butterfly hugs are tapping the outsides of one’s knees. Tap one at a time, following the pattern of “right left right left right left...”. This can be taught to calm students if they get stressed during formal events where doing a butterfly hug may seem out of place (think meetings, going into public, etc.)



Using the Wise Mind

What Is It?

Learning to calm one's emotional mind means tapping into one's analytical mind. There are two portions of the brain that interact with each other to make decisions: the emotional mind and the analytical mind.

The analytical mind evaluates the facts of the situation, and the emotional mind evaluates your feelings about it. Often, the two work together to make rational decisions. However, when we're stressed or overwhelmed, the emotional mind takes charge and drowns out the rational mind's influence.

In "Using the Wise Mind", you learn how to observe the facts of what is happening around you.

Why It Is Effective!

When we get overwhelmed, the emotional center of our brain, called the amygdala, sometimes gets out of control. When your amygdala has complete control over perception and decision making (this can be called your amygdala "flipping its lid") it is hard to calm down. The amygdala often triggers one's fight-or-flight response and has a huge part in the severity of panic attacks. Learning to control the amygdala before it gets overwhelmed helps to keep control over one's perception and response to stressful situations. Keeping the "lid" on your amygdala allows for you to handle those times with rationality and leads to better, more reasonable outcomes of disagreements, stressful tasks, etc.

Meanwhile, the polar opposite of that is the analytical mind having complete control over decisions. Oftentimes, when the analytical mind makes decisions, it does not account for the emotions involved in the execution of those actions. Therefore, holding oneself to the strict decisions made by the analytical mind can be miserable. Enduring the rigor of decision-making at the hands of the analytical mind is likely to result in a pendulum swing back to irrational guidance from the emotional mind.

Yet, there is a happy-medium to both minds. This is the Wise Mind. The Wise Mind takes into account both the logic and emotions of a situation. It will then decide to do what is the most logically feasible but not emotionally strenuous course of action. A lot of the times, Wise Mind is your intuition. Yet, it may be drowned out by the strong pull of the emotional mind or desire for logic expressed by the analytical mind.

Take Action

During this exercise the instructor guides each person through observing what is around them without bringing their emotions into it. (Asking questions such as, "What do you see?" "Who are you next to?" "What do you smell?" and "What do you feel?" are good starters for this exercise) The instructor then explains that this is a good habit to get into if you feel overwhelmed. The activity can be practiced anytime the class has down time, and class members can use this anytime they feel overwhelmed with tests, assignments, or home life.

There are links to more questions in the "Resources" section of this pamphlet. Anytime a student gets stressed during class, ask them these questions to distract from the stress, and remind them that they have tools to reduce anxious feelings.



Taking A Walk

What Is It?

The activity “Taking a Walk” is exactly what it sounds like: taking a walk. When a class has free time, or is trying to work through an issue, the teacher takes them on a walk to help relax them. On this walk, the teacher notes that if the class is feeling calmer or comes up with a solution to something they may be faced with.

Why It Is Effective!

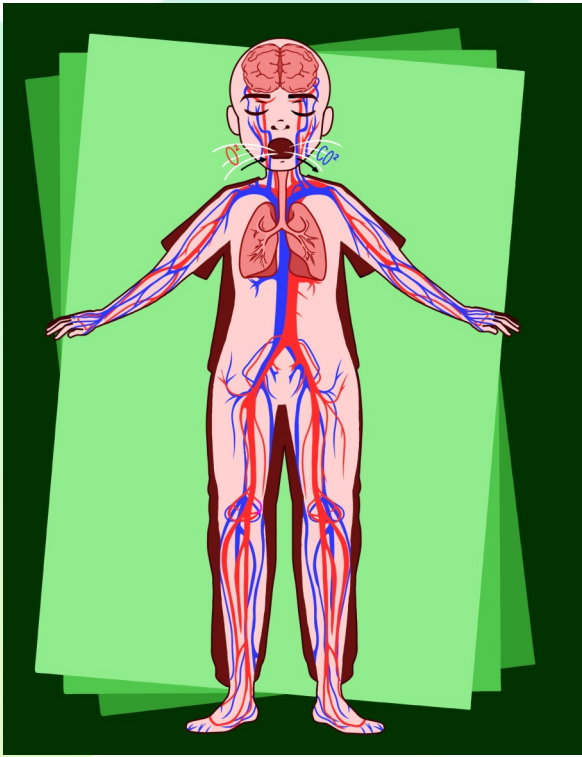
Bilateral movements are movements done by one side of the body followed by movements done by the other side of the body. They help your mind process information and solve issues it may be faced with. Walking is itself a bilateral movement, and therefore has the same effects as other bilateral movements (ex: butterfly hugs, tapping your knees, etc.) Furthermore, going on walks gives you a break from whatever you’re working on by putting physical and mental distance in between you and it. The bilateral movements of walking help you process and come up with solutions without the possible stress or monotony that may have accompanied work at a desk. Also, walking and physical activity in general is good for one’s physical health, and thereby improves one’s overall health.

