

Shake, Rattle, and Move: Wake-me Uppers for Kids

YogaHub

Virtual World Yoga & Meditation Conference

February 7 – 11, 2012



Sandy Bothmer, M.Ed., KYT 200,
CKYT/T, author of *Creating the Peaceable Classroom*

www.peaceablepathways.com / sandy@peaceablepathways.com

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Sandy Bothmer, M.Ed., Reiki Master, CKYT/T, KYT200

In today's stressful world, it is often the case that our kids need to take it easy, breathe, and relax. But the flip side of relaxation is true as well. Sometimes kids need **energization**, to get the juices going, so to speak. Any classroom teacher is well aware of the 2:00 slump where their students have difficulty focusing and thinking. They are often slumped down in their chairs, head in hand, or even worse, head resting on the desktop. Add a dreary, rainy day to the mix and the sleepy state increases.

So why does lethargy occur in mid afternoon? Well, it seems that it is a natural occurrence, our biological clock, the circadian cycle ticking, causing us to become sleepy between 2 and 4 in the afternoon when the hormone melatonin is released and the body temperature drops causing drowsiness, though not as much as in the evening before bedtime. The type and amount of light received, body temperature, the release of hormones, and the oxygen circulating in the blood can affect the circadian cycle. Ideally, one would take a short 20-minute nap to re-energize when the afternoon slump occurs, but for kids in school, this isn't possible. They have to maintain focus and attention for learning even though they are sleepy. So what is the antidote for this condition? Very simply, it's shake, rattle and move!

Yes, moving is a great way to combat the drowsiness that happens in the afternoon. It helps to:

- *increase oxygen circulation throughout the body.
- *increase body temperature combating the circadian cycle.
- *release adrenalin stimulating the brain.

Getting some direct sunlight will help as well but may not be possible during school due to the curriculum being taught at that time. However, the teacher might be able to plan for a curriculum activity outside if it is appropriate for the content.

With this in mind, we'll explore some movement activities and exercises that will help bring aliveness back to your child so he can do his best work at

school: think more clearly and learn more effectively or move through a weekend afternoon activity with more vitality. Some of the activities and exercises explored can be found in Sandy's book *Creating the Peaceable Classroom*. Participants will also benefit from this experience and may want to adopt some of the exercises themselves. We all need **energization!**

Bring: water bottle, journal, pen or pencil, Yoga Dots® or a non-skid scatter rug

FIRE BREATH

Fire Breath is a child's version of Breath of Fire (p. 48 *Creating the Peaceable Classroom*). It is a great way for your child to wake-up and revitalize when she is tired, giving her renewed energy and vitality.

1. Have your child place a hand on her belly so that she feels it go in and out as she take a series of six short, quick breaths, in and out through the nose.
2. Rest for ten seconds and repeat the series two more times with ten second rests in between.
3. When the series is done, ask your child how she feels. Does she still feel tired? Does she feel more awake? If she still feels tired, you may want to repeat the series again.

Ideally, your child will learn over time that this technique is helpful for her energization, and she will be able to self-regulate.

SWINGING BREATH

The swinging breath is a good way to wake-up the body and mind **plus** it is fun to do together. Have your child begin in a standing position with her feet a couple of fist widths (hip width) apart and her arms hanging loosely at her sides. Then have her

1. Breathe in swinging her arms up over her head alongside her ears.
2. Swing her arms down along her sides and behind on the exhalation, bending her knees as her torso bends over her legs. Repeat six times.
3. When done, after the upswing, have her exhale her arms down to her sides and stand in stillness. Ask her, “How do you feel in your body now?”

QIGONG FOR KIDS

Qigong is not just for adults; it’s for kids too. Just as with adults, it works to balance their qi (chee), vital energy, through movement, gong (kung). It’s energy exercise, fun and effective! The directions to these exercises are written for an adult teaching a child.

The Swings (Empty Coat Sleeves)

This exercise helps to get the energy moving in the body and is a great massage for the internal organs. Have your child

1. Place his feet shoulder width apart.
2. Turn his upper body from side to side. The arms are loose and gently tap the body as they swing from side to side.
3. Add sound to the movement by inhaling to one side and exhaling with a, “Ha,” to the other side.
4. Come to a close by reducing the energy put into the movement.
5. Stand in stillness and notice how he feels.

Jelly Jiggle

This is a quick way to get the energy in one's body moving again. Kids enjoy telling you what kind of jelly they are! Have your child

1. Stand with his feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, arms hanging loosely at his sides and the crown of his head reaching toward the ceiling, the stable wu ji (woo gee) position.
2. Bounce his body up and down from the knees. His arms and hands will jiggle at his sides as the rest of his body goes up and down.
3. Bounce for a while then slowly decrease the energy given to the exercise and come to a stop.
4. Stand in stillness and notice how he feels.

WIGGLE, WIGGLE, WIGGLE WORM

This activity helps to get the wiggles out. It is designed to exercise the six movements of the spine: front and back, side to side, and twisting from side to side at different levels (high, medium, low). You might need to explore the levels first. Have your child

1. Find different ways to bend her spine forward and backward with forward bends and back bends at different levels (high, medium, low).
2. Find different ways to bend her spine to the side at different levels.
3. Find different ways to twist from side to side at different levels.
4. Start to wiggle her body beginning at the fingers, up the arms, then the torso, and down to the toes. Let her wiggle like a worm all over. Have her try it on the floor, on her tummy, and on her back.

HOW DOES YOUR BODY WANT TO MOVE?

