

# BREATHE— MOVE— LEARN <sup>With</sup> **YOUNG CHILDREN**



**Activities**  
in **Mindfulness,**  
**Brain-Friendly**  
**Movement,** and  
**Social-Emotional**  
**Learning**

**Marcia Lee Unnever**

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# BREATHE— MOVE— LEARN <sup>With</sup> **YOUNG CHILDREN**



## **Activities** in Mindfulness, Brain-Friendly Movement, and Social-Emotional Learning

by

**Marcia Lee Unnever**

Educational Trainer  
New Mexico

Illustrations by Damon Pellican  
Photos by Nicholas Valdes

· P A U L · H ·  
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70 Activities in Mindfulness, Brain-Friendly Movement, and Social-Emotional Learning by Marcia Lee Unnever

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## About the Author

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Marcia Lee Unnever is an Educational Trainer certified by the state of New Mexico. She is an educational innovator and the creator of Breathe—Move—Learn, which combines mindful breathing, brain-friendly classroom physical activity, and social-emotional learning for early childhood and elementary school.

Since 1970, Marcia has taught thousands of pre-school and elementary school children and teachers in New Mexico and California. In 2010, she founded Kids Focus, a program dedicated to helping every child and teacher feel strong, positive, healthy, and smart.

Marcia is a featured TEDxABQED speaker and a member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the National Head Start Association (NHSA). Marcia can be contacted at her website: [www.kidsfocususa.com](http://www.kidsfocususa.com).



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*For the children ¡Para los niños!*

# BREATHE—MOVE—LEARN

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## How and Why It Works

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Breathe—Move—Learn by Kids Focus is unique! It works with the **WHOLE CHILD!** This program is being enjoyed by hundreds and hundreds of children and teachers, from early childhood through elementary school, both online and in person in the classroom.

Children love these three powerful tools:

- Mindful Breathing and Sensory Exercises
- Brain-friendly Movements
- Social-Emotional Learning

These three tools support and accelerate **children’s physical, mental, and emotional growth and development.** Mindful breathing and sensory exercises help kids feel calmer and more alert. Brain-friendly movement helps kids wake up, focus, and get smarter. Social-emotional learning promotes happiness, kindness, and self-compassion.

The bounty of rewards from these tools is huge. The more consistently and frequently you use these tools inside your daily classroom routine, the more you will see improvements in your students’ physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as openness to learning and giving greater effort in the classroom.

The combination of mindful breathing, sensory exercises, brain-friendly movement, and social-emotional learning supports the following essential skills and abilities:

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| ✓ Physical Fitness                         | ✓ Self-Awareness      |
| ✓ Mental and Emotional Well-Being          | ✓ Self-Management     |
| ✓ Focus and Concentration                  | ✓ Social Awareness    |
| ✓ Emotional Self-Regulation                | ✓ Relationship Skills |
| ✓ Responsible Decision-Making              | ✓ Problem-Solving     |
| ✓ Positive Attitude                        | ✓ Growth Mindset      |
| ✓ Less Test Anxiety and Higher Test Scores | ✓ Anti-bullying       |
| ✓ Decreases ADD/ADHD Behavior              |                       |

FOR MORE, go to: [bpub.fyi/BML](http://bpub.fyi/BML)

The quickest and easiest way to see these results happen in your classroom is to make these tools part of your daily classroom curriculum. It can be as easy as 1 – 2 – 3.

You can use all three steps or a combination of any of these steps anytime you want to help kids feel calmer, more focused, and open to learning. These steps require only minutes (or longer if you choose).

Using a combination of these steps ALWAYS WORKS to switch on the brain, promote childhood growth and development, and open the door to learning any subject in your curriculum. You can customize the exercises to fit your kids' needs and the time of day.

## The Power of Breathe/*Respira*



### Kids Focus Breathing and Sensory Exercises

Breathwork is powerful. The Kids Focus breathing exercises are designed to provide brain activation as well as an overall feeling of calmness, well-being, alertness, and increased focus. The benefits of simple breathing exercises are immense and instantaneous, and they are easy to do.