Take Action

Take the students on a walk. If desired, have the students discuss any shifts in attitudes or increases in focus and problem solving they experienced after going on the walk.

Encourage students to go on walks any time they notice they have been working for a long time, lose interest in something, or are frustrated with something.





Anxiety Reducing Breathing

What Is It?

Breathing for anxiety reduction, or square breathing, is performed by inhaling and counting to four, holding the breath for another count to four, exhaling for a count of four, and holding for a final count of four. The counts can be however long as one desires, and this activity can be repeated as much as desired. Remember to breathe into your diaphragm to get full breaths! And don't worry if it doesn't work immediately. Often, this breathing takes 8-10 repetitions to be effective when someone is first learning it. With practice and recurrent use, it begins to work almost immediately.

Why It Is Effective!

First off, this activity is great if one is overwhelmed because it shifts focus from a stressor to breathing. One can also envision a square while breathing to help with maintaining counts (hence the name "square breathing"). This mental picture helps with alleviating stress as the mind is preoccupied with both a mental picture of a square and counting.

This breathing not only distracts one from stressors, but according to the Mayo Clinic, the pattern of square breathing has a lot to do with nervous system reactions that induce a feeling of calm. As the breath is held in the second and fourth steps, CO₂ builds up in the blood. This tells the autonomic nervous system to tell the vagus nerve to calm the body.

Alternate Activities

3-1-6-1 Breathing: This is a different form of anxiety reducing breathing that alters the counts of square breathing. The pattern is as follows: in for 3, hold for 1, out for 6, hold for 1, repeat.

4-7-8 Breathing: This is another form of anxiety reducing breathing. If you and your class want to associate a shape with this pattern, a triangle would be best, as this breathing pattern has 3 parts. The pattern is as follows: in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8, repeat.



Acknowledgements

Many Thanks To...

Editors:

- Jamie Walterscheid
- Marilyn Kennemore


Illustrators:

- Bailey Butler

IMPORTANT

- THIS IS NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR THERAPY OR PROFESSIONAL HELP. THESE ACTIVITIES ARE LISTED TO PROVIDE EASY-TO-ACCESS RESOURCES THAT CAN BE USED TO LESSON FEELINGS OF ANXIETY. TRAUMA SHOULD NOT BE PROCESSED IN A CLASSROOM SETTING. PLEASE SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU ARE SUSPECTED OF HAVING ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, PTSD, OR OTHER MENTAL ILLNESSES.
- To get a list of overall guidelines to follow when doing the activities in the pamphlets please reference the “Safety” page in the Implementation Packet.





Resources

Reasons to go on walks:

- <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/how-walking-can-boost-your-mood-and-reduce-stress/>

Questions to calm the emotional mind:

- Extract from CBTandFeelingGood.com Workbook—© Veronica Walsh

Helping to understand the emotional mind:

- <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/wise-mind.pdf>

Reasons to go on walks:

- <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/how-walking-can-boost-your-mood-and-reduce-stress/>

Research behind Butterfly Hugs:

- <https://emdrfoundation.org/toolkit/butterfly-hug.pdf>

Understanding Bi-lateral movements for decreasing anxiety:

- <https://anxietyreleaseapp.com/what-is-bilateral-stimulation/>

Furthering your knowledge of Square Breathing!

- Square Breathing Explanation

Explanation of Wise Mind:

- <https://cogbtherapy.com/cbt-blog/wise-mind-dbt>