



Play-based Somatics Skill Building

Teach kids how their body responds to big emotions

Basketball activities and games for grades 4-12

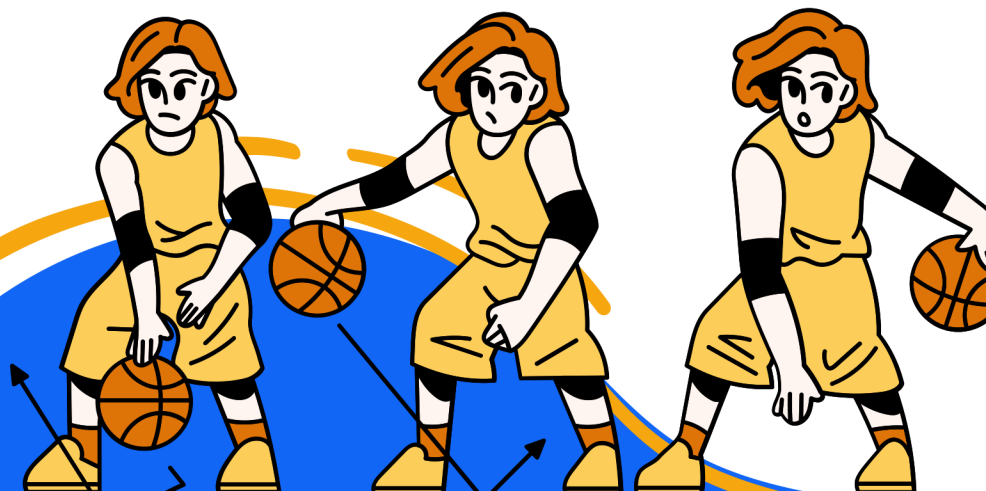


We can teach kids a better understanding of their body and how it responds to stress. CREATE simplifies evidence backed body skills and information into fun basketball oriented activities.

The following guide includes 5 body skills and their associated learning tools.

They are:

- Playable in 10 mins
- Engaging and memorable
- Replayable
- Easy to teach / play, no prior training needed
- Important body skills for better classroom behavior
- Helps record healthier nervous system responses with play



Game Guide

Move skill:

When stressed our body tenses and we keep that emotion inside our body. Lets learn movements that help us get the held emotions out!

Activities: **The Counter-Balance**
The Pendulum Swing
The Shake Out

Stretch skill:

Now that we have stretched and warmed up our body we can move better. Active stretching is how a tense body re-stores balance.

Activities: **The Body Scan**
Stress out, Stretch out

Squeeze skill:

Anger and frustration makes us ball up our hands automatically. We can respond better by helping our hands get rid of the tension. Let's take up this speed challenge!

Activities: **The Fastest Squeeze**



Appetite skill:

Stress makes our hunger signs all messed up! When we feel bad we eat less OR we eat way too much of unhealthy foods. Lets learn more about our body's unique signals and better control over it.

Activities: **The Hunger Games**
Pac-Man

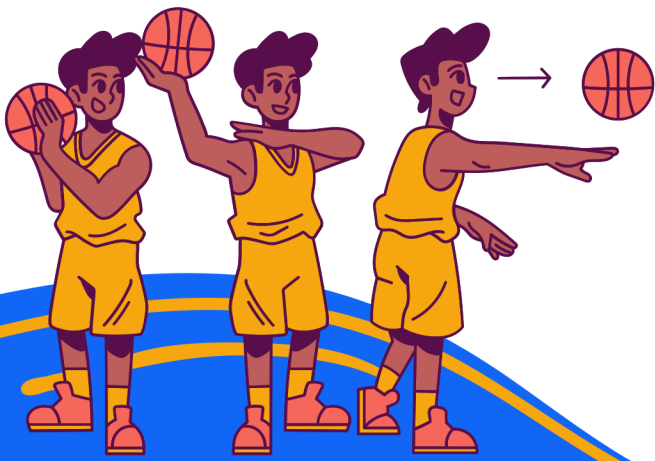
Breathe skill:

Breathing is THE most important skill in every stressful experience. It helps our entire body calm down so we can think and respond in healthy ways. Let's learn the 2 most important parts of a great breath in these games!