Besides powering the brain and body, breathing is an easy, natural way to introduce mindfulness to kids. Breathing happens right now and that's what mindfulness is all about—simply being aware of this present moment without judgment or the need to change anything.

The awareness that can happen with breathing exercises allows for the calm recognition of our feelings, thoughts, and sensations. Awareness opens the space for acceptance and peace. Breathing exercises help us learn how to respond with kindness and compassion for ourselves and for others.

Kids can learn to relax their bodies and minds and let go of stress and anxiety. Being mindful of feelings, sensations, and thoughts also gives kids an opportunity to make new and healthier choices.

The Kids Focus sensory exercises go hand in hand with breathing to provide brain activation, relax the mind and body, and sharpen focus. Using the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—literally lights up different neural pathways throughout the brain which also helps kids focus and feel more alert.

## The Power of Move/*Muevete*



### Kids Focus Brain-Friendly Movements

It's really important for kids to hear that movement/exercise is one of the most powerful ways for them to build a strong brain and body. Movement is the single most important thing you can do to enhance the brain's function and resiliency, according to Sanjay Gupta, M.D.

If you want to turn on a light, you flip the switch. The same thing happens for the human brain. For kids who are in their chairs a lot, the lights are so dim they can't think clearly. And they're bored. Even as little as 2 minutes of structured physical activity in the classroom helps switch on the brain and sharpens focus.

Kids Focus movements include stretching, cross-lateral movement, and marching or dancing. These structured physical activities in the classroom are all you need to flip the switch.

## **ADD/ADHD**

Research studies indicate that structured physical activity has been shown to improve behavior, emotional control, and cognitive function in kids struggling with ADD/ADHD behavior. Kids Focus movements are structured physical activities that help kids focus and learn to self-regulate in the classroom.

## **Physical Modifications**

For modified physical education (P.E.) and children with restricted movement, the Kids Focus movements can be done seated using the upper body or hands when possible. Even watching activates the neural pathways in the brain and lifts the spirits. The enthusiasm is infectious, whether you are standing, seated, or just watching.

It's important to let kids know that any movement should ALWAYS feel good. Kids should be encouraged to feel comfortable in their bodies. Let them know that they can modify a movement (e.g., move slower, less vigorously) for their comfort level. Pain is never an indicator of gain. Most of all, for every child, encourage participation, not perfection.

## **Special Education**

The principles for activating and balancing the brain apply to students in special education as in any other classroom. The movements can be a great support for the growth and development of a strong, healthy brain and body in every child.

Balancing the brain through movement supports emotional growth and self-regulation. Mastery may take a big longer for kids with mental or physical challenges. However, most kids are naturally intrigued by the different Kids Focus movements and the challenges they present. Encourage observation and participation, not perfection.

# **The Power of Learn/*Aprende***



## **Kids Focus SEL or Your Curriculum**

After breathing and sensory exercises and movement have switched on the brain and helped them focus, kids are ready and eager to learn. Kids are alert, refreshed, calm, and focused, so learning feels like the right next step.

**LEARN can encompass ANY SUBJECT or CURRICULUM such as reading, math, science, history, etc.** In the Kids Focus program, learning refers to social-emotional learning (SEL). Thirty-three Kids Focus SEL lessons are included in this book.

Remember: Every type of learning is most effective AFTER kids do breathing and sensory exercises and/or a variety of cross-lateral movements.

## The Active Brain



### How to Get Smarter

The human brain contains over one hundred billion brain cells and trillions of connections between brain cells. The brain is the command center for everything we think, feel, and do. Different areas and neural networks in the brain control and direct all the functions of the mind and body, sending and receiving chemical and electrical signals to and from the body.

Kids are intrigued to learn the science of how the brain is connected to everything we think, feel, and do. They are amazed that they can make their own brain cells multiply and become smarter by doing things they love to do like walking, running, dancing, exploring, reading, writing, etc.

Kids also appreciate learning about the connection between breathing, moving, and firing up their brains. It's inspiring to share brain facts. For example, although the brain accounts for only 2% of our body weight, the brain uses approximately 25% of our blood flow and 20% of the oxygen we breathe to function properly.

