



## CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IDEAS AND TIPS

There are many names for classroom physical activity — brain boosters, energizers, movement integration, active learning. Regardless of what it is called, the end goal is the same: to get students out of their seat and moving throughout the school day.

Classroom physical activity can be quick 1 to 5-minute bursts of movement that leave students more focused and ready to learn. Educators can plan physical activities in advance (e.g., have it scheduled into the day's class and/or integrated into the lesson to teach academic concepts) or use it as a classroom management tool (e.g., when they notice the class is getting restless and needs a boost in energy).

In the times of COVID-19, it is more important than ever to support children in their mental, social, emotional, and physical health. Students may feel stressed, fatigued, unmotivated, and socially isolated due to the COVID-19 safety precautions at school or virtual learning at home. And, students are at risk of being increasingly sedentary during these times. Classroom physical activity is an important approach to safely and effectively mitigate some of these challenges.

This resource provides simple and easy physical activity ideas that require very little preparation and no equipment. These activities can be done with students standing next to their desks and many are adaptable to different ages, abilities, and settings. Modify activities to better suit your unique class.

Print and cut activity cards for easy access and share them with students to do at home as well. Each activity card is labeled with an icon to indicate the suggested age group, learning setting, and type of physical activity. Although the activities are labeled, we hope they spark some inspiration for other activities and encourage educators to be creative and adapt activities for different grade levels and learning settings.

## General Tips

- ① **Model healthy behavior by participating in physical activity with students.**  
If students are at home, encourage parents/caregivers, siblings, guardians, and other household members to join in, when possible.
- ② **Communicate with parents and caregivers** about the importance of physical activity. Share the types of activities being integrated to keep students active so they know what to expect, understand the purpose, and can support and reinforce participation. Share any practical considerations of which families should be aware (e.g., space needs, audio requirements, noise level, etc.).
- ③ **Ask students to share their physical activity ideas** and give them the opportunity to choose the physical activity idea and/or to lead the activities.
- ④ **Mix it up** — all the ideas are flexible and can be customized. Change the prompts, rotate the movements/exercises, and vary the length of the activity. Make it work for you and your students.
- ⑤ **Play music.** Play a song or tune to signify a movement break. Music and movement can help students feel more energized and less stressed.
- ⑥ **Be mindful of different abilities and provide alternatives** (e.g., arm circles instead of jumping jacks; doing activities from a seated position instead of a standing position). Let students know that it is okay to engage in a different physical activity — the idea is to take a break and move.
- ⑦ **When doing virtual learning, keep in mind where students are physically located** (e.g., in a community center, at home in a crowded space, etc.) and how that might affect their ability to participate in physical activity.
- ⑧ **Notice patterns of student participation** (i.e., who is participating and who is not) with respect to race, gender, language of origin, physical or learning ability, where they are seated, etc. Explore reasons why they may not be engaged and find opportunities to more inclusively engage these students. For example, some students may not know seemingly common terms for movement or games (e.g., jumping jacks, etc.) and therefore might not participate or feel included. To help students feel more comfortable, teachers can model the physical activity and do a practice round with the class. Modeling physical activity is also a best practice.
- ⑨ **Use classroom physical activity as an opportunity to build community** and get to know one another.



## Engage youth in sharing/creating a physical activity

Encourage and give students an option to: 1) create a 1 to 2-minute video of themselves doing, or explaining, an activity of their choice, or 2) write a description of a physical activity idea. These physical activity ideas can be collected and used as a bank for the class to choose activities from.

## List of movements for physical activity breaks

- Side shuffle
- Vertical jumps
- Jump side-to-side
- Run in place
- Squat jump
- High knees
- Jumping jacks
- Skip
- Front & back strokes
- Forward & backwards arm circles
- Standing opposite elbow-to-knee

## List of common stretches

- Hold head to right shoulder, and then head to left shoulder
- Shoulder shrugs/rolls in each direction
- Reach for toes, reach left arm to right foot, reach right arm to left foot, bend over and hold elbows (can sway hips)
- Arms up and wiggle fingers, wiggle toes
- Rotate both wrists in each direction



### HELPFUL TIP:

Engage your school's physical education teacher to model the correct form and how to safely do a list of stretches and physical activities, either in-person or virtually, early and/or throughout the school year.

