

Creating a Classroom that Flows: A Teaching Guide for Flow

by Wynne Kinder BA Ed.



Mindfulness in Your Classroom

A healthy classroom culture is one where students feel safe, open, and supported. It is where teachers feel confident in their ability to engage students and maintain balance between purpose and freedom.

Mindfulness practices help students learn to direct their attention to the present moment with an open mind. Rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen, these exercises train students to respond skillfully in the moment -- without judgment.

Practicing mindfulness in school can empower students to feel more confident, safe, and calm by positively influencing attitude, stress, behavior, focus, emotions, and learning.

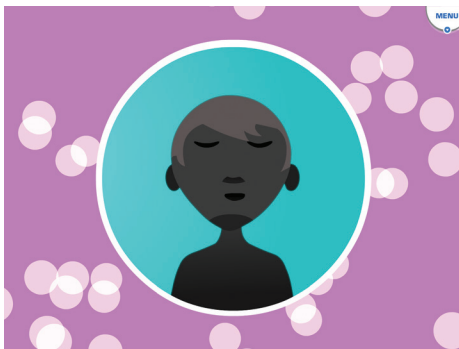
Flow is designed as a “jumping off” point for mindfulness practice. While Flow does not represent the entirety of mindfulness practice, it serves as a way to guide students in short, repeatable mindfulness exercises without need for prior experience. After using Flow, you may find yourself exploring other ways to practice mindfulness in your classroom or in your own life.

Categories with Exercises that Flow

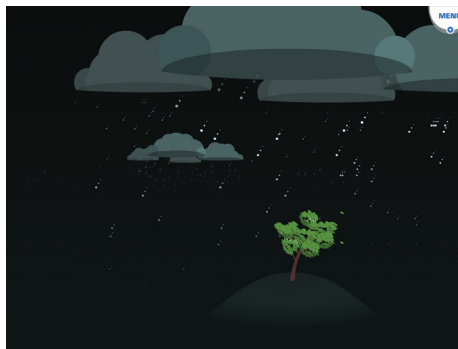
Currently, Flow features two categories, each including three mindful exercises. These unique mindfulness practices are grouped in categories so that you can choose which theme will best suit the needs of your students in the moment. They are meant to be practiced and repeated as often as you would like.



Attitude



Chin Up: Sometimes we can feel down. It happens to everybody. This exercise will show you how to look up in order to feel up.



Weather the Storm: When your day doesn't seem to be going quite right, there are images you can create in your mind that might help things get better. The stormy time will pass and you will be able to stay strong and calm.



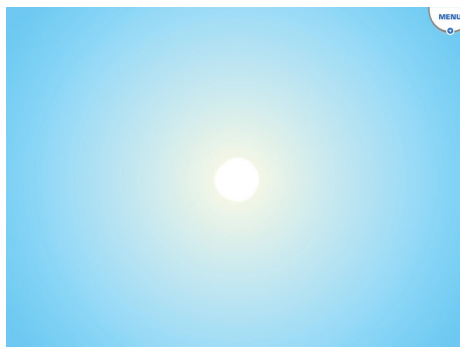
Victorious: When nervousness takes over it can be hard to do our best, to be our best self. Our bodies are here to help. This exercise will show you how to grow strength and confidence from inside yourself. You might just feel more ready to succeed.



Stress



Bring It Down: This exercise will teach you how to gain control of your stressful energy when it gets too high to handle. You get to use your imagination and put a picture in your mind. Your body rests while your attention works.



On and Off: This exercise will teach you how to turn high-stressful energy OFF, so you can do what you need to do to be your best. We'll tense (and turn on) then release (and turn off) specific areas of our bodies, one area at a time. Remember, you are in control of your body.



Rainbow Breath: When we feel down from stress, we can use our bodies to change how we feel. This exercise will teach you how to raise your energy and face your day. Make sure you have space on both sides of your body so you can raise your arms and raise your energy.

Try Flow for Yourself First

Use Flow as a way to care for yourself. Not only will you — the teacher — benefit from mindfulness practice in the same way your students do, but becoming more centered and present helps you model what you hope for your students. You'll also be able to genuinely communicate with students that you've noticed a change after practicing for yourself.

Flow into Your Classroom

Explain the Purpose

Your students will respond more positively to Flow if you preface the activity and share its benefits. Use this as a discussion opportunity. If you've used it yourself, explain how you found it beneficial or how you found it to be challenging at first.

Pre-teach with Flow

Readiness is critical for success with anything you wish your students to do. If your students are restless and struggling to focus, you may want to use an active brain break first. Then, lead them into a Flow exercise as a way to transition smoothly back to calm. Meet them where they are (energy-wise), then take them where you want them to go.

