



Second Grade Mini Unit: Brain & Body Awareness with Miss McClatchey, School Social Worker

During October and November, all second grade classes at Marion-Walker Elementary participated in a social-emotional learning (SEL) mini unit. This four-week unit supplements the school's SEL curriculum and mindfulness interventions with an in-depth study of brain functioning and body awareness.

During the four-week unit, students learned:

- How to identify and describe sensations in their bodies (self-awareness skills)
- The way the brain “flips its lid” in response to strong feelings (an automatic process called a stress response)
- A variety of strategies for calming the brain and body after a stress response (self-regulation skills)
- When to seek help from a trusted adult

SEL is an important investment in students' current and future wellbeing. When students understand how their brains and bodies function, they have more skills to take quality care of themselves in times of stress, describe what they feel and need, and connect to appropriate support.

On the following pages you will find:

- **A copy of the body sensations matching activity we used in class.** Students matched the shuffled-up vocabulary words with the corresponding pictures to get familiar with the sensations. They also played charades using the sensations vocabulary. Try it at home, and see if you can guess which sensation your child is demonstrating! Use the vocabulary words at home to discuss what sensations happen in your body when you are excited, stressed, angry, or happy.
- **An explanation of the parts of the brain and how the brain “flips its lid.”** Our brains are designed to keep us safe by recognizing potential danger, and automatically getting our bodies ready to address that danger (fight, flight, or freeze). This is an important, normal process! However, it can feel uncomfortable or scary if we don't know what is happening. That is why we use a hand model of the brain to explain how a stress response happens, and how the brain returns to its resting state afterward.
- **Strategies for calming the brain and body.** Students learned that our lids “flip” automatically when we have a stress response, but we can learn to bring those lids back down on purpose. Using strategies such as starfish breathing, 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, and push-pull-dangle help to regulate the nervous system and get us back to a calmer, more focused state of mind.
- **Reminders for when to get help.** Although the stress response is usually a helpful process for keeping us safe (and the brain and body usually calm back down under regular circumstances), it is important to recognize when stress or anxiety might be building up to an uncomfortable or unsafe level. Students learned three clues for when to ask for help. Review them together, and add any other clues you want your child to look for!

Questions about the unit? Ideas about other topics? Please Contact Me!

Maria McClatchey, LSW

School Social Worker

Email: mmcclatchey@ciu10.org OR mmcclatchey@basd.net

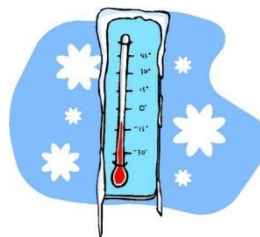
Work Cell: (814) 592-0757 calls & texts welcome

Body Sensations Vocabulary

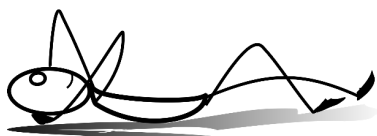
Tense



Cold



Relaxed



Shaky



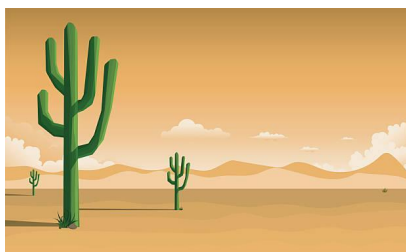
Sweaty



Still



Dry



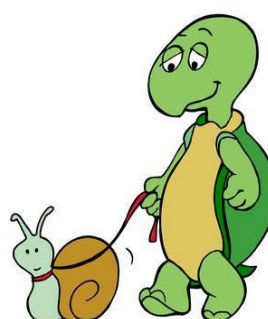
Fast



Hot



Slow



HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN



At the base of your brain, represented here by your wrist, is the brain stem. It's responsible for basic things like breathing and keeping your heart pumping.



Your thumb, folded in, sits in the middle, just like the amygdala in the brain. The amygdala is responsible for sensing danger and telling the brain + body.



Your fingers are like your pre-frontal cortex- that's the part of the brain that helps us manage emotions and make complex decisions



When fear, danger, or intense emotion overwhelm our amygdala our prefrontal cortex goes offline and we "flip our lid." That's why sometimes it is so hard to make thoughtful decisions when we are very upset.

When brains are overwhelmed like this, they need a break to reflect and reconnect.

CONCEPT CREATED BY DAN SIEGEL MD. VISUALLY TRANSLATED BY LINDSAY BRAMAN

Along with using this hand model of the brain, we watched a short illustrated video called "Fight Flight Freeze – A Guide to Anxiety for Kids." This video, by Anxiety Canada, uses kid-friendly language to describe a stress response, and give examples of when someone's lid might flip. Check it out at home!

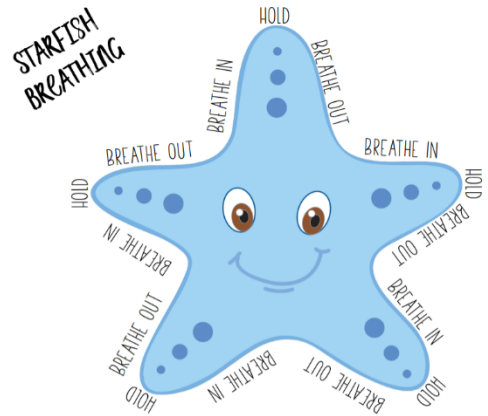


Calming Strategies (to bring the lid back down)

Your hand is the starfish! To do this exercise, use a finger to trace along your hand as you take slow, relaxed breaths. As you trace up your thumb, breathe in. As you trace down your thumb, breathe out. Repeat this with all fingers as you move across your hand.

Variations:

- Ask your child if they would like to take turns being the starfish with you.
- Use a stuffed animal's paw, or something else cozy, to trace along your starfish hand.
- Pause briefly and hold your breath at the tip of each finger. Only do this if it feels comfortable.

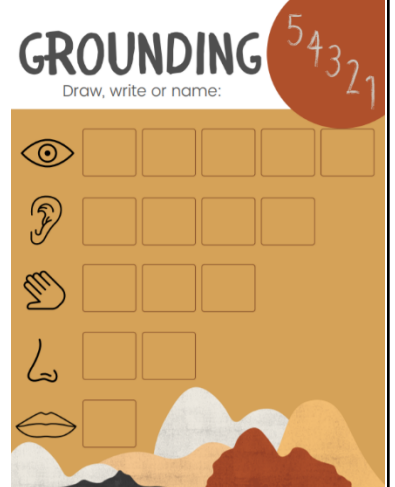


In this grounding exercise, use your five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) to help reconnect your brain and body to the world around you. Notice 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.

When we have a strong feeling and our lid flips, it can feel like our brain has just gone somewhere else. We can use our five senses strategically to bring us back to the present and reconnect with what is happening around us.

Variations:

- Say or think the things you notice
- Write down the things you notice
- Draw a little picture of the things you notice



If our muscles get shaky or tense, it can help to tighten and engage the muscles on purpose, then relax them all together and let the tension fall away.

Variation:

- If it is uncomfortable to push down or pull up a chair, try giving yourself a tight hug, or pressing your legs together, before dangling your legs and arms to relax.

PUSH - PULL - DANGLE

PUSH down hard on the seat of your chair while you count to 10

PULL up hard on the seat of your chair while you count to 10

And then **DANGLE** your arms.

Feel the all the stress leave your body©



on

When to Ask for Help

Ask for help if:

- Your lid seems to flip all the time
- It is really hard for your lid to come back down
- You feel confused about why your lid flipped