## Links to more classroom physical activity ideas

### [Active Home from OPEN](#)

Great games, videos, and a PE at Home Calendar.

### [#PlayAtHome from Playworks](#)

A manual full of great games adapted for the home, in English and Spanish, and Live Recess 5x a week at 11, 1, and 3 pm CST.

### [Fitness Breaks from Healthier Generation](#)

Short videos to get the heart rate up and the fun going.

### [HYPE at Home from Hip Hop](#)

#### [Public Health](#)

Fun music videos that can be filtered by grade level, type of media, and PE standards.

### [Good Energy at Home from GoNoodle](#)

Great videos and off-screen activities.

## ICON LEGEND

### AGE RANGES



All ages



Elementary school



Middle school



High school

### CLASSROOM SETTINGS



In-person activity



Virtual activity

### ACTIVITY TYPE



Physical activity break



Physical activity integrated into lessons

## Scavenger Hunt

Give students a list of items to retrieve from their home and a time limit to retrieve them so they move as quickly as possible (e.g., 15 items in 5 minutes). Ideas might include something red, something you wear on your head, something that brings you joy, etc. After time is up, go down the list and ask students show what they found on screen.

**TIP:** You can tie in a few items for the next part of your lesson (e.g., math — something that measures volume; geography — an object that tells a story about a place; literature — a book by a favorite author).

This activity can also be done in-person if it is conducted outdoors.

ALL



## 5-minute Dance Party

Create a playlist and get students to do a different movement every time you change songs.

**TIP:** Use digital content designed to promote classroom physical activity, such as [Hip Hop Public Health](#) and [GoNoodle](#). Let students choose the songs, a video, and the movements.



ES

MS



## Crazy 8's

Choose four different exercises and ask students to do each eight times.

### Examples of exercises:

- 8 jumping jacks
- 8 silly shakes (just shake as silly as you can)
- 8 high knees
- 8 punches
- 8 lunges

**TIP:** Include both upper and lower body movements.

ALL



## Getting to Know You

Ask students to stand up. One by one, each student introduces themselves with their name and favorite physical activity, acting out the activity. The class says hello to the student in response, and also acts out the physical activity.

**VARIATION:** Ask students to stand up and do some kind of movement if something applies to them (e.g., Stand up and do arm circles if your birthday is in the month of December).



ALL





## Stretch Session

Ask students to either stand up by their chair/desk or sit up straight in their chair and lead a short stretch break. Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds.

### Examples of stretches:

- Hold head to right shoulder, and then head to left shoulder
- Shoulder shrugs/rolls in each direction
- Reach for toes, reach left arm to right foot, reach right arm to left foot, bend over and hold elbows (can sway hips)
- Arms up and wiggle fingers, wiggle toes
- Rotate both wrists in each direction

**TIP:** Play calming music in the background while students stretch.

ALL



## Touch Blue

Ask students to touch something with a certain attribute (e.g., "touch blue" - and students touch something blue in their setting). Other ideas: "touch something cold," or "touch something that makes you happy." Students can move around their space and off screen, but they should be able to hear the next instruction. Wait 10 seconds between instructions so the game moves quickly. If a participant cannot find an item during any of the rounds, provide them with an alternative physical activity (e.g., march in place, stretch, high knees, etc.).

**TIP:** Tie in concepts from lessons being taught (e.g., science – touch something recyclable). Then, have students debrief what they touched.

ALL



## Walking Challenge

Organize and facilitate a class walking challenge for a prize and/or as a fundraiser for a cause. Track steps or miles or minutes.

**TIP:** If tracking steps/miles, students can download an app on their phone to use as a pedometer. For students who don't have access to a phone or pedometer, reach out to your local or state health department to ask about programs that offer free pedometers.



MS

HS



## 20-20-20 Rule

Use the 20-20-20 rule where every 20 minutes, you look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds to minimize eye strain.