### Activating the Brain

Breathing and moving have a huge impact on our brains. Our brains must have a constant, deep supply of oxygen to grow and develop. The Kids Focus breathing exercises provide essential oxygen and blood flow to the brain and body, calming the nervous system and improving alertness and focus. And the exercises are fun.

It's also enlightening to understand that the brain is connected to the spinal cord running down the length of the spine. So, posture counts. The brain sends signals to every part of the body through the nerve connections in the spine.

When you do the Kids Focus movements and exercises, let kids know which parts of the brain they are activating and using. This knowledge is self-empowering and provides a springboard for self-awareness and motivation for self-regulation.

For example, during sensory exercises, I touch different parts of my head or point to a huge illustration of the Active Brain (see the next page) to indicate that we are activating different locations in the brain for vision, smell, taste, movement, memory, etc.

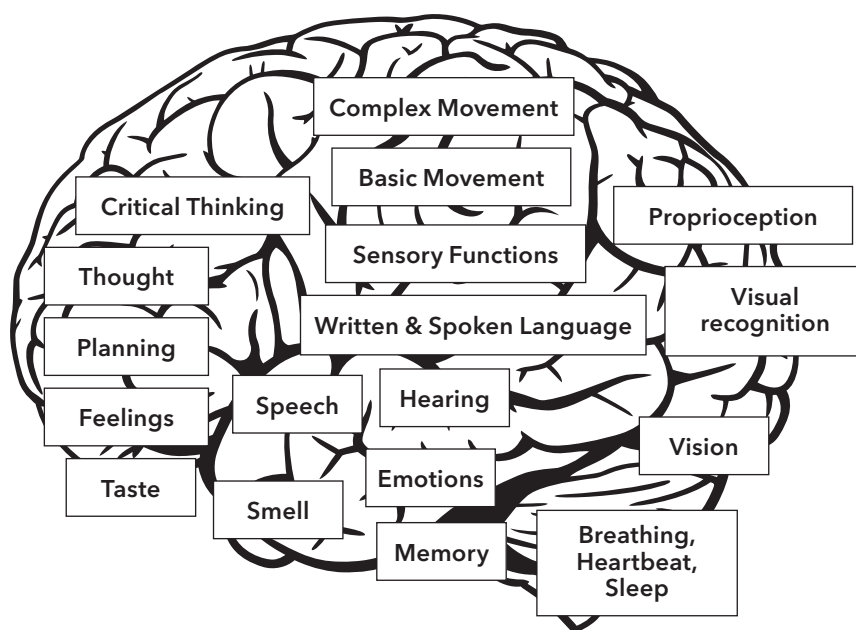
Here are some other ways to point out parts of the brain being activated: When I ask kids to look around and find something green, I tell them they just woke up the back of their

brains! When I ask them to make believe they can smell an orange, I tell them they just woke up the bottom front of their brains! Sensory exercises are great examples of the connections between the brain and the body.

I also fold my fingers into a fist and use my fist and arm as a model of the brain with my arm representing the spinal cord. I point out the areas for higher-level thinking at the front of my fist as well as areas in the back, sides and middle of my fist to show the locations on the brain that connect to important bodily functions. The fist-and-arm model also emphasizes the importance of a straight, strong spine.

### You Can Do It!

Most important of all, kids need to understand that each of us has the ability to consciously mold and strengthen different parts of the brain, through mindful breathing, movement, and exploration of our feelings and thoughts, and social and emotional concepts. You can sharpen your brain. That's exciting.



Active Brain

## How To Use in Your Classroom

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### **Breathe—Move—Learn With SEL (15 minutes+)**

Using the three steps of Breathe—Move—Learn switches on the brain and gets kids eager and open to experiencing a social-emotional learning lesson. These steps can be completed in as little as 15 minutes or longer if you wish in your classroom. I recommend doing Breathe—Move—Learn with a social-emotional learning lesson at least once a day.

