

Personifying the Brain

To make the brain easier for students to understand, you can personify the sections of the house with the characters that inhabit them.

1. Introduce students to the concepts of the upstairs and downstairs brain. Start to brainstorm who lives in the house (teaching tip: for younger students, it may be helpful to come up with names yourself) and how they respond to situations.

The downstairs characters are feelers who are focused on our safety and survival. These characters identify dangers, spark emotions, and respond quickly.

The upstairs characters are thinkers and problem solvers. They help us regulate our emotions and plan our responses.

2. When the stairs are connecting the upstairs and downstairs, the characters can run up and down between the sections of the house with messages for one another.

Brainstorm with your students what this looks like (e.g. we are able to play with our friends, solve problems when they come up, calm ourselves down in difficult situations, and make good choices).

3. Sometimes our downstairs brain will spot danger and we will flip our lids. The characters block off our upstairs section of the house so the stairs are no longer connected until the threat is minimized. This looks like our fight, flight, or freeze responses.

Ask your students when these reactions would be safest. For younger students, start with unlikely situations so that they do not get scared.

4. Let students know that we all flip our lids, and share a light-hearted example of how you recently flipped your lid.

By doing this activity, you work with your students to establish a shared language to understand and more freely communicate their emotions. It also helps to remove the personalization and judgment around our emotional reactions and enables students to learn functional ways to have conversations about them.

Draw the House

To take the analogy a step further, give students the opportunity to draw the analogy.

1. Draw the house and characters that live in the house.
2. Draw what happens when the two parts are connected.
3. Draw what happens when we flip our lids.

Ocean Breath

Today is math test day and tests are a sure trigger for Andy's anxiety. As you are distributing the test, you look around the classroom and you notice Andy staring off into space while tapping his foot frantically. After handing out the tests, you ask students to come to a tall seat in their chairs and lead them through three rounds of ocean breath. By the second round, Andy has visibly calmed down and by the third round, his focus returns to the room and he starts working on his test.

Why It Works: Stress and anxiety are held in your jaw, shoulders, low back, and hips. By opening the mouth and making an audible exhale, you consciously let go of the stress and anxiety tension stored in the body.

ON THE MAT



IN THE CHAIR



Instructions:

1. Begin seated in your chair or on your mat. If you are on your chair, make sure both feet are touching the floor & you are sitting up tall.
2. Inhale through your nose.
3. Exhale, open your mouth “*hahhh*,” making the sound of an ocean wave.

Teaching Tip: Ask students to place their first two fingers under their ears and gently massage. Ask if they feel any tension. Then, ask them to open their mouths really big and feel the release that happens. Do this experiment before and after the breath and see if they notice any difference in their muscles.

Forward Fold at the Desk

Amy was a sweet girl, but she could go from sweet Amy to angry Amy in the flip on a switch. When Amy gets mad watch out she will slam her desk, shove her chair, and recently she pinched the little boy next to her. You notice that this happens most frequently after morning recess before our reading groups. So you decide to try something new today. As usual, all of your kids run up to your room from recess, but as they reach the door, they notice the lights in the room are low, and soft classical music is playing. You meet them at the door and ask them to enter the room quietly and place their heads down at the desk. Once they are at their desks, you ask them to stay here for one minute and at the end of one minute, you notice your students' energy shift. In particular, Amy looks calmer than usual and as you direct them to take their books out, she quietly sets her book on the desk, focused on the activity at hand.

Why It Works: Forward folds calm the body down by reversing the blood flow. It allows students to take a moment and let their focus go inward to inquire about their behavior and then make a choice to shift into who and how they want to be.

Instructions:

1. Begin in seated in your chair with your feet on the floor sitting up tall in your spine.
2. Inhale, reach your arms up to the sky.
3. Exhale, bend your elbows so your hands stack on top of opposite elbows.
4. Inhale, sit up tall.
5. Exhale, fold forward to your desk, allow your head to rest on top of your arms.
6. Breathe.
7. Inhale, come back up to seated.

Teaching Tip: Try it without a desk.



Mountain Pose

After lunch, you and your students are often low energy, and therefore have difficulty teaching and learning. However, with such little time in the school day to get through everything we need to cover, your tactic has been to push through the disengaged, tired energy (aka “tough it up”). Recently, you start to notice that this is not productive for you or your students. Enter Mountain Pose, a tool you recently learned from Yoga Ed. When you and your students return from lunch today, you teach them Mountain Pose. You check in there, asking and joining them to: lift your legs up and put them down, touch your shoulders, touch your ears, touch the peak of your mountain (your heads), and roll your shoulders three times and do ocean breath once. It sounds simple, but it’s a game changer for focus and concentration.

Why It Works: This pose is energizing. By standing up tall in your body and taking a few deep breaths you awaken the mind and the body.

ON THE MAT



IN THE CHAIR



Instructions:

1. Begin standing on your mat, or in front of or behind your chair.
2. Inhale, allow your toes to touch.
3. Exhale, extend your arms down, palms facing the sides of your legs.
4. Breathe.