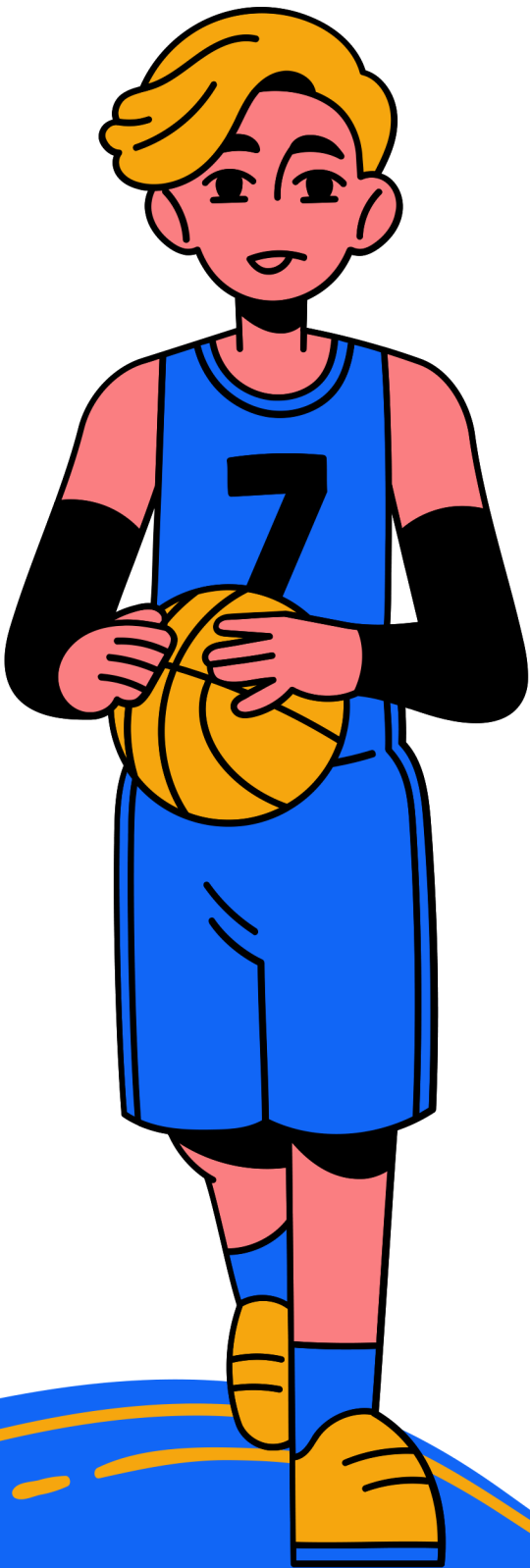
Activities: **My Basketball Buddy**
Air Ball

Closing:

Learning body skills are important because your body shows you signals that help you react to emotions and life in better ways. Stronger control over our body means we can think better in important moments. It also means we can do better on the court!



Encourage kids to practice these body skills at home and use their basketball breathing buddy to help them feel better faster while having fun.



The next pages include 1 game page and 1 teacher's guide per activity. Separate 10-15 minutes per skill for instruction and play time.

Let's get started!

Emotion: Fear, Anxiety, Anger**Skill:** Move

Our body has its own memory inside. When we have big feelings and we tense up we remember it in our body's memory. That is bad because the memory we keep inside can make us feel nervous or uncomfortable in the future if we don't help our body release it. One easy way to do that is by looking for the tense spots we feel in our hands, arms, legs and back. When we find a spot that feels stiff and stretch it out our body feels better and doesn't hold on tight to the sadness, anger, or fear.

Skill: Release the tension that negative emotions store in the body with active movements that re-balance, shake and swing retained stress.

What's happening: Active stretches help our body let go of stress it's holding onto.

