



9 YOGA & MINDFULNESS TOOLS FOR MENTAL HEALTH



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AN INTRODUCTION

As we head into “Back to School” season, teachers, students, and families alike are all wondering, “What exactly are we going back to?” This increased stress and anxiety around the unknown poses challenges to our mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Further, we recognize that meeting these novel challenges successfully requires robust support.

Now, in a way we have never experienced before, we understand the critical truth that everyone needs access to mental wellness resources, education, and tools.

At Yoga Ed., we recognize that how healthy and well we are directly impacts how healthy and well our classrooms and our school communities will be.

Therapists, social workers, and organizations such as [NAMI Virginia](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness Virginia), along with [Youth MOVE Virginia](#) and [Virginia Family Network](#), are also well aware of this crucial correlation between individual and collective mental health.

Together, we are here to provide adults and youth with mind-body resources to develop and strengthen healthy approaches to managing emotions and exploring effective coping strategies, especially in times of challenge and uncertainty.

This year, going back to school healthfully means moving towards a greater self-awareness first and foremost. In times of stress and anxiety, to come

back into connection with ourselves, we begin with breath. A slow, deep breath not only breaks the stress-feedback loop, but also can reunite us with our body, which then reinforces the mind-body connection. Yoga, as a mindful practice, grants us the awareness to become present in the here and now, as well as the focus and fortitude to start looking to the future.

To put it simply, more self-awareness means more potential for health and learning.

For youth, learning mind-body skills early in life can provide significant benefits to their physical, emotional, and social growth. In order to choose calm in times of stress, we first need the opportunity to experience calm and practice arriving at a calm state. All of the tools you find in this toolkit help cultivate this practice, whether it's a breath, a mindful movement, or a restorative moment.

Our hope is that teachers and families can utilize this toolkit as a helpful resource to not only assist the youth under their care but also to develop coping strategies for themselves.

This toolkit aims to provide adaptable resources suitable for a variety of settings and time frames: each tool may be as brief as 1 minute or expanded as needed. Use the tools individually or all together to tailor your own experience, gaining the benefits of self-awareness and cultivating the mind-body connection, now and for the long term.



BREATH PRACTICES

Counting Breath

BENEFITS

- Gently focuses attention
- Relieves symptoms of stress

GAZE POINT

- Counting hand, or forward

MODIFICATION

- You're welcome to offer a different number to count down from. By beginning from a higher number, students will have predictability in knowing how many rounds are left.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Let students know how many rounds of breath you will practice.
2. Begin by sitting up tall.
3. Show student(s) your fingers that you'll use to countdown the breath from 5.
4. The student may use their fingers to keep count along with you or place their hands on their sides to feel the breath.
5. Breathing in, Breathing out. 5. [showing five fingers]
6. Breathe in, Breathe out. 4. [showing four fingers]
7. In, Out. 3. [showing three fingers]
8. In, Out. 2. [showing two fingers]
9. In, Out. 1. [showing one finger]



BREATH PRACTICES

Core Breath

BENEFITS

- Awakens the body
- Increases oxygen levels
- Tones the abdominal muscles

MODIFICATIONS

- Explore the importance of the core and where the core is in the body.
- You may mention that everyone has a core, and it's not about how the core looks on the outside.
- You can choose how many "bursts" of exhales to include to best meet the needs of your students.
- Explore exhales through the nose or mouth in this breath.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Let students know how many rounds of breath you will practice.
2. Begin by sitting up tall in your chair.
3. Inhale, fill your belly with air.
4. Exhale, in short bursts, and pull your belly inward with each breath. (We suggest 5x.)
5. Repeat 2–3 times.



Core Breath 1



Core Breath 2

YOGA POSES

Triangle with Hand Variation

MENTAL BENEFIT

- Builds focus
- Develops willpower
- Stimulates the mind

GAZE POINT

- Raised arm, chair, or neutral

INSTRUCTIONS VARIATION 1 - HAND ON CHAIR BACK

1. Begin standing to the side of your chair with your feet hips distance apart.
2. Inhale, bring your hands to hips.
3. Exhale, turn your foot closest to the chair toward the chair, keep your other foot pointing forward.
4. Inhale, reach your arms to a "T".
5. Exhale, bring your hand closest to the chair on the back of the chair
6. Inhale, reach your other arm up towards the ceiling, your palm facing forward.
7. Breathe.
8. When you are ready, inhale and return to standing with your feet hips distance apart.
9. Repeat on the other side.

VARIATION 2 - HAND ON SEAT OF CHAIR

1. Begin standing to the side of your chair with your feet hips distance apart.
2. Inhale, bring your hands to hips.
3. Exhale, turn your foot closest to the chair toward the chair, keep your other foot pointing forward.
4. Inhale, reach your arms to a "T".
5. Exhale, bring your hand closest to the chair on the seat of the chair
6. Inhale, reach your other arm up towards the ceiling, your palm facing forward.
7. Breathe.
8. When you are ready, inhale and return to standing with your feet hips distance apart.
9. Repeat on the other side.