**TIP:** A variation might be to prompt students to scan the room or walk around and look for an object (e.g., something that starts with the letter "p") and then have a few students share what they saw/found.

ALL



## 4 Walls

Choose 4 different movements. Facing one wall of a room, prompt students to do a movement for 30 seconds. Then, ask them to face another wall and prompt another movement. Repeat until all 4 walls are covered.

### Movement examples:

- Side shuffle
- Vertical jumps
- Arm circles (forward/backwards)
- Jump side-to-side
- Run in place
- Squat jump

**TIP:** For one of the walls, let students choose their own movement or prompt them “act out your favorite activity.”

ALL



## Stand Up — Hand Up — Pair Up

1. Verbally provide or write a prompt or question on the board.
2. Ask students to put their hand up in the air and find a partner by waving to another student.
3. Students are given an identifier for which partner will answer first (i.e., the oldest partner starts).
4. Together, partners answer the prompt together.
5. At the end, partners thank each other and wave again.
6. Students find a new partner by putting their hand back in the air and finding someone new to wave to.

ES

MS



## Up, Down, Stop, Go (Opposites)

- “Up” — Students squat down
- “Down” — Students jump, or stretch up as high as possible
- “Stop” — Students do a specific movement in the same spot (e.g., running, hopping, etc. in place)
- “Go” — Players freeze

Call out the commands “up,” “down,” “stop,” or “go” one at a time. Practice a few rounds before starting to model the activities as you call them out.

**TIPS:** Ask a student to be the caller of the commands.

Add other commands (e.g., “fast” – players move slowly; “forward” – players face backward).

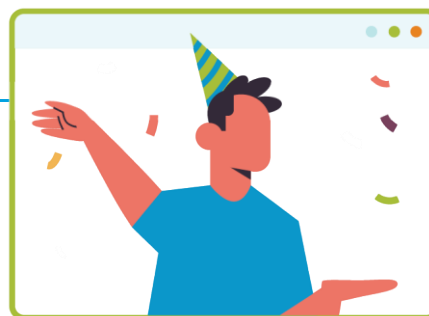
ALL



## Freeze Dance Party

Play music, and when the music stops, students freeze.

**TIP:** Mark off personal space using floor tape or cones, so students have properly distanced boundaries.



ES

MS



## Rock, Paper, Scissors, Jump

Ask students multiple choice questions and have students respond by jumping into the correct position:

- Choice A — feet together
- Choice B — feet apart in a straddle position
- Choice C — one foot in front of the other

Students jump three times and on the fourth jump they should land in the position that corresponds to the correct answer choice.



ALL



## Charades Relay

Review the basics of charades! One person acts out a word or phrase without speaking while the team tries to guess the word is.

Teams compete trying to be the first to guess all items on a prepared list of words. To start, ask one member from each team to come to you. Show the first word on the list and have them return to their group to act it out. Once a member of the group guesses the word correctly, another team member returns to you for the next word. They must tell you the first word before receiving the second word. The game is over once a team completes the list.



**TIPS:** To add more movement, have each player complete a movement before receiving the next word (e.g., 5 lunges).

If virtual, use the chat function to share the list and have teams guess as many words as possible within a short time span.

ALL



## Vote with Your Feet

Post around the classroom signs that say: yes, no, true, false, agree, and disagree.

Depending on the day's lesson, ask students to answer questions by going to stand by the sign that best reflects their answer. If applicable, ask students to elaborate on their answers. Remind students to stand at least 6 feet apart.



**TIPS:** If there is space in the classroom, ask students to actively move (e.g., hop, skip, etc.) to their answer choice.

If virtual, instead of signs around the classroom, use movement to indicate the response. For example, do arm circles if you think A; stretch overhead if you think B; give yourself a big hug if you think C).

## Zip, Zap, Zop

This game challenges groups to stay focused and consistent in rhythm. Have students stand in a circle and repeat: "Zip, Zap, Zop." The first person starts the game by saying "Zip" while clapping their hands together and sliding one hand towards another student. The next person says "Zap," repeating the motion towards a different student. The third person says "Zop," repeating the motion towards another student. Repeat. Encourage eye contact throughout the game.