#### ***Sample Lesson Plan With SEL***

- **STEP 1—Breathe/*Respira***

##### **Kids Focus Breathing and Sensory Exercises**

- Check Inside
- Breathing and Sensory Exercises

- **STEP 2—Move/*Muevete***

##### **Kids Focus Brain-Friendly Movements**

- Safety Reminders
- Tapping and Stretching
- Cross-Lateral Movement
- Marching or Dancing

- **STEP 3—Learn/*Aprende***

##### **Kids Focus SEL**

- Slow Down with Breathing Exercise
- Kids Focus SEL Topic
- Drawing and Sharing
- Check Inside
- Daily Messages

### **Breathe—Move—Learn With Your Curriculum (15 minutes+)**

You can use Breathe—Move—Learn without the social-emotional learning component. You can pick and choose individual Kids Focus breathing and sensory exercises and/or Kids Focus movements to intersperse throughout the school day before studying any subject in your curriculum—letters, numbers, math, reading, science, etc. These steps can be completed in as little as 15 minutes or longer if you wish in your classroom.

# FOR MORE, go to: [bpub.fyi/BML](http://bpub.fyi/BML)

The sample lesson plan below shows the steps for using Breathe—Move—Learn with any subject in your curriculum.

Remember: **Breathe and Move switches on the brain for LEARNING EVERYTHING.** Doing Breathe and Move before studying a particular subject helps kids feel calm and focused and ready to learn.

## *Sample Lesson Plan With Your Curriculum*

- **STEP 1—Breathe/*Respira***

### **Kids Focus Breathing and Sensory Exercises**

- Breathing Exercises
- Sensory Exercises

- **STEP 2—Move/*Muevete***

### **Kids Focus Movements**

- Safety Reminders
- Stretching
- Cross-Lateral Movement

- **STEP 3—Learn/*Aprende***

### **Learning Your Curriculum**

- Slow Down With Breathing Exercise
- Learn Math—Reading—Science—Social Studies, etc.
- Check Inside
- Daily Messages

## *Sample Lesson Plan With SEL or Your Curriculum*

Approximate Timing: 30-45 Minutes

The sample lesson plan below shows how to combine Breathe—Move—Learn with either SEL or your own curriculum (e.g., learning numbers or letters).

The time you give to Step 1—Breathe or Step 2—Move can be expanded when kids need more physical and/or emotional support. The time you give to Step 3—Learn can be expanded to allow more time for sharing an SEL concept or exploring a challenging topic in your curriculum.

- **STEP 1—Breathe/*Respira***

### **Kids Focus Breathing and Sensory Exercises—3 Minutes**

- Check Inside                                   45 Seconds
- Balloon Belly Breathing               30 Seconds



FOR MORE, go to: [bpub.fyi/BML](http://bpub.fyi/BML)

- Scoop the Air and Push Up 45 Seconds
- Buzz Like a Bee 30 Seconds
- Find Something Green 30 Seconds
- **STEP 2—Move/*Muevete***
  - Kids Focus Brain-friendly Movements—10 Minutes**
    - Safety Reminders 30 Seconds
    - Healthy Taps 1½ Minutes
    - Wake-Up Taps 2 Minutes
    - Stretch in All Directions 1 Minute
    - Cross Lifts 2 Minutes
    - Marching 3 Minutes
  - **STEP 3—Learn/*Aprende*—16 Minutes**
    - Kids Focus SEL**
      - Breathe in the Flower/Blow out the Candle 1 Minute
      - Gratitude—The Glad Tree (Presentation) 3 Minutes  
OR Math Concept
      - Drawing OR Skill Exercise 5 Minutes
      - Sharing OR Checking Mastery 6 Minutes
      - Check Inside 30 Seconds
      - Daily Messages 1½ Minutes

### Meeting Kids' Needs and Timing

Breathe—Move—Learn can be used to meet a variety of mental, emotional, and physical needs at different times throughout the school day. These tools can provide:

- Brain Wake-Up—when kids feel sleepy, tired, or bored
- Brain Booster—when kids feel distracted, unfocused, or inattentive
- Brain Balancer—when kids feel emotional, impulsive, or hyperactive
- Brain Soother—when kids feel anxious, unsafe, or scared

### ***Start the School Day***

Timing: 15-30 minutes

Starting the school day with Breathe—Move—Learn with SEL sets the tone for the whole day. Kids feel energized, calm, focused, and emotionally balanced.

