

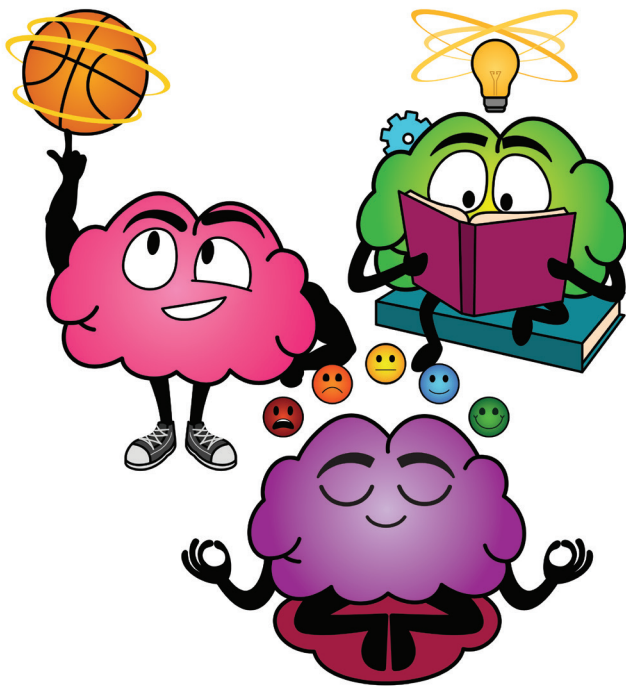
HOW-TO GUIDE:

BRAIN BREAKS: WHY & HOW?

What are Brain Breaks?

Brain breaks are simple and short physical and/or mental exercises designed to manage the physiology and attention of the class and to keep students in the most receptive state possible for further learning. They take virtually no preparation or extra materials to perform.

Why are Brain Breaks important for learning?



Of our three brains (**Wild**, **Emotional** and **Smart**), **Smart Brain** (the cerebral cortex) is the seat of cognition and higher order thinking. The best way to ensure **Smart Brain** is **receptive to learning** is ‘feed the needs’ of the **Emotional** (limbic system) and **Wild** Brains (brain stem and cerebellum). Whole Brain Teaching requires that all three parts of the brain are **stimulated and integrated so that optimal learning can occur**.

One of the best ways to meet our **Wild Brain** needs is through **patterned, repetitive sensory experiences** such as walking, music and stretching. Doing these activities in a group context or with peers also helps to meet the needs of our **Emotional Brain** through **developing relationships and connections**. Once calmed and happy, the **Smart Brain** is **open to cognitive input**.

Physical activity also increases blood flow throughout the body, including the brain. Brain Breaks can also help students to cross the mid-line of their body which helps both sides of the brain engage. The more students are active throughout the day, the more focused they will be. Movement also helps to anchor the information students are learning.

The brain needs time to integrate newly acquired information and fatigues easily if kept concentrating for long periods in a repetitive manner. Neurologically we seek novelty and stimulation so breaking up cognitive tasks with movement and repetitive tasks will **ensure our neurons keep firing**.

Having a short interruption to learning by using a breathing or stretching Brain Break can re-energise students and give them the ability to return to work with **increased focused and attention**.

How do I use Brain Breaks?

Select Brain Breaks that are appropriate for the class you are teaching. You might find that Brain Breaks that enthuse, excite and uplift the class are too stimulating for some classes at some time periods, preferring to use a calming break. Trial a range of Brain Breaks and discover what works best to help students take a break then quickly re-engage with their learning. Brain Breaks that continue to use the lesson content can also support learning efficiency and keep the break 'on task.'

Using Brain Breaks in acknowledgment of class effort and concentration gives students a well earned break. You can also nominate individual students or groups to select the Brain Break from a menu of trialled possibilities.

Brain Breaks work for all ages (including us adults). They can be presented as brain twisters or games to secondary students if you are concerned about age appropriateness.

When do I use Brain Breaks?