YOGA POSES

Triangle with Hand Variation



Triangle - Variation 1



Triangle - Variation 2

YOGA POSES

Warrior I with Hand Variation

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

- Increases endurance
- Strengthens the ankles, knees, quadriceps, hamstrings, abdominals, back, and arms
- Stretches the calves, quadriceps, hamstrings, hip flexors, chest, and shoulders

MENTAL BENEFIT

- Builds focus
- Increases alertness
- Develops willpower

GAZE POINT

- Down the nose, or the sky

INSTRUCTIONS | VARIATION 1 - ARMS ON CHAIR

1. Begin standing behind your chair in Mountain Pose with your feet hips distance apart.
2. Inhale, bring your hands to your hips.
3. Exhale, step your left foot back as far as is comfortable for you, keeping your right foot facing forward.
4. Inhale, bend into your front right knee until you feel a stretch, with your back leg straight.
5. Exhale, bring your arms to the chair.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, bring your hands back to your hips and step your left foot forward to Mountain Pose.
8. Repeat on the other side.

VARIATION 2 - ARMS OVERHEAD

1. Begin standing behind your chair in Mountain Pose with your feet hips distance apart.
2. Inhale, bring your hands to your hips.
3. Exhale, step your left foot back as far as is comfortable for you, keeping your right foot facing forward.
4. Inhale, bend into your front right knee until you feel a stretch, with your back leg straight.
5. Exhale, reach your arms up to the sky.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, bring your hands back to your hips and step your left foot forward to Mountain Pose.
8. Repeat on the other side.

YOGA POSES

Warrior I with Hand Variation



Warrior I - Variation 1



Warrior I - Variation 2

YOGA POSES

Eagle

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

- Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, and abdominals
- Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, back, and shoulders

MENTAL BENEFIT

- Builds focus
- Develops willpower
- Stimulates the mind

GAZE POINT

- Forward

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin in Mountain Pose.
2. Inhale, stand tall in your body.
3. Exhale, bend your knees slightly as you step your right foot over your left leg. Place your right foot like a kickstand to the outside of the left foot.
4. Inhale, reach your arms out to like a “T”.
5. Exhale, cross your right arm over your left arm. Bend your elbows placing the hands on the upper arms or shoulders.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, unwind your arms and legs to return to Mountain Pose.



Eagle 1



Eagle 2



Eagle 3

YOGA POSE

Seated Twist

PHYSICAL BENEFIT

- Strengthens the back
- Stretches the groin, chest, spine, and shoulders

MENTAL BENEFIT

- Calms the mind

GAZE POINT

- Down the nose

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin seated in your chair with your feet on the floor.
2. Inhale, reach your arms up.
3. Exhale, reach your right hand to the outside of your left knee.
4. Inhale, sit tall.
5. Exhale, bring your left hand behind you. Twist to look over your shoulder.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, untwist and come back to seated.
8. Repeat on the other side.



YOGA POSE

Legs Up the Chair

PHYSICAL BENEFIT

- Reduces fatigue in the legs and feet
- Relieves minor backaches and headaches
- Gently stretches the calves and hamstrings

MENTAL BENEFIT

- Calms the mind

GAZE POINT

- Up or eyes closed

MODIFICATION

- See what it would be like to close your eyes, you can always open them again.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin lying down on your back, facing toward your chair.
2. Inhale, lift your legs up to the air.
3. Exhale, bend at the knees and place your legs on the chair.
4. Inhale, flex your toes towards your shins.
5. Exhale, hands can come to your middle, your side, or to “cactus” shape on the floor.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, bring your legs off of the chair and bend your knees as you turn to one side.
8. Calmly return to seated in your chair.



BRAIN BREAKS

Wash Away

SKILLS

- Coordination
- Creativity
- Imagination

MODIFICATIONS

- Offer examples of something students may want to release: stress, an argument with a friend/family member, anxiety, expectations.
- Offer examples of something students may want more of: kindness, self-compassion, respect, acceptance, love.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Invite students to think of something they want to let go of and imagine it washing out.
2. Students stand with their arms hanging.
3. Students begin to twist from their hips so their arms swing out and wrap around them, first one way, then the other.
4. Repeat until they feel clear.
5. Students think of something they want more of.
6. Imagine tapping it in.
7. Students start at the top of our head and tap down their fronts to their toes; then to their heads. Students tap across both shoulders and down and up their arms.
8. Repeat until they feel refreshed.

RELAXATION

Inner Mountain

Read or paraphrase the following script. Let students know this practice will be 2 -5 minutes long.



INSTRUCTIONS

Invite students to find a comfortable position on their mat in either Easy Pose or Resting Pose.

This practice will be about [insert minutes]. You can keep your eyes open or close your eyes, whichever is most comfortable for you. Take a deep breath in, take a deep breath out. As if you're falling asleep, let go of all thoughts. Just feel your breath. I'll wait for everyone to settle, sigh and melt, release any movement and tension. With every breath, become more and more calm... great.

Imagine that you see a mountain. Notice everything you can about this mountain: its shape and height, its colors and qualities. Notice how calm, strong, steady, wise it is.

Now imagine yourself as the mountain. Let yourself become strong, steady, and solid. Whatever happens, bad weather or good, friendly hikers or not, you, the mountain, stay the same. Your foundation is rooted deep into the earth and you are unshakable. Trust in your foundation and the strength that comes from being able to be with whatever comes, knowing that it will pass. Take a deep breath in, let a deep breath out. Let everything come and go. You notice the world change... Thoughts and feelings come and go, but you, the mountain, remain... strong, steady, solid and still.

Pause for a few moments. (30 second Pause)

Gently begin to wiggle your fingers and your toes. Blink open the eyes if they were closed or slowly lift the gaze. Take any final stretches that feel good to you and slowly come back to a comfortable seated position in your chair.