**TIP:** To add more movement, add "Boing" to the end of the "Zip, Zap, Zop" sequence. When someone says "Boing", everyone jumps up. Then, the person who says "Boing" restarts the sequence with "Zip".

ALL



## Sports Gallery

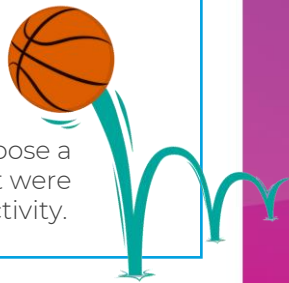
Choose a few different sports skills and ask students to mimic each of them for at least 10 seconds. **Some sports skills ideas:**

- Shooting a basketball
- Kicking a soccer ball
- Dancing like a ballerina
- Hitting a baseball
- Swinging a golf club
- Skiing downhill
- Serving a tennis ball
- Shooting an arrow

**TIPS:** To increase the heart rate, prompt students to change the speed of the actions (e.g., dribble a basketball as fast as you can).

For the final action called, prompt students to mimic their favorite activity.

You can ask students to choose a favorite out of the ones that were just called or any favorite activity.



## Voice Activation

Use voice commands to cue different movements:

- **Play:** Move forward
- **Fast forward:** Run in place as fast as you can
- **Rewind:** Move backwards
- **Pause:** Freeze in place
- **Power off:** Crouch down and curl into a ball
- **Power on:** Jump up with arms and legs spread

**TIPS:** Add on different movements (e.g., move forward while doing arm circles). Ask students to think of other actions to add to the voice commands.

This can be teacher- or student-led. A variation of the game might be to take turns calling out a name with the command (e.g., Student A says, "Sam, play!"; then Sam moves forward and says, "Jamil, power on!"; etc.).

ES

MS



## Would You Rather

Ask students a fun and silly "would you rather" question with two choices. Assign how or where students will move for the two choices.

**For example:** Would you rather be able to fly or read minds? If flying, flap your "wings" to the door (or flap in place). If reading minds, mimic "mind control" and stand by the windows (or mimic "mind control" in place).

After each question, have students volunteer to explain their decisions.

**Other ideas:** Would you rather: explore outer space or the deep blue sea; read or draw; travel to the past or the future.

**TIP:** This is a great "get to know you" activity, but it can also be used to review classroom concepts. For example, in social studies or history class, you can ask: Would you rather go back in time to live in ancient Greece or ancient China?

## Walk and Talk

Break students into groups of 2 or 3, and assign a topic related to a current lesson plan that students need to discuss while taking a 5-minute walk around the classroom, learning space, or outdoor area. After 5-minutes, ask for volunteers to share highlights from their discussion with the whole class.



ALL





## Sentence-by-Sentence Story

Create and tell a story together in real-time. Choose a theme/topic. The first student starts the story with one sentence. As they say the sentence, the student physically acts out the verb or action in the sentence. Each subsequent student adds to the story with one additional sentence, acting out their verb or action. The story ends with the last student.

**TIP:** Before beginning the story, review with students what a verb is and demonstrate with a sentence.

Alternatively, after each student acts out their sentence, ask the whole class to act out the sentence together before proceeding to the next sentence.



ALL



## Physical Activity Jeopardy

Tape 5-10 cards/sheets of paper on a wall in the classroom. On the back of each paper, write a physical activity movement and on the front, write a number (10, 15, 20, 25, etc.).

Call on a student to pick one of the cards, and the class performs the physical activity on the card for the number of repetitions written on the front – while counting out loud.

**Some movement ideas:** Boxing jabs, jumps, push-ups, triceps dips using their chair, arm circles, jumping jacks, elbow to opposite knee touches, etc.

**TIP:** If virtual, use a free online platform such as Factile ([www.playfactile.com](http://www.playfactile.com)) to create a similar board. Be sure to provide alternative activities to take into account different ability levels.