Let's Play: The Counter Balance

Duration: 10 Minutes**Recommended Ages:** 6+ yrs**Group Size:** Any**Materials:** Basketball

1. Have students stand a part with available space to stretch. Direct them to stand straight with legs shoulder width a part.
2. They will stretch out forwards as far as possible until they feel off balance and practice shifting their body weight so they re-balance while holding the stretch.
3. Walk around checking students that are falling forwards. Help them move their body opposite of the stretch while holding the stretch.
4. Repeat stretching side-ways and reaching backwards with the same goal.

Let's Play: The Pendulum Swing

1. Instruct kids to stand with legs shoulder width a part and arms spread out, then swing back and forth like they are "clearing the table." Alternate the speed.

Let's Play: The Shake Out

1. Instruct kids to stand with legs shoulder width a part and practice shaking out every part of their body, starting from the bottom (feet, legs) moving upwards (arms, hands).

Teacher's Guide: **The Move Skill**

We're going to learn important body movements that help release stress stuck in the body. Start by reading the top game paragraph. Explain each skill using the description below before beginning the game instructions found on the game page. While playing the games remind children that tension in our body comes from emotional highs like times we are angry, sad, afraid or frustrated. Active movements like the ones in this game help release the tension our body creates.

Skills:

Counter-Balance

Balance weight of the body opposite from side being reached towards to maintain better balance.

Pendulum Swing

With legs shoulder width apart and arms spread out, swing back and forth like you are "clearing the table."

The Shake Out

Shake legs and arms.

What's happening:

Active movement helps our body let go of stress it's holding onto and counter-balance skills help the body gain better balance faster.

The Science: Feldenkrais exercises for balance

Balance is important for basketball and it's also important for everyday life. The Feldenkrais method, an approach that helps people expand movement and increase bodily self-awareness, is a beneficial treatment for chronic back pain. According to a 2017 study. A study of older adults saw improved mobility after only several Feldenkrais movement lessons, while research from 2010 suggests that the use of somatics in dance practices helped improve movement among professional and student dancers.

Pendulum swing and shaking for tension release

Slow, active movements create better body awareness retrain your nervous system to release chronic muscle contraction and stand or move in a new way. The slower you move, the more effectively you can train your body into better balance in these positions. These same movements help dissipate the stress created by strong negative emotions like anger or fear. When changing speed and strength we can release tension as well. The very same applies for shaking actions. Shaking out our legs, arms or jumping place helps our body release tension. That's why athletes or performers do it before getting started!

Emotion: Fear, Anxiety, Anger

Skill: Stretch

Our body has its own memory inside. When we have big feelings and we tense up we remember it in our body's memory. That is bad because the memory we keep inside can make us feel nervous or uncomfortable in the future if we don't help our body release it. One easy way to do that is by looking for the tense spots we feel in our hands, arms, legs and back. When we find a spot that feels stiff and stretch it out our body feels better and doesn't hold on tight to the sadness, anger, or fear.

Skill: Feel through your body for tense spots. When you find one stretch it both ways for 1 minute. Repeat 3 times or more if you need to.

What's happening: Stretching helps our body let go of stress it's holding onto.

