A black background with a black square

Description automatically generated with medium confidenceCraft Activities for Managing Stress

**Activity Ideas**



**What to do:** Use these activities with students or staff, singly or in a group, modified to suit age. These activities provide opportunities to talk about stress, its impacts, and ways to manage feelings of anxiety, frustration, or anger.

**Why it matters:** Recognizing and naming feelings are first steps toward managing them if they become overwhelming. Students — and even some adults — need opportunities and support to learn and practice self-regulation skills.

Caution: Keep small balls and toys with small parts away from children younger than age 3, and keep deflated balloons away from children younger than age 8.

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| Design Your Own Stress Ball **Suggested Age Range:** Pre-K through adult  **Time:** 5 minutes or more | |
| **Materials**  Balloons  Play dough (store bought or homemade)  *Optional*  Permanent markers | *Some people experience emotional, physiological, and psychological benefits from using a stress ball. Stress balls can help to release tension, stimulate nerves, divert attention, and improve mood. They have been found helpful for students with sensory considerations such as autism or ADHD.*  **Steps**   * Work over a table to catch bits of play dough. * Half a 4-ounce can of play dough makes a stress ball the perfect size for little hands. Use more for adults. Homemade play dough also works well for this activity. * Roll the dough into small “snakes” measuring about 2 inches in length and insert into the balloon. The play dough will fall to the bottom, versus having to push it through the opening. Work in pairs to hold the balloon open for each other. * Push the excess air out of the balloon and tie off the end.   Optional: Decorate with permanent markers. |

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| **Materials**  Paint brushes  Acrylic paint  Bowls (for paint)  Stones (flat, smooth stones are best)  *Optional*  Clear paint or glue  Dough or clay that is dryable (air-dryable is preferred) | *Worry stones, also known as palm stones, are usually oval shaped. These smooth stones are small enough to hold between the thumb and index finger. Gently moving the thumb back and forth over the surface of the stone while focusing on positive thoughts helps many people release physical tension and feel a sense of calm and renewed focus.*  **Steps**   * Cover the working area with newspaper or a tablecloth. * Wash stones to remove dirt. * Pour paint into bowls. * Use a paintbrush to apply paint to one side of the stone. Make a pattern or picture, if you’d like. * Wait for the first side to dry, then apply paint to the other side of the stone.   Optional: Create a more colorfast, extra-smooth surface by applying clear paint or glue to both sides of the stone.  Alternatively, you can create worry stones using dough or clay that can be dried. If using this method, take a small amount of clay and roll it into a ball. Form it into a flattened oval. Press your thumb into the oval to make a small indentation on one side. |

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| Clothespin Worry Dolls | Homan at HomeCreate Your Own Worry Doll **Suggested Age Range:** Pre-K through adult  **Time:** 5 minutes or more | |
| **Materials**  Wooden clothespins (round or flat)  Yarn (multiple colors)  Scissors  Markers (fine tip)  Hot glue gun (regular glue will work if there’s adequate dry time)  ***Tip:*** If you have no yarn, use markers to color the doll bodies. | *Worry dolls are colorful, teeny-tiny dolls that students can customize. They are thought to have originated in Guatemala, where they were given to people who had trouble sleeping due to worries. Students can make more than one worry doll. The idea is to share one worry with each doll and let the doll worry for you so that you can sleep.*  **Steps**   * Cover the working area with newspaper or a tablecloth. * Select colors of yarn and begin wrapping the clothespin from the bottom up, stopping a little below the top to allow room for a face. Secure the yarn with glue. * Use markers to draw a face at the top of the clothespin.   Optional: To add hair to the worry doll, add yarn to the top of the clothespin. |

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| /var/folders/79/p3lf79m575s45dp7qvb8k7qm0000gn/T/com.microsoft.Word/WebArchiveCopyPasteTempFiles/Zendoodle.jpgZen Coloring Pages **Suggested Age Range:** Pre-K through adult  **Time:** 5 minutes or more | |
| **Materials**  Coloring pages  Markers or colored pencils  *Optional*  Soft, calming instrumental music | *Coloring has the potential to reduce* [*anxiety*](http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/08/health/women-anxiety-disorders/index.html)*, create focus, or* [*bring about mindfulness*](http://dailyburn.com/life/health/mindful-eating-tips-weight-loss/?partner=cnn&mtype=5&sub_id=01042016_coloringbooks&utm_source=cnn&utm_medium=cnn&utm_campaign=01042016_coloringbooks&utm_content=01042016_coloringbooks) *for children and adults. Coloring books can be purchased, or you can search online for anti-stress coloring pages and print the ones you want.*  **Steps**   * Offer a variety of designs, from simple to complex. * Allow participants to choose their own design, and emphasize the joy in the process, not just the product. * Provide enough markers or colored pencils for all participants. * Allow participants to color at their own pace.   Optional: Play soft music while participants color. |

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| /var/folders/79/p3lf79m575s45dp7qvb8k7qm0000gn/T/com.microsoft.Word/WebArchiveCopyPasteTempFiles/th?id=OIP.cX7ej86GaZifJ_oeRF5ATAHaE8&pid=15.1&P=0&w=253&h=170Hot Chocolate Breathing Technique **Suggested Age Range:** Pre-K through adult  **Time:** 5 minutes or more | |
| **Materials**  Your imagination  *or*  Hot water  Hot chocolate mix (or tea, coffee, or another hot drink)  Spoons  Cups  *Optional*  Whipped cream Chocolate chips  Marshmallows | *Deep breathing also goes by the names of diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, and belly breathing. When you breathe deeply, the air coming in through your nose fully fills your lungs and the lower belly rises. Deep abdominal breathing encourages full oxygen exchange. The exchange can help slow the heartbeat and lower or stabilize blood pressure, which can help to create calming feelings.*  **Steps**   * Mix a cup of hot chocolate by combining hot water and hot chocolate mix *or* imagine you are holding a cup of hot chocolate. (Tea, coffee, or another hot drink can be substituted.) Young children might even enjoy the exercise of “preparing” their imaginary hot drink. * Close your eyes and feel or imagine the warm drink in your hands. * Bring the drink close, or pretend, and take a big deep breath through your nose to smell the beverage. * Breathe out slowly through your mouth as if you are gently blowing on the drink to cool it. * Repeat this multiple times, as if taking in the smell and blowing out to cool the drink. * Take a sip of the hot chocolate or imagine yourself taking a sip. * Think to yourself: Is it cool enough to drink? Can I feel the warmth of the hot chocolate in my mouth? Can I feel it moving through my chest and down into my stomach? * You can repeat these steps as many times as you like.   Find breathing techniques and other ideas at these sources:  <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/breathing-exercises-to-help-calm-young-children>  <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/relax-breathing.html> |

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| Balloon Breathing Technique **Suggested Age Range:** Pre-K through adult  **Time:** 5 minutes or more | |
| **Materials**  Your imagination | *This simple activity needs no materials. By focusing on their breathing, students may find themselves calming quickly.*  **Steps**   * Close your eyes and imagine a balloon in your belly. Give the balloon a color or a design that changes as it inflates and imagine how it feels. * Take in a slow breath and “fill up” the balloon. Count to 4 or 5 as you breathe in, then exhale slowly and calmly. * Repeat several times, breathing in to fill up the balloon all the way, then slowly letting out the air.   Adapted from [https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/ 10/Relaxation-using-controlled-breathing.pdf](https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Relaxation-using-controlled-breathing.pdf) |

To help staff and students understand and manage the effects of trauma and stress, see these tools: **Booklist: Teaching Students Who’ve Experienced Trauma** and **Student Trauma Book List**.



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