### ***Wake Up After Lunch***

Timing: 15-30 minutes

Kids can feel sleepy, unfocused, or tired after lunch. Taking time to breathe and move rejuvenates the mind and the body.

### ***End the School Day***

Timing: 15-30 minutes

Ending the school day with Breathe—Move—Learn with SEL helps kids feel calm and emotionally balanced. It's a great way to take these positive feelings home with them. And they can look forward to coming back to school to practice those feelings again.

### ***3-Minute Brain Power Boost***

Timing: 3 minutes

Breathe—Move—Learn can be used as a quick brain power boost when kids are feeling distracted, inattentive, hyperactive, or emotionally challenged. Breathing followed by movement can get kids back on track quickly. If time is limited, use breathing exercises OR movement.

### ***Build Positive Class Culture***

Timing: 15-30 minutes

When kids breathe, move, and share together, a bond of trust and safety is built. Working out together allows each of us to share our humanity in the form of feelings, thoughts, and needs.

### ***Reduce Bullying and Conflict***

Timing: 3-5 minutes

Breathe—Move—Learn can quickly interrupt a cycle of strong negative emotions and behaviors like bullying and calm a budding conflict. Breathing and moving together helps kids pause, take a deep breath, calm down, and experience a natural time-out without punishment. This natural pause provides an opportunity to re-evaluate our emotions and make a better, kinder choice.

STEP  
1

# Breathe/Respira

## Kids Focus Breathing and Sensory Exercises

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** Check Inside/

*Revisa el interior*

### BREATHING EXERCISES

1. Balloon Belly Breathing/*Respiración del vientre con globo*
2. Breathe in the Flower—Blow Out the Candle/*Huele la flor—sopla la vela*
3. Breathe Like a Sleeping Bear/*Respira como un oso dormido*
4. Breathe Through the O/*Respira a través de la o*
5. Buzz Like a Bee—Hiss Like a Snake/*Zumba como una abeja—sisea como una serpiente*
6. Count to 5/*Cuenta hasta cinco*
7. Scoop the Air and Push Up/*Recoge el aire y empuja hacia arriba*
8. Slider/*El Deslizador*
9. Trace Your Fingers/*Traza tus dedos*

### SENSORY EXERCISES

10. Hearing—Listen to My Bicycle Horn/*Escuchando—escucha la bocina de mi bicicleta*
11. Seeing—Find Something Green/*Encuentra algo verde*
12. Smelling—Smell the Flower or the Orange/*Oliendo—huele la flor o la naranja*
13. Tasting—Taste Your Favorite Ice Cream/*Probando—probando prueba tu helado favorito*
14. Touching—Clap Your Hands/*Tocando—aplaude*
15. Countdown—All 5 Senses/*Cuenta regresiva—los cinco sentidos*
16. Rest Your Eyes/*Descansa tus ojos*



**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**



Check Inside . . . . . **14**

**BREATHING EXERCISES**



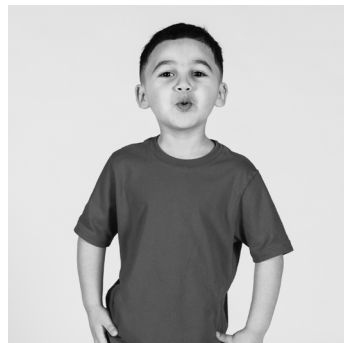
1. Balloon Belly Breathing . . . . . **15**



2. Breathe in the Flower—Blow Out the Candle . . . . . **16**



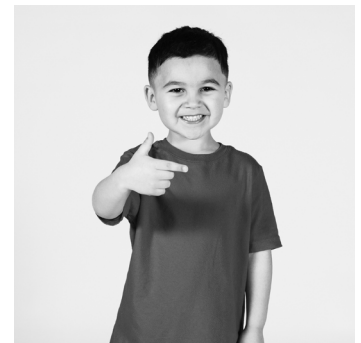
3. Breathe like a Sleeping Bear . . . . . **17**



