

5

Relaxation and sense awareness

CAT STRETCHES

TO THE LEADER The cat is a great model for flexibility and comfort. Notice that each time the cat moves from a reclining state, he stretches the length of his body. That image of easy self-care is the basis for this experiment.

Stretching is one of the friendliest things we can do for ourselves, and it has many physical and emotional benefits. Helping students build stretching into their daily lives can prevent later degenerative changes and reinforce growing knowledge of their inner rhythms and their bodies' needs. It can be done next to desks, down on the floor, and in ways you invent.

Relaxation and sense awareness

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Close your eyes and let your mind remember the last time you saw a cat stretching itself. Let yourself experience that stretch as though the cat's body were your own. Imagine how your body would move and look, how that long S-curving would feel down your spine.

(Hold for 10–15 seconds.)

Good . . . now open your eyes and let your right arm stretch from top to toe the way a cat would stretch. Add your left arm. And rest.

Now find an open space and give your whole body a couple of feline flounces and cat stretches. Notice the way the stretch ripples through your body. Feel free to make yawning, sighing, and purring sounds with your stretches.

(Hold for 30–60 seconds.)

Now bring your stretched self back to your seat.

COMMENT Once students have done cat stretches several times, they can be cued quite simply. Cat stretches provide quick work breaks. You might even declare a “cat stretch day,” where everyone stretches *each* time she or he gets up from sitting or lying down.

BACK TAPPING

TO THE LEADER This invigorating activity really wakes us up while relaxing the muscles we use to hold ourselves up all the time. It can be used as an interlude or prelude to another activity.

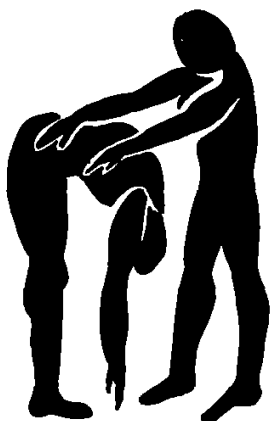
Relaxation and sense awareness

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Find a partner and move to a place in the room where you'll have some space around you. Decide which of you has the tingly hands right now . . . great . . . you'll be the first tapper. Your partner will be the bender.

Bender, keep your knees loose as you slowly roll over from your head, leaning forward over your toes until you're hanging from your hips, back round, head loose and dropped. Good.

Now, Tapper, with loose wrists you're going to tap your hands along your partner's back, down the legs, up the back again, down and up the arms. Do not tap right on the backbone, but do tap gently on the back muscles. Ask your partner if the touch is just right, too hard, or too soft . . . let your touch be just perfect.

(Do this for 2 minutes.)



Relaxation and sense awareness

Now, Tapper, finish up, and Bender, roll back up to standing position *very* slowly, breathing easily and letting your head be the last part to come back up on top of your spine.

Good, now switch roles.

MAKING SPACE

TO THE LEADER This experiment can be adapted to several settings, at desks or in open space in the room. It can be used as a stretch break or as an introduction to other spatial-awareness experiments.

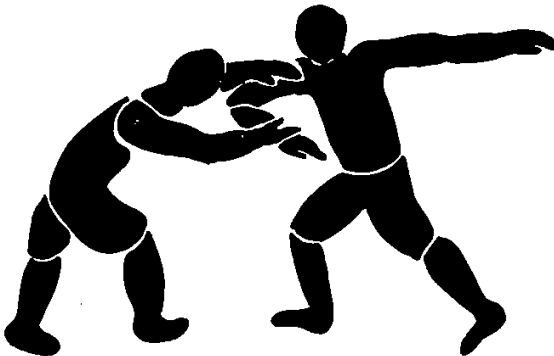
INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Breath makes space. Close your eyes and take a huge-to-bursting breath, and feel how big you are inside. Now let it out all at once and see if your body seems smaller. Take a breath and send it into your right arm. Let your right arm breathe out into the air around you; paint the air with your breath. Now take a breath into your left foot. Let the air out, sending it out through your foot, very slowly like a pinprick leak . . . ssssh . . . and let the leak move your foot through the air around you. Now send a breath into the middle of your back. How does the breath want to move you in space? Choose another part of you somewhere that needs a little space, and breathe a warm and cozy breath into it. Let the breath movement surprise you, let it move you through space.

TESTING THE WATER

TO THE LEADER Relaxing while moving and relaxing while following are both explored in this experiment, which comes from the martial art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Students might notice how they anticipate movement and where they tense their bodies in an unfamiliar situation. When this experiment is working well, participants report delicious sensations of floating, feeling a oneness with their partners, and deep relaxation. Use relaxation music as background (see the music reference list in the *References*).

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Totally silently, find a partner and stand facing each other. Without talking about it, decide who will be Partner One and who will be Partner Two. Good.

Partner One, extend your favorite forearm in front of you, letting the rest of your body breathe out . . . hhaa.



Relaxation and sense awareness

Your arm is going to be the floor of the boat for your partner.

Partner Two, place your fingertips on your partner's forearm and rest them so they're heavier than feather light and lighter than an anchor. Find the most relaxed way of resting on your partner's arm.

Both partners, move your feet and legs in a rocking motion, one leg behind the other, until you feel settled and ready to move in any direction.

Partner Two, close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths, releasing any ropes in your muscles with each out-breath. Partner One, begin to move your forearm in even, slow patterns through space, guiding your boat over gentle, rippling waves. You may want to close your eyes, too. Your job is to stay in contact with your partner and to guide him or her into the sea of relaxation. When you feel in touch with your partner, you can begin moving your feet as well, taking your boat through the room.

(Continue for 2-3 minutes. Encourage Partner One to make random patterns.)

Now slowly bring your forearm to a resting place, Partner One. Each of you take a few long, sighing breaths and stretch out your body for a moment, then switch roles.

COMMENT It's valuable to have time after this experiment to let students share their experience, either verbally or by drawing or finger painting their sensations on paper. This has been a favorite relaxation for participants, and seems to be more fun each time it's done.

BACK BREATH

TO THE LEADER A warm room, carpet, and soft lights provide the best background for this experiment. It is designed to open up the back of the body to breathing, to provide a new way for students to be with each other, and to facilitate a sense of relaxation that might give students an opportunity to integrate information and experience. Participants occasionally fall asleep, so you might want to give them permission to do so.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Find a partner from the other side of the room. One of you, Partner One, lie down on your stomach on the floor. Take a few minutes to wiggle and stretch your body into a comfortable lying position where you can rest for several minutes. Partner Two, sit down cross-legged facing your partner's back on the right side, close enough that you can easily reach the middle of your partner's back.

Partner Two, watch your partner's breathing closely until you can see the place where there is the most rising and falling. Place your left hand gently but firmly in contact with that part of the back. Greet your partner through your touch. Watch and feel how far up the back her or his breath moves. Place your right hand *just beyond* the place where the breath moves, and rest it there.

Partner One, your only task is to *let* your breath move between the two hands. No pushing or oomphing, just allowing. Partner Two, as breath fills up the space between your hands, move one or the other again just beyond the moving place and wait until breath fills it up again. Take



your time, close your eyes from time to time to feel how the breath moves. You may eventually have your hands at both ends of your partner's back, or the breath may move up to the shoulder blades. How far doesn't matter.

(Take 5–10 minutes depending on students' involvement.)

Now, Partner Two, get ready to say goodbye with your hands. When you are ready, easily remove your hands and move away from your partner. Partner One, let your body begin to wake up again, opening your limbs and stretching out catlike as you gradually come back to the room.

After a few minutes, switch roles.