

3.1.5. Mindful Breathing Journey

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

This guided mindfulness exercise helps children learn to recognize, observe, and regulate their emotions using mindful breathing and visualization techniques. This activity requires a calm, quiet indoor space with minimal distractions. A classroom with soft lighting or drawn curtains is ideal. The activity strengthens self-regulation and emotional awareness by guiding children through slow, mindful breathing accompanied by a visual or narrative journey. As children imagine moving through calming scenes (like forests, clouds, or underwater worlds), they synchronize their breathing with the rhythm of the story.

Skill focus

Primary Skill Focus

- Emotional awareness, regulation and communication

Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus

- Resilience

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	Whole class or small groups (5 to 25 children)	15-20 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

The children sit in a comfortable position, either cross-legged on the floor or lying on a mat. The space should be quiet and calm, with soft lighting if possible. The teacher explains that they will go on a small inner journey using their breath to help their bodies and minds feel calm and peaceful.

Below is a step-by-step script the teacher can follow, adaptable based on the children's age and familiarity with mindfulness.

- Setting the tone (1-2 minutes):** "Today we're going to take a little trip—but not with our legs, with our breath and our imagination. This is called a 'Mindful Journey'. It helps our minds feel calm, and our hearts feel kind."

"Let's all find a quiet, still position. You can sit like a mountain or lie down like a quiet lake. Close your eyes if that feels good to you or look down at your hands."

- Connecting with the breath (2-3 minutes):** "Let's begin by noticing our breath. Just breathe in... and breathe out. Don't change anything. Just feel it."

"Now let's try to breathe slowly together. Breathe in slowly like you're smelling a flower... (pause)... and breathe out slowly like you're blowing on hot cocoa... (pause)."

"Let's do that three more times. In through the nose... and out through the mouth."

3. **Introducing the emotional journey (3-4 minutes):** “Now I’d like you to imagine a small river. It’s gentle and clear. It flows slowly past you. You are sitting beside it, very still. The sun is warm on your face.”

“Now imagine that your feelings are like leaves. When you notice a feeling—maybe worry, or excitement, or sadness—you can place it gently on a leaf. Watch it float down the river. You don’t have to hold it. Just let it pass by.”

“If you notice a feeling in your body—like a tight tummy or a heavy head—place that on a leaf too. And just keep breathing slowly. In... and out.”

4. **Deepening awareness (3-4 minutes):** “If a thought pops up in your head—like ‘I want to go play’ or ‘I don’t like this’—you can place the thought on a leaf too. Watch it float away. Then bring your attention back to your breath.”

“Your only job is to breathe. Breathe in calm... breathe out any tension. You’re safe. You’re quiet. You’re doing just fine.”

“Let’s sit in this calm river space for a few more moments. Breathing in... and breathing out.”

5. **Returning to the group (2 minutes):** “Now it’s time to come back. Wiggle your fingers and your toes slowly. Stretch like a cat. Gently open your eyes when you’re ready.”

“Take a moment to notice how your body feels. Are you more relaxed than before?”

“Thank yourself for taking care of your mind and your breath.”

This script can be shortened to 5-7 minutes for younger children (age 6-7), or expanded to 10-12 minutes for older children (age 9-10), who are more capable of sustained focus.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor only: This activity requires a calm, quiet indoor space with minimal distractions. A classroom with soft lighting or drawn curtains is ideal. Children should sit or lie on soft mats or cushions, spaced out enough to feel personal space. If available, play gentle instrumental music or use a small bell to signal the beginning and end of the session. Ensure the teacher’s voice can be clearly heard by all participants without raising the volume.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

This activity strengthens self-regulation and emotional awareness by guiding children through slow, mindful breathing accompanied by a visual or narrative journey. As children imagine moving through calming scenes (like forests, clouds, or underwater worlds), they synchronize their breathing with the rhythm of the story.

This process helps children:

- Tune into their body and breath,
- Slow down physiological responses to stress,
- Practice focused attention through guided imagery.

By linking breath to mental visualization, the activity creates a gentle and enjoyable entry point into mindfulness practice, equipping children with a concrete strategy they can recall when feeling overwhelmed or emotionally activated.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will:

- be able to pause and observe emotions
- understand the non-judgmental awareness of feelings
- be aware the breathing techniques to self-regulate emotions
- have better focus and attention

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

- A child feels nervous about an upcoming test; during the practice, they imagine the nervousness as a small leaf floating by on a stream, allowing them to observe and detach from the feeling.
- Another child feels excited after recess; they visualize their excitement as a bright red balloon gently rising, breathing slowly to bring their energy down and feel more centered.
- A third child comes back from a conflict with a peer and feels angry; the teacher invites them to imagine the anger as a stormy cloud slowly drifting across the sky with each breath, noticing how it begins to lighten and move away.
- A fourth child is feeling sad and tired after a long day; through mindful breathing, they picture their sadness as a blue raindrop falling into a calm pond, watching the ripples fade as they breathe in calm and breathe out heaviness.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Calm background music (optional)
- A soft chime or bell to mark the start and end
- Floor mats or cushions for comfort

Guiding questions

Only debriefing questions are suggested

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children may giggle or have trouble staying still, especially if they are not used to mindfulness.
Tip: The teacher should normalize this, reassuring them that learning to sit quietly takes practice.
- **Challenge:** Other children may struggle to name their emotions during the reflection.
Tip: In this case, the teacher can offer a menu of emotions to help them find words (e.g., “Are you feeling calm, worried, excited, or tired?”). The teacher’s attitude should always be non-judgmental and supportive, emphasizing that there is no right or wrong way to feel. Modelling calm, steady breathing helps children mirror the practice.

Difficulty level tailoring

- **Beginner learners (6-7 years old):** keep the visualization simple—just focus on the breath and imagine a cloud or balloon floating away with strong feelings. Younger children may benefit from placing a stuffed animal on their belly to observe their breath.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** introduce the concept of naming emotions silently as they notice them, encouraging a pause between noticing and reacting. They can also practice breathing techniques (4 counts in, 4 counts out) to anchor themselves.
- **Expert learners (9-10 years old):** encourage more self-reflection, asking them to notice where emotions show up in their body (tight chest, butterflies in the stomach) and guide them to breathe into those sensations.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- Was it easy or hard to sit quietly and notice your emotions?
- Did you notice any feelings you didn't expect?
- How did your body feel before, during, and after the activity?
- Can you think of a time outside school where you could use this technique?
- Why is it helpful to observe emotions instead of ignoring them?