4. Breathe Through the O . . . . . **18**



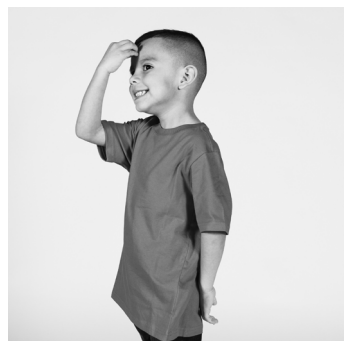
5. Buzz Like a Bee—Hiss Like a Snake . . . . . **19**



6. Count to 5 . . . . . **20**



7. Scoop the Air and Push Up . . . . . **21**



8. Slider . . . . . **22**



9. Trace Your Fingers . . . . . **23**

SENSORY EXERCISES



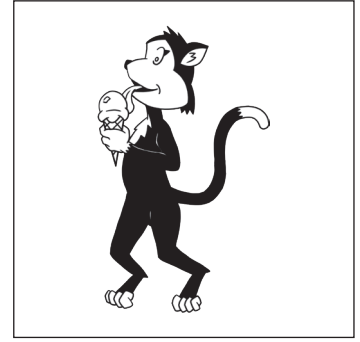
10. Hearing—Listen to My Bicycle Horn . . . . . **24**



11. Seeing—Find Something Green. . . . . **24**



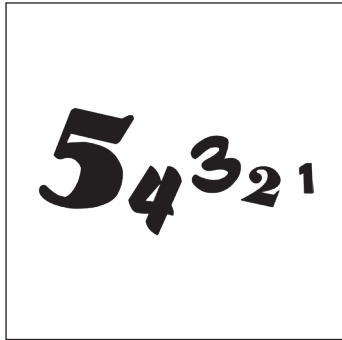
12. Smelling—Smell the Flower or the Orange . . . . . **25**



13. Tasting—Taste Your Favorite Ice Cream . . . **25**



14. Touching—Use Your Hands . . . . . **26**



15. Countdown—All 5 Senses . . . . . **27**



16. Rest Your Eyes. . . . . **28**

# Before You Begin: Check Inside

## *Revisa el interior*

STANDING



Check Inside is the gateway to mindfulness. This exercise helps kids become aware of how they feel and think in the moment. Each of us can look inside ourselves with curiosity and kindness. Do Check Inside several times a day to notice the changes happening in your minds, feelings, and bodies throughout the day.

1. Stand or sit up tall in your chair. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable. Relax your shoulders and breathe easily.
2. Notice the weather inside your body and in your mind. Do you feel stormy, dark, and heavy or calm, bright, and light inside? Do your thoughts match how you feel inside? Just notice without labeling the way you feel as good or bad. Just be curious—and kind.
3. If you just finished a learning lesson, how do you feel about what you learned?
4. If you're not sure how you feel, think about a puppy. What kind of puppy do you feel like right now—jumpy, sad, tired, scared, happy, full of energy? Just notice. Be curious. The way we feel inside changes all the time.
5. Open your eyes. Check Inside again after breathing, moving, or doing a lesson to notice changes in how you feel and think.

# 1 Balloon Belly Breathing

## *Respiración del vientre con globo*

STANDING



Balloon Belly Breathing helps kids switch on their brains and focus their minds. It feels great. Both the exhale and the inhale are important. Breathe through the nose for calmness. Breathe through the mouth for more energy. Yawns are also great.

1. Make believe your lungs are a big balloon. Place your hands on your belly. Breathe deeply way down into your belly. Feel your belly get rounder as you fill your lungs like a big balloon.
2. If it's hard to feel your belly, hold or pretend to hold a small stuffed animal or toy in front of your belly so you can watch the toy move with you.
3. Relax and let the air out slowly with a whooshing sound. Feel your belly sink toward your spine and pull in your belly button a little.
4. Breathe deeply and fill your balloon belly up three more times.