When to Flow



- **Morning Meeting** offers an opportunity to set the tone for your day.
- **Class Meetings** are an interjection of a needed shift/skill for you and your students.
- **Transitions** are one of the most uncertain parts of classroom management, as they afford the most opportunity to “lose” the class. Make Flow a natural 3-minute transition aid. Use Flow as a chance for students to be more present and to give yourself the opportunity to smoothly shift focus and manage energy.
- **Anytime.** Really, anytime you or your students want to Flow.

How to Flow

Vary Implementation Strategies

Depending on their age and developmental readiness, your students may require differentiated strategies for implementation.

- **Younger elementary (Grades K-1): Pre-teach with quick discussion.** For example, if you’re using “Bring it Down”, start by asking “Some balloons float, some don’t. Have you noticed this? Let’s figure this out.” Do a little research together.
- **Upper elementary (Grades 2-4): Pre-teach with activity.** For example, if you’re using “Weather the Storm,” play Charades. While students guess, stand and demonstrate a tree swaying in the wind, swirling in a tornado, and barely moving in a slight breeze. Use this to introduce the concept and help them connect the metaphor in the exercise to their emotions.
- **Intermediate (Grades 5 and up): Pre-teach with relevant discussion.** For example, if you’re using “Chin Up,” ask “What are some phrases or expressions that people might say to help you cheer up when you are down?” (You can do it. It’ll be okay. You got this. Things will get better. Don’t let it get you down.) Prompt the class to engage in discussion.

Normalize Mindfulness with Repetition

Some students may seem disengaged from the Flow exercises the first time you play. It’s okay, especially if your students expect that all GoNoodle brain breaks are highly active. They may feel uncertain about how they should participate in Flow activities.

Repetition and consistency can overcome these early reactions. Try this: Prepare the class at the beginning of the day by saying, “We’ll be doing ‘Bring It Down’ three times throughout our day.” Let them know that they can imagine a different color balloon each time. Challenge them to notice one thing about their own experience each time they practice. Possibly use each play as a prompt for a short discussion about managing stress.

By repeating the activity multiple times, students will become more comfortable with the visualization. Over time, you’ll find that their engagement changes, and likely deepens.

Pair Flow with more Active Brain Breaks

Regular mindfulness practice has benefits, but your students might desire more movement. You could alternate energizing brain breaks and calming breaks based on the needs of your students.

You may also wish to use Flow as a way to re-center the classroom after using the more vigorous brain breaks in GoNoodle. Many teachers set the expectation that brain break time will always end with a calming break, indicating to students that they should prepare their bodies and minds for more time on-task.

Welcome a Variety of Expression

There's no "right" way to participate in the mindfulness exercises in Flow. Some students may wish to close their eyes, others might peek throughout, and others may keep eyes open. Some may be better engaged if sitting. Others may wish to stand. As long as they are engaged or trying, try to avoid labeling or judging. Allow yourself to step away from the role of evaluator. Let students just be with their experience, so little praise is needed.

Give Choice instead of Command

Students respond better to prompts that are choices rather than commands. For example, you may give your students a choice of the exercise in Flow that they wish to experience. You might give them a choice of when to do Flow — maybe before and/or after a test.



And Finally...

Mindfulness is about being in the present moment, and bringing our best self to that moment. We can use concentration (focused attention on a single target, like the breath or the body or an image), movement, and creative imagery to train the mind to settle into the present.

Flow is an introduction to mindfulness that gives students the experience of honing their attention skills. Eventually, students may gain enough confidence to close their eyes during Flow and then even try to practice mindfulness unguided, on their own.

These brain breaks are attention and self-regulation tools that, once generally committed to memory, might serve as useful practices of self-care.

Additional Resources for Teachers and Students

- *Child's Mind* by Christopher Willard
- *The Mindful Child* by Susan Kaiser Greenland
- *A Still Quiet Place* by Amy Saltzman
- *Sitting Still Like a Frog* by Eline Snel
- *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* by Deborah Schoeberlein and Suki Sheth
- *Wherever You Go There You Are* by Jon Kabat-Zinn



About the Author

This teaching guide and the exercises in Flow were developed by Wynne Kinder — a classroom teacher, wellness and mindfulness educator, curriculum author, and teacher trainer with 17 years of classroom teaching experience and 10 years of teaching mindfulness, social skills, and emotional balance to (k-12) students and teachers. Wynne is a partner in Kinder Associates LLC and co-creator of Wellness Works in Schools.



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