

Pebble Practice

Four pebbles or twigs; four breaths; four phrases to guide the breath.

Introduction for teachers:

This is an activity for young children, preschool through elementary age. Teachers can easily adapt it to their group. The concepts and actual phrases are taken from the work of Thich Nhat Hahn.

This activity helps students learn the skill of calm centering and develop concentration power by focusing on their breath. It can be introduced as an activity to build calmness in the mind and body and develop the skill of concentration, while at the same time building relaxation. This creates a perfect context in the mind-body system for learning.

Pebble Practice is a sound developmental activity for the brain and for sensory-motor integration, as it involves physically crossing the midline of the body. It also develops coordination and awareness of the body in space, as well as practice with right – left directions. Let the students know that the focus on the breath can be used for calming and centering at any time, such as before a test, or any time of frustration or anxiety.

Materials:

1. Enough small pebbles or twigs for each student to have 4.
Note: Finding the natural objects outside can be a special activity in itself. Later, children can make a small bag for safekeeping of their “calming” objects.
2. Small cards for the In-Out phrases. The cards may be preprinted with the words, or older children can be invited to write the words on the cards. For young children, print the phrases on chart paper and review the words as a language building activity. Use the Socratic method to generate the words.
3. A small bell.

Directions:

Part 1.

Introduce the activity with a discussion of how the mind works and teach the idea of calm, relaxed attention as a core skill for learning anything.

Invite the students to sit in a circle.

Invite students to take 4 pebbles from a bowl that is passed around and place them at their right side.

Part II.

The activity involves focusing the awareness on the physical sensation of the breath. Model and practice before doing the activity together as a mindfulness activity.

This activity was designed for students sitting on the floor in a circle. It could be adapted to sit in chairs if there is space for placing the pebbles on the thigh or the side of the chair.

Say the phrases, slowly, for the in and out breath.

As the the first word of each phrase I spoken, take one pebble from the right side, and moving the arm in an arc toward the left side of the body, place the pebble down on the left side.

At the midpoint of the arc, the inhale ends and the exhale begins; speak the second word of the phrase for the exhale.

When the four phrases have been competed and the four pebbles moved to the left side, the activity can be repeated with moving the pebbles, one breath at a time, back to the right side.

When the directions and practice session are complete, invite students to close their eyes at the sound of the bell and at the end of the activity to open their eyes at the sound of the bell.

Ask the students what they noticed.

Part III.

The next round can be done on a different day after repeating the first two rounds, or introduced on the same day, depending on the feeling and success of the group during part II. This round is a community activity emphasizing cooperation and the concept of interdependence.

For this round, everyone takes just one pebble (the remaining pebbles can be placed back into the bowl that is passed around.)

The one pebble is placed at the right side of the body on the floor. The phrases and movement are the same. Each time the student completes the arc by placing the pebble at the side of the person to her left.

Then with the second phrase, the student reaches for the pebble on her right, which has been placed there by the person on her right.

The eyes are kept slightly open to support this activity. When the directions and practice session are complete, invite students to close their eyes at the sound of the bell and at the end of the activity to open their eyes at the sound of the bell.

Ask the students what they noticed. (Some will notice that they got their own pebbles back!)

The phrases are:

(On the in-breath) (On the out-breath)

IN OUT

DEEP SLOW

CALM. EASE

HERE NOW