ALL



## Minute Masters

Display a list of different movements for all to see on a wall or board. Set the timer for a designated time and at each minute the students perform a movement of choice (e.g., if the timer is set for 5 minutes, students will do up to 5 different movements for a minute each). Each student may choose different movements or stay on the same one for each minute – let it be the student's choice.

**Some suggested movements:** Jumping jacks, marching, knee lifts, jogging in place, alternating lunges, twisting, jumping, arm circles, crisscrossing both arms, etc.

**TIPS:** If virtual, use a PowerPoint slide to display movement options or ideas.

To make it more fun, play music and let students choose the song.

## Mindfulness 5-4-3-2-1

Use the five senses to focus and ground yourself in the moment. **Narration example:** *First find your breath. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out of your mouth.*

- Look around the room. What do you see? *Find 5 things around you that you can see.*
- Feel around you. What do you feel? *Find 4 things near you that you can touch.*
- Close your eyes. Listen. What do you hear? *Find 3 things around you that you can hear.*
- Keep your eyes closed. Take a deep breath through your nose. What do you smell? *Find 2 things around you that you can smell.*
- With your eyes still closed. What can you taste? *Find 1 thing you can taste.*

Afterwards, debrief with students: How do you feel now? Did anything change?

**TIP:** After each question, you can state a few examples to help prompt students. For example: Find 4 things near you that you can touch. This can be your feet on the ground, the chair, the heat, your socks, etc.

ALL



ALL



## Moving 5-4-3-2-1

Ask students to touch or do 5, 4, 3, 2 things sequentially and then end with 1 calming breath. For example, touch their toes 5 times, twist side-to-side 4 times, do 3 jumping jacks, squat 2 times, and do 1 calming breath.

**TIP:** When it is safe to do so, incorporate variations of the activity – for example, touch 5 tables, 4 walls, 3 chairs, 2 high fives, 1 calming breath; or, find 5 pencils, 4 red objects, 3 things made out of paper, 2 shiny objects, 1 thing you love; etc.

ES

MS



## Yes, No

Call out topics (e.g., orange juice, skydiving, little dogs, etc.) and ask participants to crisscross their arms for “no” if they don’t like the topic or stretch their arms up for “yes” if they do.

**VARIATION:** Instead of yes or no topics, read statements and answer true or false. Students jump in place for 10 seconds for “true” and reach for their toes if “no”. This is a good activity for reviewing and checking content understanding.

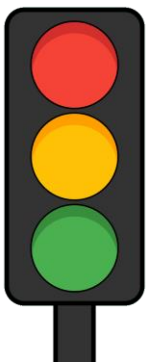


ALL



## Red Light, Green Light

Choose an action for students to copy. Say the following to change the speed of the action:



- Red light! = Freeze in place
- Yellow light! = Slow down the action
- Green light! = Repeat the action as fast as possible

**TIP:** Once students are familiar with the activity, ask students to take turns leading and/or coming up with the movements.

ES

MS



## What Changed?

Ask students to pay attention and see if they notice any changes. Strike a pose and freeze for 30 seconds. Turn off the camera and change something about your appearance. Turn the camera back on and ask students to try to guess what changed.

**TIPS:** The student who guesses right can be the next person to strike a pose.

If in-person, have students turn around while you change your pose/appearance.

MS

HS



## Classroom Physical Activity Calendar

As a group, have students provide ideas to fill in a monthly "Classroom Physical Activity Calendar." Once the calendar is complete, post the calendar in the room and/or provide each student with a copy of the calendar. Do the assigned activity for each day throughout the month.

**TIPS:** Encourage students to lead the activities, especially one that they suggested.

Use a free online calendar template ([www.editablecalendar.com](http://www.editablecalendar.com)) to populate ideas, download/ print, and share.



MS

HS



## Instant Stress Relief

For a quick way to relax and calm the class, choose one of the options below:

**Pressure point massage:** Gently massage the pressure point between your thumb and pointer finger for one minute. Switch hands after 30 seconds.

**Breathing exercise:** For 6 total breathes, have students breathe in slowly (4 count), hold for 4 seconds, breathe out slowly (4 count), and hold for 4 seconds.