Let your child explore moving his body to the sounds of various instruments. You'll need an array of instruments that make different sounds to encourage his creative moving. Here is a list of some instrument possibilities:

drum	bells	shakers
claves	triangle	chimes
tingshas	slide whistle	clickers
tambourine	cymbal	gong

Set the parameters for movement: self-space (one's own space) general space (a designated area in the room), both self-space and general space. You might take turns using the instrument and watching each other move.

Depending upon the age of your child, you might also ask him questions related to the

- speed of his movement (medium, slow, fast)
- energy of his movement (smooth, sharp, shaky, swiny)
- weight of his movement (strong, light)
- flow of his movement (free, bound)

(Gilbert, 2006)

You might say, "When you moved to the sound of the shaker, was your body moving slow, medium, or fast? Was your movement strong or light?"

You can also find household items to make sound with such as crumpling tissue paper or newspaper, striking a wooden spoon on a pan, and spinning a lettuce spinner. Use your imagination and watch your child use his as he moves the way the sound makes his body want to move!

Variation

If you don't have instruments to use, play a song from a CD and ask your child to move his body the way the music makes him want to move. See chapter 13 in *Creating the Peaceable Classroom* for music options.

MOVE AND SHAPE

This activity requires focused listening and promotes freedom of expression. You'll need a drum or lively music and Yoga Dots if you have them. Of course, you could use your hands as an instrument and clap a rhythm.

1. If you have yoga dots, place them randomly on the floor and have your child find one to stand on. You can stand on one too. Otherwise, have your child stand in her self-space.
2. Play a lively song on a CD or a rhythm on the drum and have your child move around the dots or room walking with front, back, or side body leading. (Remind your child to look over his shoulder so she doesn't bump into something when moving with the back body leading.) Another way would be to skip in her own way, slide, river run (slow running with tiny steps, arms at the side), hop, or create a new way around the dots or in the room.
3. At some point say, "Find a dot and make your own shape or a yoga shape," or "Stop and make a shape."
4. You might suggest the size and speed of the movement that would go with your rhythm such as, "Move slowly with large steps," or "Move fast with tiny steps." Or say, "Show me how a giant would move to this rhythm." Another way would be to ask afterwards, "When the rhythm was fast, what kind of steps did you take?"
5. Continue until the CD song is done or you see your child has had enough.

POPCORN POPPING

Tell your child that he is going to imagine that he is a kernel of corn in a popcorn popper. He will start out popping slowly but as the popper heats up he will pop faster and faster then slow down again and come to stillness when the last kernel has been popped.

1. Have your child crouch down low on a yoga dot or in his self-space (You can do the same.).
2. Pretend to turn the popper on and have him say, "Pop," each time he pops up. (You can do the same.) You might also use a clicker for the popping sound. Your child will pop up with each click.
3. As the popper heats up, the popping gets faster and faster then starts to slow down and stops as the last kernel pops.

This is fun with a group of children as they all pop up at different times.

BRAINDANCE

Adapted from Anne Green Gilbert's Work

This is a quick warm-up for whole brain integration, recuperation, oxygenation, centering, relaxation and rejuvenation. Have your child do the entire sequence or parts of it as time permits.

BREATH 4-5 Complete (Dirgha) Breaths

TACTILE Finger tap, palm pat, squeeze, then brush the front, back side bodies, arms, legs, and head.

CORE TO DISTAL Round into a ball and extend out into an X. Repeat.

HEAD TO TAIL Standing, swing the arms up overhead curving the back into a C, then swing them down, bending the knees going into a squat as the arms swing back along the sides. Repeat.

UPPER LOWER BODY Stand with the feet hip or shoulder width apart. Press the feet into the earth and imagine roots growing out of the bottoms of your feet into the earth. Keep the knees slightly bent. Move the upper body from the head to the hips in many, varied ways. Next, reach the arms out to the sides in a T position. Release the feet and move the lower body from the hips down in many, varied ways.

SIDE BODY Start with your feet planted firmly hip width apart. Shift your weight to your left leg and move the right side of your body in many, varied ways. Shift your weight to right side of your body and move the left side of your body in many, varied ways.

CROSS LATERAL Find as many ways to move cross laterally as you can. i.e. right elbow to left knee, left elbow to right knee, right hand to left foot in front to the body, left hand to right knee in front of the body (Try this from the back side too.)

VESTIBULAR STIMULATION With feet hip width apart, bend over from the hinge (the crease where leg and hip meet) with the crown of the head reaching toward the floor and the sits bones reaching toward the ceiling, ribs to thighs arms hanging loosely. Sway the arms and torso from side to side and rock forward and backward. **End with three deep breaths.**

MACHINE MAKING

Making machines encourages problem solving, creative thinking, and concentration waking-up the body/mind. You can partner with your child or children/students to make interesting connections.

1. Have your child make a shape with his body creating open spaces with his arms and legs, bending or twisting then move a body part(s) while making a sound. i.e. the arms go up and down as she says, “Ch, ch, ch, ch. . . .”
2. You find a way to move a body part(s) in and out of your partners open space making a sound as you move it. (Both of you are moving at the same time, a machine in motion.)
3. If you like, you can speed-up the movements and sound, then slow it down until it stops or fizzles out.

If you have more than one child, they will come in one at a time adding on by moving a body part in and out of another open space while they make a sound for their movement.

In conclusion, you can help your child overcome the afternoon slump by getting him up and moving. Playful, energizing activities and exercises are the antidote for this condition as well as a dose of sunshine. So, the next time your students slump at their desks around 2 p.m. just as you are ready to teach social studies or your child complains that he's tired on a Saturday afternoon, just get him up to shake, rattle, and move!

Reference / Resource List

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THOUGHTS