Spread your Brain Breaks throughout the day. Aim for one every 20 minutes or when concentration lags and learning fatigue sets in. Think about opportunities to incorporate Brain Breaks:

- During transitions
- Before or after a long work time
- Before or after a test
- After break times to calm down and focus
- When the class needs a pick-me-up
- As a class reward/recognition of sustained effort
- To mix things up during a content lesson
- During waiting time before a presentation, guest speaker etc.

TIPS

- Create a positive atmosphere that enhances self-esteem for all students.
- Make sure every student understands the Brain Break expectations prior to the start of the activity.
- Link a Brain Break with some aspect of the content you are teaching where possible.
- Use Brain Breaks as a transition activity, such as walking around the room before starting a new task.
- Incorporate Brain Breaks into activities, such as sitting at a new desk to answer each question on a worksheet.
- If you participate in Brain Break activities, your students are more likely to join you. Model enthusiasm for physical activity.
- Tell your students why you do Brain Breaks: movement helps to get the blood flowing to the brain so they can think better and feel more alert.
- Use appropriate music that appeals to the age group.
- Integrate class content into movement.
- After a high energy activity, you might like to get students to take 30 seconds to do a breathing activity to bring their focus to their breath and settle them ready for the next activity.
- Put the Brain Breaks you like to use on paddle pop sticks or bright cards and let students pick one out of a box. This way the ideas are easily at hand and don't require you to think of one on the spot when needed.
- Set a time limit and share this with the students before beginning movement.
- Help students regulate by stepping them through 3 phases of movement:
 - High movement (uplifting)
 - Medium movement/more focused
 - Focused activity (calm, relaxed)
- Compliment groups or individuals so that everyone feels as though their participation was valued.

Where do I find Brain Breaks?

The Reboot Resource Bank (<https://rebootingeducation.com/reboot-resource-bank/>) has a list of Brain Breaks Ideas that are categorised into age categories and by duration; Uplifting and Calming; Gross motor movement; Fine motor movement; Thinking; and Breathing.

Other sources include:

- Active Plan, Active Learning: Brain Breaks Guide (pdf download):
<https://sph.uth.edu/content/uploads/2014/06/APAL-Brain-Breaks-Guide.pdf>
- Visit Go Noodle, a free website with lots of movement activities:
<http://www.gonoodle.com>
- Brain Breaks – Why and How (2 ¼ min YouTube video):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhFiNwULXAA>
- Brain Gym – simple exercises for a better mind and body:
<https://brutallyfrank.wordpress.com/2011/07/05/brain-gym-simple-exercises-for-a-better-mind-and-body/>

Troubleshooting

What do I do if...

- The student doesn't want to or refuses to participate: Some students may seem apathetic towards Brain Breaks that they see as silly or pointless. These are common expressions of being self-conscious about trying something new in front of their peers. Seek a Brain Break that connects with the student who is refusing to participate – make it irresistible to them. With practice, this discomfort can be minimised and students will be more relaxed and willing to participate.
- Students won't stop the Brain Break activity: Set up a 'stop signal' at the beginning of Brain Breaks to make sure you can bring the group back together.
- Students remain hyperactive after a Brain Break: If you are having trouble calming students down, you can play soft, calming music or take students through a series of deep breathing exercises.
- Students start to pick on each other: If students stay so busy and engaged with the Brain Break activity, conflict should be minimal.

Videos

- Brain development: activities for self regulation (4 mins):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVRO7PdYRnM&app=desktop>
- Brain Breaks: Why and How (2¼ mins):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhFiNwULXAA>

Reading/References

- The Brain Breaks study (University of Western Australia):
<http://www.science.uwa.edu.au/future-students/postgrad/opportunities/human/brain>
- Why Crossing the Midline activities helped this child listen to his teacher:
<http://ilslearningcorner.com/2015-11-why-crossing-the-midline-activities-helped-this-child-listen-to-his-teacher/>
- Why kids need to move, touch and experience to learn:
<https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/03/26/why-kids-need-to-move-touch-and-experience-to-learn/>