Let's Play: Stretch out, Stress out

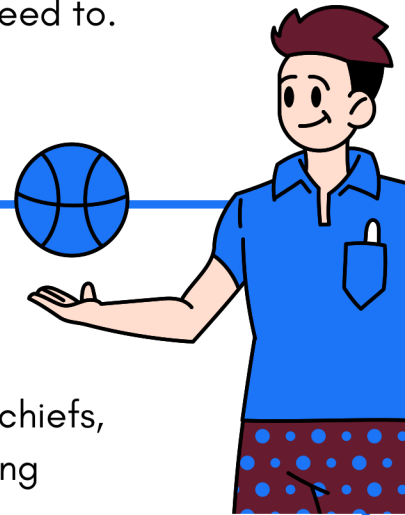
Duration: 10 Minutes

Recommended Ages: 6+ yrs

Group Size: Any

Materials: Basketball, Color Handkerchiefs, Hula Hoops, Provided String

1. After the guided stretch (see instructor's guide) separate kids into teams evenly.
2. Line the children up in two lines so that they are facing each other and are at least 15 feet apart.
3. The children will toss up their handkerchief and hop to the other side on time to catch the one tossed up by the opposite child. If a child doesn't catch it they cannot help their team earn points in the second game.
4. Remaining kids move on to the hula hoop station where one child will drag the hoop using the attached string while the second child dribbles inside the hoop towards the finish line. Alternate so each child gets a chance to dribble and pull the string.
5. Each child that makes it to the finish line without dribbling outside of the hoop gets to take a shot at the rim to earn 1 point for their team. Team with the most points wins!



Teacher's Guide: **The Stretch Skill**

Now that we have learned important body movements that help release stress stuck in the body it's necessary to remind kids that activity relieves body tension. Walking, dancing, jumping and more help regulate the body's nervous system so it can more healthily release natural flight, fight and freeze responses.

Start by reading the top game paragraph. Explain each skill using the description below before beginning the game instructions found on the game page. While playing the games remind children that stress in our body from strong emotions creates feelings of having to fight, run away or freeze in place, even when we aren't in physical danger. Focusing on activities that feel similar to the feeling to fight or flee helps our body to release those impulses and makes sure we don't retain them in the body.

Skill: Release the automatic stress negative emotions create in the body as they happen by dissipating it through activities that mimic the feeling.

What's happening: Active stretches help our body let go of stress it's holding onto.

The Science

Activities that mimic stress responses help eliminate them:

Active movement creates activity that helps your brain release endorphins, which serves as natural painkillers. When we practice consistent active movement, we encourage our brain to regularly release endorphins which help improve our mood, keep us motivated and happy. Active movement activities also helps your body lower stress by promoting the release of hormones like cortisol. The combination of releases between endorphins stress reduction hormones helps you feel calm and in control of your life.

Most injuries and chronic pain in our bodies happen because of the gradual buildup of muscle tension from repetitive motions, habitual posture or pent up emotions that aren't fully processed. These gradually compromise our body's ability to function at its best so they cause pain.

On the other hand physical activity can change how your body processes oxygen while improving blood flow. Stress, even when it's just minor, can be a trigger for health issues due to inadequate blood flow to the heart. Since it improves circulation and lowers blood pressure it contributes to better protection against retained stress, illness and infection.

Emotion: Anger, Anxiety

Skill: Squeeze

Our body doesn't talk so it sends us signs about how it is feeling instead. When we are angry our body can show us by making our hands start to ball up. It happens so fast that we don't even notice it. Emotions like feeling frustrated or scared can make our hands feel these stress signals until we help them feel better. If we don't help our body feel better the stress can get trapped inside! Let's play a game that will teach us how to get the stress out of our hands:

Skill: Squeeze as hard as you can, hold for 2 seconds, and let go. Repeat 3 times or keep going if you need to.

What's happening: Our hands use physical pressure to try to make us feel strong and safe inside.



Let's Play: The Fastest Squeeze

Duration: 10 Minutes

Recommended Ages: 6+ yrs

Group Size: 4+ Children

Materials: Basketballs, cone

1. Create equal teams of children and line up 2 teams opposite of each other so each child is facing the other. Line up a basketball in between the two children.
2. The instructor will let the kids know that, after yelling the skill squeeze, "ball" can be called out right after. Then instructor will begin to yell out each of the skills taught that day (breathe, stretch, move, squeeze) and the child will do the corresponding physical movement.
3. At the instructors discretion "ball" will be yelled out after one of the squeeze prompts. The fastest student to grab the ball gets a chance to run up to the designated spot to shoot for 1 point.
4. The team that has the most points after 5 minutes wins. Play offs between winning teams are a great way to continue this game.

Teacher's Guide: **The Squeeze Skill**

One of the most important automatic body reactions a child can learn is that their hands ball up because of anger. There are so much harm that can be avoided if a child had better tools to deal with this natural impulse. Teaching a child to squeeze as hard as they can, as needed, helps their mind regain control by assisting the body with release of this tension. It also helps improve the mind's functioning in really helpful ways (see below).