**Count backwards:** Slowly count to 10 and then back down to 1.

**Progressive relaxation:** Squeeze your body, release/relax your body – repeat 5 times.

**TIP:** These activities can be done at any time. Try one at the start of class, before a test, at the end of the day, etc. This could also be combined with the Stretch Session or Mindfulness activities.

ALL



## Movement Dice

On the board, write a movement for each number of a dice. For example:

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1 - Squat       | 4 - Jumping jacks |
| 2 - Jump        | 5 - Butt kicks    |
| 3 - Toe touches | 6 - Wall push ups |

Roll the dice and have students do the movement corresponding to the number rolled. For example, if a 4 is rolled, have students do 4 jumping jacks.

**TIP:** Add another dice or roll the same dice twice to add, subtract, divide, or multiply the number of repetitions. For example, 2 is rolled for jumping and 4 is rolled on another dice. Ask the class, "How many jumps are we going to do? What is 2 plus 4?"

If virtual, use a free online dice roller like the one at [www.rolladie.net](http://www.rolladie.net).

ES

MS



## All About the Midline

Activities that promote crossing the midline (moving our arm or leg across the middle of our body) enhance the coordination and communication of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Prompt students to do a few or all the following movements, 10 times each:

- **Elbow tap:** Bend and touch right elbow to left knee as you raise your leg; and then touch left elbow to right knee.
- **Windmills:** Start with feet spread apart and arms extended. Bend over at waist and tap right hand to left foot. Back up and then bend and tap left hand to right foot.
- **Backwards:** Bend left knee and put foot behind right leg. Reach back around with right hand and touch left foot. Reverse and put right foot behind your left leg as you touch it with your left hand.
- **Figure 8's:** Start with an object (e.g., pen, eraser, bottle, etc.) in your right hand. Bend over and pass the object behind your left leg into your left hand and then bring it to the front and pass the object behind your right leg into your right hand.

**TIP:** Any of these cross-midline movements can be integrated into the movement options for the other classroom physical activity cards.

ALL



## Memory Game

Have participants introduce themselves while demonstrating a movement that represents their favorite activity.

The first person introduces themselves with their movement (e.g., Bianca, swinging a tennis racket), and the group will say the first person's name and copy the movement. The second person will then introduce themselves with their movement (e.g., Silas, running in place), and the group will say their name and movement, followed by the first person's name and movement (e.g., Silas, running in place; Bianca, swinging a tennis racket). The process repeats until everyone has a chance to introduce themselves and their movement, and the group has a chance to repeat everyone's name and movement.

**TIP:** Use this activity to help people get to know one another by asking different questions that require movement (e.g., a skill they wished they had, a superhero power they would want, etc.).

ALL



## The Counting Game

This activity can be used as a warmup and/or review for math concepts. Ask students to stand (if they are comfortable and able) and have them demonstrate a math concept with an action as they count out loud to a certain number (e.g., 20, 50, 100). Some examples include:

- Jump on every even number
- Do arms circle on multiples of 4
- Touch hand to opposite toe on each prime number

**TIP:** Mix up the movements for each round. To make it more challenging, you can add more than one math concept to a round of counting.



MS

HS



## 8 Count Shake Out

Everyone counts out loud from 1 to 8 while shaking their left hand, then right hand then left foot, and then right foot:

- Left hand shake – “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8”
- Right hand shake – “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8”
- Left foot shake – “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8”
- Right foot shake – “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8”

Repeat the sequence again, but this time while counting up to 7. Keep repeating the sequence until you get to 1.

**TIPS:** Instead of counting up to 8, count backwards down to 1 (e.g., 8, 7, 6...).

Count up/down to only the even or odd numbers (e.g., 8, 6, 4...).



ALL



## MORE SPRINGBOARD TO ACTIVE SCHOOLS RESOURCES



[Considerations for Classroom Physical Activity during COVID-19](#)



[Keeping Kids Physically Active: Tips for Caregivers](#)



[@Springboard2AS](#)



[@SpringboardtoActiveSchools](#)



[Springboard to Active Schools](#)



[www.schoolspringboard.org](http://www.schoolspringboard.org)



Document last updated March 2021