## 2 Breathe in the Flower— Blow Out the Candle

*Huele la flor—sopla la vela*

STANDING OR SITTING



Breathe in the Flower—Blow Out the Candle helps kids easily and comfortably regulate their breathing and calm themselves through visualization. This exercise also gives kids an opportunity to breathe gently and rhythmically.

1. In one hand make believe you are holding your favorite flower in front of your face. Is it a rose or a carnation with a sweet smell? In the other hand make believe you are holding a lit candle.
2. Gently breathe in the fragrance of the flower through your nose.
3. Raise the hand holding your candle. Gently blow out the flame on your candle.
4. Repeat these steps two more times. Breathe in gently. Blow out gently.
5. Take time to notice how you feel with each in and out breath. Do you feel more relaxed now or more comfortable inside your body?



## 3 Breathe Like a Sleeping Bear

*Respira como un oso dormido*

STANDING OR SITTING



Breathe Like a Sleeping Bear is a fun way to help kids visualize and slow down their breathing. Thinking about a sleeping bear naturally helps us slow down our breaths and breathe deeply.

1. Pretend you are a big bear sleeping in a cave for the winter. You are all curled up, feeling comfy and relaxed. Your cave is warm and cozy.
2. **SLOWLY** breathe in as you count to four. **SLOWLY** breathe out as you count to four.
3. Repeat two more times. Try to breathe in and out slower and slower each time.
4. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation in your body and mind. When you wake up, you'll be ready to go.

“Breathe–Move–Learn goes right to the heart of how to support safety, health, and social-emotional well-being for our youngest learners . . . I especially love the sequence and easy-to-use format, making it a must-have resource for everyone who works with young children.”

–Jen Alexander, M.A., NCC, SB-RPT, Author of *Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools* and more!

“Offers an exciting and enriching dimension to the classroom environment, equipping teachers with a diverse array of activities designed to engage a child’s body, mind, and emotions to optimize their whole learning experience.”

–Suzi Tortora, Ed.D., BC-DMT, Founder and Director, Dancing Dialogue, LCAT LMHC PLLC

Get every young child ready to learn—and support their social-emotional development—with these 70 fun, quick, and effective activities! Teachers of early childhood through Grade 3 will love this unique combination of SEL, mindfulness, and brain-friendly physical activity that promotes growth, development, and behavior management.

Designed to increase focus and nurture the essential skills every kid needs for social and academic success, the activities in this teacher-friendly book are a perfect complement to all of today’s popular curricula. They’re field-tested, easy to implement in as little as 15 minutes a day, and great for use in person or in the virtual classroom. Use Breathe–Move–Learn activities throughout the school day to:

- ✓ **Encourage mindfulness** with breathing and sensory exercises that help kids calm down and get focused
- ✓ **Set the stage for learning** with structured movements that support the brain’s function and resiliency
- ✓ **Strengthen social-emotional learning (SEL)** with activities that support the CASEL Core Competencies
- ✓ **Build self-esteem and enthusiasm** with short, uplifting messages to use each day
- ✓ **Reduce behavior challenges** and make everyday classroom management easier
- ✓ **Promote academic achievement**—field testing showed correlation with test score improvement

A must-have for all teachers from early childhood to elementary school, Breathe–Move–Learn activities will help kids develop the mental, physical, emotional, and social skills to support a lifetime of learning.



**Activities Help Promote:**

- Focus and Concentration •
- Self-Management • Physical Fitness •
- Self-Awareness • Mental and Emotional Well-Being • Social Awareness • Emotional Self-Regulation •
- Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision-Making • Problem-Solving •
- Reduced Test Anxiety • Positive Attitude • Growth Mindset •
- Increased Self-Esteem •
- Reduced Bullying

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **Marcia Lee Unnever**, creator of Breathe–Move–Learn, is an educational trainer certified by the state of New Mexico. She is the founder of Kids Focus, a program dedicated to helping every child and teacher feel strong, positive, healthy, and smart. A featured TEDxABQED speaker, Marcia has taught thousands of preschool and elementary school children and teachers in New Mexico and California.