Start by reading the top game paragraph. Explain each skill using the description below before beginning the game instructions found on the game page. While playing the games remind children that anger creates stress and tension in our hands. We can make better decisions that keeps us from danger by helping our hands feel better. Consciously squeezing hard helps our mind understand think about the best options for us faster.

Skill: Squeeze as hard as you can, hold for 2 seconds, and let go.
Repeat 3 times or keep going if you need to.

What's happening: Our hands use physical pressure to try to make us feel strong and safe inside. It prepares us for action but can also be diverted to better thinking power.

The Science

Squeezing relieve stress within the hands from strong emotions:

Activating and relaxing the muscles of the hand by squeezing a stress ball can help a child release tension in their muscles, which helps them relieve stress. Unilateral hand clenching increases neuronal activity in the frontal lobe of the contra-lateral hemisphere. This type of hand clenching is associated with increased "mode of processing," memory encoding and retrieval. Together, these findings show that unilateral hand clenching can be used to help a child process thoughts and make better decisions by helping their hands relieve automatic stress.

Athletes have shown improvement of their performance under pressure simply by squeezing a ball or clenching their left hand before competition to activate certain parts of the brain, according to research published by the American Psychological Association. Squeezing a ball or clenching the left hand activated the right hemisphere of the brain and reduced the likelihood of the athlete's "choking under pressure". Whether its on or off the court, the squeeze skill, activates the brain in ways that helps decision making during high stress situations. Kids can use this as an intervention tool that puts more control in their hands during strong negative emotions.

Emotion: Fear, Anxiety, Anger

Skill: Appetite

Our body doesn't talk so it sends us signs about how it is feeling instead. When we become scared or angry our body can turn off our hunger signals so we can focus on other things. If we are sad or stressed we can confuse our body signals and eat lots of foods that are bad for us but make us feel better for a little while. When we know how our body reacts to stress we can make better decisions about what to eat or when. Knowing how to take care of our body when feeling bad helps us stay healthier all the time!

Skill: The most important eating habits to focus on are eating slowly and stopping when you are 80% full. This helps us listen to our body better.

What's happening:

Learning our body's unique hunger signals helps us make better decisions no matter the food or emotion we're dealing with.

Let's Play: The Hunger Games + Pac Man

Duration: 10 Minutes

Recommended Ages: 6+ yrs

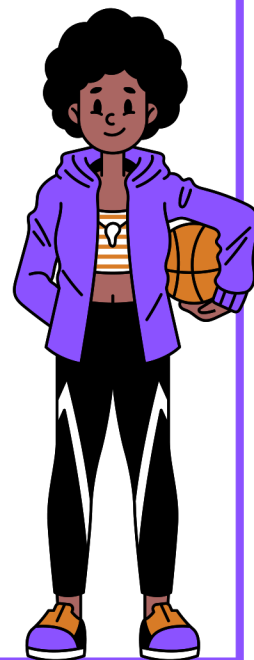
Group Size: Any

Materials: Basketball

1. Have students stand away from each other, with a basketball.
2. They will bounce the ball in place while the instructor asks trivia questions to them at random (see trivia page or add in your own).
3. When a child stops bouncing OR gets a question wrong they are out and the last child standing wins the game.

Let's Play: Pac-Man

1. Place 4 cones in a large square. Have 2 students stand diagonal from each other, each with a basketball.
2. They will bounce the ball to the nearest cone, trying to catch up with the other student. One will be bouncing forwards and one backwards.
3. The instructor can yell speed levels, since it helps a child concentrate on dribbling/control skills OR change directions at random
4. The child that "eats" the other wins a point for their team.



Teacher's Guide: **The Appetite Skill**

The most important eating skill a child can learn is their own body's unique signals and moderation. There is so much nutritional confusion and harm that can be avoided if a child had better tools to deal with addictive foods and emotional eating. Teaching a child to listen to their own body's cues, especially to eat slowly and stop early (at 80% full) helps their mind stay control and even protects them in the inevitable moments they eat unhealthy foods.

