

CHAPTER 7 SUPPLEMENT PROMOTING SELF-CONTROL AND FOCUS

GRADES 6–12

(Teacher notes are in bold italics)

This lesson is designed to help teachers introduce the concept of mental shift in a manner that increases student participation.

THE LESSON GOALS

1. To provide a platform to enable students to understand and implement coping strategies as part of their daily lives when attempting to regain self-control.
2. To introduce specific coping strategies that have been proven through studies using fMRI to shift the brain into a more balanced state.
3. To provide approaches that will enable students to practice these strategies on a regular basis.

MATERIALS

- Index cards
- Interesting objects
- Creative reinforcers
- Calming music selection

THREE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE MENTAL SHIFT

Each of the three strategies described in this section are often referred to as *sense grounding* techniques. Before beginning the lesson, it is important for teachers to become familiar with sense grounding and even practice the activities themselves.

TECHNIQUE I—MENTAL GROUNDING

Mental grounding can be achieved by having a person rapidly list as many items as possible under a designated category within a given time frame. Getting individuals to recall items quickly within a given category in rapid succession forces the brain to shift from the emotional region to the executive functioning regions. It is important that the listing of items under a few different categories be done consecutively to allow the brain enough time to make the transition. This means that someone who is becoming agitated can have an active method to shift from focusing on the negative emotion to engaging in a concrete task. Since the technique is concrete rather than abstract, the individual is able to rate how well he or she attended to the action.

The following are a few examples of mental grounding:

- Identify as many colors as you can that are in the room.
- List as many square shapes as you can find in the room.
- Name as many cities as you can.
- Name as many TV shows as you can.
- Name as many music artists as you can.

Students can even create new categories in advance that they will use the next time they feel themselves becoming emotional. The key is that they have practiced the technique enough to be able to begin and have success in attending to the task during early stages of arousal.

TECHNIQUE II—SOOTHING GROUNDING

Soothing grounding gets the individual to shift the condition of the emotional brain by focusing on topics that have a positive impact on them. It requires the individual to recall a series of positive things. The technique is most useful with individuals who have been trained to visualize. However, with individuals who are not trained to visualize, it works more like mental grounding. If a person can bring back what something looks like, smells like, or tastes like, this approach can quickly change his or her mood. The following are examples of soothing grounding.

I want you to close your eyes and think of the following things as I mention them:

- Your favorite thing to eat and how it tastes
- The last movie you watched that made you laugh

- Your favorite song. Now sing the first verse and chorus in your mind.
- A game you play that makes you happy

If students have not been trained to visualize, you can do similar things in list form.

List the following:

- Your favorite foods
- Your favorite TV shows
- The cars you would like to drive
- Your favorite songs

Please note that soothing grounding done in list form must be much longer than the example provided above.

Teachers should not attempt to have students engage in soothing grounding as a visualization exercise unless they have established a trusting classroom climate. Unless students feel safe and comfortable with their peers, they will struggle with feeling self-conscious and with closing their eyes. Sometimes dimming the lights and soft music in the background improves success. With more at-risk student populations, one might have to do soothing grounding one-on-one away from peers to get students comfortable with the process before doing it as a group. However, the listing approach to soothing grounding can be utilized with relative ease with most students.

TECHNIQUE III—PHYSICAL GROUNDING

Physical grounding is really examining an object and identifying even the smallest details. Physically engaging in inspection is such a concrete task that the brain can quickly shift because you have to touch the object. It engages the senses and then shifts to a cognitive task. Although you can have students examine any object, it is more effective if the initial times you do this process, the students inspect something interesting or that they might be curious about. It is important that the teacher clearly illustrate the level of detail that students must achieve. See the detail provided below.