Start by reading the top game paragraph. Explain each skill using the description below before beginning the game instructions found on the game page. While playing the games remind children that eating sweet, salty or fried foods is tasty but we also focus on them when we feel bad. Noticing when we are eating because we feel bad and taking the time to eat slowly/ only until 80% full helps our body stay safe and keeps us in control of our tummy's signals.

Skill: The most important eating habits to focus on are eating slowly and stopping when you are 80% full. This helps us listen to our body better.

What's happening: Learning our body's unique hunger signals helps us make better decisions no matter the food or emotion we're dealing with.

The Science

Portion control and learning about hunger cues

Hara hachi bu is a Japanese term meaning "Eat until you're 80% full." It originated in the city of Okinawa, where people use this advice as a way to control their eating habits. Interestingly, they have one of the lowest rates of illness from heart disease, cancer and stroke, and a fairly long life expectancy.

The aim of this skill is to feel satisfied and not hungry anymore, rather than full. That's because speed contributes to mindless overeating and your stomach takes 20 minutes to digest you food. By eating slowly and only to 80% full a child can better learn body cues and establish strong habits that protect against over eating of any kind. This is a foundational skill since building strong body signal knowledge is the #1 skill for healthy eating.

The 80% approach is also an important skill for under-eaters, who may tend to feel too full or bloated when they eat a large meal. Feeling too full is a significant trigger of discomfort, negative feelings and the urge to purge. If a person struggles with under-eating, eating smaller portions helps cope with the 'too full' feeling.

The Hunger Games Trivia Sheet

1. (True or False) Healthy eating means everything is "low-fat" - FALSE
2. Carbs are a major group of foods we eat. Which one of the following is a carb?

- a. eggs and cheese
b. bread and rice
c. beef and chicken
d. pork and turkey

Answer: B

3. Which one represents the right size of protein per serving?

- a. a deck of cards
b. a bar of soap
c. a thin book
d. an iphone

Answer: A

4. Which vegetable is a flower that we eat?

- a. potatoes
b. broccoli
c. squash
d. lettuce

Answer: B

5. Which vegetable is a seed that we eat?

- a. zucchini
b. carrot
c. corn
d. cabbage

Answer: C

6. Which vegetable is a root that we eat?

- a. green beans
b. carrot
c. corn
d. broccoli

Answer: B

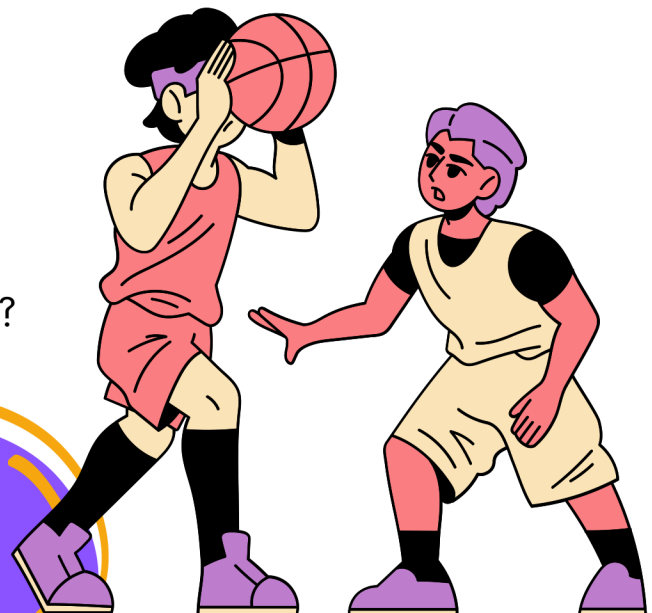
7. What part of the plant, when developed, is classified as a fruit?

- a. the flowers
b. the leaves
c. the stem
d. the seed

Answer: A

8. Which is the only fruit with seeds on the outer skin?

Answer: Strawberries



Need more trivia questions?

Visit createkidsedu.org/trivia for 100+ more questions!

Emotion:	Fear, Anxiety, Sadness
Skill:	Breathe

Our body doesn't talk so it sends us signs about how it is feeling instead. When we are stress it is normal for us to inhale and hold in air. Unfortunately, doing makes us raise our heart rate and trigger the release of stress hormones. It hurts our body because it's constantly on alert. Controlling our breathing is the first step of managing stress and we can learn the 2 most important things to focus on for strong breathing! Let's play a game that will teach us how to get the stress out of our lungs:

Skill: Breathe deeply through your nose while watching for your belly to push outward. Push your lips like you are blowing out a candle and really push the air out. Repeat 3 times or keep going if needed.

What's happening: Taking deep breathes helps get the stress chemicals out of our blood and that helps us feel better.



Let's Play: My Basketball Buddy

Duration: 10 Minutes

Recommended Ages: 6+ yrs

Group Size: Any

Materials: Basketball, Mini Basketballs, Straws, Course Materials

1. Instructors start by explaining that breathing buddies can help us make sure we are using our belly to breath correctly. Our basketball is the best breathing buddy!
2. Have kids hold the basketball in front of them so the ball is touching their belly then have them breathe deeply and notice how the basketball moves.
3. Remind them that they can use the natural way we hold our basketball to correct stress based breathing patterns.
4. Create a mini obstacle course using the cones, hoops or bean bags provided.
5. Give each child a straw and mini basketball while they are lined up at the obstacle course's start line.
6. Students will have to use the deep breathing and pursed lips skills to best navigate the obstical course. Making it to the finish line means kids have practiced engaging their lungs and controlling their breathe's pacing to move about!

Teacher's Guide: **The Breath Skill**

In the middle of breathing difficulty the most important skill a child can use to regulate their breathe is to focus on belly generated movement and a strong exhale. That's because stressed breathing from strong emotions begin from the chest, instead of the belly. Also, strong exhales bring more oxygen into the system which clears the blood from stress related chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol. Teaching a child to focus on their stomach and pushing air out of their system is what helps us feel better faster and even assist in controlling asthma attacks!

Start by reading the top game paragraph. Explain each skill using the description below before beginning the game instructions found on the game page. While playing the games remind children that the two most important things to remember in a healthy breathe is belly movement and strong exhales that push the air out because it helps them balance their body inside and feel better quickly.

Skill: Breathe deeply through your nose while watching for your belly to push outward. Push your lips like you are blowing out a candle and really push the air out. Repeat 3 times or keep going if needed.

What's happening:

Belly breathes break our body out of stress based chest breathing. Pushing air out actually helps get more oxygen in so the stress chemicals work their way out of our blood and we feel better.

The Science

Belly derived breathing:

Breathing is the internal dialogue of our nervous system. Inhaling makes us alert and ready for action, while exhaling calms us down, stimulates digestion and relaxes the muscles. When faced with stress, it is perfectly normal for us to inhale and hold in air. Unfortunately, by doing so we raise our heart rate and trigger the release of stress hormones, which puts the body in a vicious circle of agitation. Conscious control over breathing is therefore the first step towards managing stress and work-related burdens. Shallow breathing forces the heart into an abnormal rhythm and stimulates the sympathetic tone of the nervous system, which is known to occur in a number of cardiovascular conditions.

Strong Exhaling:

Every time we inhale we raise our heart rate and increase the contractile force of the heart. When we exhale, we achieve the opposite effect and cause our body to relax.

Pursed lip breathing means exhaling through pursed lips which forces out 2 or 3 decilitres more air than exhaling through nose. A more efficient exhalation leads to deeper breathing, also referred to as belly breathing or diaphragmatic breathing.

Thank you for giving children's mental health the assist!

These body skills teach kids how their body responds to big emotions, which is foundational to building a healthy and successful future. **We appreciate your support in our mission to improve children's mental health through better body awareness.**



Citations:

Move:

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